

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 50

February 2020

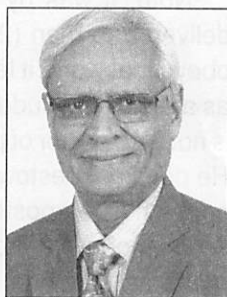
No. 10

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

One Must Be Born Again To Enter The Kingdom Of God

IN SPEAKING TO A man named Nicodemus, Jesus made the statement, as recorded in John 3:3, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus could not understand that statement of Jesus. So he asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus told him, "Most assuredly, I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:4, 5). It is therefore imperative that to enter into God's home in heaven, His kingdom, one must be born again, born anew, and that new birth must be "of water and the Spirit." So the question: "How is one born of the water and the Spirit? Some think, it is a mystical experience, "which is better felt than told," bestowed upon a person by the Lord Himself. Such a concept, however, is not even once mentioned in the Bible anywhere. Rather, it is something that one must do individually.



Since only the saved whose sins have been forgiven will enter the kingdom of heaven, notice, therefore, the parallel reading, Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16). Who will enter heaven? The saved. Who will be saved, according

to Christ? One who believes and is baptized. Observe: when the three thousand on the day of Pentecost heard the gospel and asked the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter told them, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37, 38). When the eunuch heard the gospel of Jesus, he wanted to be baptized. Philip told him, "If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." (Acts 8: 35-39). This is how one is born of the water and the Spirit. Not through a mystical or supernatural experience, "better felt than told."

Note: It was by the Spirit of God that the word of God was delivered to man (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21). When man obeys that word, it leads him to salvation. Salvation does not come as a result of a sudden mystical or supernatural experience. God is not a respecter of persons, He shows no partiality. (Acts 10:34). He does not bestow a supernatural experience to one and leaves another. The apostle Peter wrote, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." (1 Peter 1:22, 23). How did they purify their souls? **In obeying the truth** that was preached or brought to them. They were born again through the word of God. Every individual who has believed in Christ with whole heart and repented of all wrongs, and has been baptized into Christ, after confessing the name of Christ, has been born of the water and the Spirit. He is a Christian and a member of the Lord's church, His spiritual body (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13), and has been promised, therefore, the entrance into God's kingdom. **Take note:** A Christian is not born again. But one must be born again to become a Christian. The statement, "born again Christian" is, therefore, incorrect. A Christian is not born again, but one is born again, born of water and the Spirit, to become a Christian or a follower of Christ.

Religious Names and Divisions

J.C. Choate



WORLDWIDE, THERE ARE many religions, called by many different names. Those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the one Savior of the world are often greatly criticized for their "narrow mindedness". To say that there is only one God, or to affirm, as Jesus said of Himself, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6), is to bring on oneself the anathema of the "politically (spiritual) correct elite". We just can't be so judgmental and exclusive, they say. They would argue that there are many gods, many ways to God, and that no one has the right to pass judgment on another person's religion. Actually, the real belief of such people is one of three: either they at heart are unbelievers, or they believe in the exclusiveness of their own religion, or they believe that it is ultimately one's own goodness that matters—not a "god" or a "savior".

Leaders in the denominational world who speak out in response to charges of bigotry, and who would defend the fact that Jesus is the only way to God, realize that the "Christian" world is coming under attack and that persecution for our faith may lie in our future. They feel the pressure from the outside world because of the exclusive doctrine they preach. But, realizing that Jesus boldly claimed to be the only way to God, and that He died as our Savior, they are compelled to stay with what has become a very unpopular teaching.

Did Jesus say, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*"? If He did, and if we believe in Him, we must have the courage to stand with Him and to say with conviction, "He is **the** way, **the** truth, and **the** life. No one comes to the Father **except through Him**" *To make that statement makes one bigoted in the eyes of many, but so be it.*

But what other exclusive statement did Jesus make? He said, "I will build My **church**" (Matthew 16:18). Again, He was very specific and exclusive. His church exists in the world, even today, because He promised that it would never be destroyed, that He will come back one day to receive it unto Himself, "... *a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:27).

When members of the church of Christ make the statement, "Jesus established only one church, and we should not have all the division and confusion that exists among believers in Christ today," they are criticized and condemned for being bigoted. But the parallel is there: just as we must remain firm in our affirmation that there is only one way to God—Jesus Christ—we must be just as adamant in our affirmation that He meant what He said when He promised to build only one church. We must not deny that truth, even though it causes anger and even hatred in the hearts of those who don't want to hear it.

What can we do? We can't re-write the Scriptures. And we can't be honest with ourselves while denying the plain statements made by our Lord.

The Bible is our source book for identifying God, our Savior, and His family of people who are called out of the world to live for Him and to be His bride.

But those same religious leaders have taken the "idea" of God, of Christ, and of the church, and they have corrupted those teachings to the point that they have created religions just as foreign to the Scriptures as others. After all, if men are presuming to create churches and doctrines in contradiction to the one way that has been established in Scripture, is this not "preaching another Gospel", and "adding to what has been written", as is condemned in Galatians 1:8 and Revelation 22:18,19?

Where in Scripture do we read the religious names applied to men: reverend, archbishop, cardinal, pope? Where in Scripture do we read of the Holy Roman Catholic Church? the Methodist Church? the Presbyterian Church? the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints? the Jehovah's Witnesses? the Lutheran Church? the Salvation Army? the Church of the Nazarene? and all of the community churches that may be called such names as "The New Light Church" or "The Church on the Rock" or "The Saddleback Community Church" or the "Willow Creek Community Church"?

Not only do all of these names violate the claim of Scripture that it is only in the name of Christ that salvation can be found (Acts 4:12), but all of them represent doctrinal division. They vary from each other and from Scripture in what they would teach people to do to have their sins forgiven; their worship varies from one to the other; their organization is according to laws and rules they have developed; their standard of morals and values varies from one to the other.

All of these differences, identified as spiritual division by the very names they have invented for themselves, are condemned by God. They show the world that these denominations deny the bold statement of the Savior they claim to follow. He said the church is "My" (Matthew 16:18), the church is **His body** (Colossians 1:18.24), the church is **His family** (Ephesians 3:15), the church is **His bride** (Ephesians 5:27), the church is **His kingdom** (Matthew 16:18.19: 1 Timothy 6:15).

Denominational religious leaders feel the pressure of disfavor in the eyes of the world when they affirm that there is **only one way to God**. Why, at the same time, are they adamant in *denying* the oneness of the church?

Will A Man Rob God?

Jerry Bates

"*Will a man rob God.*" These words were asked by Malachi to the people of Israel (3:8), charging them with the sin of robbing God. I am sure they did not think they were actually stealing from God. In fact, the very idea would undoubtedly have been appalling to Israel. After all, one of the Ten Commandments was, "*You shall not steal*" (Exodus 20:15). Yet, that is exactly what Malachi says they were doing.

How had they robbed God? Malachi answers they had robbed Him in their tithes and offerings (3:8.9). They had not brought the tithes that God had commanded, and even while giving their offerings, they had robbed Him by sacrificing the lame and sick (1:8), animals that they would not have offered to a secular ruler (1:8). When they refused to give what rightfully belonged to God, they were robbing Him.

In contrast to their covetous attitude, Malachi reminded them of God's promise to bless them materially if they would only first give to Him (3:10-12).

We need to consider this same question: **Will a man rob God?** It is common to hear Christians justify their lack of generosity in contributions by saying that neither Jesus nor the apostles' ever commanded us to *tithe*. That is true, but silence on that subject does not mean that we are not commanded to *give*. By instruction

of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."* (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Christ had much to say about our material goods because He knew that concern over money and possessions would be one of the strongest temptations that could be offered to man in Satan's war against God. Close to half of Christ's recorded sayings concern man's attitude toward stewardship over his possessions.

In Luke 21, Jesus observed some rich men giving their offerings to the Lord. He also saw a poor widow who contributed only two mites. A mite was the smallest Jewish coin in circulation and was worth very little. In comparison to the relatively large amounts contributed by the rich, it was insignificant. Yet, Jesus commended her by saying that she had given more than everyone else because she gave all she had (21:3,4). Why was she willing to give so much? Obviously, the two mites were given out of love. Her gift was small, but her love was great.

The poor widow is not the only liberal giver in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 8 the Apostle Paul commended the Macedonia Christians for generously giving to help the afflicted Christians in Jerusalem. These Macedonians were described by Paul as being in affliction and deep poverty (8:2). Those words carry the idea of being about as poor as you can get. One commentator described it as "rock bottom poverty." Yet in spite of their poverty, they gave liberally. Paul even thought they had given too much! Imagine this: Gentiles gave generously to help some poor Jews, most of whom initially did not even want to accept them! Why did they give so generously? They gave because of their great love for God. They gave generously because they first gave themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Why do we give? We do not give to accomplish a great work. If that was true most of us would not give anything, because we cannot give enough, by ourselves, to accomplish very much.

- We give for the glory and honor of God.
- We give because of our great love for God, and we simply express that love in our giving. If we give little, then our love and trust in God are correspondingly small. God's love for us is greater than we can comprehend; therefore, how can we stand before Him, having little love in our hearts for the One who has done everything for us?

- How much should we give?
- The Jews were required to give 10%, but that was just the starting point.
- In addition, there were freewill offerings and other sacrifices on special occasions.

Most Christians think they are poor. Of course, that is a very relative term. The amount we give is dependent upon how God has prospered us. The poor widow had nothing left after she gave. The Macedonians gave even while in deep poverty. We should never use the excuse of being poor to justify our lack of generosity. God looks upon the heart and judges us, not just on the size of our gift, but on how we have been blessed, and how selflessly we are willing to give.

When we give *ourselves* to the Lord, how much we should give is not a big question. We give all we can, sometimes even more than others might think we should. After all, if we have really given ourselves, then **God already has everything anyway.**

God has promised to bless us if we first give to Him. Jesus said, *"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom.*

For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). Malachi 3:10 was God's promise: *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."*

This is not a promise of prosperity, but it is simply God's assurance that He will bless us with the things we need in this life.

Will a man rob God? That is a serious question, and the answer is just as relevant today as it was in Malachi's day. I doubt that any Christian consciously thinks he is robbing God. However, when we fail to give as He intended, that is exactly what we are doing.

Asking Three Questions Commencing With "Why?"

Maxie B. Boren

WHY IS IT THAT many people will NOT accept the clear and insurmountable evidence of God's existence? After all, "the

heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1, NKJV) "For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity..." (Romans 1:20).

In every flower that blooms, in every bee that gathers nectar and makes honey, in every tree that grows, in every breeze that blows, in every bird that flies, in every star that shines, and in every baby that is born, there is evidence of God's existence! In every raindrop that falls, in every fish that swims, in every ear of corn, in every lion that roars, in every eagle that soars, in every ray of the sun, and in the moon that lights the night, there is proof of the Creator!

The human body alone, with its feet to walk, its hands to work, its ears to hear, its nose to smell, its lungs to breathe, its lips to speak, its eyes to see, and its brain to think is undeniable evidence of a Master Designer and Maker! Thus, the believer declares, *"I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made"* (Psalm 139:14). Yes indeed, the evidence is overwhelming! **!! THERE IS A GOD!!!**

Everything that exists connotes and denotes an all-powerful and infinitely intelligent, eternal Being the Bible calls God. *"In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God"* (Psalm 90:2)! Thus, the apostle Paul urged the people to whom he spoke to turn from *"vain things unto a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is..."* (Acts 14:15). But in spite of all the evidence, multitudes have *"refused to have God in their knowledge"* (Romans 1:28). For sure, *"the fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'"* (Psalm 14:1).

To be plain and forthright, I personally cannot imagine why anyone would choose to ignore and/or deny the evidence and disavow the existence of God! But nonetheless, ***I believe the answer is "human pride and intellectualism."*** MANY people are so puffed-up with their inflated egos they just can't bring themselves to accept One whose thoughts and ways are incalculably superior to their own! Read Isaiah 55:6-9 and THINK!

A second question, closely akin to the first, is this—**Why is it that millions readily embrace the Godless theory of organic evolution which has NOT and CANNOT be proven because IT IS FALSE, and at the same time deny the Biblical account of**

God's creative genius and power, concerning which we are surrounded by tons of evidence? ***The answer is the same as above... "human pride and intellectualism."*** The apostle warned, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man thinks that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:18,19). What such people desperately need to do is "***Humble [themselves] under the mighty hand of God***" (1 Peter 5:6). Someday they will bow before God and confess to Him (Romans 14:11,12), but then it will be too late because at that time those "***that know not God***" and have not obeyed the gospel of Christ shall be banished into everlasting punishment (note 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9).

Lastly, ***why has moral sensibility been abandoned by the Federal Judiciary in our country on the subject of abortion?*** While Federal Law makes it a crime to destroy a sea turtle's egg, or an eagle egg, yet the elite Jurists have determined that it is perfectly legal for human babies to be destroyed in the abortion clinic! The abortionists and the activist Judges that have promoted abortion try to salve their consciences by calling the unborn child an "embryo" or "fetus" but, believe me, that "dodge" will not "hold up" before God in judgment, and for certain a judgment day is coming (Acts 17:31)! Ironically, the United States House of Representatives just this past week passed legislation designed to make it criminal for anyone to do hurt to an unborn child in the mother's womb, which is a step in the right direction. But still, in America today, the mother herself can walk into an abortion clinic and have a so-called doctor abort her baby legally! It is insane and reprehensible! What is the answer to the question, though? Well, ***the answer must surely be tied into the two questions preceding, and their answers.***

Truth And Love

Joe Malone

WE READ IN Ephesians 4:14-16 about "***speaking the truth in love.***" God's purpose is accomplished through "***speaking the truth in love.***" There is an intimate relationship between truth and love. Truth directs; love motivates.

Let us notice three things involved in "***speaking the truth in love***":
(1) The truth is to be spoken. God's Word is truth (John 17:17).

Our eternal happiness depends upon our acceptance of it. Hence, it is hardly too much to say that the crudest thing we can do to others is to withhold from them needful truth. Further, unity is not so dear nor peace so sweet as to be purchased at the expense of the truth (Matthew 10:34-38).

(2) The truth is to be spoken in love. The more painful the impression which truth is expected to impart, the more urgent the need of dealing with it in love. When truth is set forth, it is to be with evident desire to do good and because of a genuine love for the hearer. When it admonishes one of his faults, it does so in the spirit of meekness, bearing in mind that all are susceptible to error.

(3) *"Speaking the truth in love"* implies **being true** as well as **speaking truth**. Loyalty to truth is the backbone of Christianity. *"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Christians live that way—and their message is heard!

"I WON'T TAKE THAT MEDICINE UNLESS IT TASTES GOOD!"

Garell L. Forehand

I HOPE THIS will be taken in the spirit in which it is intended. We ought to be always getting better. Growth and improvement are the hallmarks of the Christian life. We recognize, of course, that attitudes characteristic of immaturity should be forever laid aside as we begin to actually develop in the Lord. *"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but now that I am become a man..."* (1 Corinthians 13:11). Growing up involves our coming to appreciate those things that we know are best for us, whether or not they are what we feel like embracing. With these thoughts in mind, let me suggest that there is a growing problem in the church today that, in reality, should be outgrown.

We have so emphasized that truth is to be spoken *"in love"* (Ephesians 4:15) that we have somehow developed an attitude which in essence asserts, "I won't seriously consider the truth until

it is spoken *like I desire it to be spoken*.” How often we hear fellow Christians bitterly decry the tone used in delivering the truth to them as being strident, overpowering, or unloving. How often we see them feel justified in totally ignoring the truth itself when their perception is that it was couched in “unloving” communication. There is something dreadfully wrong with this viewpoint.

First, let me make it clear that we should always deliver the precious message, as well as specific rebuke or correction, in as loving a manner as we know how. That, in itself, is a part of growing up. And without it the speaker is not in the right, nor is his message as readily accepted by its intended recipient. But please understand that Ephesians 4:14,15 is written for the would-be speaker, not the hearer. And though we may speak extensively, we must all participate as hearers from time to time. It is to those occasions that we address this reminder.

Let me suggest something that may sound radical to some. Truth can be taught, Christ can be proclaimed, and the Gospel may be delivered to the eternal saving of souls without loving communication or a loving speaker. Notice what Paul described to the Philippian brethren. *“Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice”* (Philippians 1:15-18).

Just granting for the sake of discussion that some today are actually proclaiming the truth out of jealousy, a contentious spirit, hypocrisy, and even intended torment for faithful Christians, it still becomes rather obvious that many don’t rejoice that truth is being disseminated. In fact, it is apparent that many of us simply *refuse to consider the message at all if we feel it has been delivered in an unsatisfactory manner*.

How can we ever let truth become so *unimportant* to us as to *discount* it when our feelings are not edified? We, of all people on earth, should understand that men are to “buy the truth” regardless of its price or their feelings. We, of all people, should be objective enough to leave the rest of the world a bright example of what truth-seeking is all about.

God’s saving Word can operate independently—separate and apart from love, sincerity, or gentleness in the one who delivers it.

Hear Jesus discuss the responsibility of truth-seeking hearers when such teaching prevails. "*The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you to observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not*" (Matthew 23:2,3).

Truth delivered should be obeyed. But bad attitudes and sinful lifestyles on the part of the teachers should of course be avoided. The seed of the kingdom can be sown by spiritual blackbirds or careless and lazy farmers, and yet produce much fruit for the Lord. The Word of God is the living and powerful "*sword of the Spirit*", whether or not a true Christian soldier is wielding it. Therefore, let us fully understand that it is the message, and not the type of messenger, that is essential for salvation.

I think I would be remiss if I failed to suggest that what we often consider to be unloving or excessively harsh preaching and correction is sometimes (though not always) merely methodology that is abrasive to our own personalities. It may not actually be unloving at all as offered by another person. The apostles even disagreed with the manner in which Jesus offered some strong teaching to the erring religious leaders of His day. "*Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?*" (Matthew 15:12). Would the Jews of the first century have been justified in refusing the truth delivered to them by Jesus and John after it had been prefaced with a reference to their being "*sons of snakes*"?

Let's really think about this one. And let us do our best to always speak the truth in love. I am certainly not trying to make excuses for those people in the church who fail in their duty to deliver the message properly. But, on the other hand, may we never demand to be spoon-fed with sugar before we will eat what is good for us.

DRINKING FROM THE SAUCER

I've never made a fortune,
and I'll never make one now.
But it really doesn't matter
cause I'm happy anyhow.
I go alone my journey
reaping better than I've sowed.
I'm drinking from the saucer,
cause my cup has overflowed.

I don't have many riches,
and sometimes *the* going's tough.
But while my kids still love me.
I think I'm rich enough.
I'll thank God for His blessings.
His mercy he bestowed -
I'm drinking from the saucer
cause my CUP has overflowed.
If He'll give me strength and courage,
when the road grows steep and rough.
I'll not ask for other blessings -
I'm already blest enough.
May I never be too busy
to help bear another's load.
I'm drinking from the saucer
cause my CUP has overflowed.

DOING THE FATHER'S WILL

(Matthew 21:23-32)

Gary C. Hampton

A Challenge to Christ's Authority

Jesus was walking in the **temple** area when the chief priests, scribes, **and** elders of the people confronted **Him** (Mark 11:27). They came at this time to expose Jesus as one **who** had no authority to teach in or cleanse the temple. It was likely their hope to retake their place as the dominant religious force in the lives of the Jewish people. So, they asked Him where He got His authority to do the things He did.

Jesus promised to answer if they would answer one question from Him. He asked them whether John's baptism was from heaven or men. The problem for these members of the Sanhedrin was readily apparent. If they said John baptized under heaven's authority, He would ask them why they did not believe him. They, after all, had neither been baptized by him nor yielded to the one who came after him, that is, Jesus (John 1:6,7,15,32-34; 3:22-36; 10:40-42). If they said his authority was from men, they would be faced with the anger of the multitudes who believed him. So, they said they did

not know. By so answering, they showed an unwillingness to yield to those empowered by God. Therefore, Jesus said He would not answer their question.

The Repentant Son

Jesus then told a parable about a father with two sons. The sons clearly represent the two classes of people among the Jews of Christ's day. The first class was that of the common Jewish people. In the parable, the father went to his first son and asked him to go into his vineyard and work. Though he was asked nicely, the son said, "*I will not.*" The publicans and harlots had rejected God's will, as could be seen by their sinful lives. Like this son, they openly refused to do God's bidding.

Later, the first son repented and went to work in his father's vineyard. Similarly, the publicans and harlots had yielded to the teachings of John (Matthew 3:1-6). When Jesus passed through Jericho, He met a publican named Zacchaeus. This man determined to make restitution for any wrongs he had done the people, and got to hear Jesus say, "*Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham*" (Luke 19:1-10). In other words, the common folks repented and went when they heard God's Word proclaimed.

The Son Who Refused To Do The Father's Will

The second son represents the chief priests, scribes, and elders. When the father asked this son to go work in his vineyard, he immediately said he would. However, he never went. The Pharisees and others who considered themselves to be of the religious elite appeared to be anxious to do as God instructed. Yet, their lives showed disrespect for the Father's wishes (Matthew 3:7-12). Matthew 23 is a record of Jesus' scathing denunciation of their hypocritical response. They pretended to be quite religious while inwardly harboring vile sins.

Trapped By Their Own Response

When Jesus asked which of the sons did the will of the father, they had to say the first. The answer now given to the Lord exposes the actions of the Sanhedrin as opposed to those of the publicans and harlots.

The religious leaders viewed the common people, especially the publicans and harlots, as having no special knowledge of God's will. They saw them as being ignorant of God's Word. They clearly

did not see their response as giving anyone credibility (John 7:45-49).

Refusing God's Spokesman

Despite all of this, the publicans and harlots had recognized John as a prophet. They had heeded his call to repentance. The religious leaders had failed to respond to God's call either before or after those they viewed as common sinners. The Pharisees demanded strict adherence to their demands for righteousness. John lived a righteous life. Yet, they refused to accept John as a spokesman in authority from God. The Lord knew such rejection showed the nature of their heart. There was no need for Him to openly proclaim that His authority had come from God. They would reject Him just as they had the Baptizer.

God Still Calls Us To Work In His Vineyard

It is important that readers today see the parable as still applicable. All men today must still be called to repentance (Luke 24:46,47; 1 Timothy 2:4). It is not enough to be a good moral person. Instead, each one who would be saved must obey the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). Just as the father asked his sons to work "today," we must respond now to the Gospel call (Proverbs 27:1; 2 Corinthians 6:2). Further, it is possible to appear to be righteous to those around us without ever intending to do the will of the Father. We must recognize Jesus as God's spokesman for our time, and yield to the message He brought down from the Father (Hebrews 1:1-4). He made sure all truth was delivered by sending the Holy Spirit. We can know all that is necessary to have eternal life and be God-like (John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:3).

There Is A End

E. Claude Gardner

LOOK ALL AROUND you and see the earth, water, mountains, rocks, trees, and myriad plants, animals, and human beings. They are tangible: they exist. How did they come into reality? One can make only two choices. There is a Supreme Being, the one living God who created the universe and all things in it. The other choice is that of the atheist who denies God. If there is no Creator, it would follow that our world somehow came into being as a matter of

chance. The decision should be easy, because it is more reasonable to believe in God than to deny God and attempt to explain our origins on the basis of chance and accident. *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God"* (Psalm 14:1).

Man and mountains did not make themselves, but it is self-evident they must have had a Maker, which is Almighty God. He is *"the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein"* (Acts 14:15). All Nature exclaims that God exists, for the psalmist sang, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1).

The first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, starts with the assumption that God exists, and no arguments are given to prove it. Surely as man is made *"in the image of God"* (Genesis 1:27), he must come to the understanding that there is a God. Mankind universally worships a higher power than himself.

But some who accept a higher power believe in many gods. People fall prostrate before gods of wood and stone. Some worship other human beings; others worship animals, rivers, the sun, moon and stars; still others worship Satan. The Bible calls upon us to worship *"the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve"* (Matthew 4:10). Worship of the one true God forbids worship of icons, saints, popes, and ancestors.

The one eternal God is described in the Bible in a manner that we know He loves us, gives us hope and comfort, and has a desire and plan to eventually take us to heaven to live with Him eternally. Jesus said, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8). *"... your Father (God) also is merciful"* (Luke 6:36). *The apostle Paul speaks of "the goodness of God"* (Romans 2:4). God offers one a new life of hope and forgiveness. A person can have a new beginning as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Who is the God of the Bible? He is holy, righteous, good, just, faithful in His promises, sovereign ruler, invisible, perfect, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-present, and from everlasting (2 Timothy 1:17; James 1:17; Matthew 19:17; 1 Peter 4:19; John 4:24; Acts 10:34,35; 1 Peter 1:16; Hebrews 4:13, 1 Corinthians 10:26 and hundreds of other passages). He is worthy. We should bow down to Him in humble adoration.

Any and all nations that "forget God" are bound for crumbling and extinction (Psalm 9:17). This is as true for modern nations as

it was for the ancient civilizations of Rome, Greece, and Chaldea.

God is one and one only, but He is made manifest in Three Persons: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:4-6).

God made man and placed him on this beautiful earth for a purpose—to seek and glorify God. Paul preached about God in Athens and declared, “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is the Lord of heaven and earth—and hath made of one blood all nations of men—that they should seek the Lord*” (Acts 17:24,26,27). Our reason for being on earth is to seek God and to serve Him. When we come to Him with an obedient faith we will have a great reward in heaven. “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*” (Hebrews 11:6).

Do you believe in the personal, almighty God? If so, will you diligently seek Him by confessing your faith, turning from sin and Satan, and being immersed in water “*for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38)? Then you will have God as your Father, you will be one of God’s children, and you will have brothers and sisters in the church, which is the family of God (Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:14-15; Romans 12:4,5). You will become a Christian (1 Peter 4:16).

CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS

Leon Barnes

CHRIST IS AT the very heart of Christianity. Even the church gets its importance because of its relationship to Christ. He is the builder of the church (Matthew 16:18). He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The church is His body and “*the fullness of him who fills all in all*” (Ephesians 1:22,23). In Colossians 1:18 we read, “*He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.*” The only other time the word “preeminence” is found in Scripture is in the book of 3 John, when the reference is made to Diotrephes loving to have the preeminence among the brethren, and there that spirit is condemned.

Every aspect of the church’s life is to place Christ at the very center. When we worship, we take the communion supper to remember His death, burial, and resurrection. When we sing, it is

praise to God for the marvelous grace He showed in giving Christ as the atonement for our sins. When we pray, it is through the name and authority of Jesus, the Christ. The preaching should be centered in Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Even the organization of the church puts Christ as the head over all things to the church.

If we, as the body of Christ, keep the focus on Christ, the Lord and Savior, it will have a unifying effect on the entire church. It is when we take Christ from the spotlight and place one another under the light of examination that real troubles begin. Christ's life is perfect. All of us have mistakes, and many of them are very obvious.

But, understand, Christ-centeredness does not mean a failure to emphasize what Christ has taught in His Word. He is the one with all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). It is by the words of the Lord we will be judged in the last day (John 12:48). Respect for Christ must lead to submission to His will for our lives. *"Do you not know, to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants you are, whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?"* (Romans 6:16).

It is true, we need to shine the light on the Christ instead of on the church. It is true, He is to be the focus, rather than ourselves. But, it is not true that such a focus will do away with, or even lessen, the importance of either the church or the Scriptures. It certainly does not lessen the need for complete obedience to God.

What it will do is change our means of evangelism from "My church is better than yours" to *"Come see a man who told me all things I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"* The more those who come are led to focus on the greatness of our God and the marvel of His grace, the less the danger that they will be disappointed to learn that we, as the church, are not everything they thought we would be. We truly serve a perfect Lord, but we are not a perfect church, and we never have been.

Buy The Truth And Sell It Not

T. Pierce Brown

SOLOMON SAID IN Proverbs 23:23, *"Buy the truth and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding."* To the superficial mind, the question might be raised, "How could a person buy something if no one sold?" But the thing of which Solomon spoke in

Proverbs 23:23 is not a commercial venture. Our Christian heritage was bought with the blood of the martyrs, but no person sold it to us.

When Jesus said, "*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32), He expressed a principle of the widest application. Knowledge of *historic* truth can make us free from having to repeat the same mistakes over and over. Knowledge of *scientific* truth can make us free from superstition in those areas and free to explore in all sorts of areas heretofore inaccessible. *Economic* truths can make us free from poverty. *Medical* truth can make us free from various kinds of diseases. *Moral* and *ethical* truths can make us free from many of the social ills that plague our nations. *Religious* truth can make us free from the love, practice, guilt, burden, stain, and punishment of sin. But when Jesus used the word "shall" He did not mean that it was an automatic or predetermined reality. "*You shall know the truth*" in no way means you are forced to know it. And "*the truth shall make you free*" only if it is applied or acted upon.

If we think in man's normal relationships with man, we can immediately see the value of Paul's admonition, "*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor*" (Ephesians 4:25). **An orderly society cannot exist in the absence of truth.** The disorder in all societies is largely the result of the failure to recognize the value of truth.

In the philosophical or scientific area, the same kind of thing is true. For example, the acceptance of the false doctrine of evolution and its related corollaries has brought untold damage to humanity. It includes such things as the murder of millions of unborn babies, Hitler's atrocities (many of which were based on the idea of "the survival of the fittest," which is an evolutionary concept), including selective breeding, and the murder of the "unfit," and many other examples of man's inhumanity to man. There is nothing at all philosophically or scientifically sound about the theory of evolution, for it cannot be proven to be logical or scientific.

There is also moral, religious, and spiritual truth. Probably Solomon primarily had this kind in mind. If God is not a sovereign God, the source of all moral and spiritual truth, and man is not a mortal, moral, accountable being, made in His image, bound by nature and law to live in accord with that truth or suffer the consequences, then any talk of ethics and morality is utter foolishness.

To buy the truth, then, is to assert its reality, persevere in its

acquisition, and devote oneself to its practice. Prejudice and pride must be put aside. Sin and self-will must be sacrificed.

To “sell it not” means never to lose the disposition of mind that causes you to value it above all else. It means never to betray it through selfish or sordid motive. A preacher who preaches some false doctrine through the desire for money, prestige, or power has sold the truth. But the preacher who does not preach false doctrine, but fails to preach the truth for the same reasons, or any other, has also sold it.

Inasmuch as no society can *function* with disregard for truth, no noble or worthwhile activity that is based on error or lies can be carried to successful *fruition*, our freedom in any area is *based on* truth, and our sanctification and eternal salvation are as *a result of truth*, let us **buy the truth and sell it not**. Let us sacrifice all, even life, if need be, on the altar of truth.

Contempt For God

Jack W. Carter

NOT MANY OF us will admit to any kind of contempt for God. Most of us feel that we are respectful enough, even if we are not always mindful of Him.

But that's part of it. It is usually when we are not really mindful of Him that we show the most contempt.

It is becoming more and more common to hear the word “God” used by Christians as an exclamation. No real thought is given to this use of His name; it is just a spur-of-the-moment outcry. But, whatever else it may be, it is, first of all, contempt. God's name is holy and should not be used as some kind of profane malediction—or even as a meaningless exclamation. I have often wondered how those who justify using the Lord's name in this way would feel if we shouted out their mother's name as an expletive.

Improper conduct is also a form of contempt for God, contempt for the fact of His omnipresence. We watch our behavior very closely when someone is present that we do not wish to offend. God is ever present—why do we feel that it is not contempt for Him when we act directly contrary to what He has asked of us and what His presence should demand?

Indifference while worshipping is perhaps one of the greater

offenses. This is a time set apart specifically to honor God. We allocate so little time for Him alone, how can we dare demonstrate nonchalance during what should be such precious moments?

There must be a thousand ways for us to show contempt for our God while He is not even on our minds. But the best way to *correct* this problem is to make certain that He is *always* on our minds and *honored* in our hearts.

What Do You See In The Cross?

Clem Thurman

"THE WORD OF the cross is to them that perish foolishness; hut unto us who are saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). The cross has different meanings for different people, and it always has. To folk in Jerusalem in A.D. 33 the cross was just a particularly cruel form of execution, usually reserved for the worst type of criminal. It was shameful, and that is the reason for the statement about Jesus, *"He endured the cross, despising the shame"* (Heb. 12:2). But for believers, the shame of that kind of death was overcome by the glory made possible by the death of Him who died there. Paul wrote later, *"Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of Christ"* (Gal. 6:14). While unbelievers ridicule the cross, believers find power there. There is something in the cross to be seen with the eye of faith that an unbelieving world can never comprehend.

What do you see in the cross? Do you see "a religious symbol" to be worn as an ornament or used as decoration? Do you see a form of torture and execution? Do you see the hopelessness of life and certainty of death? Or do you see hope for eternity? There are at least four things in the cross that every believer should see.

We See the Love of God

When man sinned in Eden, God drove him out from His presence. But He announced then His intention to overcome Satan's influence and save man from sin (Gen. 3:15). From that time we see in the Scriptures the unfolding of *"God's eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord"* (Eph. 3:11). In the many events recorded in the Old Testament, God prepared the world for the coming (and death) of His Son (Gal. 3:24-25; 4:4). God grants us *"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3), and it was not an afterthought on His part: *"Even as he chose us in him before the*

foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). God purposed from eternity that we should be saved *"in Christ,"* which salvation is made possible by the cross. God looked down on a world of sinners, people who were immoral and rebellious, and *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Jno. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Could there be a better way for God to show how much He wanted man to be saved??? When we look at the cross, we ought to see that great love. Would you allow your son to suffer and die for someone who was your enemy (Rom. 5:10), a vile sinner without any redeeming characteristics? God did! We may not fully comprehend why God so much wanted our salvation that He was willing to pay such a price, but we believe He does. The cross reveals that God *"would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:4) and the Lord *"is not willing that any should perish"* (2 Pet. 3:9). Great is the view of the cross that exclaims with grateful wonder, *"Behold how much God loves me!"*

We See the Blackness of Sin

Many have the idea that because everyone sins, "one little sin won't hurt." But we need to learn to view sin as God does. It is filth (Rev. 3:4), it is the dirt of the world (Jas. 1:27), it is described by the Lord as being like a muddy hogpen (Lk. 15). Look at graphic picture which God paints of one going back into sin, *"It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire"* (2 Pet. 2:22). When we see sin like that, when we can see it as God sees it, we can begin to appreciate the cross which frees us from the guilt and practice of sin.

God hates sin (Psa. 119:104; Prov. 6:16-19). God created man *"in his own image"* (Gen. 1:27), loved him and provided for him. Then came the devil and led man into sin (Gen. 3:1-6). And it is sin that separated man from God: *"God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:1-2). But even understanding all of that does not reveal how much God hates sin as does the cross! Nailed to that cross, in agony such as hardly any can imagine, Jesus cried, *"My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?"* (Matt. 27:46). To see the blackness of sin, as God does, look at the cross. In order to save us from sin, God left *"his only begotten Son"* (Jno. 3:16) to die in horrible pain in order to free us from sin. God hates sin that much. So should we.

We See the Torment of Hell

The fact of the judgment of all people is one of the basic teachings of the Scriptures. Man's purpose is summed up, *"Fear God and keep his commandment, which is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment"* (Eccle. 12:13-14). Again, *"It is appointed unto men once to die, then comes the judgment"* (Heb. 9:27). Over and over God declares it. He tells us that the righteous and wicked will be separated, with the wicked being sent into eternal punishment (Matt. 25:31-46). Still many people do not believe it, they refuse to accept it. Some even question, "How can a loving God condemn anyone to a fiery hell?" As though God were responsible for man's sins! But look at the cross: *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?"* (Rom. 8:32). If God was willing to pay such a price to save us, it should reveal how terrible the consequences from which He wants to save us. If we believe Jesus died on the cross to save us (and He did), we must believe that whatever he saves us FROM makes that death worthwhile. And if God would not spare His own Son, in order to save us, who can doubt that God will refuse to spare us, if we reject His salvation?

Jesus revealed much about the terrors of hell during His earthly ministry: *"Hell, where the fire is not quenched and their worm dieth not... The eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... The furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"* (Mk. 9:48; Matt. 25:41; 13:42). We are told that the Lord will return, *"With angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus"* (2 Thes. 1:7-8). John describes the final abode of Satan: *"The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone... and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever... And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev. 20:10,15). One who claims faith in Jesus can hardly doubt what He said! And Jesus has plainly said that the wicked will be cast into *"the furnace of fire... where the fire is not quenched... the lake of fire and brimstone"* where he will be *"tormented day and night for ever and ever."* Jesus knew just how terrible hell is, and will be. That is the reason He was willing to go to the cross to save us from it.

We See the Glory of Heaven

Jesus, near the close of His earthly ministry, told the apostles that He was going back to the Father in heaven, and then told them,

"I go to prepare a place for you" (Jno. 14:2). Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2:8-9 of the fact that those who put Jesus to death were ignorant of His mission and purpose, then added, *"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him."* If mankind could not understand the wonders of the gospel before it was revealed (1 Cor. 2:9-10), much less can we expect to completely perceive the glories of that place called heaven! Although there is much that we cannot know, we surely find enough about heaven to want to go there.

Can you imagine a place where there will be no sickness, no pain, no sorrow? Where sin can never enter, where there will be no separations? John wrote of the vision shown him, *"A river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God... On this side of the river and on that was the tree of life... And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever"* (Rev. 22:1-5). To live eternally in the presence of God, with all the redeemed of all the ages, to again enjoy the fellowship of loved ones from whom death has separated us—that is heaven.

Sometimes people wonder if all the problems of this life are worth putting up with. But the apostle Paul wrote, *"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed"* (Rom. 8:18). The same apostle said that God *"is able to do more exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think"* (Eph. 3:20). Regardless of what happens with us in this life, if we reach heaven, it will all be worth it. There will be no complaints from anyone there! Our salvation did not come cheap, just look at the cross. And the glory of heaven can be measured by the price He was willing to pay so that we could go there! As we see the cross, we ought to be able to see the glory of *"the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb. 11:10).

What do you see in the cross? If you belong to the Lord, you should see the love of God, the blackness of sin, the torment of hell and the glory of heaven. If you see all that, then to you the *"word of the cross"* is *"the power of God"* (1 Cor. 1:18). May the Lord help us to see the cross as He intended we should.
