

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

That There Be No Divisions Among You

IN HIS EPISTLE TO CHRISTIANS at Corinth the apostle Paul wrote: "Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10). But almost two thousand years after that statement of the apostle, we observe, that this is an undeniable fact that divisions exists among the followers of Christ everywhere throughout the world. There are hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of denominational churches all existing separate and apart from each other; possessing distinctive names, and doctrines and practices, yet all claiming to faithfully follow Christ and to be His divine church. Yet, we are told that the author of Christianity Christ had established but only one church (Matthew 16:18). And before His death He had prayed earnestly that all who would believe in Him might be one in Him as He and the Father are one. Why then are there so many denominational churches on earth today? This condition certainly is very confusing to many sincere people. What causes denominationalism to exist?



Of all the causes that might be found for the existence of denominations, which represent divisions, not one worthy cause can really be found. Those causes are not sacred, but are carnal

and sinful . The division that exists today among those who should be brothers and sisters in Christ and in His one church is the most appalling fruit of denominationalism. The cause of the division, however, is not what the Bible teaches, since God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), but the cause of division among the followers of Christ is on things the Bible does not teach, as many believe and follow things which are not taught in God's word. Certainly, we can all agree on what the Bible says, but we all cannot agree on what the Bible does not teach. For example, we all agree that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that He was born in the Bethlehem of Judea, because the Bible says so. But we all cannot agree that He was born on December 25th, simply because the Bible nowhere teaches this. Similarly, we all agree that Jesus built the church, since He had Promised, "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18); too we all agree that the church is the spiritual body of Christ and He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). But we all cannot agree that the church of Christ is Catholic or protestant or one of the denominations. Because we do not read about any of them in the Bible. The church Christ had built is neither catholic nor protestant. The church of Christ is not a denomination or a conglomeration of denominations. Moreover, we can all agree to call ourselves Christians, because the Bible says that the followers of Christ were called Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). But we all cannot agree to call ourselves Baptist, or Methodist, or Lutheran, or Pentecostal, etcetera. Again, simply because the Bible does not say anything about any of these.

The same reasoning could be given for any number of things through which we can clearly see that the cause of division amongst the believers of Christ today are the doctrines and the commandments of men (Matthew 15:8, 9), which people have been blindly following for centuries , and not the teaching of God's word. For as long as people would continue to follow their "religious leaders", their "church doctrines", their "creed books" and "liturgical orders" , they would remain divided and away from God's truth as He has revealed for all men alike in His Bible. The only way to unity among all the believers in Christ is to return to God's written word. God's word, if believed and followed unadulterated and unaltered, will never divide people but it will unite them all in Christ and in His one church, where they will all worship alike (John 4:24), and will live for the glory of God.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SIN?

J.C. Choate



THERE WAS A TIME WHEN we knew about sin. We heard about it. It was spoken against. We knew what it was and we knew of its consequences. Those who engaged in it were frowned on, shunned, and disgraced. But it seems that times have changed. Attitudes toward sin are not what they were at one time. The word sin is almost never used anymore. For instance, how often do you hear the word sin used? How often do you hear someone talking about sin, or labeling a certain action as being sinful? Who knows anything about sin? What would be classified as sin today? As a matter of fact, many things that were frowned on at one time are now accepted. Many would be insulted for the subject of sin to be brought up.

As pointed out, many things that were at one time labeled as being sinful are now generally accepted. These would include homosexuality, living together outside of marriage, adultery, fornication, abortion, bad language, nudity, lying, cheating, murder, and many other similar acts. For example, a number of countries have now passed laws to legalize homosexuality. Those who engage in such now pass it off as being their own personal lifestyle. They are known as the "Gays" in some parts of the world and with the change of attitude toward them they have come out into the open to declare who they are and they seem to take pride in all of the attention they are getting. Some would pass them off as being sick, but they would reject even this idea. Actually, these are people who are involved in an unnatural act and the Bible labels it as being sinful and ungodly. Instead of being legalized, it should be outlawed. Certainly those who involve themselves in such a practice stand condemned before God and must repent of such activities in order to become Christians.

In the modern day society attitudes have so changed toward morals that a segment of young people, and even some older people, have begun to live together as man and woman outside of marriage. They claim that marriage is old-fashioned and out of date. However, the young women in particular who get caught in this kind of

philosophy will be the ones who will have to pay for it in the years to come. One can say what he wants to about marriage but where there is no marriage contract then the male will eventually feel free to walk out on the arrangement. But where will this leave the lady? It will leave her without a companion, perhaps with children, and who then will want to marry her? She therefore has all to lose and nothing to gain. Of course such living is bad and wrong and sinful. God's law demands marriage, and regardless of what the world has said it is not old-fashioned and out of date. It is as modern and up to date as today.

Akin to this are fornication and adultery. Fornication is an immoral act between man and woman both outside of marriage as well as in marriage. Adultery results when one is married lawfully and scripturally but puts away his or her companion without a scriptural reason and then marries another. (Matthew 19:9). More and more of these acts are being indulged in and it is becoming a sinful way of life.

Abortion is the act of killing a baby before birth. At one time this was done mainly where the life of the mother was in danger or where young women had become pregnant outside of marriage and rather than to go through the shame of having their child they would risk their lives by finding someone to do an unlawful abortion. But countries around the world, are now freely legalizing and performing abortions on thousands and even millions of women. In highly populated countries this may even become a popular means of holding the birthrate down. But this is nothing less than an act of murder. This is the killing of a new human being. It might be argued that this child is not a human being since it is yet unborn. If it is not a human life then what is it? Would it be vegetable life? No. Would it be animal life? No, again. Then it must be human life. And if it is human life and it is aborted or destroyed then that means that it has been killed, and that is murder. Actually, what we have today is that thousands and millions of unborn babies are being murdered around the world. Isn't that a horrible thought?

When we read of what King Herod did at the time of Jesus' birth we think how terrible that he would send his soldiers to Bethlehem and have them kill all the male babies two years and younger. He did this because he had heard that Jesus was born to be a king and he feared that one day Jesus might challenge him for his throne. Of course Jesus was not going to be an earthly king but Herod didn't know this. Anyway, Herod has gone down in history as having

been a fiendish person, a murderer of children. And he was all of that, but it has been estimated that may be 200 children were killed at that time but that is nothing in comparison to the number of unborn babies that are being killed each day in our time. Thousands more than that are being aborted every day and yet most people think nothing about it. Another heinous act with which we are all familiar was what Hitler did in recent history. He also had a program of exterminating babies, crippled and insane people, and he attempted to systematically do away with all of the Jews living in his country. That was a horrible thing, no one will deny. But as bad as it was it was nothing in comparison to what is happening in our own time, and that lawfully. Various governments and countries have even borrowed some of Hitler's ideas and practices for their plans to eliminate the weak and unwanted from society.

As awful as the foregoing is, did you know that this could be just the beginning? As the people around the world harden themselves to this kind of thing, they will be ready for some further evils to be introduced. And this is already in this works. In America, bills in many States have been formulated to permit older people who consent, and whose families consent, to be taken off drugs, medicines, and machines and allowed to die. Then eventually it may come to pass that crippled children insane people, and people at a pre-determined age will be exterminated for the "good" of the rest of society. Yes, the world is changing in its thinking and attitudes toward certain evils, but this is not making the world any better.

Bad language is now accepted as decent language. Nudity is on the increase. Even more and more of it is seen in Indian films. It is somewhat controlled by the censors but the very fact there is a growing number of adult pictures tells us that something is wrong somewhere. Then add to that the many other social, moral, and religious acts and practices that are somewhat common place and you can begin to get the idea of why the question is being asked, "Whatever happened to sin?"

As an explanation for some of these things we are told that people who indulge in them are sick. Often times a murderer or one who is guilty of some other hideous crime tries to get by the law by pleading insanity. Some of these sins may also be explained away with "situation ethics." That is, people would say that it depends on where you are, the circumstances, and so on, as to how a certain act or practice may be classified. Of course the Bible teaches that sin is sin, that there is no double standard. Other evils that are

practiced may result from the social values in certain places. In many countries the things we have discussed have been legalized and are therefore lawful. But regardless of what laws man pass, if a thing is sin it is sin. Then many would reason that "everyone does it" but they fail to realize that everyone can also be wrong. In recent times also the idea has grown up among young people in particular that one should be left to do his "own thing." They reason that if you want to do it and feel that it is right for you, then who would have a right to object to it? This kind of reasoning, if practised by all, would nullify all laws and would turn man loose to do as he pleased and thus the whole world would be flung into a chaotic condition. Neither has the women's lib movement helped the situation because the idea is basically that woman is liberated and should be free to do whatever she wants to do.

The question we need to ask, then, is: What is sin? It is said to be many things. Some of the words or synonymous that would define it would be "iniquity, offence, transgression, wickedness, evil, bad, wrong, ungodliness", and so on we could go. The Apostle John tells us that "All unrighteousness is sin." (1 John 5:17). Again, "Sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4). That is, God's word is our standard of authority and when we go beyond that law or when we break it then we have sinned or done wrong. In 1 John 3:8 he says that "He that committeth sin is of the Devil." Also, "If we say...we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." (1 John 1:9). And Paul concludes, "For all have sinned." (Romans 3:23).

What does the Bible say about the sins that we have discussed thus far, and those who commit them? Let's go to the Bible and see. Paul writes concerning a wicked group of people: "For the invisible things of Him from the creation are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 1:20-25). Here was a group of

people who had turned from God and had begun to worship images of man, fowl, and beasts. They had gotten so far away that the Lord gave them up to their own destruction. That is going as far into sin as you can go.

Again Paul writes, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Unless one turns away from sin he cannot be saved, and if one is not saved then he cannot be a part of the Lord's kingdom or church. Neither can such a person go to heaven. That is how serious this question is.

A similar passage is found in Galatians 5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Here, and in so many other places throughout the scriptures, specific sins are mentioned. They are also specifically mentioned as works of the flesh and those who do them cannot enter the kingdom of God. It is true that since the church is made up of human beings, that a congregation of Christians—being human beings—might accept one or more into their fellowship who is guilty of one or more of these things but that does not mean that the Lord has accepted them. Also, one may claim that he has repented, and on this basis, may be accepted into the fellowship of the saints, but again that does not mean that the Lord has added such an individual to his kingdom or church, unless one has genuinely repented. The only possible way to be saved and to be added to the church is for one to repent or turn away from all of his sins and thus to obey God that his sins might be washed away. (Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:47). But one other thing, and that is, someone might claim that Paul did not mention some particular sin and therefore that sin may be done without the Lord's disapproval, but Paul did mention it when he said, "...and such like." No doubt Paul, or the Spirit who guided him to write these things, knew that the day would come when man would invent to himself similar acts and practices that would likewise be wrong and, so as not to leave them out, he summed up the

whole thing by saying that one could not do these particular things, and such like, and expect to enter the kingdom of God or the church.

We are told what will happen to those who commit such sins: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerors, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Such is to say that all such people, those who do these things and all other bad things will be lost or will be cast into hell which is described as spiritual death, where one will be punished forever and forever. Yes, that is how serious sin is with the Lord and this is the consequence of sin. It should therefore not be taken lightly.

In Galatians 6:7, 8, Paul reminds us of this important truth: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." If we think we can sin without reaping the consequences, we are mistaken. We should not be deceived into thinking that sin is nice and that there is happiness in it. There have been those who reasoned that it is to be expected that young people in particular would sow their wild oats or would go on while they are young and do some things that they will not do when they become older. These same people overlook the fact that when young people or old people sow to the flesh that they will also have to reap the consequences.

Finally, we read the words of Paul: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23). It is true that you may go on and do all the things you want to do in life. You may engage in all of the sinful things that we have mentioned, and many others that we have not mentioned, and you may reason that this is your business. You may go on and do them and even have the approval of others. But remember this one thing: You will receive your wages for this, if not in this life, at least in the world to come and your wages will be death, spiritual death, eternal death. You cannot live a life of sin without having to suffer the consequences sooner or later, and often times sooner. Even if you live a long life, and do not experience many consequences in this life, eternity is a long time to have to pay for a few short years of sin. You had better think about the value of your soul and ask yourself if you are really ready to sell it for a few worldly sinful things. (Matthew 16:26).

My brethren and friends, there are some facts that we need to face. We must realize that sin is sin, that we cannot hide from it, and we must rid ourselves of it or suffer the consequences. We can call it by many names, even pretty names; we can pretend that it is not there, overlook it, try to hide it, but sin is still there. Only obedience to Christ can bring forgiveness or wash away our sins. (Acts 2:38; Matthew 26:28; Acts 2:47).

How do you view sin? Do you know what sin is? Do you recognize it? Do you condone it, wink at it, or hate it? Do you know what it can do for you? Have you repented of it in your life, purified your body and soul of it, and are you working against it? Oh, how we as God's people need to be on guard against it, warning others about it, and pointing to a life of godliness and showing what it means to live such a life. And we have this promise from God's word itself, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7).

Whatever happened to sin? Although the word has somewhat been put in the background by the masses, nevertheless, the evil is still there—it is alive and strong—and still working in the lives of all accountable beings all over the world. It is still taking its toll, bringing, heartaches, pains, sadness, sorrow, death, and eternal destruction to millions and billions. Again, we point you to Jesus Christ as the alternative, the only answer to sin. Through him, and only through him, can one rid himself of this killing disease and through him and only through him can one have the hope of life and life eternal. The wise will have no difficult choice to make when considering between the two.

What The Church Is

Ron Bryant

SPEAKING OF THE CITIZENS OF THE Kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, *"Ye are the salt of the earth . . . ye are the light of the world"* (Matthew 5:12ff). He then urged His disciples, *"Let your light shine... let men see your good works and as a result come to glorify your Father in heaven."* He urges simply that His followers function as a distinctive and saving influence in the world.

The Kingdom of God's dear Son is made up of men and women, boys and girls, that have been translated out of darkness. They

have been reconciled unto God through the blood of Christ. These reconciled ones also have come to a post of duty. They are called by God to personify and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to the world.

In any community members of the body represent the Kingdom in that community. It is obvious that in a given place the body can never be more effective nor dynamic than the individuals that compose it. In simple terms, if we belong to Christ, we represent Him. It is our faith and our love, our devotion and our commitment that the world observes. It is only as we consistently and effectively personify and proclaim our Lord that His body is able to function effectively. In even simpler terms: If the church is a warm, caring fellowship it will be so only if we are warm and caring. If the church is growing spiritually and numerically, it will be so only as we are studying, sharing, praising, following, and encouraging others to do so. If it is a generous and liberal body, it will be so only as you and I give liberally and sacrificially to the work of the Lord. If it is a spiritually strong, biblically sound body, it will be so because you and I are, above all else, committed to the Word of God. If it is a soul-winning body, it will be so because you and I are daily proclaiming and personifying Christ. The church is us.

Seek Those Things Which Are Above

Wayne Barrier

THE BIBLE PROVIDES CLEAR INSTRUCTION about the priority of things that can demand our energy, attention, and emphasis in life. We sometimes forget this instruction and allow less important things to take control in our lives. We seem to easily drift into very complex/busy, demanding lifestyles that put Christian service and emphasis at a lower priority than many other dimensions of life.

From Colossians 3:1-4 we read, *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."*

Jesus stated in Matthew 6:33, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to*

you." In this verse Jesus is referring to a list of things that man often seeks and emphasizes over the kingdom of God. He further says in Matthew 6:24, *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."*

We must learn to place *"things above"* in first priority. To do so doesn't mean we can put no emphasis on anything else in life. Certainly other things are important, too. We must work to live, giving some emphasis to jobs, careers, finances, and such things. If our first priority is *"things above,"* then our efforts in other areas of life will be influenced by our first priority—Christ. When we successfully *"seek first those things above,"* emphasis on our jobs, careers, finances, etc. will result in greater service to God.

Paul, in Colossians 3:5, mentions some things that must be *"put to death"* which are earthly. These things are the products of placing emphasis on earthly goals. They include fornication, uncleanness, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry.

We are promised eternal life if we can live faithfully to God until death (Revelation 2:10). Most people would pay a great price for something that would lengthen life on earth. Christ makes it possible for every man to have the hope of eternal life (John 3:16). We are asked only to give Him first priority in life. His Word provides the meaning of "first priority."

The Trivial, The Important, The All-Important

Dalton Key

WE MUST BEGIN LEARNING TO distinguish between things trivial, things important, and things all-important. Many of us have become sadly distracted, majoring in minors and minoring in majors.

As one observer has commented, modern man appears to be worshipping his work, working at his play, and playing at his worship.

Take a good, hard look at yourself. Do you allow trivial matters to dominate your life? Are important matters given higher priority than those which are all-important? Are all-important matters relegated to realms of virtual obscurity?

Just what are we talking about? A stain on the tie is trivial; a secure financial future is important; faithfulness to the Lord of life

is all-important.

How often is our day made or ruined—determined to be good or bad—depending upon whether we're having a good hair—do, whether or not our favorite shirt is clean, or what the weather is like? How often do we allow a red light or a long line or a critical neighbor to dominate our thinking, our conversation, our very attitude and outlook?

But as grave a problem as this is, there is something more dangerous still. Are we not coming close to exchanging our very souls for the important? When flesh is given prominence over spirit, when living is allowed to supersede eternal life, we when time is valued over eternity, we are revealing a disastrous misdirection of focus. There is nothing—**nothing**—more important than faithfulness of God. Jesus expects it; discipleship demands it (Matthew 16:24,25). First century Christians gave their lives in death for it (Revelation 2:10).

Self-preservation is a powerful instinct, but it is not the most important thing on earth. We are more than animals, clawing from maddened instinct for survival. We have been blessed with the capacity to look beyond this life, to prioritize matters vying for our attention, and to truly put first things first.

But will we?

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

E. Claude Gardner

NO PERSON CAN DETERMINE BY his wisdom who is a Christian. However, the Bible defines and describes a Christian.

"Christian" is broadly used to describe a nation as being Christian, and to include any person who claims to follow Jesus.

It is important to understand who is a Christian *in the Bible sense*. This will determine whether we seek to teach New Testament Christianity to the world. If all who are sincere and devout are pleasing to God, then we should be unconcerned with their status with God and forget about trying to evangelize them. It follows that we would not have any gospel message to bring them.

Furthermore, if all who claim to be Christians are *Christians*, we have fellowship or participation with them. If they are Christians as *defined by the New Testament*, there can be joint participation with them in worship, campaigns, and religious projects. The Bible says

that all *“who walk in the light”* of truth have fellowship with each other and with Christ (1 John 1:7).

It would be wonderful to be brothers to all who are good, decent people who are trying to serve God in their own way. How painful it is to be separated from respectable people who are honorable and religious.

The plan of unity given in the Bible (Ephesians 4:3-6) is the divine way of being united in Christ. Regretfully, there are religious people who reject or attempt to circumvent these seven basic points: **one body** (church), **one Spirit**, **one hope**, **one Lord**, **one faith** (belief), **one baptism**, and **one God**. To accept one of the seven is to accept all seven.

We dare not judge by human insight who is a Christian. God gives the answer. He has revealed the plan of salvation whereby one becomes a Christian, which is by obeying Christ. A Christian is one who has been saved from past sins by coming to Jesus on conditions He and the inspired apostles gave.

Jesus simply stated, *“He that believeth and is baptized (immersed) shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). Peter commanded, *“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 Spirit”* (Acts 2:38). Numerous other verses teach that these commands are necessary. If one command can be waived or diluted, then this can be done for the others. Both repentance and baptism are essential.

Many religions teach that one becomes a Christian by “faith only,” “accepting Jesus as your personal Savior,” or by praying for forgiveness. Even so, the words of Jesus stand, and we therefore must teach that a penitent believer must be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in order to become a Christian. How can there be partnership with those who have not obeyed Jesus?

A Christian is one who has come to Jesus in obedience (Acts 2:38,41), and when this is done, he is added to the church because he has been saved by Jesus. *“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:41). In New Testament times there were no saved people outside the church. Becoming a Christian or being saved results in belonging to the church and not to a denomination, because none existed until several hundred years later. It is like a physical birth—when a baby is born, it becomes a member of the family at the same time. Likewise, when one is “born again” (John 3:5) he enters God’s family, the church. Those who

have obeyed the Gospel of Christ have fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ.

A Christian is one who wears the name of Christ. He is a "Christian"—Christ-like. Being a follower and disciple of Christ, he honors Christ as Savior, founder, and head of His church. He rejects all human and non-biblical names as being divisive and unscriptural. It is right to be a Christian only (1 Peter 4:16).

A Christian lives a life in harmony with the life and teachings of Jesus. Although not perfect, he seeks to imitate the Lord in all of his relationships of life. He will be dedicated in worship, prayer, and Bible study. He will be a good citizen in the community, in the family, in business, and in the church (Titus 2:11,12; Matthew 7:12).

A Christian will be faithful and some day, by God's grace, he will hear Jesus announce, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21).

Jesus taught, *"For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother"* (Matthew 12:50). Today we can enjoy fellowship with all who "do the will" of the Father (Matthew 7:21).

The Ultimate Tragedy

David Pharr

If you were to fall away (that is, leave the church and go back to your former way of life and/or former religion—back into sin and disobedience), what would be your condition? As a defense against pressure and temptation, you need to know the awful consequences of falling away,

There are many passages which describe the end of those who fall away, but the following texts are enough to show us how dreadful it is to forsake God. Please read each of them carefully.

John 15:4-6. This is part of an illustration Jesus used. As a branch must remain attached to the vine, so every Christian must remain attached to Christ. Fruit-bearing is an evidence that the "branch" is still abiding in the "Vine." Notice the consequences in verse 6.

Hebrews 10:26-31. The willful sin named in verse 26 refers to the deliberate decision to leave Christ and the church. When one does this he has forsaken the only sacrifice for sins and can no longer have any hope of being saved (unless he repents). Verses

28-31 show that to be lost eternally is worse {“*sorer punishment*”) than being killed without mercy.

2 Peter 2:20-22. The plain fact is that when one who has been a Christian forsakes Christ, forsakes Christ’s church, and forsakes the truth, he puts himself in a worse position than a heathen who has never known the Lord. The illustrations of the dog and sow in verse 22 emphasize the ugliness of backsliding into sin.

A brother was once asked, “If you should ever leave the church of Christ, where would you go?” He answered, To hell!” Either the Bible is right or it is wrong. God does not lie. What the Bible says about the necessity of faithfulness in Christ’s church, of loyalty to the truth, and of purity of heart and life is true without exception. Excuses and self-approving rationalization cannot change it. God’s will does not change. When people turn away from God they face terrible consequences.

When a member of the church goes back into willful sin and ceases to be faithful, the rest of the church must withdraw fellowship from him. Notice Paul’s instructions about this in 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15. Read also 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, where he deals especially with a brother who was living in fornication.

When a person can no longer have the fellowship of God’s people, *he no longer has fellowship with God.* Such a one has no hope until he repents and comes back to the right way. To die while in a fallen-away condition means being lost forever.

You may be thinking that you could never turn your back on Christ and His church. This should certainly be your prayer and your purpose. But remember that 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*” Always realize that such a possibility exists. Be on guard, therefore, against temptations, against discouragements, and against anything that might cause your love and loyalty to grow weak. If there is the slightest temptation to backslide, come to grips with it at once. While you are talking to God, the devil will not be “talking” to you.

The CRISIS

Batsell Barrett Baxter

In all of our work for Christ, we are undertaking a major self-examination of every activity, every program, every expenditure. Every decision must be made in view of our prime objective and

task, the saving of souls. Every activity must be reevaluated and every activity must justify itself afresh or be dropped.

We must make personal commitments of dedication and of willingness to sacrifice for the salvation of souls. All of us must be willing to dedicate ourselves, our talents, our time, and our substance totally, to the cause of evangelism. We need to go back and reexamine the dedication of the apostles, especially the apostle Paul. Only when Christians throughout the world are really in earnest about bringing the Gospel of Christ to the millions of people around us, and to the billions in our world, will our evangelistic efforts become effective.

Ours is a time of crisis in leadership. Elders, deacons, preachers, editors, speakers on radio and television programs, teachers, and all others who occupy places of influence must lead the way in this evangelistic crisis. Leaders must lead if others are to follow. *We have often become so busy doing other things—important and good things—that evangelism has been crowded out.* Elders and preachers and leaders in other phases of the Lord's work have often been so busy that they did not take the time to get out and talk to people about their souls or do very much to encourage and support those who did. Each one of us needs to examine himself and ask the question, "Who have I brought to Christ in the last 12 months?"

With all of our wonderful church buildings, with all of our fine Bible school programs, and with everything else that we have done, the contours of darkness have still continued to close in upon us. We have been too busy about secondary things, and *the first thing has been neglected.*

There have been too many chiefs and not enough Indians. There has been too little dedication. *Our real crisis is a crisis of ineffectiveness growing out of a failure of will, a failure of dedication.*

Up Or Down?

John Reese

The religions of the world try to climb up to some idea of Perfection or "God." They recognize that God is great and exalted. Man, therefore, in order to reach God, must climb up to Him in some way. The "ladder" upward has many rungs, that is, many rules and good works that must be kept. Thus, people try to make themselves "good enough" to come into God's presence.

There are at least two great problems. First, they have little way of being *sure* that their rules are the right rules. How can they be sure whether their ladder is going up or down? Secondly, people keep falling. The ladder is so high that sooner or later even the most skilled climber slips and falls. He breaks the rungs—the rules. Since this imaginary ladder seems to be the only way to reach God, this kind of religion leaves people feeling sad, guilty, and far from God.

The fact is that their way never works. Try a little experiment: Take hold of your toes and try to lift yourself one inch off the ground. You cannot do it! If you cannot lift yourself an inch, how are you going to lift yourself all the way to heaven?

The Christianity of the Bible is different from human religions. It confronts our sinfulness and weakness. It shows us that we cannot take ourselves to heaven. It says that none of us is “good enough” to come to the holy, majestic God. *“There is no one righteous, not even one for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:10,23). Therefore, the only hope for mankind is for God to come down and save us!

In His great mercy, God did this very thing. He sent a part of Himself, His own Son, from heaven to earth. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:1,14).

Was Saul of Tarsus Saved on the Damascus Road?

Ken Tyler

It has been argued by many preachers that Saul of Tarsus was saved in the midst of the light on the road to Damascus before he ever went into the city. But friends, if you will only study his conversion carefully you will see that this is not right.

The conversion of Saul is found in Acts 9. He reviewed what took place in his conversion in Acts 22 and 26. Saul was on his way to Damascus for the purpose of arresting Christians and bringing them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). When he came near Damascus there shined round about him a light from heaven (Acts 9:3). He fell

to the ground and heard a voice saying, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:4). Saul then asked, "*Who art thou, Lord?*" The Lord answered, "*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*" (Acts 9:5). Saul, who was trembling and astonished, then asked the most important question in the world: "*What wilt thou have me to do?*" The Lord told him to arise and go into the city, and there he would be told what he must do (Acts 9:6).

Acts 9:8 points out that Saul was blind and had to be led by the hand into Damascus. Acts 9:9 says that he was three days without sight and neither did eat nor drink. Acts 9:11 further shows that in Damascus he was praying. (I might mention here that this showed his penitent spirit.)

There was a disciple in Damascus by the name of Ananias. The Lord sent Ananias to Saul to tell him what to do (Acts 9:6,11). Ananias was leery of Saul because he knew of his persecution of Christians. However, the Lord told him Saul was a chosen vessel (Acts 9:13-15). Ananias then went to Saul, restored his sight, and told him what to do (Acts 9:17-18). According to Saul (Paul) in Acts 22:16, Ananias asked him, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*"

The story is plain. Saul **was not saved on the Damascus road**, but *in Damascus* when he obeyed what Ananias told him to do, to **arise and be baptized and wash away his sins**.

Remember, the Lord Himself had said to Saul, "*Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do*" (Acts 9:6). It was *in the city* that he would be told what to do. Ananias told him, he obeyed it, and he was saved.

It would indeed be a strange conversion if Saul actually had been saved in the midst of the light on the road to Damascus. If that was the case, **Saul himself did not know it**, for he asked the Lord what he must do; and if that was the case, **Jesus did not know it**, for he told Saul to go into the city and there he would be told what to do; and if he was saved on the road, he was the most miserable *saved* man anyone ever read about because he was blind, did not eat or drink a drop, and was praying for those three days. Does that sound like a saved man? No! Penitent Saul was saved when he arose and was baptized to wash away his sins. I pray you and I will practice the same.

CONVERSION

Bill Dillon

What exactly is conversion? Why is it necessary? What actually happens when a person is converted? The correct answers to these questions are given in the Bible.

The essence of conversion is change. Many conversions are found in nature. Wood becomes paper; a piece of coal becomes a diamond through the process called conversion.

In religion, conversion means a change from a life of sin to a life of righteousness. In Matthew 18:3 Jesus said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

When any man or woman is about to be converted, a kind of famine comes into that life. Not a famine of food, but a famine of meaning and purpose. The conscience begins to be troubled as Almighty God, through His Word, presses upon the soul, and this leads to the question, "What can I do about my sin?"

The soul feels spent. We have reached the end of ourselves. Worldly pleasures and activities become void of meaning. Eventually, there is no rest or peace until we come to terms with the will of God.

Being aware more and more of the numerous dangers and snares of life, the frailty of our being, and the inevitability of our death, we start to wake up to spiritual realities and realize our undone condition apart from God and Christ. We are condemned. We need to be converted.

Conversion involves:

1. A change of heart. This is produced by faith (Acts 15:9).
2. A change of allegiance. This is evidenced by confessing Christ to others (Romans 10:10; Acts 8:37).
3. A change of state. This change in relationship occurs in baptism (Galatians 3:26,27).

Conversion is necessary because sinners unconverted are unsuitable and unacceptable to God. Sinners must be converted into saints. That is such a tremendous task that only God can accomplish it!

If I am to be converted and to know the Lord, if I am to be changed, I must humbly seek the Lord and keep His commandments. The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, has made the long journey into this world to save us (Romans

5:8). He hung on the cross of Calvary and suffered grievously so that He could pardon all who repent and obey His Gospel.

Have you been converted?

THINGS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE!

Roy Beasley

GOD HAS ALWAYS REQUIRED sacrifice on the part of His people. First, it was a blood sacrifice of animals, which foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The stipulation was that the faithful were to give the best of the sheep, goats, and oxen. All others were rejected.

Now God requires the sacrifice of self. We are to give ourselves as *"a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is (our) reasonable (or, spiritual) service"* (Romans 12:1). This would include the sacrifice of time, money, and everything we have, including our own lives.

But there are some things that are even more important than sacrifice. Back in the Old Testament **King Saul was commanded by God to go out and utterly destroy the Amalekites, including all their flocks and herds.** Saul did as God commanded and marched his army against the fearsome Amalekites, and God gave him the victory. Saul destroyed all the Amalekites—every man, woman, and child—*except for one: Agag, the king*, whom he brought back to display as a trophy of war.

Saul also destroyed all the flocks and herds, *except for a few of the best*, which he brought back to offer as sacrifice to God. When he and his army came marching home, Samuel the prophet, went to meet him. No doubt he was expecting congratulations from Samuel for a job well done. Instead, Samuel said, *"What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"* Saul replied that it was because **the people** wanted to bring them back to sacrifice. Then Samuel spoke these remarkable words, ***"Behold, TO OBEY is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams."***

God has always required absolute and complete obedience. Disobedience, or even partial obedience, is never acceptable to God. One may make great sacrifices. He may sacrifice of his time and money. He may even *"give his body to be burned,"* but it is all

in vain if he fails to completely obey the Lord from the heart.

The prophet Hosea tells us that there are two more things better than sacrifice. He wrote in Hosea 6:6, “I desire **mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**”

The people were meeting together and worshipping in the right way. But some of them—even the priests—were guilty of terrible sins against their fellowman. Some were robbers and murderers. There was no justice in the land; there was no mercy. This showed that they did not have the *knowledge of God* in their hearts. The lack of that knowledge was reflected in the lives they lived.

The same problem existed in the days of Micah, the prophet, for he also wrote, “*With what shall I come before the Lord?..with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil?*” “No,” he goes on to say. “That is not what God wants.” What, then does He want, Micah? “*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*” (Micah 6:6-8).

To translate this into modern-day terminology, it is important to assemble on the Lord's Day with the saints, to sing, pray, preach the Word, and partake of the Lord's Supper. But, this will do no good unless we love God with the heart, mind, soul, and strength, and unless we love our neighbor as our self. We must seek to serve the Lord in humble obedience, treat others as we desire to be treated, and help those who are in need. Christianity is a life of faith coupled with action.

Yes, there are some things better than sacrifice: **obedience, mercy, and a knowledge of God.**

THIS MORTAL WILL PUT ON IMMORTALITY

James W. Farris

Brother Thomas B. Warren makes a significant point in his recent book entitled, **All of Us Will Be Somewhere Forever**. The title of the book is not only an assertion but also a biblical teaching.

The chilling fact of eternity should cause each person now living to evaluate his or her spiritual life in relation to the Word of God. The religious world has made many claims in times past regarding the eternal spiritual state of mankind. Some teach the notion of a

place called purgatory where man can "pay off his sins" until God accepts him into Heaven. Others claim that the souls of wicked men will be obliterated at the point of judgment. All such claims are based on man's opinions and should be denied by the Bible believing child of God. The Bible teaches there is only one of two places the spiritual portion of man will eternally reside.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said in John 11:25, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."* Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:13, *"But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen."* Following in 15:18, *"Then all those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."* Yet, because we know Christ was raised from the dead, we also have this hope of immortality. Paul further presses in 15:54, *"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in Victory.'"* Paul makes the conclusion that our hope of immortality is based on Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the promised return of our Lord.

People have long looked to an existence beyond this temporal, physical one. For example, the philosopher Plato remarked in his writings about the "... immortal, imperishable soul of man" and the "... Divine spiritual element that is forever."

Indeed as Brother Warren states in his book, there will be a "persistence of personality" for all people. However, there is only one person who is able to transform us, by means of that great resurrection, to the life of immortality: that person is JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God. The Christian has the hope of eternal life, while the alien sinner has only the everlasting destruction described by Jesus in Matthew 25:46.

We are separated from eternity by a thin line called life. Our life is as a vapor that appears for a short time and is gone away (James 4:14). As God's children, we meet every day with fascination and a spirit of humility and dedication to service. At the end of this life, God's child is gently lowered into an earthly tomb, but all the while that same hope Paul declared to the Thessalonians is very real, *"...and the dead in Christ will rise first"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16). So on that day, God's people **will** burst into one eternal day and greet the everlasting glory of newness. Let us all live so that our mortal will put on immortality. *"O Death where is thy sting?"*

What Does "Private Interpretation" Mean?

Jerry L. Davidson

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." (2 Peter 1:20.)

Well-meaning people in the religious world have avoided reading and studying the Bible because they have been led to believe that they are unable to interpret the Scriptures for themselves: In fact, many religious leaders point to 2 Peter 1:20 as a proof text for teaching that individuals can't understand the Bible unless it is interpreted for them by those who have had ecclesiastical training, or by the church. However, an examination of the context of this passage shows that this is not the case.

In this passage, Peter speaks of the "prophetic word" (Scriptures) being "made more sure" (verse 19) not, "by the will of man," but through "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (verse 21.) The Greek word for "moved" is a word that means "borne" or "carried along" as the wind moves or carries along a ship. The clear meaning is that the Biblical writers were **led** or **inspired** in their writings by the Holy Spirit.

The writers of the New Testament expected their readers to understand their writings, as the following passages indicate: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

"...by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4).

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren" (1 Thessalonians 5:27).

2 Peter 1:20 shows that the Scriptures were not of human origin. The Scriptures were not written by the invention of men, writing their own thoughts and creating their own laws, *"but holy men of God spake (wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*

Therefore; 2 Peter 1:20,21 is an explanation of *how* the Scriptures were transmitted to man from God. *It does not speak of whether Bible readers can understand its message.* Many passages in the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God intended for His

Word to be read and studied, and understood.

The apostle Paul wrote: *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Message From The Cross: Forgiving

Royce Frederick

"... when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink. Then they crucified Him ..." (Matthew 27:33-35).

This time, the Master Teacher was not sitting on a beautiful mountain side by the Sea of Galilee, nor in a portico of the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. There was no crowd of adoring followers eagerly listening to every word. Instead, He was being murdered in public. His friends had fled. The religious leaders had called Him an enemy of God. And the Roman governor had authorized His execution while declaring, *"I find no fault in this Man"* (Luke 23:4; see verse 14; John 18:38; 19:4,6). What would He say this time? *"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'"* (Luke 23:34).

It can be very difficult to forgive injuries—even after many years. But Jesus forgave these people **while** they were murdering Him. He desired **life** for those who gave Him **death**. God does not want any person to be lost eternally (Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4).

Jesus had told the crowd in Galilee, *"... love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44). He *told* us—then He *showed* us.

He also warned, *"... if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6:12,14,15; see Romans 12:14-21; James 2:13; Colossians 3:13). To enter heaven, we must be **forgiven and forgiving**.
