

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## Editorial

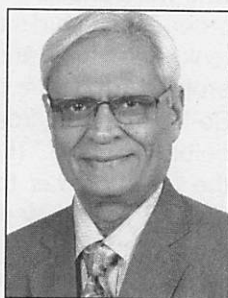
### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

#### *Sin of Presumption*

#### *Is One Of The Most Deadliest Sin*

KING DAVID, in Psalm 19:13, prayed to God, saying, "Keep back your servant also from Presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me...." To sins presumptuously against God means to defy or refuse to obey God and thus to show disrespect to God's authority. The sin of presumption is one of the most deadliest sins. Those who were found sinning presumptuously against God, in the Old Testament time, were certainly and promptly punished (Numbers 15:30, 31), as the following examples show:

In the book of 1 Samuel chapter 15, we read about Saul, the first king of Israel. God, through His prophet Samuel had commanded Saul to go to Amalek and utterly destroy all and everything of the Amalekites, because of their hostility to Israel when they were coming out of Egypt. Saul gathered his army and went to Amalek to do what God had commanded him to do. When he was coming back from Amalek, Samuel met him on the way, on seeing Samuel, Saul proudly said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But Samuel said to him, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" To that Saul replied, "They (that is, the people who had accompanied him) have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we



have utterly destroyed." Saul's reasoning was, since he had brought with him all those things, which should have been destroyed along with all other things, to offer to God, therefore he should be commended and not rebuked. Notice too, that he blamed the people for doing that! However, Samuel told Saul, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king." Saul had despised the word of the Lord. He didn't do exactly what he was asked to do. He had, therefore, presumptuously sinned against God.

Another example is of Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron, who were priests in God's temple, according to the Old Testament order. The record says, "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." (Leviticus 10:1, 2). According to Leviticus 16:12, the fire that was to be offered must have been from the altar. Evidently, both Nadab and Abihu had offered a fire from another source, and not the one from the altar that was specified. As priests of God in His temple both Nadab and Abihu knew from where the fire was to be taken. But in this instance they didn't take God seriously. They reasoned, a fire is a fire, no matter from where it was taken. But it did matter to God. To Him it was a profane fire, because He had not commanded that. Like Saul, Nadab and Abihu too had sinned presumptuously and like him they too were punished for their sin.

Yet again, we read about another man, named Uzzah, in the book of 2 Samuel, who had on impulse presumptuously sinned, and was also punished with death. Uzzah, with another man, in this instance, was driving a cart on which the holy ark of God was set, the record says, "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." (2 Samuel 6:6,7). What was Uzzah's error? In Numbers 4:15, we read, God had earlier commanded: "They shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." Since the oxen stumbled, Uzzah thought the ark would fall, and he tried to save the ark from falling, but as

soon as he had touched the ark, God punished him with death. From human reasoning Uzzah was right, you or I *would have done the same thing, if we were in his place. But* God does not think as man does. He requires from man exactly the same what He has asked him to do. (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Man often tries to make changes in what God has said. Man thinks making a little change here or there in what God has said, if it seems good and reasonable, would make no difference, in fact, man thinks that that would improve on what God has said. This is exactly how many think about using the musical instruments with spiritual songs in the worship of God today, even though the Scripture says, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:19). To sing is God's command. The melody or music should be made in the heart and not with an instrument of music that man has made. But man doesn't seem to learn that God means exactly the same what He has said. Man thinks the playing of musical instruments while singing spiritual songs makes singing sound better and lovely, so there is nothing wrong in using them. The point is not what man thinks, feels or likes, but the point is has God commanded it? When man offers his worship to God in the manner He has not specified, he does that presumptuously, against the will of God. (Matt. 15:8,9)

Many more examples from the Bible could be given in this article to show the destructive nature of the most prevalent sin of presumption, however, one more, that of king Uzaiiah, may be cited, and it will adequately suffice to illustrate the point. Uzaiiah was the king of Judah. The Bible says that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and as long as he walked with the Lord, God made him prosper in various ways, and as a result he became very powerful. "But when he was strong," we read, "his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord—valiant men. And they withstood king Uzaiiah, and said to him, "it is not for you, Uzaiiah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from Lord God." Then Uzaiiah became furious, and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the incense altar. And Azariah, the

chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death." (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). All along Uzziah knew that it was the task of the priests alone to burn incense in the temple on the altar of incense. But pride had lifted up his heart and he became haughty and arrogant even to the point where he would not care what the Lord had said. More than eighty priests were not able to convince him that he was doing wrong, because he had made up his mind to do what he wanted to do. "Convince a man against his will," as the saying goes, "he is of the same opinion still." No matter how many times one may be told of what the Scriptures says, it will have no effect on the individual who has already made up his/her mind to do and practice what he/she thinks is right. For example, Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16). But millions who claim to believe in Christ, refuse to be baptized to be saved, because they are convinced that one is saved by faith alone. Yet the Bible teaches the opposite (James 2:24).

From all of these cited narratives from the Bible we need to learn that God means what He says, and says what He means. Man cannot improve on God's commandments. Romans 15:4, says, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning..." Today God is not punishing people instantly, as He did in the Old Testament time when He dealt with people directly and personally, but He has revealed His will for us today in the written form in His New Testament of the Bible, which says, God has appointed a day on which He will judge all people through Christ (Acts 17:31 Matthew 7: 21-23), and Hebrews 10:31 teaches, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."



## ***THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD***

**J.C. Choate**

THE LONGER I preach the more convinced I become of the power that is in God's Word. It is not me that has the power but the power is in the word that I preach. It is not me that converts but it is the word which enters the heart and convicts, that moves

sinner to obey God. I am but messenger and I am important only to that extent.

Paul declared the gospel to be God's power to salvation to everyone that believeth. (Roman 1:16,17). Peter says that our souls are purified in obeying the truth. (1 Peter 1:22). He goes on to say that we are born again by the word of God. (1 Peter 1:23). And finally, Christ tells us that the truth makes men free. (John 8:32).

This word is from God. (John 17:17). It lives and will abide forever. (1 Peter 3:21,25). It is quick and powerful and sharper than a two edged sword. (Hebrews 4:12). It was written that we might believe. (John 20:30, 31; Romans 10:17). We are to be doers of it. (James 1:22). It completely furnishes man unto every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Then in the end it will judge man. (John 12:48).

With this being true, how much we need to read it, study it, obey it, preach it, and live by it. We need to refer people to it, urge them to read it, and quote from it. Our sermons should be filled with it.

It is so easy for man to drift away from God's word, to begin to preach his own philosophy, ideas, and opinions. It is easy for him to rely on what man has said and overlook what God has spoken. If he is not careful he will begin to quote men instead of quoting the scriptures. This may make him seem intelligent in the eyes of men but it makes him little in the sight of God. In doing this his sermons lose their power and influence for good. They are no longer able to convert souls and to give hope. Instead they deceive and lead people away from God.

We often think we are so big and important. We imagine ourselves to be so valuable to the Lord and his cause. Really, it is the other way around. We are so little and insignificant. We are so frail and worthless. We become important to the Lord not because of who we are or what we are, but because of the message we proclaim. If we will humble ourselves, and yield ourselves to the Lord's wishes, preaching his word, then the Lord can use us. We then become a mouthpiece for the Lord-not to speak of ourselves, but to speak the word of God.

God's word is so powerful, it can do things that we can never do. This is why we need to preach it and to keep preaching it. This is why we need to keep it pure. This is why we need to fill our sermons with it. It will not return to the Lord void. It will not fail. It will bring forth a harvest.

Don't underestimate the Lord's word and the power of it. It can change people. It can save people. It can change nations. Yes, it

can change the world. How blessed we are to be bearers of it. But what a great responsibility we have to see that it is properly delivered. May God help us all to see this and to act accordingly.

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## ***Achieving Success in Life***

**Clem Thurman**

WE LIVE IN AN ERA WHEN "success" has become a kind of "god" to be worshiped. I suppose that, to some extent, all of us get caught up in the pursuit of it. It is a tragedy, however, that so many people, longing for success in life, do not really know what constitutes success. Nor do they know the necessary ingredients for a successful life. In the long ago, God said to Joshua, *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate thereon day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success"* (Josh. 1:8).

But what shall be the standard of success? What constitutes success? Quite often a coach and player disagree on what makes a good play. Parent and child often disagree on what will make for "success" for the child. Seemingly, most folk measure success in money, but this is most certainly a phantom standard. The rich of today are often destitute tomorrow. Let us see if we can't find a better standard than that.

Solomon, in explaining what this life is all about, listed the various things which had been his: riches, wisdom, pleasures, accomplishments. But he then declared, *"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity"* (Eccle. 12:8). What, then, is man's purpose, and how can we achieve success? He answers, *"This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man"* (Eccle. 12:13). To achieve real success in life, we must realize the very purpose of life.

But what are the ingredients that make for success in this life? What must we do to achieve real success in our lives?

### **A LIFE OF FAITH**

The noted atheist, Col. Robert Ingersol, stood at the graveside of his brother and said, "Life is a narrow vale between the cold and

barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights, we cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry." Other atheists have made similar statements. "I am taking a fearful leap into the dark" (Hobbs). "Dreary, dreary; all is dark" (Gibbon). That is the forlorn despair that is characteristic of those who have no faith in God nor in eternity.

Contrast the above with statements of the apostle Paul: *"For I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12). He could say that because of His life in Christ: *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me"* (Gal. 2:20). And near the end of his life, Paul wrote, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better"* (Phil. 1:21-23). Paul wasn't afraid of death, for he had faith in the Lord to sustain him beyond!

A successful life must be based on faith: faith in God (Heb. 11:6) and faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:24). But the successful life is also based on faith in one's self! Too many times we hide behind the excuse, "I can't." But Jesus said, *"All things are possible to him that believeth"* (Mark 9:23). All of us have seen examples of "underdog" teams winning the big game because they believed in themselves and each other. But we don't just believe in our own abilities and our own strengths. We believe in Christ working in us. Paul wrote, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Phil. 4:13). When we really believe in God and Christ, then we can depend on His promise, *"God works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:13). If God works in us, we cannot fail! As the Bible says, *"We are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).

### **A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE**

When God told Joshua, *"Then thou shalt have good success"* (Josh. 1:8), it was based on the premise that he would seek the will of the Lord and do it. Obedience is the natural result of faith. Look at the great servants of God, as they are found in Heb. 11. *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice ... By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death ... By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly*

*fear, prepared an ark ... By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed" (vs. 4,5,7,8).*

Many today would disparage the necessity of obedience, believing that "faith alone" is enough, or that God will find a way to save all of us, anyway. But each of those in Heb. 11 (above), and the others listed in that chapter, believed God and did what He told them. That same principle must be at work in our lives today, *"Ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18).* And for that reason, Peter declared, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth" (1 Pet. 1:22).* The only way to please God, and achieve success in life, is to obey Him.

It is said of Jesus, *"Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8).* And as we *"follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21),* we will also obey. The Lord said, *"Not every one that 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).*

A successful life is built on the foundation of obedience to God. As Jesus put it, *"If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).* The successful life is not built on the basis of doing what we want, for: *"I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).* God created us, and He knows what is best for us that we might achieve happiness and success.

### **A LIFE OF DEDICATION**

A successful life must also be a life of real dedication. "Dedicate" means: "To set aside for a special use; to devote, as to duty." In his address at Gettysburg, President Lincoln said, "We are dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." This is a dedicated nation. And I am convinced that one of the basic factors that has helped make this a great nation is that sense of dedication among its citizens. As Our founding fathers declared, certain truths are self-evident: "That we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights." In other words, this nation was established on the foundation that God's rule would be our rule of law.

To succeed, as individuals, we must be dedicated to something greater than ourselves, dedicated to a worthy cause—dedicated to



God. The apostle Paul wrote of his dedication in these words: *"Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ... Brethren, I could not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before. I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 3:7-8,13-14).

That is real dedication! The apostle Paul had been persecuted and had faced all manner of difficulties for the cause of Christ. He had been beaten, whipped, put in jail, shipwrecked, stoned and was in constant peril (2 Cor. 11:23ff), but he said, *"Our light affliction, which is for the moment"* (2 Cor. 4:17). When Paul was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, he stopped to meet with the brothers in Christ in Caesarea. The prophet Agabus there foretold he would be arrested and put in chains in Jerusalem, and the brothers begged him not to go. *"Then Paul answered, What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 21:13).

That kind of dedication made Paul a great servant of Jesus Christ, and enabled him to be a real success in life. A dedicated life, a life of dedication to the Lord and His service, will make you a real success. So, determine to live a life of faith in God and in Christ, living in constant obedience to His will, and dedicating yourself to that kind of noble life. That will bring you, as God said, *"Good success."*

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## ***Saved From What?***

**Johnny Ramsey**

*"HE THAT BELIEVETH and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). Jesus promised salvation to those who believe the gospel and are baptized. Have you ever wondered what it is that we are saved from? Salvation is truly a blessed and joyous relationship. The very word brings happiness to our souls. Some of the finest spiritual songs extol the splendor of redemption. Jesse Pounds wrote these glorious words:

*Soul, a Savior thou art needing,*

*Soul, a Savior waits for thee;  
Hear His words of tender pleading,  
Hear His gracious, "Come to me."*

Would it not be tragic indeed if there were no possibility of being saved from this old wicked world? What if the hope of cleansing from sin were absolutely beyond the realm of possibility? *"Without hope and without God in the world"* (Eph. 2:11-12), would be our portion here below! An un-known penman challenges our attention with thoughts that bring us face to face with Jesus:

*I knelt in tears at the feet of Christ,  
In the hush of the twilight dim,  
And all that I was, or hoped or sought,  
Surrendered unto Him.  
Crowned or crucified—my heart shall know  
No King but Christ, Who loved me so!*

But what would be our plight if Golgotha had never been? The blood shed at the cross gives us hope for salvation otherwise unobtainable.

Through obedience to the gospel plan of redemption (Rom. 6:16-18), we can be saved from sin. The Redeemer came *"to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10) and to deliver us from bondage of death (Heb. 2:14). He gave Himself for the iniquities of the whole world (1 John 2:2) and became the One Who died for all (2 Cor. 5:14). The Lord Jesus Christ is *"able to save to the uttermost"* (Heb. 7:25) as God's grace is found in Him unto eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10).

Not only does obeying the truth free us from sin, it also saves us from being separated from our Maker. The prophet Isaiah clearly speaks of the loneliness and sorrow that sin produces: *"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:2). Ultimately, were it not for the sacrifice of Jesus our Lord, we would experience eternal separation from the Creator (Rev. 20:14-15; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). To be ransomed from a devil's hell is one of the richest blessings which Christianity brings.

We also are saved from Satan's snare, when we receive and obey the Holy Scriptures (James 1:21-22). The Tempter desires our condemnation (Luke 22:31) and lays traps to capture our very souls (1 Tim. 3:7). He is clever and tenacious and often successful (2 Cor. 2:11; 11:3). But fortunately Christ is more powerful (1 John 3:8; 4:4). To be saved from condemnation and darkness through acceptance of the simple way of salvation makes Christianity most

appealing (Acts 13:38-39). When we resist the devil (James 4:7) and draw near to God, this life and the one to come is made more beautiful immediately.

Virgil, who wrote some thirty years before Christ, spoke of the hopeless nature of oppressed people when he cogently stated, "There is but one safe thing for the vanquished: Not to hope for safety!" Conversely, regardless of the external circumstances, servants of the Savior are always victorious and triumphant (2 Cor. 2:14). Verily, we are *"more than conquerors through Him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).

Christianity even saves us from ourselves! Where the Lord Jesus rules, selfishness cannot dwell (Luke 9:23). What a blessing it is to be delivered from the ego-centered lifestyle that captivates billions of the earth's dwellers. The elder brother mentality of Luke 15, wherein personal pronouns occupy center state, is truly a miserable existence. Being redeemed by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19) means that we have been saved to serve. This provides meaning, depth and direction to a life previously overwhelmed by shallow, earthly emphasis. When we attempt to guide ourselves, we miss so many verdant pastures the Creator would like to show to us (Jer. 10:23).

Salvation in Christ also delivers us from the sting of death (1 Cor. 15:54-57). From the moment we enter the Lord, and thus partake of a quality of life that is of eternal consequence (John 17:3), we eagerly look forward to that place where *"the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest"* (Job. 3:17). Therefore, when this earth is rolled up like an old garment and cast aside (Heb. 1; 2 Pet. 3:11), the loyal followers of the Prince of Peace shall know assuredly that salvation in the Lord was truly the pearl of great price. When the Master promised, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16), He opened up vistas of beauty and joy forevermore.

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## **ABSOLUTE TRUTH**

**Ancil Jenkins**

*"WHAT IS TRUTH?"* Pilate asked (John 18:38). Pontius Pilate repeated a question people have asked for centuries. One aspect of the study of philosophy is to understand what is true and how man comprehends it. To the Christian this question should not be a

great problem. The Bible says, "As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (John 8:40). Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (John 17:17).

How basic to Christianity is the acceptance of absolute truth residing in God, His Son, and His Word! This is the battleground upon which we confront His enemies—relativism, liberalism, and humanism. These concepts do not and cannot allow the thought that truth is knowable and unchangeable.

I was not much surprised to see a recent survey of how few people accept the possibility of absolute truth. Only about 19% of the general population strongly believe this. Of those who claim to be "born again," the numbers increase only to 25%. (The Barna Report: What Americans Believe, p.85.)

These figures show why reaching the secular world with the Gospel is difficult. Since eight out of ten do not strongly believe it is possible to know truth absolutely, they will probably reject the Bible since it claims to be truth. If the Bible is not accepted as truth, one cuts himself off from the only viable source of knowledge of God, Jesus Christ, or His Gospel. This should put our personal teaching into a new perspective. Preliminary to our teaching, we must establish a common acceptance of truth.

Yet, we must also earn the right to teach absolute truth. It is inconsistent to preach absolute truth if we do not believe it. How many more professing Christians believe in absolute truth than the average person? According to the survey, only 6%! If these figures are correct, it means that *three out of four who claim to be Christians do not believe strongly in absolute truth*. Thus, many religious people will affirm that it really doesn't matter what one believes. Serving God becomes simply a matter of individual choice and interpretation. Such individual faith does not foster any church loyalty.

Most tragic is the resulting lack of assurance. If nothing is absolutely true, **is forgiveness real? Does prayer have any effect? Is there a heaven?** Unless one is able to believe and commit to these absolute truths, life has little comfort and meaning.

We need to believe in the absolutes: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible. On the basis of this faith, we must commit our lives to them. Such a commitment will lead us to live and act in life-changing ways.

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PHARISEES?

**Cecil May, Jr.**

THE PHARISEES WERE the conservatives of their day. They believed the Bible. Their very name implied separation from sin and uncleanness. They were scrupulous in keeping the law and conscientious about honoring their religious traditions.

Nevertheless, Jesus rebuked them for several things. Many talked a better religion than they practiced (Matthew 23:2,3), judged others harshly and excused themselves (Matthew 23:4), and were too wedded to their traditions, binding them on others as though they were God's laws and honoring them even when they contradicted God's law (Matthew 15:1-9).

Jesus also indicted some of them because:

**They trusted their own obedience instead of the One they were obeying.** Jesus addressed a parable to some who *"trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others"* (Luke 18:9). The Pharisee *"prayed with himself"* (Luke 18:11). He bragged to God about what he had done: *"I fasted, prayed, gave alms."* He received nothing from his prayer, because he asked for nothing. He felt he needed nothing.

**They pared down the law to what they could keep.** Fasting, praying, and giving were specific and measurable. Things that could be quantified they handled well. In tithing they included every tenth mint leaf and every tenth dill seed. They were not wrong to do those things. Jesus told them, *"These you ought to have done"* (Matthew 23:23).

**They left out the tough parts.** They omitted justice and mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23). They were absorbed with formalities and forgot people.

We need to be careful about that ourselves. We could do the same. Baptism is an essential part of our response to God's offer of grace. The Lord's supper every Sunday, singing without an instrument, and congregational church government are important if we are to be obedient to God. Jesus would still say, *"These you ought to have done."*

However, if we do these things and think we do not need grace, if we are confident these things alone set us apart from sinners, we need to remember *"the weightier matters."* Do we faithfully show mercy? Do we visit the fatherless and widows, feed the hungry, and clothe the poor? Do we do all the good we know to do? Do we treat every brother as a brother, regardless of the color of his skin? Do we love the unlovely? Do we readily forgive those who offend or mistreat us? Would we act as a loving neighbor even to those of a different race or religion?

If we consider those things too, perhaps we will be more merciful and faithful. At least we should be motivated to pray, *"Lord be merciful to me, a sinner."*

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## ***We Preach Christ Crucified***

**Ron Bryant**

THE CROSS OF CHRIST is central in the Gospel. The whole scheme of redemption hangs on the fact of the death of Christ for the sins of man. Yet, the preaching of the cross was offensive to the hearers of the first century. A crucified Messiah was a contradiction to the mindset of both Jew and Gentile in that period of time.

To preach a crucified Messiah was to stir the prejudice of the Jews and to move into an arena of argument (see Acts 26:23). The Jews demanded a victorious Messiah, heralded by signs, who would restore the glories of the kingdom of David and Solomon. To the Jew the cross was the sufficient and decisive refutation of the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. On this point a Jew had to unlearn before he could learn. The Jews wanted signs but they needed to get their eyes opened to "the sign" (Romans 1:3,4).

The Gentiles also had to unlearn in order to learn, but in a different way. They were ready to weigh the "pros" and "cons" of almost any new system, but lacked the presuppositions that would have led them to simple faith in Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles had presuppositions that served as barriers to their receiving a "crucified Savior."

But the preaching of Christ was not accommodative; Jesus was not preached as a conqueror to please the Jews, nor as a philosopher to please the Gentiles. He was preached as the crucified Nazarene.

To preach "Christ crucified" is not of man! It is of God! It is in the

Cross that God's greater vision comes into operation in the salvation of mankind. God's power and wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Romans 1:16,17) show themselves in a way which is not in keeping with the preconceived standards of men, and in every point God's way transcends such standards. To those who are being saved, the preaching of the Cross is both the wisdom and the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

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## **PETER'S FAITH**

**O.P. Baird**

### **WHO IS JESUS?**

BEFORE JESUS BEGAN His public ministry, God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Him. John preached, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" and he baptized many people (Matthew 3:1-6). "*Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased' (Luke 3:21,22).*

Before Jesus was baptized, John knew Him as a righteous man, but he did not know Him as the Christ or Messiah. "*And John bore witness, saying 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God' (John 1:32-34).*

### **PETER MEETS THE SAVIOR**

"*Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus .... One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, a Stone)' (John 1:35-37, 40-*

42). The names "Peter" and "Cephas" both mean "rock", as a stone or detached boulder, not a ledge of rock.

### **PETER'S CONFESSION OF FAITH**

The teaching of Jesus and His miraculous signs convinced His disciples that He was the Christ, but it did not convince all who heard Him.

*"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 16:13-17).* That same faith brings the blessing of God today, but, just as in Peter's time, people of the world have different opinions about who Jesus was.

Later Jesus was teaching in Capernaum to a large gathering of people. The multitude of people turned and went away because they did not understand His teaching. His disciples didn't understand either but, when Jesus asked them, *"Do you also want to go away?"* Peter answered, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (John 6:67-69). The disciples were limited in understanding, but their faith in Christ caused them to trust Him and accept as truth all that He taught. Faith in Christ has the same effect now.

We have the words of eternal life today. When Jesus left His disciples He sent the Holy Spirit to give His Word to them. They have given His Word to us in the New Testament Scriptures. Our faith comes through that Word (Romans 10:17). On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples, *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into/all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you"* (John 16:12-15).

Do we have the faith expressed by Peter at Caesarea Philippi



and Capernaum? If we do, we will believe in Christ and trust Him completely, and keep our hearts open to all that He teaches, because He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

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## ***IS IT TOO FAR TO JERUSALEM?***

**W. Douglas Harris**

*"IS IT TOO MUCH for you to go up to Jerusalem"* (1 Kings 12:28; read the entire chapter for the background). This chapter records the division of the kingdom of Israel after Rehoboam's accession to the throne. Rehoboam had followed the advice of the younger men in his realm rather than that of the older men in redressing the grievances of the people. As a result, ten tribes revolted and summoned Jereboam from exile in Egypt to be their king. Jereboam established his government based on idolatry. Fearing that the people might desert him if they returned to Jerusalem (the place authorized by God) to worship, he set up golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Then he soothed their consciences by proclaiming that it was too inconvenient for them to go back to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. This appeal to the flesh and the love of ease was deadening and dangerous, both then and now.

### **ANCIENT APPEAL OF JERUSALEM**

Jerusalem was always important to the Jews—it held a special charm and appeal to them. It was their capital city, seat of government, place of worship, and was called *"the city of the great king"* (Matthew 5:35). In captivity Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem, and when Nehemiah in captivity heard of the city's state of disrepair, he wept (Daniel 6:10; Nehemiah 2:3). The Jews' general love and attitude toward Jerusalem is expressed poignantly in Psalm 137:5,6.

In a figurative sense, Jerusalem is just as important today to the restorers of the New Testament church as it was to the ancient Israelites. Peter referred to Jerusalem by inspiration as *"the beginning"* (Acts 11:15). The events of Acts 2 mark the beginning of many things: the preaching of the Gospel as established facts as well as commands to be obeyed, the new covenant ratified by the blood of Christ, the Gospel plan of salvation, baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, obedience to Christ's commands concerning the Great Commission, the birth of the church of Christ, worship as authorized by Christ, the binding and loosing authority

of the apostles of Christ, and the reign of Christ on David's throne.

The word "Jerusalem" is used in a metaphorical sense to picture the true will of God today. Since the Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, when the same Gospel is preached today unchanged, it is described as "the-old-Jerusalem" Gospel.

### **TOO FAR FOR MANY TODAY**

Many in Christendom today find it too far to Jerusalem—they are not willing to go back before Catholicism and Protestantism, abandoning all human creeds and catechisms, to make the New Testament their exclusive guide and thus to restore the church that had its beginning in Jerusalem. Many are not willing to turn their backs religiously on relatives, forsake practices held dear for generations, and go all the way back to Jerusalem and follow the inspired pattern for the church.

Many find it too far to Jerusalem to attain religious unity on the seven-step plan of Ephesians 4:4-6—one Lord, **one** faith, **one** Spirit, one body, one hope, **one** baptism, one God. This is the Jerusalem Gospel. There is no other basis or plan that will work. It will never be attained in sectarian division. Some find it too far to Jerusalem to restore the scriptural action in baptism. Effusion—sprinkling or pouring—for baptism is the easy, convenient, and unauthorized action. The Jerusalem Gospel teaches that baptism is a burial in water (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4).

Many find it too far to Jerusalem to practice the kind of music authorized by Christ and His apostles—vocal music (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

The majority of the religious world find it too far to Jerusalem for the scriptural design of baptism, scriptural designations for the church, the scriptural creed of the church, and scriptural worship, including the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper.

### **CONCLUSION**

Have you obeyed the Jerusalem Gospel? From Acts 2:22-47 we learn what was required in Jerusalem by the inspired apostles of Christ. Their audience heard the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ proclaimed. They were indicted for slaying Christ. Cut to the heart, they cried out, asking what they needed to do to be saved; and as believers in Christ, they were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. This was "the beginning."

**Is it too far for you to go to Jerusalem?**

# ***There Am I In The Midst***

**J. A. Thornton**

YES, JESUS SAID, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matthew 18:20). This is a wonderful thought and assurance. Jesus is not with everyone. "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son*" (2 John 9).

Those who are *in Christ* have all spiritual blessings available to them (Ephesians 1:3). One of these blessings is salvation, and this salvation is *in Christ* (2 Timothy 2:10). One enters Christ by believing and being baptized (Galatians 3:26,27). Then we are to walk in Him (Colossians 2:6). And, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, the blood of Jesus keeps us clean (1 John 1:7). These things are essential if we would have the assurance of Jesus being with us.

## **SUGGESTS AN ASSEMBLY**

The expression "*where two or three are gathered*" most certainly suggests an assembly. One may worship alone and should so do, but this in no way removes the need for worship in the assembly; nor does assembled worship minimize the need for personal devotion.

It may also be pointed out that in the worshipping assembly, worship is acceptable to God on an individual basis. For example, all should be participating, even in unison, but God judges *individually*.

The writer of the Hebrews epistle said, "*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,*" and this is a part of holding fast the profession of our faith (Hebrews 10:23-25). In a time of heavy persecution, slavery, and difficulty of assembly that we cannot imagine, Christians were told not to forsake the assembly. How much more should we be faithful to assemble in our time of great convenience and ease!

## **IN THE NAME OF JESUS**

Jesus said, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name....*" There are a number of things we are told to do in His name: be baptized, pray, sing, and give thanks.

*"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."* (Colossians 3:17). What does it mean to do a thing in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38)? Thayer's Greek Lexicon says it means to act by His authority. This is like the law officer saying, "Stop in the name of the law." That is, "I, as a spokesman for the recognized law, have the authority to stop you."

Therefore, when Jesus said, *"Where two or three are gathered in my name,"* He was simply saying, "Where two or three are gathered by *My authority*." Recognizing the meaning of "in Jesus' name" will help us to understand some other passages. In Mark 9:38 John said, *"Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followed not us and we forbade him..."* Jesus told them not to forbid him, then He observed, *"He that is not against us is for us."* This principle applies only to those who do things by the authority of Christ and not to religious people who act without His authority.

### **THERE WILL I BE IN THE MIDST OF THEM**

This is a wonderful assurance. Does it not thrill us to know that when we assemble to worship, Jesus is right there with us? He is not physically present, but spiritually He is there. He is not in every public gathering, but He is in the meeting that takes place in His name.

I am afraid that we are not conscious enough of His presence. He is the unseen guest. To help us visualize this better, just suppose that when you entered the meeting place Jesus visibly came and sat beside you. How would you feel? When the song service began, would you sing if He were there? Would you daydream during the prayer? What about the preaching? Could you relax enough to doze off? Would you be thinking about lunch during the Lord's Supper if He were there? When it came time to give, if Jesus actually sat by you, would you give more? When the service ended and Jesus walked out of the service with you, would you rush out and ignore your brothers and sisters?

### **HONESTLY, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

You cannot see Him, but He sees you. He is right there beside you, for *"Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20).

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# ***God Is On The Throne, Not on Stage***

## **Dalton Key**

THE GOD WE SERVE is an awesome, spiritual being both deserving and desirous of our deepest respect. Though described in Scripture as a friend to man (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23), He is not some sort of “good buddy” to joke with or about. Our God is still on the throne (Psalm 45:6). His ways remain higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9), and His authoritative Word still promises to judge us in the Last Day (Revelation 20:12).

No measure of self-appointed, flippant familiarity with the God of heaven detracts one bit or whit from His inherent majesty. Our God is eminently worthy of our reverence, thus we must serve Him *“acceptably with reverence and godly fear”* (Hebrews 12:28). Truly, reverence is the “very first element of religion”.

Moreover, our periods of public worship should express this spirit of reverence. *“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be held in reverence of all (them that are) about Him”* (Psalm 89:7). Worship performed “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24) suggests a demeanor of awe and reverence.

We agree that our worship services should be permeated with expressions of joy and thanksgiving—they should not come to resemble a congregational visit to the dentist; but neither should the reverent worship of our heavenly Father be confused with a carnival or a rock concert. Whether our worship is that offered during a Sunday morning service, involving a lectureship assembly, or that which is engaged in by a zealous throng of young people attending a youth rally—regardless of where, when or by whom the worship is performed—it **must be characterized by reverence and decorum**. *“Let all things be done decently and in order”* (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The worship assembly is not the proper setting for screaming, whistling, clapping, and stomping the feet in response to a speaker's message. We do not meet in order to pay homage to men, but to worship God. We do not come together as to a football game or a stage-band concert; we must come to worship God. We do not assemble with the intent of being entertained or sensually excited; we come to worship God. Any assembly of saints with the intent of worshipping and praising the God of

heaven should reject that which emphasizes the carnal emotions and minimizes the spiritual man.

In the realm of worship, *"zeal without knowledge"* paves a dangerous road toward pagan, flesh-oriented, and riotous assemblies. Some of our denominational neighbors have long gone this route, with services geared more toward entertaining man than worshipping God. May we learn to temper our joy in Christ with a Christ-like reverence for things holy. And may we teach our children so.

**Remember, our God is on the throne—not on stage.**

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## Treatment Of The Lord's Day

**Raymond Kelcy**

THE STORY IS TOLD that once upon a time, a little boy was looking through the fence of an orchard owned by a very successful fruit grower. He was looking with longing eyes at some delicious pears on a nearby tree.

The man who owned the orchard saw the little boy and his heart went out in love and compassion. He picked six beautiful pears and gave them to the lad. The boy did not thank the man for the generous gift, and later came back when the man was absent and stole the seventh pear which was still on the tree.

One would be inclined to think of this as a mean and selfish act. He didn't thank the man for his generosity! Then he stole the one remaining pear after the man had **been** so good in giving him the other six!

However, this wasn't half as bad as what is done by hundreds of men and women who use six days each week in a very selfish way, not ever taking time out to thank God for His goodness. Then when the Lord's Day comes, they take that for themselves too.

"It's the only day I have," some have been heard to say. "I was so tired that I felt I needed the rest," is another rather common excuse.

But the Lord's Day is **the Lord's**. It is not **ours**. It isn't the only day we have. How can *thinking* people be so thankless as to live so selfishly? How can people sleep, read the paper, listen to the radio, watch TV, or play golf when the time comes for God's people

to assemble at His feet for Bible study and worship?

*"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is..." (Hebrews 10:25).*

## When Was Paul Saved?

**Owen D. Olbricht**

MANY PREACHERS AND RELIGIOUS teachers say that Paul was saved on the road to Damascus. The assumption is made that Jesus' appearing to him brought about his salvation. Is this true? What proof is offered that he was saved when Jesus appeared to him?

Three reasons are usually given for the basis of the conclusion that Paul was saved at that time: (1) Jesus appeared to him for the purpose of giving him salvation. (2) Jesus gave him the Holy Spirit as a seal of his salvation. And (3) Ananias called him "brother Saul" when he came to him.

Nothing is said in the New Testament to indicate that Jesus appeared to Paul in order to save him. Such a teaching is merely an assumption and not a stated fact. If Jesus appeared to him for this purpose, this was an exception and not the rule. Nowhere is it recorded that Jesus appeared to any others in order to save them. In all other cases a God-approved preacher preached Jesus and salvation (Acts 2:36-38; Acts 8:12, 35-39; 11:14).

The text shows that Paul was not an exception. Jesus did not tell him what to do, but rather told him, *"Go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do"* (Acts 9:6). Ananias, whom Jesus sent, told Paul to *"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16).

The appearance of Jesus was not for the purpose of bringing about salvation. Paul stated that *"Last of all he was seen of me also"* (1 Corinthians 15:8). If seeing Jesus brings about salvation, then Paul was the last person to be saved.

Jesus explained why He appeared to Paul. He did not say He appeared to him in order to save him. He said, *"I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee"* (Acts 26:16). This was Paul's call by Jesus to be an apostle. He could not witness with the

other apostles the resurrection (Acts 1:22) had he not seen the resurrected Lord. Paul argued that he was an apostle, based on his having seen Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1).

The New Testament does not state when Paul received the Holy Spirit. The safe conclusion is that he did not receive the Holy Spirit until after baptism. We know that Paul did not receive the Holy Spirit on the road to Damascus, because three days later when Ananias (Acts 9:9) came to Paul he had not received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

The most likely conclusion is that Paul was not an exception but that he received the Holy Spirit as others received Him. Those who are baptized (Acts 2:38), obey Jesus (Acts 5:32), becoming sons of God (Galatians 4:6), and are the ones who receive the Holy Spirit. The only exception to this rule that is recorded in the New Testament were the first Gentiles, Cornelius' household, to whom the Holy Spirit was given in order to prove to Jewish Christians that God would accept Gentiles (Acts 10:47; 11:17: 15:7,8).

The fact that Ananias called Paul, "brother Saul," is not proof that Paul was already saved. Peter called his fellow Jews, "brethren" (Acts 2:29), but then told them to *"Repent, and baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38).

On other occasions, Peter also called fellow Jews brethren (Acts 3:17), as did Stephen (Acts 7:2), and Paul (Acts 13:26,38; 22:1; 23:1, 5, 6; 28:17). Ananias did not call him "brother Saul" because he was a brother in Christ, but because he was a brother Jew.

According to Ananias, Paul's sins were not forgiven **until he was baptized** (Acts 22:16). Saul was not saved on the road to Damascus but, rather, he was saved when his sins were washed away by the blood of Jesus at the time of his baptism (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

God does not show partiality. We must obey Him in order to be saved (Hebrews 5:9) now that Christ has all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18-20). He said we must, *"Believe and be baptized,"* in order to be saved (Mark 16:15,16), which is what Paul did to have his sins forgiven (Acts 22:16).