

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Preach The Word

IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE that we present this 50th volume of The Bible Teacher to our readers. Our goal has been, and will always be to present through the pages of The Bible Teacher only what the Bible teaches without addition, subtraction or substitution. Our desire has always been to present the pure New Testament Christianity of the Bible.



The aim of The Bible Teacher has been and will always be to enlighten its readers about what the Bible teaches on the subjects of what men must do to be saved from sin (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38); what is the one true church of the Bible that Christ Himself established in the city of Jerusalem in A.D.33, before any denominational churches, Catholic or Protestant, etc., came into existence on earth (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Acts 20:28); what is the true worship acceptable to God today (John 4:24; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16); and other such vital subjects. We want to urge one and all to return to the Bible for all they believe and practice in the name of Christianity, realizing that the Bible is the only authoritative word of God; it contains the whole truth and it presents God's pattern for us for all things. We are emphasizing that the Bible alone should be our rule of faith. (Romans 10:17). As such the Bible cannot be improved upon. Therefore it must be left as it is. God has not given to any man the authority to tamper with it. No man has the right to

change it or to alter its contents in any way or to replace its teachings with the teaching of men. (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 22: 18-19). Rather God would have us all to read it, study it, believe it, and obey it as it is. It has the power to save those who will obey it, and to destroy those who will refuse to do what it says. (John 12:48; Hebrews 4:12). It should, therefore, be dealt with all humility and reverence. We cannot afford to deal with it lightly.

As the apostle Paul exhorted the young preacher Timothy by saying, "Preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:2). He didn't mean to preach any word, men's philosophies or doctrines of men. But he was encouraging him to preach the word of God as He has given it. Something of what this means has been lost in today's modern definition of preaching. The true meaning of what the apostle had in mind is, to herald the word of God in its completeness, not altering it in any way, nor adding anything of his own that is borrowed from another source. It also includes the mandate to announce to men everywhere the total message as God gave it. So many in the world have departed from what the Bible teaches, as the apostle had warned, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (2 Timothy 4: 3, 4). Many today claim to believe and follow the Bible, but in fact, they are, in their ignorance, following teachings of men. The masses of the people all over the world have been led to believe that they are being taught God's will, when in reality they are being taught the doctrines of men. This is very much seen in all of the division and corruption that is to be found in the religious world of today.

The aim of The Bible Teacher will continue to be to emphasize what the Bible teaches regardless of what men say. It will not be trying to uphold anything that is not in the Bible. It will not be a tool for promoting any denominational or sectarian doctrine or teaching. It will be emphasizing the Truth of the Bible alone on all subjects, and urging all to read, study, and investigate the things presented in it in the light of the Bible. The Bible will be the theme and its acceptance will be stressed over and over again. To God be the glory.

Does God Speak Directly to Us Today?

J.C. Choate



CHRIST PREPARED HIS apostles to carry on His work when He returned to God in heaven. But they were only human, and He knew it would be impossible for them to remember all that He had said to them. In human error, they might have even taught false doctrines. To prevent such tragic and eternal problems, Jesus promised to send the Comforter, or the Holy Spirit, to lead the apostles into all truth. He said, *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and **bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you**"* (John 14:26). Again, He said, *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, **He will guide you into all the truth**: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come"* (John 16:13).

On the day of Pentecost, the apostles were gathered in Jerusalem, as Jesus had instructed them, when suddenly the Holy Spirit was poured out on them from God. Being baptized with the Spirit, as had been promised, they were now able to miraculously speak in the languages of those who were gathered to hear them (Acts 2:4-8). They were also able to heal the sick, raise the dead, and to speak the truths of God by the direction of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised. Through that power, they wrote the books of the New Testament, without human error and without contradiction.

Now, what were the reasons for these miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit?

- * Jesus had returned to heaven and was not there to guide the apostles.
- * The church was begun with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and divine guidance was needed to ensure that all practices and teachings with regard to the church be without human error.
- * As the apostles and their converts moved about the world, preaching the good news of salvation, they proved themselves

to be of God by the miracles they were able to perform.

- * The New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written. It was through the Holy Spirit that this was done, as the apostles penned the “God-breathed” words.
- * The New Testament was confirmed to be the word of God by the miraculous signs done by the writers (Mark 16:20).
- * During this infant stage of the church, before the Scriptures had been completed, there was a critical need for inspired guidance in the various congregations as they were scattered throughout the world. By prayer and the laying on of the **apostles’ hands** (Acts 8:14-18), individual miraculous gifts were given to Christians, to enable them to provide the correct leadership (1 Corinthians 12:4-31). There is no record anywhere in the New Testament which shows that anyone other than the apostles could give these miraculous gifts; therefore, when the apostles died, and those people died to whom they had given gifts, the miraculous age ceased. The reason for this was not that God would be limiting Himself, but that the Scriptures were then complete. His written word was then to be the guide for all men, for all time.

Regarding the completeness of God’s revealed message in the New Testament, we read, “*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).

How do we, today, learn God’s will? How do we develop faith? The answer is given in Romans 10:17: “*So then faith cometh by **hearing**, and **hearing by the word of God***”.

Yet many religious people today claim that God speaks directly to them, giving them new revelations, words that were not written in the New Testament. Are their claims true? Does the Holy Spirit talk to people individually during this time? Does He give one instruction to one man and different instructions to another, both of which contradict clear statements in the New Testament? When religious leaders claim to be speaking by inspiration, and the message of their “gospel” conflicts with what has already been laid down, written and confirmed as law in God’s revealed word, can these men be speaking the truth?

God warns through the apostle Paul, “*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach **any other gospel** to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed*” (Galatians 1:8).

*"We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of **any private interpretation**, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God **spoke** as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. But there were also **false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you...**" (2 Peter 1:19-21;2:1).*

The closing words of the Scriptures, Revelation 22:18,19, warn that nothing is to be **added to** or **taken from** what has been revealed. God's message for mankind is complete. Those who claim to speak new words from Him today are speaking the words of their own imagination. They are deceived and they deceive those who believe them. If you want to know what God has said, go to the Bible and let Him speak to you through those inspired pages.

*"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; **you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**" (Deuteronomy 12:32).*

Construction Underway

Bob Cruse

WHEN JESUS' DISCIPLES revealed their pride in "the buildings of the temple," He spoke tersely to them: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another" (Matthew 24:1-2 ASV).

The followers of Jesus, like many ancient Jews, were intensely mundane in their thinking. The Son of God, while on earth, tried constantly to instill within them a positive spiritual attitude. However, only after His death and resurrection, under the influence of the Comforter, were their hearts fully transformed. Their inspired discussions of such things as buildings and temples always accentuate the spiritual.

Peter writes about the construction of a beautiful temple. His God-breathed words reveal Christ to be the chief cornerstone. He pictures a spiritual house built with "living stones" for the purpose of offering up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Paul told the Athenians that "God...dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24). He refers to Christians as "God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9) and as "a temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:16). The building Paul describes to the Ephesians is a spiritual temple "fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord

... for a habitation of God" (Ephesians 2:20-22).

While this apostolic reasoning is powerful and persuasive, we must understand that a necessary inference of inspiration tempers its silence on the construction of physical facilities. Many spiritual activities designed by God to be done together to "provoke unto love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24-25) are given in Scripture. We need modest meeting places. However, the honing and polishing of living stones for God's building—that is, baptizing people and equipping them with moral and doctrinal purity—must be our first priority. When our priorities are in line with God's Word, He will provide adequate brick and mortar buildings.

Opportunities for spiritual construction are obvious. Cottages for our children's homes are used seven days a week for transforming unfortunate children into living stones. The rate of conversion of precious souls admitted to these homes has always been near 100 percent. Most of the children remain lifelong, fruit-bearing Christians. On the other hand, lavish, expensive church buildings, mostly empty and unused six days each week, have become a minimal source of conversions to Christ.

The evangelistic fervor we knew in the '50s and '60s lies dormant in a host of talented Christians. Truly spiritual leaders always will be busy providing motivation and training for these potential soul-winners. Big buildings do not save souls—dedicated Christians do. Erecting God's building upon the only foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9), is the only way we again will be the fastest growing religious group.

Some of our missionaries live at or below the poverty level as they labor to enlarge God's spiritual temple. Monies used to make our meeting houses appealing to the eye should be diverted to these neglected workers. Our leaders need a vision of how many more reapers could be sent forth when the spiritual is accentuated in the construction of buildings.

Too many elders do not see themselves as spiritual leaders (1 Peter 5:1-4). Too many elders cannot visualize their involvement in building God's spiritual house. Freed, however, from the burdens of deficit budgets, some elders might return to the God-given tasks of holding to the faithful Word, exhorting in the sound doctrine, and convicting the gainsayers.

False teachers and immoral people, with their combustible doctrines of men, always tarnish the luster of brilliant living stones and severely impede the work of building God's building.

The Inspiration and Authority of the Scriptures

Jimmy Jividen

FAITH IN THE AUTHORITY of the Scriptures is not an unscientific shot in the dark. It is supported by evidence. Physical evidences of history, archaeology and science confirm Bible history where valid evidence is available.

Faith in the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures is more than a naive leap into the unknown. A person cannot ignore the evidence that many of the Old Testament prophecies, given hundreds of years before their time of fulfillment, were accurately fulfilled in the events of history.

Faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures is not some irrational conclusion. The contents of the Scriptures are evidence for faith. How could some 40 different men scattered in different countries, living in different centuries and under different cultures write in three languages over a period of 3,000 years and yet write one story without contradiction? Inspiration is the only reasonable explanation. These facts give evidence that the Scriptures were written by holy men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Jesus called the Word of God “truth” (John 17:17). Paul called the Word of God “holy” and “sacred” (Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15). If a man cannot accept this view of the Scriptures, he cannot logically maintain faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus comes by the Word of God. If the Scriptures cannot be totally trusted, then faith in Jesus is based on a delusion. If the foundation is gone, the superstructure collapses.

God Substitutes

Belief in the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures is currently being undermined by God substitutes. The High and Holy God revealed in the Scriptures is incompatible with what most men want to do and with the god most men want to worship.

A definition of “god” in the field of psychology of religion is “the object of ultimate concern.” The God revealed in Scripture is not the object of ultimate concern for most men. Most serve idols of their own making, like the pagan gods worshiped by the Greeks and Romans of the first century.

- The god of secularism is worshiped by those who make

physical things into a god. Secular values become their objects of ultimate concern. The Scriptures expose these values as an idol. Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). When one makes secularism the object of ultimate concern, he cannot find fulfillment. His god will not last, and certainly it gives no hope (I John 2:15-17). If a person makes secularism the object of his ultimate concern he, like foolish pagans, becomes an idol worshiper.

- The negative god of atheism makes a religion of rejecting God all together. Believing that there is no God, an atheist has made his denial of God the object of his ultimate concern. His plight is described in the Psalms: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good” (Psalm 14:1).

The atheist has no basis for morality, no knowledge of the source of his existence, and no motive for kindness or spiritual values. He does not believe in God or the Scriptures that reveal God. This person sees himself forced into existence and dumped into an evil, alien world with no hope of heaven and no fear of hell.

- There is the god of “egoatry”—the deification of one’s own ego. This man sees himself as the center of the universe. Truth is what is true to him. Right is what he wants to do. Sin is what he does not like to do. Salvation is doing his own thing. Grace is rejecting any personal accountability for his conduct. These beliefs are popular in today’s cultures. Followers of this idol reject the Scriptures as religious authority and believe only in values that seem right in their own eyes. Scriptures call this doctrine of postmodernism foolish: “The way of the fool is right in his own eyes” (Proverbs 12:15). One who serves this idol is a worshiper of himself, the object of his ultimate concern.
- There is another god of one’s own emotion. Most evangelical religions are experiential, that is, a person’s faith comes by or is associated with an emotional, psychological experience. With variations, this is a fundamental teaching of most Calvinists, Pentecostals, Mormons and Charismatics. They interpret their own feelings as being their private religious authority and claim that God has revealed Himself through such an experience. It matters not whether this experience has Scriptural support. The personal experience is interpreted

as being a sign from God. Emotions are the foundation of this religion and become the object of ultimate concern.

Questioning

Another challenge to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures is of the greatest concern. The Scriptures are being questioned not openly but by subtle suggestions. One person might refuse to believe the Scriptures because he thinks they are outdated. Another might reject the inspiration of the Scriptures because he has been told and has come to believe that they are the product of an ignorant, ancient culture and are irrelevant in today's world. Still another might call them inspired but mean something different.

The meaning some give to "inspired" does not mean the Scriptures are true, absolute and authoritative. They define "inspired" as being inspirational to the reader. The Scriptures are called inspired because they contain the Word of God not because they are the Word of God. This person believes the Scriptures are inspired but must be re-interpreted in the contemporary culture. The authority of the Scriptures is found to be no more than what the believer wants to believe.

The statement of this view of the Scriptures was given by Krister Stendahl in *The Bible and the Role of Women*: "Thus we have in the Bible what is absolute only in and through what is relative. It is the work of the Spirit to make the word of man in the Bible into God's absolute word to us" (16). Because the inspiration is in the reader, the text may mean different things to different people.

These views of the Scriptures and the flawed interpretations of the Scriptures have already brought about apostasy in many churches and destroyed the faith of countless Christians.

Again let it be said, "No other doctrine is being called into question more than the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures."

New Hermeneutical Challenges

Four new, but not so new, hermeneutical challenges currently face leaders of the church. These challenges arise from the way Scripture is viewed. Either the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative or they are of human origin, permissive and accommodating to the culture. How one views the Scriptures reflects whether he or she is traveling the high road to restoration or the well-beaten path to apostasy.

- First is the challenge of substituting "performance worship" for the practice of worship in spirit and truth with the mind.

Worship in the temple was a performance by a priest with flickering candles, sweet-smelling incense, the sound and smell of animal sacrifices and trained singers with instrumental music. It was very impressive. Christian worship is done by the individual himself and is an expression of praise and devotion to God. Worship is something you do, not something done to you. Its purpose is to express devotion to God, not impress men with performance.

- Second is the challenge of doing things that God “has not commanded.” The Old Testament contains warnings about practicing unauthorized worship that God had not commanded (Leviticus 10:1-2; Deuteronomy 5:32; 18:20-21). Paul gave the same teachings in the New Testament: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord” (Colossians 3:17).
- Third is the presumption on the part of some people that the silence of the Scriptures allows innovations. This challenge seeks to promote the idea that where the Scriptures are silent, one can do as he pleases. This false interpretation has led to the introduction of innovations of instrumental music, acceptance of unauthorized baptism, and leadership roles for women. If the restroom door says “Ladies,” that excludes men and boys. If the Scriptures say “sing,” that excludes everything not involved in singing. If the Scriptures say baptism is for the remission of sins, that excludes baptism as an outward sign of an inward grace.
- Last is the challenge of rejecting the authority of what is called “apostolic traditions” or “approved apostolic examples.” The pattern of the apostolic church is not to be followed. That practice, according to this view, would make a person a “first-century Semite.” The followers of this belief neglect to see that God’s will has been taught not only in words but also by approved examples. What was exemplified in practice by apostolic authority should be regarded as scriptural authority.

That You May Believe

Kevin Cauley

IS HISTORY RELIABLE? Of course it is. History happened, no doubt about it. What many question, however, is the reliability of certain *accounts* of history; that is, whether some individual’s representation

of that history is reliable. So how does one determine that any given account of history is reliable?

First, if there are witnesses to the historical event, those witnesses may testify to what they personally experienced. Second, the alleged historical events may also be corroborated with physical artifacts or available effects. Third, present-day philosophy of history also affects how individuals feel about the reliability of any given history.

Craig Blomberg, in his book *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, says, “The only completely convincing way to confirm or deny historical testimony is by comparison with other historical testimony, which of course will also stand in need of confirmation or denial.” Given the satisfaction of these criteria, an individual may consider an account of history reliable.

Witness Testimony

Witness testimony comes in two forms: verbal and written. For more recent historical events, verbal testimony is adequate. However, for events long past, written testimony is inescapable. Archaeological data is limited and cannot replace a textual tradition. Some texts are written contemporary with the events they record, such as a diary. Other texts are written after the events they record, like a history book.

A historian is a special witness who researches historical events and then writes about them. An eyewitness is a person who reports events he has personally experienced. Matthew and John were eyewitnesses (John 21:24, 1 John 1:1, Matthew 9:9); Mark and Luke were historians, although many believe that Mark was informed by Peter, an eyewitness (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 12:12). The fact that these writers were willing to sacrifice their lives—and in some cases did—for the sake of the gospel is the strongest possible evidence for their credibility. Their testimony is historically reliable.

Historical Events

The texts themselves are also important. Sometimes original texts were preserved, but the most important ancient texts were copied for the sake of preservation. The New Testament and, specifically, the Gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—are such texts. They were written in the first century A.D. and, subsequently, copied and distributed to the churches. There is much evidence of this practice.

First, we have more than 5,700 different textual witnesses to

the Greek New Testament dating from early in the second century A.D. through the 16th century. This great number ensures that the text of the Greek New Testament is more than 99 percent accurate as to what the originals said. Next, second-century Christian writers quote the Gospel books extensively in their writings and, thereby, testify to the genuineness of the text. Third, we have many early (second century and upward) translations of the New Testament that also speak to the authenticity of the text. Textually, the four accounts of the Gospel are historically reliable.

When we consider the Gospel's record archaeologically, we find many points of corroboration. Although some skeptics have denied that people lived in Nazareth during the early first century A.D., in 2009 archaeologists uncovered dwellings that proved them wrong.

One find of particular note was the ankle bone of a crucified victim that still had the nail embedded in it. This find gave clear empirical evidence of the Roman practice of crucifixion and corroborated the Gospel's account of Jesus' death. Considerable discoveries have also been made relative to the types of tombs used during Jesus' time, and archaeology has confirmed the many ritualistic practices of the Jews in the first century just as the Gospel's account described them.

The amount of archaeological data from the first century that corroborates the Gospel's account is voluminous. Archaeologically, the Gospel books are historically reliable.

Philosophy of History

The biggest challenge today to the historical reliability of the books of the Gospel stands on philosophical grounds. The Gospel record the miracles of Jesus, but we do not see such miracles today. Are miracles even possible? The philosophical predisposition of naturalism has prejudiced many into believing that all historical events must be explained by the laws of nature. By definition, they would have us conclude that miracles never happened. Of course, if God exists, then all things are possible, including miracles (Luke 18:27).

Another argument against miracles centers on the probability theory: the more probable a historical action is, the more likely that it occurred, but miracles are, by definition, improbable. With such thinking, one may judge certain types of historical accounts to be unreliable based upon the notion that the events described in them do not happen regularly, are improbable, or are contradictory to all "known" human experience. The only problem with this theory is

that people often act in the most improbable of ways, and all of God's acts are humanly improbable by definition.

History as probability excludes too much of human behavior, and it excludes all of God's interactions with the world. Probability may be a good guideline for events already known to be common but cannot be reliably employed to judge the authenticity of unique historical events.

Another contemporary philosophical prejudice is interpreting history through economics and power. Accounts of miracles are seen by contemporary historians as the writers' attempts to prejudice the reader toward a particular economic power structure. However, the generosity and self-sacrifice of the gospel writers militate against such a theory. These writers were not in positions of political or economic power; rather, they simply wanted others to know Jesus' message. Their sacrifices to ensure the documentation of Jesus' message preclude any other hidden agenda. Philosophically, the Gospel's record are historically reliable.

After Craig Blomberg's thorough discussion of these and many other issues, he concludes: "Whether by giving the gospel's books the benefit of the doubt which all narratives of purportedly historical events merit or by approaching them with an initial suspicion in which every detail must satisfy the criteria of authenticity, the verdict should remain the same. The gospel's account may be accepted as trustworthy accounts of what Jesus did and said.... The evidence becomes sufficient for one to declare that what can be checked is accurate, so that it is entirely proper to believe that what cannot be checked is probably accurate as well."

We conclude as well that the Gospel's record are historically reliable.

WHEN I AM LIFTED UP

Buddy Johnson

IN ONE OF THE TRULY great texts of the Bible, our Lord, during the closing days of His life, said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32 NIV84). It is difficult for us to realize the tremendous faith this expression reflects. We hear these words through the 20 centuries of Christian history that followed them, but when Jesus made this statement, there was little visible evidence to make anyone believe that these words might literally come true.

It must have seemed to those who heard it the most presumptuous statement ever made. After all, Jesus was an unschooled peasant from the obscure village of Nazareth in Galilee. He owned nothing, had no political power, and was surrounded by a group of men who, while honest, were rather unimpressive. These words in John 12:32 must have sounded hollow to His critics.

Twice earlier in John's gospel account, Jesus was quoted as using the expression "lifted up." In John 3:14-15, He said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." In this passage, Jesus referred to an incident recorded in Numbers 21. As the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness due to their sin of unbelief, they grew impatient on the way. They spoke harshly against God and against Moses. They said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?" (v. 5).

Because of their unbelief and their harsh accusations, God sent venomous snakes among them. The snakes bit the people, and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said: "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us" (Numbers 21:7). And Moses did so. He prayed for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses: "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live" (v. 8). So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when those bitten by a snake looked at the bronze snake, they would live.

Why did Jesus refer to this story? Just as the bronze snake was lifted up and served as a means of salvation to those in the desert, Jesus was saying that He is the means of salvation for you and me.

Christ Was Lifted Up on the Cross

On another occasion, Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:28). This is the second time Jesus used this idea of being "lifted up." The third time He used this idea is in John 12:32.

Less than a week after uttering these words, Christ was lifted up by His enemies on the cross. Mark described the events of the crucifixion in a simple but powerful manner. After telling us about the betrayal by Judas and the illegal condemnation by the high priest, Mark wrote:

"They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means

The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

“It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: **the king of the jews**. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!’

“In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.’ Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him” (Mark 15:22-32).

Luke continued the story in his gospel: “It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.

“The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things” (Luke 23:44-49).

Christ Was Lifted Up From the Grave

Our Lord was lifted up from the grave where He had been put after His crucifixion. The resurrection story is the central event in Scripture. It was told simply and beautifully by Matthew: “After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

“The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: “He has risen from the dead and

is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.” Now I have told you.’

“So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him” (Matthew 28:1-9).

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to the other women, and afterward to 10 of His apostles, who were assembled in Jerusalem on that Sunday evening. He also appeared to two disciples on the way to Emmaus, to the 11 in Jerusalem one week later, to the seven in Galilee, to Peter, to James, and to a number of others.

Those who had known Him best in life and who had seen Him die on the cross were convinced that He had been raised from the dead, and they were willing to give their lives for this conviction. They had seen Him die; they had also seen Him live again. They ate with Him; they talked with Him; they walked with Him; and they knew He was alive forevermore.

Christ Was Lifted Up Into Heaven

Christ was lifted up from the earth into heaven, where He sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19) and where He is at this very moment reigning with His heavenly Father (1 Corinthians 15:25). Luke told the story of His ascension in these words:

“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:50-53).

Christ Draws All Men to Himself

Even during His earthly ministry, Christ had a wonderful power through which He drew all kinds of people to Himself. There was Mary Magdalene, a woman of poor reputation who had also been possessed by demons. When Christ cleansed her, she became one of His most loyal followers. There were Matthew, the tax collector, and Zacchaeus, the publican. There were Peter, the fisherman, and several of his business partners.

The lame, the deaf, the blind, lepers and many others who were stricken with diseases and sin followed Jesus because of the power He had to cleanse them and make them whole. But it was not only the poor and the humble who were impressed by the Lord. Even

those who were high in the ranks of Judaism, such as Nicodemus and Simon the Pharisee, felt the irresistible magnetism of the humble Galilean.

After He had been lifted up, His influence became even greater as His disciples carried this story to others. It is thrilling to read of the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion; the Ethiopian nobleman; Saul of Tarsus, the brilliant young Pharisee; Lydia, the successful business-woman; the Philippian jailer; Dionysius, the Areopagite; Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus; and even those of Caesar's household. All these felt the appeal of the uplifted Lord and responded by changing the course of their lives so that they might wear His name and be His humble followers.

Through the centuries, men and women of every walk and station in life have felt the same wonderful appeal. Emperors like Constantine and Napoleon have worn His name and paid tribute to His influence.

Christ draws all people to Him. There are emperors, but there are also slaves. There are the rich and the poor. There are the old and the young. There are businessmen and statesmen. There are architects and builders. There are artists and poets. One poet put it this way: "More poems have been written, more stories told, more pictures painted, and more songs sung about Christ than any other person in human history."

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (John 12:32). Even today, Christ would have every person on this earth come to Him. But not all have accepted Christ. Some have been blinded by the glamour of this world and have turned a deaf ear to His call. Others have been so caught up in sin that they do not hear His appeal. But the great fact is that Christ died for all men; that He has called all men; and that wherever men have been willing to hear, He has drawn all men unto Himself. A great number of men and women have come to accept Him, and those who have come to accept Him and to wear His name are the happiest and most valuable citizens of earth.

Christ is lifted up today in our hearts and lives. We are His disciples. We who are Christians, who wear His name, are constantly lifting Him up through our lives so that others may know something of the wonderful blessings He has in store for His children. Our task as Christians is to lift Him up so that others may see Him as He really is—altogether lovely, the perfect Son of God, and the Savior of the world.

It Was There All the Time!

Frances Parr

OUR WONDERFUL, POWERFUL GOD created everything that has been created. He knows all about endless space, what's inside the earth, what makes the wind blow, and how the human body can begin as a microscopic egg and grow to be a man or a woman. He also knew, from the beginning, that we would be confused and not always understand. He caused special people to write books that explained certain things He knew we needed to know. All these writings are put together in one book — the Bible.

The Bible is a very special book and we can learn many things by reading it carefully. It is important to read the Bible and to see how much God loves us. He loved us so much that He sent Jesus to make a way for us to get to heaven.

Even after studying the Bible, we still will not understand everything about God and His creation. 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that all that pertains to life and godliness has been revealed. This means that all we need to know to become a Christian and go to heaven is recorded in the Bible.

The Bible can also be *fun* to read. Sometimes we have read or heard stories so repeatedly that we think we know all about them. Then one day, reading that same story again, we'll see something we've never seen before! That's because we have grown more mature in our comprehension and knowledge of God. *Those words were there all the time, but we just didn't understand them!*

History books tell us that long ago people thought the earth was flat. Many felt if a person wasn't careful, he might fall right off the edge into nothing and keep on falling forever. In reading Psalm 98:3 *"All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God"* and Psalm 135:7 *"He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth"*, one might agree with that. However, Isaiah 40:22 describes the earth in a different way, one which astronauts' photographs have proven to be the correct description. Isaiah says of God, *"It is He who sits above the circle of the earth."*

Early navigators discovered currents in the sea which were like giant rivers flowing in certain directions. If ships sailed in these currents, they could go faster with less fuel or wind for the sails. David had already spoken of the fish which swim in *"the paths of the sea"* (Psalm 8:8).

A few years ago someone noticed that the eastern edge of South America fit nicely into the southwest part of Africa. Then it was observed that other land masses, now many miles away from each other, seemed to have been attached. Genesis 1:9 indicates that at creation all waters were gathered together and dry land appeared, that also all together.

The Israelites were God's special people, and He took care of their every need. Sometimes they felt that God had gone away, and they worried that He wasn't near enough to know their needs. In his book, the prophet Isaiah told the people to *"behold your God!"* Look at Isaiah 40 and behold or see God as Isaiah described Him.

In the Old Testament we can read about David. He loved God very much and sang praises to Him. He wrote many songs about the wonder and power of God. We can read David's songs in the Bible in the book of Psalms. Find your own favorite chapters or read Psalms 100 and 104.

After reading about God's greatness, take a family walk, noticing especially the beautiful things God has put on the earth for people to enjoy. Make lists of things that are special to each member of the family.

When you are back home, end with a time of sharing and a devotional. Try to always look for and notice the ever-changing wonders of God. Not only has He provided for our needs, but He has also added many things that are beautiful and just for our pleasure.

Reading God's Book, the Bible, is never boring. The stories are as fresh and applicable today as they were when the inspired authors wrote them. As a Christian grows, there are endless levels and depths to be discovered and explored.

Truly, our God is all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-wonderful! The Bible tells us so!

JUST ANY NAME WON'T DO

Brian W. Jones

I WANT TO BELONG TO A CHURCH that has a name which is found in the Bible. I also want to belong to a church that follows the teachings of Christ. Just any name won't do!

Many folks say that the name of a church doesn't matter much. However, a church must wear the proper name and teach the whole

counsel of God in order for it to be the church spoken of in Scripture.

The church is the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2). A bride should wear the groom's name. We become members of God's family at the point of baptism (1 Timothy 3:15). Should not His family wear His name? The purchaser of the church is Christ (Acts 20:28). Doesn't the purchaser of a body have the right to name it?

The Bible gives several descriptive names for the church: "*church of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:2); "*church of the firstborn*" (Hebrews 12:23); "*churches of Christ*" (Romans 16:16); "*body of Christ*" (Colossians 1:24); "*bride of Christ*" (Revelation 21:2); "*house of God*" (1 Timothy 3:15). God and Christ's names are glorified in these names. These are some of the names that **God** has chosen for **His** church.

So, the next time someone asks you — "What difference does a name make?" — offer to write that person a check without signing your name. Without the authorized name, the check is invalid. Wouldn't it likewise be true that a church without the proper name is also invalid? A check with a valid signature and insufficient funds is worthless. Wouldn't it likewise be true that a church with a valid name, but unbiblical teachings is also worthless?

Please think on these things.

SURE FOUNDATIONS

Bill Nicks

IN AN AGE OF SKEPTICISM, we long for that about which we can be positive. There are many ways that "*seem right, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Proverbs 14:12). We have in our generation passed through a sexual revolution, a feminist movement, and laws made by governing bodies that legalize abortion. The church is affected by these aberrations in our society.

There is a way to be sure and certain. "*Behold, I lay in Zion ... a sure foundation*" (Isaiah 28:16). This foundation of which Isaiah spoke was fulfilled in Christ and the church, and the principles governing it is the everlasting Gospel of Christ. "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*" (Matthew 24:35). "*And the scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). "*Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 3:11). "*Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18).

By the law God gave man regarding marriage, we can be positive that God allows man only one wife (1 Corinthians 7:2), and woman only one husband. We can be positive that when this bond is broken by fornication, only the innocent party has the right to remarry (Matthew 19:9). Otherwise, “except” has no meaning at all. We can be positive that homosexuality and lesbianism are perversions of God’s natural heterosexual plan (Genesis 2:24; Romans 1:24-28). I am not being arrogant, but am humbly pleading for a return to God’s way. I am for God’s plan in marriage and am positive it is right; therefore I must stand opposed (at the risk of being termed “negative”) to any deviation from the right way.

By God’s law forbidding murder, we can be positive that abortion is sinful, because it is killing a human baby (Exodus 20:13; Romans 13:9). Whether we consider the Old Testament or the New, we are sure that it is forbidden in both. Whether it is a babe in the womb (Luke 1:41), or one born from the womb (same word, Luke 2:12), or an elderly person in a nursing home, it is still wrong to take human life.

In like manner, we can be sure that God’s will is for men to pray publicly and teach publicly, and for women to teach only other women and children (1 Timothy 2:12; Titus 2:3-5).

There are some things we cannot know for sure, such as the age of the earth (though we believe it is recent, in contrast to the billions of years assigned by evolutionists), nor do we have scriptural assurance that God will sanction instrumental music in worship. The reason is simple. There is no evidence in the New Testament for its use in worship. There are no commands, examples, or inferences for its use, but rather, the New Testament records that Christians *sang* in worship to God. We can be positive that the Lord has given us a pattern for the one body to follow *in all things* (2 Timothy 1:13), and that one body is the church which Jesus purchased with His own blood (Colossians 1:18,24; Acts 20:28).

There are many who today are turning from the old paths to follow ways about which we cannot be positive. Let us “*prove all things and hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In a world bent on apostasy from the truth, let us continue in His Word, for only then are we “*disciples indeed*” (John 8:31). As David of old said, “*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Psalm 11:3).

TRUE OR FALSE

Tony Lalli

“IF YOU ABIDE IN MY WORD, then are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31,32).

Today our society seems to be evolving around reality and non-reality. People are wondering what is true and what is false. I saw a television commercial once that showed a person in a dilemma because every product he picked up or everything he looked at was in some way false. That is, it wasn't what it pretended to be. Then, of course, there came along one product that was able to do everything it claimed it could do. It was true to the purchaser!

How like the Word of God is the above illustration! Many people are in a dilemma concerning life. So often life does not turn out to be what it pretends it is. And, in too many cases, lives are ruined before the lesson is learned. Pilate is an excellent example of one being in such a position. Pilate asked Jesus, *“Are you a king then?”* Jesus answered, *“You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice.”* Pilate then asked, *“What is truth?”* (John 18:37,38).

In his question we can see that Pilate has reached the point where he is not sure what the truth is. He had lived one way all his life and had been around the Jews long enough to be familiar with their religion. Now he has heard of Jesus and His teachings. It is no wonder he asks, *“What is truth?”*

The sad thing about this man is that he washed his hands of the whole affair. He preferred continuing in the same situation in which he had always lived and taking his chances with the consequences. It is a shame that so many people today choose to continue in their present situation instead of seeking the truth.

The Psalmist says, *“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endure forever”* (Psalm 119:160). In John 17:17, Jesus prays, *“Sanctify them in your truth: your word is truth.”* We therefore see that to be sanctified in God, we must abide in His truth, and that truth is His Word!

For one seeking what is true, there is only one “product” that will qualify concerning man's salvation — the teaching of Jesus. And He teaches us to do the will of God. *“Not all who say unto me, Lord,*

Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The Good Seed of the Kingdom of God

Neil Emory

IN ROMANS 10, Paul asserted from the prophet Joel that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (v. 13 *ESV*). He then posed a series of rhetorical questions to prove that the gospel must be heard before it can be believed and it must be believed before it can create the faith necessary to call on the name of the Lord acceptably, thereby receiving God’s grace and salvation (vv. 13-14). This inescapably logical argument proves that “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (v. 17). Yet, as Paul asked, “How are they to hear without someone preaching?” (v. 14).

Such was my situation. Growing up in a nonreligious/agnostic household didn’t provide much exposure to the Bible. We considered ourselves Christians simply because we weren’t part of any other religion. If we owned a copy of the Bible, I don’t recall seeing it, much less hearing or reading it. I knew a little about God and Jesus. I knew the Bible existed, but there didn’t seem to be anyone around to tell me about it. That was fine with me; I wouldn’t have been interested if they’d tried.

My great-aunt was the only member of the family who was religious. She was an unwavering Christian, but she lived 400 miles away. Still, visiting her was such a joy that I was willing to attend church services with her (not that I had a choice). Besides, I didn’t have to pay attention and hardly ever did.

My attitude changed after a few semesters in college but not for religious or spiritual reasons. While majoring in history, it occurred to me that human history is actually religious history. Studying the past was studying people who were motivated by religion in various ways.

Although no professor mentioned it, I wondered how one could understand history without learning a little about world religions. The Bible in particular seemed necessary because the last 2,000 years of Western history is an account of what most refer to as “Christendom.”

Therefore, I resolved to read the entire Bible. It took a long time and several readings to make sense of it. Eventually, the endeavor became more than academic. I actually started to believe the Bible was true. I desired to respond but was ignorant about how. To whom could I go for answers? With so many churches claiming to be correct but offering different answers, how could I know which one was right?

If the Bible is “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” and “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:15-16), and God “has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3) through His written Word, then the Bible must provide sufficient information for anyone seeking salvation.

The Bible was the only thing I could be sure was true. So, it seemed best to hold it up as a template. With Bible in hand, I searched for the right church. After visiting and studying the beliefs and doctrines of various churches, I was surprised to discover that the church for which I was searching was much closer than I’d expected. The church to which my great-aunt had dragged me as a child met the criteria. They worshiped as commanded and exemplified in the Bible. This was a congregation of the church of Christ and upon finding a similar congregation near my home, I was baptized.

Here’s the kicker; I don’t consider myself particularly smart by any means. Yet by starting with God’s written Word alone, even I learned enough to obey and find the Church established by Christ. This was possible because, as Jesus once illustrated, “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).

Like a seed, the Word of God can be planted and take hold in hearts honestly seeking truth. With water, such as I had unwittingly received during those visits with my great-aunt, God can cause growth that springs forth into salvation. The written Word of God is enough for anyone to learn how to be saved.

Most people aren’t going to just pick up a Bible and start reading, but knowing that someone did, shows that the Word of God does indeed have the power of salvation (Romans 1:16). It is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), and it will accomplish His purposes for sending it (cf. Isaiah 55:11). Being certain of this, Christians will proclaim the gospel with boldness and confidence.