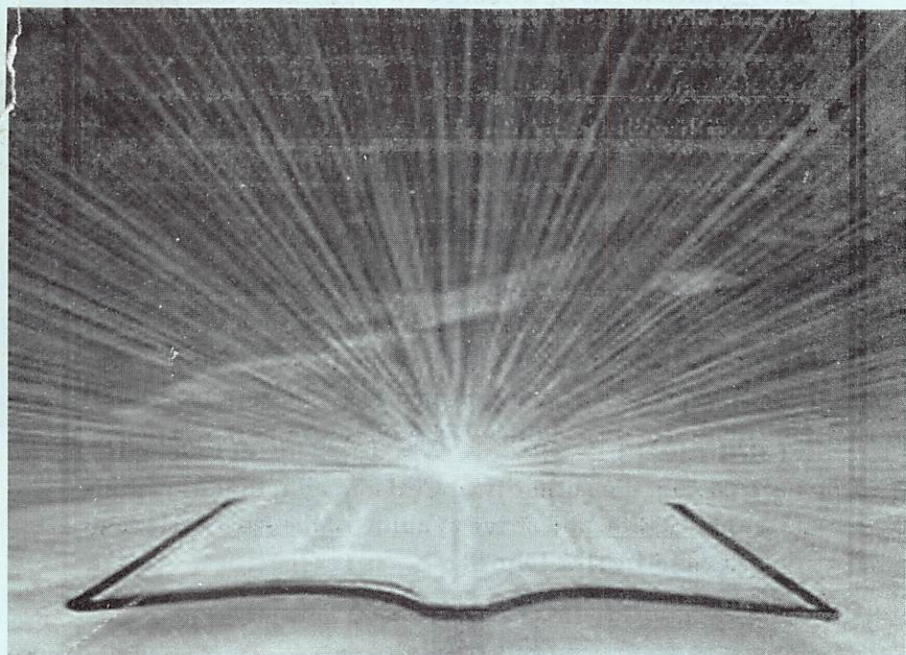


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THE BIBLE TEACHER



Our Plea

Let the Truth Prevail

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18; Col. 1:18). That congregations of the one church of the Bible everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the Church. (1 Corinthians 1:10; John 20:20, 21).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must believe in Christ, repent of wrong, confess Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands to be saved are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, and Christians only, after His name alone, with no Prefixes or Suffixes, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men which contain doctrines and commandments of men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Do Not Add To His Words

ONE OF THE WARNINGS repeatedly mentioned in the Bible is, not to add anything in the written word of God, neither take anything from it, nor make any change in what God has said in His book. Proverbs 30:6 says, "Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." Moses said to the Israelites, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." (Deuteronomy 4:2). When the apostle John finished writing the book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, he wrote the same words of warning at the end of his book.



Sadly, though, as the centuries unfolded, numerous departures from the word of God became apparent, and eventually the world of modern sectarianism was fully formed. What a glaring contrast there now is between the current state of religious confusion and the church that was ushered into this world on that day of Pentecost almost two thousand years ago.

When Christ came and began to preach repentance and coming of God's kingdom. At the outset of His ministry He chose certain disciples, who later became His apostles and witnesses of His resurrection. To them He had promised that after His death and resurrection when He would go back to heaven, He would send to them the Holy Spirit, Who would teach them all things and would bring to their remembrance all things that He had been teaching

them. (John 14:25-26). Further He said to them, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; For He will not speak of His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." (John 16:12-13). At the point of His departure back to heaven, the Scripture says, "He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, He said, you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.....But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:4,5, 8). This promise of Christ to the apostles was fulfilled as we read in Acts chapter 2:1-4. In the same chapter we read of the establishment of the church of Christ which He had promised to build. (Matthew 16:18). There we read a huge number of people, after hearing the gospel of Christ and believing in Him repented of all their wrongs and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins as they were told by the apostles to do, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:37-47).

Thus, after the establishment of the Lord's church in Jerusalem, in A.D. 33, the followers of Christ, Christians, continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine or teaching (Acts 2:42). At this time, in the beginning of the church, the New Testament part of the Bible, as we have it today, was not available to the church, as it was being written by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), and was not completed until the end of the first century A.D. In the absence of God's written will for the church, the Holy Spirit inspired apostles guided the church into all truth. The apostles were the spokespersons of Christ, they were the ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). It was to them Jesus had said, "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18). Meaning whatever the apostles would teach the church that would be by heaven's authority, and whatever they would loose, or not teach, as they did not teach Christians to follow the commandments of the Old Testament law of Moses, will be acceptable to heaven.

But the apostle Paul had warned Christians that after the passing away of the apostles, many men, even from among themselves, will arise who will teach false doctrines and will lead away the

disciples from the truth. To the elders of the church at Ephesus, he said, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:28-30). The apostle wrote Timothy, and said, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrine of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:1-2). Again, he wrote, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 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 4:1-4).

Accordingly, the inevitable happened. After the apostles died, early church history records numerous innovations and departures from the apostles' doctrine taking place in the church. Men began teaching unscriptural doctrines and practicing things which were not authorized in the New Testament. Slowly one began to see a form of Christianity that was completely different from the one found in the pages of the New Testament. It was different in name, in doctrine, in worship, in organization, and in mission. First it produced the Catholic church in the Roman empire, whose head was Boniface III in AD 606. Then in 1517, when one of its Priests, Martin Luther, raised his voice against the apostate Catholic church, wanting to reform it, he was cast out of the church, and he and his followers were called Protestors. This gave birth to a new movement, called "Protestant." Today we have hundreds, and perhaps thousands of Protestant churches all over the world; calling themselves by different names, worshipping in different ways, teaching and practicing different doctrines, completely in defiance to what the New Testament teaches. (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4; John 17:20,21).

Today churches of Christ all over the world are pleading to all those who believe in Christ, why not go back to the beginning, leaving all Catholic and protestant beliefs, and strive to be the church established by Christ? Surely there can be no more thrilling plea

than this: "Let us return to the pattern of the original church" to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent, and to be what the people were in the New Testament times, only Christians. Reject all human teachings and creeds, follow the New Testament of the Bible alone without addition, without subtraction, and without modification. "The seed" Jesus taught, "is the word of God." (Luke 8:11). We have the same seed today in the Bible. Why wouldn't it produce the same thing today, as it did in the first century—Christians (Acts 11:26) and members of the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), everywhere, if we sow the seed of the word of God, without mixing it with any human teaching? In other words, if we want to be what they were, we should teach the same plan of salvation as they taught (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38); we should worship as they worshipped (Acts 2:42; 20:7); and practice what they practiced; and be simply the New Testament church, without ever joining any man-made denominational church, wearing any sectarian name, subscribing to any human creed, or teaching for doctrines the commandment of men. (Matthew 15:8, 9). What could be a more thrilling non-denominational plea than this?



HOLY THINGS

J.C. Choate

IN THE LONG AGO, Paul said: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1). Please ponder this verse of scripture very carefully with emphasis on the

latter part. Note that the people of God are to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God, and the writer adds, "which is your reasonable service." Consider especially the little word "holy." The entire verse is simply a plea for holiness.

Another apostle wrote: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Thus, Peter calls upon the people of his time to be holy in all that they do, realizing that the Lord is holy. Such has ever been his desire and there is no danger of it changing.

Since the verses of scripture cited, and others that could be,

Speak of the word "holy" it might be good that we define that term before continuing. The term holy refers to that which is sanctified, or set apart; that which is godly and pure. In connection with this it should be pointed out that the word holy is a good, scriptural term. This truth is submitted inasmuch as many people are afraid to mention the word holy or the word holiness, in that a group of religious people call themselves "Holiness." Of course, we know that such people are unscriptural in other ways but they are right in emphasizing holiness. The point is, those of us who claim to be the people of God, the true church of Christ, should be the ones setting forth the beauty of holiness. No, we should not be ashamed of the word, but rather we should be holy even as the Lord is holy, that is, we should ever strive toward perfection. Actually to be holy, as it relates to man, means that one must be climbing the ladder of perfection, not that he is perfect, but that he is striving to be perfect. Then one day the faithful will be made perfect and will dwell forever with the Lord.

Consider now those things which are holy:

1. **GOD IS HOLY.** (John 17:11). He has no beginning or ending, reigns in heaven, creator of all things. His Son calls upon him as "Holy Father."
2. **CHRIST IS HOLY.** (1 Pet. 1:15). He is the Son of God, came from heaven, lived a perfect life, and after his death, burial, and resurrection ascended to his Father to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.
3. **THE SPIRIT IS HOLY.** (Matt. 28:19). Christ sent the Spirit upon the apostles; he directed the men of God to pen the scriptures, and is presented to every soul who obeys God. He is also spoken of as being holy.
4. **THE CHURCH IS HOLY.** (Heb. 3:1). Christ established it; purchased it with his blood; he is its head and saviour.
5. **THE GOSPEL IS HOLY.** (Rom. 1:16). Based on the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection; the lost are called by the gospel; it has power to save.
6. **THE BLOOD IS HOLY.** (1 Pet. 1:18,19). The blood of Christ; it redeems or forgives; it remits or washes away sin.
7. **THE NAME IS HOLY.** (Acts 4:12). The name of Christ; the Lord's people are to wear it individually and collectively; salvation is in it.
8. **THE WORD IS HOLY.** (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The word of God, and thus, all inspired of him; it has the power to save.

9. HEAVEN IS HOLY. God and Christ dwell there; only the righteous will inherit it, and it will stand forever.

Since all of these things are holy let's ask a few questions: How in this world does a sinner think he can be saved unless he obeys God and lives faithful unto death? How on earth can an erring Christian think for one minute that he can be saved if he dies in such a condition? How can we that are Christians think we can be saved unless we live holy lives for God? The point is, if the things mentioned are holy, we are going to have to be holy in order to have fellowship with them. All that is of God is holy and if we are going to belong to him we must be holy too. May the Lord help us then, to "TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY."

Shepherdless Sheep

David Deffenbaugh

"WHEN JESUS WENT ASHORE, He saw a large crowd, and he felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34).

A person who knows what to think and feel and do in any given situation is to be admired. Jesus is to be admired; yes, for many reasons, but for this reason too—He knew what to think about people, what to feel about them and what to do for them.

Searching for solitude for Himself and His disciples had only resulted in finding more people. Jesus had sought rest but He found more need. Jesus' response was compassion for these people because *"they were like sheep without a shepherd."* Knowing what to think about them, He knew how to feel about them.

Shepherdless sheep are to be pitied. They are vulnerable, susceptible, and clueless. It would not be a stretch, even though the text does not specify, to think that the disciples' feelings about this multitude were not identical to Jesus'. Perhaps they were annoyed and irritated by the interference of such crowds. Unquestionably, people can, at times, be annoying. But, without Christ, without a shepherd, people are to be pitied. Their circumstance is precarious, at best.

What did Jesus do for the shepherdless? He taught them. Jesus' response to shepherdless humanity is markedly different from modern Christianity's response. Jesus did not seek to provide an atmosphere in which these people could freely indulge their personal

preferences, give expression to their spiritual inclinations as they chose, or seek assurance from a relationship with Him on their own terms. *Truth had to be known!* Truth was and is the answer for the shepherdless. Jesus did not attempt to make His message compatible and undemanding (read John 6 to learn the final outcome of this very multitude). He knew their need and He supplied it.

If such was the response of Jesus to the shepherdless, so it must also be the response of His church in every age.

Barnabas—Son of Consolation

Don W. Walker

CERTAINLY ONE OF THE unsung heroes of the Bible is “*Joses, who by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas.*” Barnabas, when interpreted is, “*The son of consolation*” (Acts 4:36), meaning literally, “one who encourages or comforts.” Perhaps less literally, yet the thought is still present, Barnabas was one who would “tend to the need.” From our very first introduction to this man, we will see this point to be true.

When we turn to the close of Acts, chapter 4, we see the possibility of great need in the Lord’s church. However, the text reads, “*Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need Barnabas ... having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet*” (Acts 4:34-37). Here we see those in the church who had financial need, and this one who “tends to the need” is there with others meeting that need. Barnabas must have experienced in reality what Paul stated in Acts 20:35 from the mouth of our Lord, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35).

Another great example of this man’s “tending to the need” is found in the ninth chapter of Acts. This is the great chapter which records the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. When Saul was converted, he preached Christ powerfully and confounded the Jews (verses 20-22), thus causing them to want to put him to death (verse 23). Saul, having thwarted their hellish plan by escaping, desired to join himself with the disciples. However, they were afraid, because they did not believe that he was a disciple of Christ. “*But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how*

he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27). Saul, of course, would come to be known as the apostle Paul, and would be one of the greatest servants our Lord has had, writing half of the New Testament. Yet, it stands out boldly that Barnabas saw a need in this man's life and met that need.

As we continue to study the Book of Acts, we turn to Acts 11 and see persecution arise about Stephen, and the brethren are scattered abroad. Those that were scattered abroad *"went as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only"* (verse 19). Because of this great evangelistic thrust, many believed and turned unto the Lord (verses 20,21). *"Then the tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem, and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord"* (verses 22,23). Here we see new converts who need to be strengthened and encouraged and Barnabas, the one who tends to the need, is the one who is sent and willing to go. Thank God for men like Barnabas—The Son Of Consolation.

Space does not allow us to go into detail concerning Barnabas standing side by side with Paul in the bold proclamation of truth (Acts 14), or his standing up for John Mark when Paul had lost confidence in him (Acts 15:39). Time and time again this great first-century brother would be the answer to the needs that would arise. What an example of strength he has set for all the generations since and for those to come! May we all be encouragers and comforters as we rise to tend to the need.

Make It Plain

Dan Jenkins

GOD'S WORDS TO HABAKKUK, *"Write the vision, and make it plain ..."* (Habakkuk 2:2), should be the attitude of every worker in the kingdom of God. Far too much that we do in His service is not characterized by simplicity or plainness.

Preachers need to make it plain. Contrast the clarity of the message of Paul to Agrippa, to Felix, and to all of his listeners, with the lack of this quality in lessons that are taught today. Much of the preaching being done every week in our pulpits would be just as

acceptable in synagogues and “Christian” assemblies that no longer believe in Christ.

Have you ever wondered just how it was that the preaching of the early Christians turned peaceful cities upside down, led to the disfavor and often even the arrest of the preachers, but the preaching done by many today makes them the most popular men in town? How was it that first century preaching stirred the hearts of the listeners and caused them to leave their former religions, while much of the preaching today allows the listener to leave, never knowing that a change is required in his life?

Personal workers need to make it plain. When we study with others, they need to see clearly that they are lost. They should understand the necessity of leaving former religions behind them when they come to the Lord. They should realize, without doubt, their obligation in attendance, giving, personal work, and morality. There is no other way they can carefully count the cost. Personal workers who fail to *make it plain* render it impossible for the sinner to *make a true decision*.

Make it plain! This should be the aim for every religious conversation, sermon, Bible class, and home study. Ours is to *reveal* truth, not to *conceal* it!

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

E. Claude Gardner

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

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

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

Furthermore, if persons are *Christians*, we have fellowship or participation with them. If they are Christians *as defined by the New Testament*, there can be joint participation with them in worship, campaigns, and religious projects. The Bible says that all “*who walk in the light*” of truth have fellowship with each other and with Christ

(1 John 1:7).

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

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

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

Jesus simply stated, *"He that believeth and is baptized (immersed) shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16). Peter commanded, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). Numerous other verses teach that these commands are necessary. If one command can be waived or diluted, then this can be done for the others. Both repentance and baptism are essential.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Ultimate Tragedy

David Pharr

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

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

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

Hebrews 10:26-31. The willful sin named in verse refers to the deliberate decision to leave Christ and the church. When one does this he has forsaken the only sacrifice for sins and can no longer have any hope of being saved (unless he repents). Verses 28-31 show that to be lost eternally is worse ("*sorer punishment*") than being killed without mercy.

2 Peter 2:20-22. The plain fact is that when one who has been

a Christian forsakes Christ, forsakes Christ's church, and forsakes the truth, he puts himself in a worse position than a heathen who has never known the Lord. The illustrations of the dog and sow in verse 22 emphasize the ugliness of backsliding into sin.

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

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

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

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

A Massive Mission

Lewis G. Hale

IT IS SO EASY to casually read the Great Commission: *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15). Christ was speaking to men who had witnessed His death for the sins of the world. They were also witnesses of His resurrection. They are now charged with the mission of going throughout the world and telling this story to every creature. We cannot be sure they were totally aware of the magnitude of their mission. We have

strong evidence that they did not realize it included the Gentile world. Peter learned that when he was sent to preach to Cornelius and his household. Even when the Jewish leaders agreed to receive Gentiles, they wanted it on their terms. They insisted that Gentiles first become "Jews" (by being circumcised), and then they could be received into the Christian faith.

Are we aware that the Great Commission is still in effect? It will be until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). It is just as necessary that we preach the Gospel to every creature as it was for the apostles. Men are still lost. The Gospel is still God's power to save. *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"* (Romans 10:14). What is the solution? *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

When churches are content to "keep house for God," meet to sing a few songs, pray a few prayers, hear a sermon on current events, take communion, give a token offering, go home and put religion on the shelf for another week, they unquestionably have no notion of the massive mission with which they are charged.

Our assemblies are an essential part of God's plan. Worship is vital. God is to be praised. But God is also to be honored by the proclamation of the Gospel to lost men. Men may refuse to hear. That is between *them* and God. They may hear and refuse to heed. That is still between *them* and God. But the responsibility to *help* them hear is *ours*, between *us* and God.

Be aware of your mission and fulfil it.

Seek Those Things Which Are Above

Wayne Barrier

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

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

Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

Jesus stated in Matthew 6:33, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you."* In this verse Jesus is referring to a list of things that man often seeks and emphasizes over the kingdom of God. He further says in Matthew 6:24, *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."*

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

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

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

THE GIFT OF LIFE

Jane McWhorter

"DOST THOU LOVE LIFE: Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff that life is made of (Benjamin Franklin).

Many of us think of time as something which is due us to use as we please, but God does not owe us the dawning of one more new day and not even the conclusion of the present one. Each hour of time is a very special gift from Him. In a sense, at the beginning of each new day He hands this gift to us with the request that we use it wisely.

When we hear of a suicide, our usual reaction is the senselessness of throwing away life all at once; but most of us

don't mind doing it bit by bit. We fail to realize that to *kill time* is to *murder* it.

Time spent in the "re-creation" of mind and body is not wasted and should be worked into each day's schedule, but so many of our hours have absolutely nothing to do with recreating of ourselves in relaxation, nor with our duties to God or man. They are simply thrown away.

Think of each day as a large bucket. We may fill it full of baseballs, but it will still hold a box of marbles. At a glance we may say that we have filled all spaces. But wait. The crevices between the balls and the marbles can yet contain a large amount of little shotgun pellets. When we think that this has surely completed the task, we are amazed to learn how much sand the bucket can hold. Even when we feel that it cannot possibly hold one more particle of matter, we learn how wrong we are as we pour into it a gallon of water. In the same sense, we can include so many more worthwhile activities in every busy day by making wise use of spare moments. It has been said that footprints in the sands of time were not made by sitting down.

Just as the workers in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew had to give an account of the wise use of their talents, so must we lay God's gift of each new day back at the Giver's feet that night with a reckoning of the manner in which we have used it. If we are honest, we are often ashamed of our stewardship of this gift. However, each new day is another opportunity, a fresh chance to try again. Let us not take this priceless gift for granted, because it may never come again.

Today Will Be Yesterday Tomorrow

Willard Collins

TIME IS SO FLEETING that today will be yesterday tomorrow, and this process of change does not take very long. Life is so short.

I recently noticed a large sign in front of a church building which read, "Today Will Be Yesterday Tomorrow." This truth should make each of us determine to live well today. However, some people ruin the present because of worry over what may happen tomorrow.

During World War II an acquaintance of mine told me that his wife was about to drive him to distraction. The draft was rapidly calling men into the armed forces, and his wife thought he would receive his call any day. Every morning when he left for work she

would cry and say, "I won't get to tell you goodbye many more mornings because you will be gone to the Army." The next morning another day would begin in the same way. When this man had about decided to volunteer for the Army because of this condition at home, the wife realized how miserable she was making his life. Then she said, "You may be called any day, but until that time comes, I am going to live well each day so we may enjoy our associations." It so happened that this particular man was never drafted.

Jesus taught His disciples the value of living well one day at a time when He said, *"Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"* (Matthew 6:34). Paul continued this theme when he taught, *"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God"* (Philippians 4:6).

Life comes to each individual one day at a time. A. M. Burton, president-emeritus of the Life and Casualty Insurance Company of Nashville, described this plan of God in his book, **The Sunday Visitor**. Burton wrote: "Life does not come to us in lifetimes; it only comes a day at a time. Even tomorrow is never ours until it becomes today. Do today's duty, fight today's temptation; do not weaken or distract yourself by looking forward to things you cannot see."

John Ruskin wrote of filling each day to its brim when he penned, "Let every dawn of morning be to you as the beginning of life and each setting sun be to you as its close."

A Good Look At Self

Since today will be yesterday tomorrow, each of us needs to take a daily look at self. I once noticed a printed poem hanging on the wall of a home. This poem vividly teaches the need of daily inspection.

*"I have to live with myself,
And so I want to be fit for myself to know.
I want to be able, as the days go by,
Always to look myself in the eye.
I don't want to stand with the setting sun
And hate myself for the things I have done.
I can never hide myself from me;
I see what others may never see;
I know what others may never know;
I can't hide myself,
And so whatever happens,
I want to be self-respecting and conscience free."*

The will of God should be the standard by which we measure ourselves. Christ gave the pattern to His disciples when He said of God's will, "*And he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him*" (John 8:29).

THE TRIVIAL

Dalton Key

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But will we?

The High Cost Of Sin

Dayton Keesee

THE PENDULUM SWING OF permissiveness and the attorney's appeal pattern as a way of avoiding justice and punishment have deceived so many hearts that a mass of mankind is fully set on doing evil (see Ecclesiastes 8:11). This article relates to that caliber of creature.

We swim in a sea of uncertainties and unfairness. Every day some soul is gunned down, knocked down, or run around, subtly hooked on the harmful, peer-pressured into problems, or becomes disturbed in another domestic disaster. Irresponsibility reigns in the work place, where some people keep a better record of "days off than of duties, want their rights to do wrong, and threaten to sue if anyone dares to question their lazy, loafing, or slovenly style of service (see Colossians 3:22-25).

Wake up world! Sin suffers and promiscuity has a price tag! Free loaders on the road of life end up as captured creatures and hooked humans rather than being fun-filled folks! That assessment rests not on speculation, but on revelation and reality! Listen to the law that will outlast heaven and earth (Matthew 24:35).

*"You have **sinned against Jehovah**, and be sure **your sin will find you out**" (Numbers 32:23). "We commanded you, if any will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). "These also withstand the truth; men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be evident to all men" (2 Timothy 3:8,9). "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; **for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ...**" (Galatians 6:7ff).*

May we be sobered by the sentence Scripture imposes on sin and sinners, selecting rather the grace and goodness of God that saves souls through His Son (read carefully 1 John 4:14; Hebrews 5:8ff; Mark 16:15ff; John 14:15; Matthew 28:18-20).

...And If He Repent ...

Tim Nichols

As a sinful and undeserving man stands before the God of heaven and earth and solicits forgiveness for his sins, he must do so with

a perfect willingness to forgive his fellowman of all trespasses of which he will repent (Matthew 11:25). If the offending brother has created great distress; if he has been negligent to repent after repeated warnings; even if he has been properly disfellowshipped by the Lord's people for his offense—he is to be forgiven when he tells us that he has repented.

"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Luke 17:3,4).

After seven offenses in one day, one might come to suspect that the repeated expressions of repentance are not genuine. We might be tempted to assume, and to act upon the assumption, that the repetition of offenses implies a lack of intention to cease them. But, in keeping with the consistent Biblical principle that it is our duty to judge *observable actions* rather than *hearts*, it is our duty and need to forgive. God alone knows the hearts of men, and He will bar the gates of heaven against those whose declarations of repentance are hypocritical. Our obligation is to forgive. Notice that our Lord instructs us, under such circumstances, to take heed to ourselves. There is need for the one who has been wronged to be careful that he does not become the one *doing* wrong by failing to receive the one who has confessed his sin and repented.

Who can say what positive and good effect our forgiveness might have upon those who have obtained it through deceit when they see that the children of God are serious about living according to His ways? Since it is true that the goodness of God leads men to repent (Romans 2:4), it follows that - the goodness of His people, which is but one expression of the goodness of God, would potentially have the same effect upon those whose hard hearts can be softened by kindness. It may be that forgiveness could have the effect of drawing forth **true** repentance where none had been. We are, therefore, both obedient to our Lord and potentially helpful to one lost in sin when we refrain from judging the *motive* of one who tells us that he has repented. *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).*

The apostolic penman who rebuked the Corinthian brethren for their failure to withdraw from the openly sinful brother among them, and that guided them to jointly *"deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Corinthians 5:4,5), is the same inspired penman

who later—after the brother had repented—admonished them to forgive him, to comfort him, and to confirm their love toward him. The goal was redemption, not vengeance.

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

Notice once again that the instructions given to the Corinthians to withdraw from the sinning brother and *then to forgive* him upon his repentance were given, not only for the benefit of the erring brother (who needed to repent in order to go to heaven), but also in order to test the willingness of the *Corinthian saints* to obey God in all things. They would have disobeyed God if they had failed to discipline the brother, and they would have also disobeyed if they had failed to forgive him upon learning of his repentance. Satan has divisive "devices" that he is prepared to use at such a time (anger, malice, etc.), and we can only avoid being subject to them if we know of them and avoid them. The Corinthians apparently passed both tests and demonstrated that truth and love must always be joined together.

In our vigilant stand for the truth may we never forget that the truth directs us to love one another and to forgive. *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye"* (Colossians 3:13).

Was Saul Of Tarsus Saved On The Damascus Road?

Ken Tyler

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

The conversion of Saul is found in Acts 9. He reviewed what

took place in his conversion in Acts 22 and 26. Saul was on his way to Damascus for the purpose of arresting Christians and bringing them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). When he came near Damascus there shined round about him a light from heaven (Acts 9:3). He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:4). Saul then asked, "*Who art thou, Lord?*" The Lord answered, "*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*" (Acts 9:5). Saul, who was trembling and astonished, then asked the most important question in the world: "*What wilt thou have me to do?*" The Lord told him to arise and go into the city, and there he would be told what he must do (Acts 9:6).

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

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

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

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

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

CONVERSION

Bill Dillon

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conversion involves:

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

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

If I am to be converted and to know the Lord, if I am to be changed, I must humbly seek the Lord and keep His

commandments. The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, has made the long journey into this world to save us (Romans 5:8). He hung on the cross of Calvary and suffered grievously so that He could pardon all who repent and obey His Gospel.

Have you been converted?

Message From The Cross: Forgiving

Royce Frederick

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

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

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

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

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

GOD AND THE KINGDOM FIRST

Max Patterson

THERE ARE FOUR FACETS or clear propositions in this verse. Let us look briefly at each of these.

First, this verse contains an obligation—"seek." Seek means diligent search, patient inquiry. We need to find out our duty to God so that we may know our obligation to Him and His church. There are many admonitions in Scripture dealing with the activity of Christians. We are told to "*Work out our own salvation*" (Philippians 2:12,13). We are encouraged to be "*steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Jesus gave us a great example in John 9:4 when He said, "*I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.*"

Our obligation to be active is nowhere more clearly set out than in Matthew 7:21-27.

Second, this verse designates an object. We are to seek *the kingdom of God (or church)*. In our time, particularly, men are seeking something—Transcendental Meditation, other types of meditation, astrology, spiritualism, Scientology, various cults, immorality, etc. But because these "answers" are from men and not from God, and therefore cannot provide true direction, people often go from one to another in a ceaseless quest for lasting help with life's challenges. To seek God's kingdom is to seek the benefits, blessings, and privileges of that kingdom, both in this life and in the promised eternal life of the next world. **This can be done only by becoming a member of His kingdom** (John 3:3-5; Mark 16:15,16). **One can seek after righteousness only by doing right** (Psalms 119: 172; 1 John 3:7).

Third, the verse contains an order in life's priorities. We are to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness *first*. Now, our problem is not in any inability to understand what "first" means. Our problem, for the most part, is that we just do not want to do what God has asked. We do not put Him first in our studying, praying, attending church services, and in many other ways. We need to determine to do better.

Fourth, the verse contains a promise based on a condition. If we seek the kingdom first then "*all these (material) things shall be added,*" or literally "*thrown in to boot.*" They are offered as an added attraction. What a wonderful promise! How can we turn it down? I admonish you to choose rightly.

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