

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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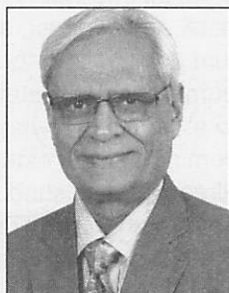
No. 6

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Many Are Mistaken Not Knowing The Scriptures

LIKE THE SADDUCEES OF JESUS' TIME who erred about the resurrection of the dead, many today are mistaken about many things the Bible teaches, simply because they do not know the Scriptures. They may be educated people who may have read many books about the Bible. Yet they do not know the Scriptures, because they do not read the Bible. They believe the preacher, whatever he preaches, without investigating if those thing are according to the Bible. (Acts 17:11). Jesus said to them, Sadducees, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." (Matthew 22:29). Had they known the Scripture doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, they would have known that it did not involve the continuance of marriage. "For in the resurrection," Christ said, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." (Matthew 22:30).



How many times people have heard false teachers and preachers predicting the year and the date and the time of Jesus' second coming, and many gullible people having believed them were led into their deception. Yet, in the Bible it is written: "But of that day and hour," Christ said, "no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). As Jesus said, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, when He

will return, that should have settled the matter forever. Yet it seems people have itching ears and they do not want to endure the sound doctrine of the Bible. (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The Bible teaches: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Did you notice, it says, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back from heaven then His people, both the resurrected and the living, shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. But there are many preachers today teaching people that Christ will come back on this earth, in Jerusalem, where He will set up His kingdom to reign from there for one thousand years. Firstly, remember, when Christ comes back, up in the air, as we have observed, the Bible tells us that at that point of time "both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10). Friends, there won't be any earth left, to state simply, when Christ comes back. Secondly, Christ is not coming back to establish His kingdom, because His kingdom was already established when His apostles were living on earth in the first century AD. The Lord's kingdom is as old as His church on earth, which was established by the Lord Himself in AD 33. (Matthew 16:18-19). Listen, again, to Christ, "And He said to them," that is, to the apostles, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." (Mark 9:1). Jesus promised that even some of those who were present with Him on that occasion would see the kingdom of God come with power. So the kingdom was to come before some of them would die, and it was to come with power. And just before He was carried up into heaven, His last words to them were: "Behold I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49). So what do we learn? The kingdom was to come with power, and according to Acts 1:8, the power was to come with the Spirit. The Spirit came to the apostles on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ in the city of Jerusalem. (Acts 2:1-4). Therefore, the kingdom came or was established on that day. Christians today are in Christ's kingdom, having been conveyed into it by God, the Father, after they have been delivered from the power of the

darkness of sin. (Colossians 1:13). Just as Acts 2:47 says that the saved were added to the church. To be saved they were told to, Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, which they did, and thereafter the Lord added them to His church. (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Being conveyed into the kingdom and added to the church are one and the same thing, because the kingdom is the church and the church is the kingdom.

The false doctrine of Pre-millennialism has confused, ignored the truth, and led many people into error to believe that Christ is going to come to establish His kingdom and reign on earth for one thousand years. This error in doctrine teaches that the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth was objected by the Jews, and thereafter Jesus simply put the church in the place of the kingdom as a substitute. Their theory further says that Jesus will come again to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, which He could not do in His first coming due to the opposition from the Jews, and that He will reign on a literal throne, for one thousand years. It is a system of speculations, error, false teaching, and fanciful conclusions.

How wonderful it would be if people just read their Bible to know what it teaches, instead of listening to men what they teach in the name of the Bible. (1 John 4:1, 6). Thank God, we are not living in an age when we do not have accessibility to the Bible everywhere in almost every language on earth. God has clearly told us in the Bible everything we need to know. We can for sure know what God wants us to believe and do to live acceptable lives to Him. Sadly, though, there was a time in the middle ages when for over one thousand years people lived in spiritual darkness as copies of the Bible were taken away from general people by a church under the guise that the church alone had the right to interpret the Scriptures. During this period of time many unscriptural things were taught by that church and the people believed them as the doctrine and teaching of the Bible, which continue to be believed and practiced as such even to this day by many without any question or investigation in light of what the Bible teaches. However, thank God, we have the Bible today, and no one is taking it away from us, but most of us keep it closed for us and consequently live in spiritual darkness and ignorance following teachings as doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:8, 9).



The Teaching Of Christ Versus The Teaching Of Men

J.C. Choate

GOD SAID, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Matthew 17:5). Christ said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63).

When Peter was questioned concerning his loyalty to Jesus, he responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68). In praying to God, Christ said concerning the Apostles, "For I have given unto them the word which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee and they have believed that thou didst send me". (John 17:8). Also read John 14:23; John 12:47-50; and Matthew 24:35.

The foregoing has been called to your attention to show you the importance of what Jesus said and of the importance of believing and obeying it. However, man has also spoken out on most of the things that Christ taught. The result is that the majority usually end up in listening to man rather than to Christ. To show you the contrast in the two, we will now give some examples of what we are talking about.

1. *The teaching of Christ* : "And Jesus came and spoke unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28 : 18). *The teaching of men* : "The Pope has the final say." "The Bishop has all authority in our church."
2. *The teaching of Christ* : "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). *The teaching of men* : "There are many ways to heaven." "One way is just as good as another."
3. *The teaching of Christ* : "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets : I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17,18).
The teaching of men : "The law of Moses is still binding today." "We practise tithing."
4. *The teaching of Christ* : "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord,

Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven..." (Matthew 7:21-23). Also, read John 9:31.

The Teaching of men : "All who pray to the Lord for the forgiveness of their sin will be saved on the spot."

5. *The Teaching of Christ* : "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16).

The teaching of men: "He that believeth is saved and can be baptized if he wants to." "Baptism is not necessary for one to be saved."

6. *The teaching of Christ* : "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16: 18).

The Teaching of men: "There are many churches." "One church is as good as another." "The church is not important." "One can go to heaven without being a member of any church."

7. *The teaching of Christ* : That "They all may be one..." (John 17:20,21).

The teaching of men: "Thank God for all of the churches where every man can join the church of his choice."

8. *The teaching of Christ*: "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9). Also read John 4:24.

The teaching of men : "It doesn't matter how you worship just as long as you are honest and sincere."

9. *The teaching of Christ* : "And call no man your father upon the earth : for one is your Father, which is in heaven." (Matthew 23:9).

The teaching of men : "You may call your priest and the Pope, father."

10. *The teaching of Christ* : "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels' of heaven, but my Father only." (Matthew 24:36).

The teaching of men : "We may know the time of the Lord's second coming."

Now can't you see the difference in the teaching of Christ and teaching of men? Which have you accepted? John exhorts us not to believe every spirit because "many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1). He goes on to warn that if we transgress and cease to abide, in the doctrine of Christ, we have not God. To have the Father and the Son we must abide in the doctrine of Christ.

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed : For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 9-11). Then Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." (Romans 16:17,18).

My friends, it is possible to be deceived in religious matters but once one learns the truth then he should honour the Lord enough to accept his word over the word of man. You will note that in the statements that have been listed from man that no scripture references have been given and this is because they are not scriptural statements. We invite you then, and plead with you to go direct to the Lord's word for all that you say and do in religion. Only then can you be right, and you may know that you are right, because it is the teaching of Christ and not of a man.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

Byron Nichols

GOOD PEOPLE TALK ABOUT conditions and circumstances in the world and say, "God is in control," implying that everything that is occurring is according to God's will and plan.

Surely all who believe in God believe that He is indeed in control of the world. However, we cannot accept the idea that God's being in control means that He causes, wants, or is pleased with everything that happens. If so, everyone is merely a robot, having no choice or power of self-will.

If His being in control means that God causes everything to happen that happens, then God causes all sins to be committed, He caused Judas to betray Christ, Moses to strike the rock and thus be unable to enter the promised land of Canaan, Adam and Eve to sin and be expelled from Eden, Nadab and Abihu to offer strange fire, etc., etc., etc.

Romans 8:28 tells us that God can and does make good results come out of bad circumstances, but it doesn't say that He causes the bad circumstances. God was in control in the life of Joseph so that the evil things done to him ultimately led to his being in a position

of tremendous power and influence (Genesis 37-47), but God's control did not cause the evil.

Surely we don't believe that God actually desires that thousands die and many more suffer greatly in other ways as a direct result of war today, yet we can most assuredly believe that He sometimes uses His people to render special service in His name as a result of wars. For example, the greatest mission activity on the part of the church in modern times came about as a result of Christians serving in the military in World War II and seeing first-hand the tremendous spiritual needs of people ravaged by war.

Is it possible that we would feel guilty for thinking that God is not directly controlling everything that takes place in His universe? Would that make Him to be less than all powerful? Friends, the owner of any large company will most certainly delegate much authority and responsibility to others beneath him, but that owner still maintains the power to alter any decision implemented by any of his subordinates. God has chosen to work in somewhat the same way. He has delegated control of nations to kings, presidents, parliaments, etc., but they are all His subordinates, although few of them seem to realize that fact.

If God is directly in control of everything, why pray to Him in behalf of that which is good and of those in high places in government, etc.? Would not such prayers be useless, since God would already have things going the way He wanted them? Praying to God and asking Him to change anything would be futile. Yet, He makes it quite clear in the Scriptures that He wants His people to pray—Luke 18:1 (we ought always to pray); Colossians 4:2 (continue in prayer); Philippians 4:6 (let requests be made known to God); 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (pray without ceasing); James 5:16 (the earnest prayer of a righteous man avails much). Furthermore, God has promised to answer our prayers—Matthew 6:5,6 (pray in secret, but He will reward openly); Matthew 7:7-11 (if we will ask, God will give us good things); John 15:7,16 (our requests to God through Christ will be granted).

It would seem that if God were in complete control, His will would constantly and consistently be done. However, in 2 Peter 3:9 we find Peter saying that God *"is longsuffering toward us, not willing (desiring) that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* It thus is made clear that God's will (desire) is that all should repent and be saved. Has that ever come about in the past? No. Is it happening now? No. Is there reason to believe it will occur

in the future? None at all. Matthew 7:13 and 14, Matthew 18:8,9,34, and 35, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, and many other passages reveal that God's will is going to be spurned by many, even the majority, throughout the existence of the earth.

Friends, we are not guilty of denying the power of God when we accept the fact that He does not exercise constant control of everything in the world. God IS in control, but He is not causing men to do evil and abuse others and violate His written will, the Bible. He IS in control—He has the power to end the existence of this world any time He may determine to do so. In the meantime, He is allowing men to exercise their free moral agency and be wicked if they so choose, but the time will most certainly come when He will put an end to it all. Until then, let us not be guilty, either intentionally or unintentionally, of trying to make God responsible for all that happens in the world.

THE CHURCH

Carroll Sites

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST thought when you hear the word "church"? What is your definition of "church"? What role should the church play in the history of man? What does God intend the church to be? Just what is the church anyway? Plainly and simply—the Lord's church is the Lord's people. "Ekklesia" is the Greek word, meaning "the called out"—"the assembly"—when attached to the church of God—"that which belongs to the Lord."

Alexander MacLaren observed, "The church is an anvil which has worn out many hammers." From the pen of Henry Ward Beecher comes the thought, "The church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones." Really, the church is not a hotel for saints, but rather a hospital for sinners. "The Church with no great anguish on its heart has no great music on its lips"—Karl Barth. Jesus taught that His disciples are to be "*the salt of the earth*"—"the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14-16). Paul writes that the church is to be a "*shining light in the world*" (Philippians 2:15). Maybe E.C. McKenzie summed it up properly—"The world at its worst needs the church at its best." You see, the church offers you something you simply cannot get elsewhere.

Someone observed, "All churches grow old, but some never

grow up." A church that is not reaching out to the lost and needy is passing out. The church is a workshop, not a dormitory. But many times, when all is said and done, more is said than done. The church desperately needs workers, not a wrecking crew.

The business of the church is to get rid of evil, not supervise it. However, if you and I were perfect, we could not belong. We are all sinners in need of the grace of God. As a place of worship, the church should be of such character that it will be easy for men to find God and difficult for them to forget Him.

A sign in front of a Chicago church building said, "The competition is terrible, but we are still open for business." And that's the way it is! The church—pray for her...support her...and help to build her up.

God's Word—The Seed of the Kingdom

Jerry L. Davidson

IS IT POSSIBLE TO have the same faith as the apostles and the first century Christians? Can we have unity among believers today as they had in the early church before the development of human creeds and denominationalism? Can we be Christians only and members of the same church established by Christ 2,000 years ago? Has God taken specific measures to preserve His church through the centuries? If so, how?

God, in His marvelous creation, established the principle of the seed as the means for propagating all living things. According to Genesis 1:11, "*God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself,* (emphasis mine) *on the earth; and it was so.*" Living things depend upon the seed-law of the Creator. Where the seed is planted new life will come forth "after its kind."

The seed-law also holds true in the spiritual realm. God's Word is pictured in the Bible as reproductive seed.

"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). The Word of God is absolutely necessary in the spiritual birth process.

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born, not by corruptible seed but

incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:22,23). God's Word is clearly identified as the "seed" through which we are born again spiritually.

Jesus, in explaining the parable of the sower, said, "*Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God*" (Luke 8:11). It is apparent, then, that the Word of God is the propagating means of the kingdom, or church (Matthew 16:18,19).

Sometimes the question is asked, "Can you trace the church of Christ, through an unbroken line, all the way back to the first century?" In the sense of an unbroken line of descent, no, such a record was not kept. But in the sense that there have always been Bible-believing and Bible-practicing Christians to represent God in the world, yes, the church of Christ has continued to exist through the centuries.

How do we know? Because Christ Himself promised that His kingdom would never be destroyed, that even the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Repeatedly in the prophetic statements of the Old Testament, the church or kingdom had been promised, with the stipulation that "*...it shall stand forever*" (Daniel 2:44; Joel 2:28; Isaiah 2:2,3).

On the other hand, because God has preserved the Seed—His Word—we can be assured that *anywhere* and *anytime* that Word is sown in honest hearts, it will bring forth the same fruit it bore in the first century. As long as those two elements continue to exist in the world—God's seed-Word and honest human hearts—the church will also continue to exist

Is it possible to have the same faith today as the apostles and the first century Christians? Is it possible to be Christians only and members of the same church established by Christ 2,000 years ago?

Absolutely! With the Word of God as the true seed, we can have the same church, the same divine plan of salvation, the same worship, and the same hope of heaven as in the first century.

THE ONLY GOD

John Thlesen

"IS IT REALLY NECESSARY to believe in a particular God? Isn't it enough to believe that there is some higher power or powers?"

Practically everyone admits there is a higher power. This is so

obvious that it is hardly questioned by most of humanity. People have always believed in a god just from observing the beauty and harmony of nature. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1). There is also an innate longing for God within the human heart, and so we see religious devotion to a deity or deities in most nations of the world by most peoples of the world.

THE UNKNOWN GOD

When the apostle Paul went to Athens, he noticed that the Greeks had a god for every conceivable situation. And, just to make sure they hadn't missed any, they had erected an altar to the UNKNOWN GOD. Paul pointed out their zealousness and spoke of this God they did not know. He said, *"Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you"* (Acts 17:23). He then preached to them about the God who had made the world and all things in it and who gave His Son Jesus Christ for them, raising Him from the dead. He was showing them that there is only one true God.

Unfortunately, there are still many people in the world who do not know this true God. Paul's message to the Athenians is needed today: *"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.*

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being," as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

There are not many Gods, but just One who is controlling this universe in which we live. He is the One described in the Bible, the

One who created the heavens and the earth and made man in His own image. When the first man and woman sinned, He expelled them from the Garden of Eden, but immediately began preparing to send a Saviour into the world to die for their sins, His own Son Jesus Christ.

He is the God who appeared to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, David and many other prophets who spoke in His name in order to build a family and nation through which to send the promised Savior. He is the one who led the Israelites across the Red Sea and the wilderness to Canaan and, after they were established, sent Jesus in the fullness of time, born of a virgin among them, to fulfill all the promises of a sin-bearer and redeemer for the whole human race.

After Jesus had accomplished His death for our sins on the cross, He conquered death when God raised Him from the dead on the third day. This same Jesus returned to God in Heaven, but with the promise that on God's appointed day, Jesus will come in the clouds with all of His holy angels, to call the dead from the graves, and to take the saved to be with Him eternally. We must believe in this one true God in order to be saved on that great day. This is because there is no other God out there to save us. Jesus said, *"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent"* (John 17:3). He also said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6).

Do you know this one true God?

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

H.L. Meeks

THIS QUESTION WAS ASKED OF Paul and Silas by a sinner, a Philippians jailer. Their answer was, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house"* (Acts 16:31). Many will say that this is all the sinner had to do. But the next two verses tell us that *"they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."*

The apostle Peter says, *"baptism doth also now save us"* (1 Peter 3:21). Not baptism only, nor faith only, nor anything else only,

will save anyone. Jesus saves us when we do His will (see Matthew 7:21). Why was the jailer first told to believe on the Lord Jesus? They were about to preach the gospel to him and this would not do him any good if he did not believe and *obey* the gospel. Why was he baptized? Because baptism is a necessary part of the gospel (see Mark 16:16).

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

In Acts 2:37, we find this same question in a little different form. The apostles had preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost. The hearers realized they had crucified the Lord of glory. *"They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Then Peter said unto them, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (verse 38). They already believed, but there was something else they must do. What was it? They must repent and be baptized.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Again in a little different form, this question is asked and answered in Acts 9. Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. Jesus appeared to him directly from heaven and made Himself known to Saul. Saul said, *"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* The Lord said, *"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."* Why did Jesus not tell Saul to believe? Because he had *already* believed when Jesus made himself known to him. Saul now was penitent. He called Jesus "Lord" and was ready to do what Jesus wanted him to do.

So, why did Jesus not tell Saul to be baptized? Because, **not since Jesus arose from the dead and went back to heaven has any heavenly messenger told any person on earth, directly, what he must do to be saved!** Search the Scriptures and you will see that this is so. *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels"* (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Jesus told Saul to go into the city and it would be told him what he must do. Saul was blind, *"but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus, and he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."* Jesus sent Ananias, a disciple, to Saul to tell him what to do. Ananias, the inspired messenger, explained the miraculous appearance of Jesus to Saul. Then he told Saul what he must do: *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and*

be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE SAVED?

What must any person today do to be saved? Just what people on the day of Pentecost did! Just what Saul of Tarsus did! Just what the Philippian jailer did! Just what all the other New Testament examples of salvation in Christ did! **The Bible tells us**—before all the human creeds were originated—that all of those early believers were **baptized** so that their sins could be forgiven!

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

Hear the gospel, Matthew 17:5; Romans 10:17. **Believe in Christ**, John 8:24; John 20:31. **Repent of all sins**, Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30. **Confess Christ**, Matthew 10:32; Acts 8:37. **Be baptized**, Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3.

The obedient believer dies to sin (Romans 6:2); he is **buried** (immersed) by baptism into death, and is **raised** to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3,4). He is added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). It will be the right church. There are many churches in the world but the Lord will add to none other than the one He built (Matthew 16:18).

Is this all? No, it is just the beginning of a life of loving service in the church. We must be faithful unto death, and then we shall receive a crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Friend, will you obey the Savior? Will you do it today? It is urgent. *Now* is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Jesus wants to save you.

God's Word Should Guide the Conscience

Basil Overton

CONSCIENCE IS THE FACULTY of one's being that approves and disapproves of matters that come to his mind. Conscience is developed through teaching. One's feeling, or conscience, on any matter comes as a result of what he learns. If one hears that which is untrue, and believes it, thinking it is true, his conscience will accept it as true, even though it is false.

Jacob was told by his sons that their brother, Joseph, was

evidently slain by an animal. To make their lie sound more like the truth, they showed Jacob Joseph's coat of many colors, which they had dipped in the blood of an animal. Jacob believed the lie; for twenty years he felt that Joseph was dead. But, Joseph was very much alive! He was in Egypt, and prospered rapidly in that great land (Genesis 39-50). Jacob felt the same during the twenty years as he would have felt had Joseph actually been dead. His feelings deceived him because he believed something that was not so! His conscience misled him because it was misled by a false report of his own sons.

Likewise, some think they are saved from their sins when they are not. Some are told they can be saved from past sins and become Christians without being baptized. If they believe this, they believe something that is not so. But, because they believe it, they feel that they are all right. Their consciences thus mislead them, because their consciences are misled by doctrine that is not in keeping with God's Word. God's Word teaches that those who believe that Christ is God's Son must repent of their sins and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:36-41). Let God's Word guide your conscience.

GOD'S WORD

Jerry Jenkins

THERE ARE NOW TELESCOPES that are extremely powerful, but we have not yet invented one that could see the earth if that telescope were located on our nearest star. Yet there is an instrument that can see not only the earth; but it can see much beyond. It is so remarkable that it enables man to look into the past and also peer into the future. That tool which enables man to see such great distances; and to look backward and forward, is the Word of God. Through the Word we can see God as He created the world and all living things (Hebrews 11:3), we can see His love for us (John 3:16), and we can learn of the Savior who died for our sins (Romans 5:6-11).

Some have wealthy relatives who can will them an estate worth millions, but no family member is able to offer an inheritance among the redeemed, which God's Word can do for us. If we are obedient and faithful to its Gospel (Acts 20:32).

Recently the Challenger was able to dock with a space laboratory

and retrieve some men and bring them back to earth. The Word of God is able to lift one into the very presence of God.

No wonder the Sweet Singer of Israel said: *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver"* (Psalm 119:71). And again, *"O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day"* (Psalm 119:97).

MALNUTRITION

Mike Kouba

THE CHURCH IS FULL OF ANOREXIC, under-nourished, hungry and malnourished people. Think about it. We feed our physical bodies two, four, even up to six times a day (if you're a teen). A snack here, a meal there; a bite whenever we can sneak one. You can certainly tell when someone has been eating well. It shows. They have energy. They are able to sustain the day's activities. And they grow, literally.

What happens when someone skips a meal? They are grouchy, irritable, restless, and "starving". Miss enough meals and the physical body goes into shock. Sickness sets in and the disease of malnutrition clearly shows.

Try it. Go seven days between meals. On that seventh day, gorge the entire day until you are so stuffed you can't take any more. You'll feel good, I promise. Until the second day. The physical body is just not designed to undergo this kind of routine.

Then **why do we force that practice upon our spiritual bodies?** We seem to be accustomed to feasting on the Word of Life only once or twice a week. And that only by the preacher or Bible class teacher. Is it boredom? Is it something we just don't think about? Is it intimidation of not knowing how? Put those same questions to the art of feeding the physical body. That might help change your perspective concerning the spiritual.

Nutritionists claim balance is the key word to a good diet. Christians don't seem to even have a diet. We are hungry, skinny, bony, pale and weak. Even more sad is the fact that we have the "food" right before us but many choose not to eat it until the seventh day. Aren't you hungry? Look into the mirror of God's word to discover the answer. It's not a "try it" type of thing. It's a must for survival.

Controlled by Fear or by Love?

David W. Chadwell

THE TWO MOST POWERFUL FORCES within relationships are love and fear. Unquestionably the more powerful is love. Husbands and wives want a spouse who loves them, not fears them. Parents want children who obey in love, not fear. Adults want friends who love them, not fear them.

Love possesses the power of endurance. It nurtures and adds meaning to life. It sustains and develops. Fear does none of that. In human relationships, love is always more constructive, beneficial, and valued than fear.

What about the human-divine relationship? Does God seek to control Christians by love or fear? As God formed and attempted to govern the nation of Israel, He often used fear. He wanted Israel to love Him (Deuteronomy 6:4,5), but He also gave Israel significant reasons to fear Him.

His personal relationship with Israel began when Moses returned to lead them. God used the plagues for His initial, personal introduction to these people (Exodus 7-11). Through the plagues, God established the reality of His existence. He demonstrated that He was the living, independent God with superior power. The message was unmistakable: "I, the living God, am a powerful God to be held in awe. Do not rebel against me!"

In Deuteronomy, Moses urged Israel to obey God. He clearly utilized fear as a motive for obedience. If a person's brother, son, daughter, wife, or best friend enticed him to commit idolatry, he was to report them and help execute them (Deuteronomy 13:6-11). This would cause all Israel to be afraid to commit idolatry.

If a man expressed disrespect for the court ruling of a priest or judge, he was to be killed (Deuteronomy 17:8-13). All Israel would hear and be afraid to express disrespect.

If a false witness testified, he was to serve the sentence for the crime of his false accusation (Deuteronomy 19:15-21). Israel would hear and be afraid to be false witnesses.

Parents who had a stubborn, rebellious son were to have him executed (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). All Israel would hear and be afraid. The law used fear as a primary means of control. Obedience was often the result of fear.

This same powerful God revealed Himself in Jesus' life, cross, and resurrection. In this self-revelation, you see love, not fear. The

cross and the resurrection are more awesome than the plagues in Egypt. The plagues revealed the power to destroy; the cross and resurrection revealed the power to give life. With the plagues, God delivered Israel from slavery. With the cross, God delivered us from sin.

God's love was at work in the plagues. However, God used fear because of the wickedness and ignorance of those people. God's love is at work in the cross and the resurrection. No longer does He seek to control His people by fear. The controlling power at work in the life of Christians is love, not fear.

God's controlling love is as clearly revealed in the Gospel as fear was in the law. Because of His love, God sent Jesus to be our Savior, not to condemn us (John 3:16-21). He demonstrated His love for us by allowing Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:5-8). The love of Christ controls us because one died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). It was God's great love for us that revealed the grace that saves us (Ephesians 2:3-5). God's love has given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16,17). The incredible thing is not that we love God, but that He loves us. In that love He gave us His only Son so that we could live through His Son (1 John 4:9-11).

The contrast of the objectives in the law and in the Gospel is astounding. The law's objective: make people afraid to commit evil. The Gospel's objective: open people's eyes to God's awesome love in the cross and in forgiveness, and they will want to obey and serve.

Christians treat other people as they wish to be treated. They are honest and honorable. They show mercy to those who fail and forgive those who hurt them. They help the least significant people. They humbly serve fellow Christians. Why do they live **daily** in this manner? Because of fear? No! Because they love Jesus and the God who sent Him. Only people controlled by love behave in those ways for a lifetime.

Can you grasp what God did for you in the cross and the resurrection? Can you appreciate the significance of forgiveness? Can you respond to the privilege of being God's son or daughter? Are you capable of loving God and Jesus more than you love yourself? Can you allow your love for Christ to direct your thinking, to determine your emotions, and to structure your behavior?

Fear can *turn* you to God, but fear cannot *bond* you to God. Only love will bond your heart, mind, and life to God. Are you capable of being controlled by love?

The Kingdom of Heaven

Derek L. Daniell

THERE WAS A FEELING of great expectancy among the people of Israel. **A prophet named John was preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand!** John is the prophet referred to by Isaiah as *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"* (Matthew 3:1-3; Isaiah 40:3). After John had been put in prison by King Herod, another messenger from God—Jesus—came preaching, saying, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:14,15).

THE KINGDOM IN PROPHECY

Was the kingdom that had been promised down through the centuries really near? Was their King coming? God had made a covenant with King David that one of his descendants would establish the throne for ever (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 89:35-37). Now the time prophesied was to be fulfilled, the kingdom was at hand.

This promise had given the nation hope in its darkest hours. One such time had been when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had destroyed their temple, burned Jerusalem and taken the nation into captivity. It was to this pagan king that God had revealed His plan for an everlasting kingdom. We read of the dream and its interpretation by the prophet Daniel, in chapter 2 of the book that bears his name.

When John and Jesus came upon the scene, three great kingdoms—Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Grecian—were history, and the fourth—Rome—had come to power. It was to be in the days of this fourth empire that God would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed. This kingdom would not be left to another people, and would stand forever (Daniel 2:36-45).

THE KING ARRIVES

The angel Gabriel had told Mary, *"Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end"* (Luke 1:30-33).

Jesus sent out the seventy disciples to proclaim *"The kingdom*

of God (heaven) is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9). After He chose twelve special men to be His apostles He sent them out with the same message, as we read in Matthew 10:7. Jesus told His disciples that some of them would actually see the kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). As the enemies of Jesus sought to have Pilate put Him to death, they accused Him of claiming to be a king, in opposition to the emperor of Rome (Luke 23:1-3). Jesus agreed that He was a king, but He said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:33-37). Though the people had attempted at one time to make Jesus their earthly king, (John 6:15), the religious leaders would not accept Him (John 19:12-15 and John 1:11).

And, contrary to what people thought in those days and still think, even today, Jesus' kingdom was to be spiritual; it was never intended to be an earthly organization set up in the city of Jerusalem (Romans 14:17). His kingdom was not to be like those of earth with positions of power for humans (Luke 22:24-30).

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

Following His resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with His apostles, ***"speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*** They were instructed to remain in Jerusalem until they received ***"power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you."*** With the coming of the power would come the kingdom (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:1-8)

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2:1-4), when Peter and the other apostles used the keys of the Gospel to open the kingdom (Matthew 16:19).

In his speech, Peter reminded his listeners of the promise God had made to David, that ***"He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne... that God hath made that same Jesus...both Lord and Christ"*** (Acts 2:22-36). Later, about 3,000 were ***"added to them"*** as they were baptized for remission of sins and they entered the Kingdom (Acts 2:41).

Jesus had told Nicodemus that in order to ***enter the Kingdom***, he must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-5). That is what these people did, on the day of Pentecost.

Following the beginning of the persecution of the church, Philip went down to Samaria, ***"preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ"*** (Acts 8:5-12).

In like manner, Paul preached the same message, in Acts 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, and 28:23,31. It was Paul who wrote to the Christians at Colosse, reminding them that they had been translated ***into the Kingdom*** of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

The Christian's citizenship is in heaven, their inheritance is described in Philippians 3:20,21. *"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear"* (Hebrews 12:28; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5). Though some will be found worthy of their inheritance, many will not, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 and Galatians 5:21.

The value of the kingdom of heaven is *"like a merchant man seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all he had, and bought it"* (Matthew 13:45,46).

How important is the Kingdom of heaven to you? Do you seek it? When you have found it, will you be willing to give all you have to obtain it? When the kingdom is yours, *"give diligence to make your calling and election sure ... for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 1:10,11).

The Kingdom Must Be FIRST

Neal Pollard

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE greatest sermon ever preached, Jesus commanded, *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). It was then, and is now, one of the most neglected commands disregarded by an overwhelming majority who seek something else *first* (Philippians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 1:22). But, the Kingdom of Christ is of primary importance.

Jesus emphasizes the Kingdom's importance particularly in Matthew 13, where He utters several parables about it. In the midst of this teaching He explains to His disciples the meaning of one of them (36-43). In it, He clearly delineates all the components of the parable of the tares. Set in opposition to each other are the wheat and the tares. With the rest of the New Testament, this parable emphasizes that *there is but one institution which is eternally important* so there is only *one* place it can occupy in the hearts of any who desire to be pleasing to God. As Jesus said, *the Kingdom must be first*.

It must be first because of what it is.

Around 600 B.C., an eighteen-year-old young man of royal descent found himself in Babylonian captivity, with the nation of Judah. In addition to other divinely-ordained insights, Daniel *"even understood all kinds of visions and dreams"* (Daniel 1:17). In chapter two, Daniel prophesies the rise and fall of four empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome. In the time of the fourth kingdom would arise another Kingdom, one which would never be destroyed but would itself endure forever (Daniel 2:44). Daniel describes an indestructible, irreplaceable, invincible, infinite institution!

But what is the Kingdom to which Daniel refers? It is discussed in Matthew 16:13-19, where Jesus speaks of *the church* and *the Kingdom* as being synonymous. Getting into the Kingdom requires the same things as getting into the church. As only those in the church will be saved, so it will be with those in the Kingdom. Therefore, the Kingdom is the blood-bought institution of Christ (Acts 20:28), the precious body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23), the very family of God (1 Timothy 5:1,2), and the only vine producing the right kind of fruit (John 15:1-4). Because the church is a Kingdom, it has a specific King (Christ), territory (the church), citizens (Christians), and laws (doctrine of Christ). The Kingdom is no ordinary or earthly-devised institution! When a Christian's actions say that he can "take" or "leave" the church, that he does not want to be involved, that he does not want to follow Christ and His rules, he says he does not care about or realize what the kingdom is.

IT MUST BE FIRST BECAUSE OF WHOSE IT IS

The Kingdom belongs to Christ (Acts 20:28), and it is a divine and heavenly Kingdom (John 18:36). It exists in this world, but its authority is in Heaven. For that reason it should be first in the Christian's life.

If a stranger gave you a list of instructions to follow, you would probably pay very little attention. It might mean more if a neighbor or friend gave you that list of things to do. If it was your spouse, you would heed it even more. The *consequences* would increase if under threat of penalty, a policeman or government official gave out the list of things to follow. But the list of instructions Christians have for their responsibilities in the Kingdom was not given by a stranger, a friend, a loved one, or even an earthly authority. The Kingdom belongs to Christ—the one who saves man by His precious blood,

who loves him with His penetrating love, and leads him with His perfect Word. Since the Kingdom belongs to Christ, it must be first!

IT MUST BE FIRST BECAUSE OF WHY IT EXISTS

Consider the reasons for the kingdom's existence:

- *God created the Kingdom as a safe haven for all who wish to avoid perishing* (John 3:5). The only good seed in the field of the world are the children of the Kingdom. One who is not in the Kingdom is a worthless, harmful weed. God created the Kingdom to benefit the individual who wants personal salvation.
- *God created the Kingdom as a life-saving station*. The children of the Kingdom are to broadcast the good seed sown by Christ. One saved from sin cannot selfishly keep salvation to himself. Jesus needs laborers in His harvest (Luke 10:2). He commands all His children to teach the world (Mark 16:15).
- *God created the Kingdom as a hospital for the hurting* (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10). The primary purpose of the church is *not* to be a social service agency, but we are to be benevolent and help as many needy people as possible. We can then use such opportunities to introduce the gospel to these people in need. Jesus often healed the sick and fed the hungry before He taught them the gospel. Why would He change His approach in His Kingdom? He thus warns that seeing without helping the needy is a practical demonstration of "*faith without works*" (James 2:14-18).
- *God created the Kingdom as a way to glorify God* (Ephesians 3:21). When the church, with its members, follows the laws and fulfills the purposes of the Kingdom, God is glorified. Basically, the Kingdom exists to meet physical needs, to save souls, and to build up the saved. When we fail to engage ourselves in these areas of responsibility, we are not putting the Kingdom first.

The areas of responsibility outlined by the Lord are not like a buffet bar from which churches can choose involvement in the one or two that suit them. Likewise, in a church which is striving to do all its God-given work, there may be individuals who are not personally carrying any of the responsibility. This is not acceptable to God. Just being in a congregation that is working will not automatically punch one's ticket to heaven. If the individual is not

producing fruit himself, he will be cut off the vine (John 15:2); if he is not laboring in the vineyard, he cannot inherit eternal life (Matthew 21:31). If an individual or church loses sight of the mission, he or it must repent or completely disassociate from Christ (Revelation 3:14-19).

IT MUST BE FIRST BECAUSE OF WHERE IT IS GOING

Paul indicates that the kingdom will be turned by Christ over to God in "the end" (1 Corinthians 15:24). While one lives, he must work for the King. Every faithful Christian says with Christ, "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work*" (John 9:4). Every person on earth is given one life, one set of talents and opportunities. Once life is over for a person, the time for labor is past. But there will come a resurrection morning (John 5: 28,29). Then, all will stand before the King (Matthew 25:31-34).

1 Corinthians 15 reveals that the Kingdom will be delivered to God; but *not all in the Kingdom will be saved*. The weeds will be separated from the wheat. Earlier, in Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of a man who sowed good seed in his field, only to have enemies sabotage his efforts by planting weeds among the wheat. It is said that a certain weed known as darnel grass looked just like wheat until it was full-grown. By then, when it stood tall, its weight caused the wheat to wilt over. You could tell the two apart only by their fruit. That is what Jesus warned in Matthew 7:16.

The angels will gather the tares out of the Kingdom and they shall be burned with everlasting fire. The righteous shall shine forth as the sun—i.e., they shall be granted eternal life. **The Kingdom cannot be moved** (Hebrews 12:28). **It will never be destroyed** (Daniel 2:44). The book of Revelation promises that they that overcome through the blood of Christ can enter that heavenly city. Because only the faithful *in the Kingdom* shall triumph, the Kingdom must be first with every Christian!

The Kingdom must be put first because of **what** it is, **Whose** it is, **why** it is, and **where** it is going. Therefore, if one is not in the kingdom, he is not in the right place. He is not serving the right Master. He is not living for the right reasons. And, he is not going in the right direction. How tragic that one would fail to gain entrance into the Kingdom when the King Himself wants all to become citizens in it (2 Peter 3:9)!