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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD THERE IS NO REMISSION



WHILE MOST RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD have blood to play some role in the system of their belief, such as the Old Testament Jewish religion, Christianity, however, is the only religion in which it is observed that God Himself became a man and shed His own blood for the ransom of humanity. The eternal Word who was with God from the beginning, and was God, put on flesh and blood and so became Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to shed His blood for us to wash us from our sins in His own blood. (John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-8; Acts 20:28).

Sin is the biggest human problem. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Says Romans 3:23. And Isaiah 59:2 says, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." Almost All people everywhere on earth realize the presence of sin in their lives. This is evident because so many different religions exist on earth. People everywhere worship God in many different ways, just as we read in Acts 17:23-31. Why do people worship, make all kinds of offerings, follow various religious rituals and traditions? There is only one purpose, and that is, they all want to go to heaven to be with God. They are all trying to please or appease God, by offering Him silver and gold and money; by making most difficult journeys to "holy" religious places. Yet the Bible says, "Without

shedding of blood there is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22).

Sinful man has nothing to offer to God to redeem himself from sin. (Isaiah 64:6). And “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, it was vitally important, and absolutely imperative for God Himself to become a man and shed His own blood to atone man’s sin and thus to provide man the way to come to Him. (John 14:6).

Before His death on the cross, from where Christ had shed His blood, He had instituted the Lord’s Supper in His memory for His followers (1 Corinthians 11:20-26), in which there were two elements, unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (grape juice). The Bible says, “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:26-28). The blood Christ shed from the cross was for many for the remission of sins.

His blood was shed to redeem man from sin and its wages (Romans 6:23). We read, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct received from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:18,19). Ephesians 1:7 says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

The blood of Christ was shed for our justification. According to Romans 5:8, 9. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” The blood of Christ justifies man because Christ took sins of man upon Himself and shed His blood for the remission of his sins. This is the point the apostle was making in 2 Corinthians 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

By shedding His blood for our sins Christ became the propitiation for our sins, “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.” (Romans 5:24, 25). The apostle John wrote, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” (1 John 2:2). To

propitiate means, to win back the friendship and approval of an angry or aggressive person, in this case, God, against whom all have sinned.

Redemption, justification, propitiation, and forgiveness of sins by the blood is in Christ and not out of Christ. So then the question arises: How may one as a penitent believer in the efficacy of the blood of Christ get into Christ to receive all these benefits?

There is only one sure way, the Bible authorises, to get into Christ, and that is, one must, as a believer, repent of all wrongs, and be baptized into Christ’s death for the remission of sins. Listen to the inspired apostle Paul: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Christ shed His blood when He died, in His death, and therefore when one is Scripturally baptized, immersed in water, he is baptized into His death, and thus contacts the saving blood of Christ. In Galatians 3:27, the apostle said, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Ananias was sent by the Lord to tell Saul (Paul) what he, as a penitent believer, should do to wash away his sins, he was told: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16). Likewise, the apostle Peter had instructed a large crowd of believers to “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 2:38). Remission of sins, justification, propitiation, and washing of sins by the blood of Christ, all are made possible when one believes in Christ, repents of sins, confesses Christ to be the Son of God, and is baptized into the death of Christ.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION

J.C. Choate



IT WOULD HARDLY BE possible to make a real study of the church without giving some thought to its organization or government. One important reason for this is to establish a Bible picture of this phase of the church instead of leaving the idea its

government is like that of the denominational churches.

First, let it be understood that Christ established the church. Therefore, he is the builder, the owner, and the head of it. Paul says of him, “And 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.” (Colossians 1:18). It should be very clear then that the church of the Bible is without an earthly head, a president, a bishop or a pope, or any other supreme leader that gives directions for the Lord’s people to follow.

Second, since Christ is the head of the church and since he is now in heaven, then it is naturally concluded that the headquarters of the church are in heaven. Another way of putting it, the church of Christ does not have any earthly headquarters. It never has, does not today, and never will.

Third, there is but one church, but it is made up of many congregations. Christ said that he would build his church. (Matthew 16:18). He was speaking of the church universal. However, the apostle Paul later spoke of the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), having reference to the various congregations that compose the one church.

Fourth, each congregation is autonomous. That is, each congregation is complete within itself and is not dependent on any other congregations, as such. A congregation may cooperate with other congregations in doing some particular work but cannot be forced to do so. Each congregation has its own government and therefore could survive even if all other congregations apostatized or fell away. Or if a given congregation becomes unfaithful, then that does not necessarily endanger the other congregations.

Fifth, each congregation is to have its own elders or bishops. They are not to dictate, but are to lead, feed the flock, etc. (Acts 20:28). In the New Testament church they are called by several names, such as elders, bishops shepherds, presbyters, and overseers. Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. If a congregation does not have men who can qualify to be elders, as Christians they are to continue without them until they develop to the point that they can qualify. It should also be noted that only men can serve as elders, or in any public office of the church.

Sixth, each congregation is to have its own deacons. They are to work under the elders of the church. They are to be helpers or servants, doing these things that perhaps the elders do not have time to do. Many think of the elder’s job as having to do with the spiritual matters of the church and the deacons work pertaining to

the physical or material aspects of the church. Both groups are important. Not just anyone can be a deacon, as is evidenced by the fact that there are qualifications given for them likewise in 1 Timothy 3.

Seventh, in the church may also be found preachers, evangelists, teachers, and just plain Christians. To mention these different ones does not necessarily indicate that they represent offices or positions, but rather indicates their field of services. The church of Christ is not composed of just a number of offices that its members must be continually striving to fill, but the church is very simple in nature and should be left as the Lord planned it.

It should be pointed out that in the religious world as a whole you’ll find several different types of church government, most of which is unscriptural. Because of such systems there has developed what many call the clergy and the laity. There is on the one hand the higher-ups in church government, and on the other hand, those who are mere members and only take orders. In Catholicism, the pope serves as the head, and a long stream of officers work under him. In Protestantism there are bishops, presidents, and other important men who pull the strings. But wouldn’t it be better to leave all of that and get back to the Bible teaching on church organization and government. With man’s system, man is glorified and exalted but with the Lord’s way man does not hold such a position but looks to Christ as his head and leader in all spiritual matters. Regardless of what is said, the way of the Lord is the right way and only it will stand the test of time.

Baptism is the work of God

Jerry Bates

Baptism is one of the most discussed religious doctrines in the world, and virtually every ‘Christian’ group practices some form of baptism. Most people would agree that the New Testament teaches baptism and that a person should be baptized at some point. However, there is a great deal of disagreement over how and why. In this short article, I want to look at the question of **why** a person should be baptized. We could look at several verses, but we cannot mention them all in this one article. In Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, we find these words: **“Repent, and let every one 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 2:38). We

see that Peter commanded these people to do two things: repent and be baptized.

First, we find the command to repent. Repentance means to change one's mind. It is a complete change of a person's mind, his will and his emotions. It is a complete surrender to Jesus. Of course, this command presupposes faith, because without faith there is no motivation for a person to change his life. This is a difficult requirement to fulfill, yet without a full commitment to God, nothing will suffice to save us. In our modern world, we do not hear much about repentance. Much is said about Christ's love, His saving death on the cross and the need for simple faith on our part, but little is said about repentance.

Secondly, we are told to be baptized. The Greek word from which we derive baptism means "to dip, to plunge, to immerse." We are told to be baptized "for" (in order to achieve the result of) the forgiveness of sins. The preposition "and" connects both repentance and baptism. Thus, they are both for the same purpose. Many claim that we should be baptized **because** our sins have already been forgiven. That is a misinterpretation of the word "for" or "eis" in the Greek. This little Greek word never looks backward. Furthermore, if we are to be baptized because our sins have been forgiven, then we should repent for the same reason. This would mean that salvation occurs before we ever change our lives in the least. Yet, Jesus Himself declared, **"...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"** (Luke 13:3, 5). There are other verses that present a similar teaching.

In the light of seemingly clear teaching regarding baptism, why is there such a reluctance to accept such teaching? One major reason is a misunderstanding of the role of faith. We find these words in Ephesians 2:8-9: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** The argument is made that we are saved by faith and not by works; thus, that rules out anything that we should do, such as repentance and baptism. Many view baptism as a work that we do and is incompatible with being saved by faith. Likewise, some people claim believing that baptism is essential to salvation means that one is trying to save himself, which obviously one cannot do.

There are a couple of points we need to quickly consider. First, the New Testament nowhere declares baptism to be a work of man. It is always spoken of in the passive tense, which means something that is done to a person, not something he does. It is not in any way

a work of merit or an effort to achieve something on one's own. According to Colossians 2:12, God is the One working in baptism. **"Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him though faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."** Notice, we are buried in baptism and raised with Christ. This includes faith in what God is doing at that time, not faith in what He had already done. Also notice that nothing is said about man working in baptism. In baptism, we demonstrate our faith in what God is doing. God is the One who is working. God is doing the saving; man is not saving himself.

The second point is that in baptism, we are in no way trying to save ourselves. We find in John 9 Jesus healing a man who was born blind. Jesus made clay, anointed his eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. All would agree that if this man had not done what Jesus told him to do, he would have remained blind. He went and washed, according to the words of Jesus, and he came back seeing (9:7). Immediately following this miracle, as one would expect, there was an uproar among the people and the religious leaders over how he was now able to see. The religious leaders were especially unwilling to accept the obvious conclusion concerning Jesus, and so they asked the blind man more than once how he was able to see. He simply told everyone the truth (9:11). We need to realize that no one there that day ever said the pool of Siloam healed the man or that he somehow healed himself, even though he was required to wash in the pool of Siloam. Everyone realized that it was only by the power of Jesus the man was able to see. Likewise, when we are baptized, according to the commands of God, we are no more saving ourselves than the blind man healed himself by doing what Jesus commanded him to do. Our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus (Revelation 1:5), but this occurs only when we do what God commands (i.e., repent and be baptized). **God is the power, and God is working in our baptism!**

PARADOXES OF CHRISTIANITY: ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

Shane Fisher

THE DICTIONARY DEFINES "a paradox as a proposition or statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd yet in fact expresses a possible truth" (www.dictionary.com). Paradoxes are

used frequently throughout the Bible to help us meditate on deeper truths. The paradox to be explored is that the Bible teaches an **inaugurated phase** of the end times what would be termed already, but there is a **consummative** (complete) **phase** of the end times, what would be called **not yet**.

This paradox will be illustrated by five themes: (1) the resurrection, (2) the kingdom, (3) salvation, (4) the judgment and (5) the heavenly city of God.

THE INAUGURATED PHASE (ALREADY) AND THE CONSUMMATIVE PHASE (NOT YET) OF THE RESURRECTION

When Adam and Eve sinned against God (Genesis 3:1-6), they brought upon themselves and their descendants the consequence of physical death (Genesis 2:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:22). There was the **certainty** from the command they would die physically, and it happened (Genesis 5:5). Every descendant of Adam and Eve makes the choice to sin (often termed *spiritual death* because there is a separation from God, Isaiah 59:1-2) when they come to an age of accountability (Romans 7:7-12; Ephesians 2:1-2).

Jesus came to undo both types of death. He died physically on the cross for our sins as a sin-sacrifice so that we could be reconciled spiritually back to God (2 Corinthians 5:20-21). He died physically also to undo the grappling power of physical death by being the first person to rise from the dead to physically die no more. He arose from the dead in an immortal, glorious, incorruptible body (Acts 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15; Hebrews 2:14-15).

If a sinner trusts and obeys the conditions God set forth on how to be saved, he can be resurrected spiritually (Romans 6:1-4). He is brought back into a right relationship with God, which is spiritual life (John 10:10; Ephesians 2:5-6). He enters into **the inaugurated phase (already) of the resurrection**. John 5:24-27 states:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

If the Christian lives a faithful life, then he has an anticipated hope of being raised physically from the dead on the last day (John 6:39, 44, 54; 12:48) when Jesus returns, which completes the

consummative phase of the resurrection (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

John 5:28-29 demonstrate **the consummative phase (not yet)**. *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”*

THE INAUGURATED PHASE (ALREADY) AND THE CONSUMMATIVE PHASE (NOT YET) OF THE KINGDOM

God has always been King of the universe (Psalm 95:3). Mankind has always been accountable and amenable to God's laws since the beginning of creation because of His right to rule (Romans 4:15; 1 John 3:4). When John the Immerser and Jesus preached that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), they were stating that the kingdom (reign) of God was about to be handed over to Jesus the Messiah. During their personal ministries, the reign of God through the Messiah was already coming about because (1) Jesus was casting out demons by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28), (2) people were attempting to make Jesus into a political king, and as it says, **“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force”** (Matthew 11:12; John 6:15) and (3) people were undergoing the baptism of John that granted them access to enter into **the inaugurated phase of the kingdom** (John 1:28,35-42; 3:3-5; 4:1-2; Luke 7:29-30; Matthew 23:13). When Jesus ascended into Heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God to rule over the kingdom (Hebrews 1:3). He was given all authority in Heaven and on Earth (Matthew 28:18). Jesus showed a display of His power in A.D. 70 when He rendered judgment on the Jews for their rebellion and rejection of Him (Luke 21:29-33). We who obey the Gospel today can enter into that inaugurated phase of the kingdom in which Jesus reigns presently (Colossians 1:13; 4:11; Acts 8:12; Romans 14:17). The church is the present manifestation of the kingdom of God because it is the visible reality of what people ought to be doing in their daily lives by allowing God to reign in their hearts and lives.

There is also **the consummative phase (not yet) of the kingdom of God** in which Jesus will return and will give the reign back to the Father to rule over the everlasting kingdom. It is then that all the righteous will enter the eternal abode with God, while the wicked will enter into an eternal Hell (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 15:24, 50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5).

THE INAUGURATED PHASE (“ALREADY”) AND THE CONSUMMATIVE PHASE (NOT YET) OF SALVATION

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came so that He could save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21; 1 Timothy 2:4). If we obey the terms of the Gospel, then, we enter into **an inaugurated phase of salvation**, being saved from our past sins (Acts 2:38). We must continue to live faithfully, and God is faithful, Who will continue to cover us by the blood of His Son if we will trust Him and repent (1 John 1:7-9; Acts 8:22-24). If we do live faithfully, Jesus will usher us into **the consummative phase of salvation — Heaven itself**— in which we will never be able to fall from grace because there will be no more sin (1 Peter 1:5; Hebrews 1:14; 5:9; 9:28). When a faithful Christian dies physically, the spirit goes and awaits in the hades realm of Paradise until the day of Christ comes, when He will reunite both physical body and soul together (Matthew 10:28; Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; Acts 2:25-28; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 20:13).

THE INAUGURATED PHASE (“ALREADY”) AND THE CONSUMMATIVE PHASE (“NOT YET”) OF JUDGMENT

We stand on trial while we live here upon this earth. **The inaugurated phase of judgment** began when Satan rebelled against God (1 Timothy 3:7). God has decreed a day in which He will render judgment on the Last Day (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). If we have broken the law of God, then, we have sinned and stand condemned as sinners before a holy and a righteous God. John 3:18 states, **“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”** We can receive justification if we obey the Gospel, and then, we are justified by the blood of Christ (Romans 3:24,26; 5:1,9). If we are in Christ, then, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). God will continue to justify us if we keep living for Him. When Jesus returns (Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:30-31), then **the consummative phase of judgment — the great Day of Judgment** (2 Corinthians 5:10) — will commence. Those who are righteous will receive a welcome from Jesus, the just Judge, in that they will be permitted to enter into the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). On that day, the wicked will be issued a sentence of ultimate condemnation to an eternal lake of fire that was originally prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

THE INAUGURATED PHASE (ALREADY) AND THE CONSUMMATIVE PHASE (NOT YET) OF THE CITY OF GOD

If we do become Christians, then, we enter into **the inaugurated phase of the city of God — the new Jerusalem**. Hebrews 12:22-24 states:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Notice these blessings for the Christian are given in the perfect tense — **“have come”** — an action that occurred in the past with abiding results. However, the writer of Hebrews also discussed **the consummative state of the city of God** in Hebrews 13:14, **“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”** John wrote about this same city at the end of Revelation 21-22, and there we also see an inaugurated-consummative phase of the city. Christians can know they have entered into the inaugurated phase of the city of God because of the testimony of Hebrews 12:22-24, and if we should add to or take away anything out of Revelation, then, we are in danger of being cast out of the holy city (Revelation 22:18-19), which only makes sense if we are in the inaugurated phase of having entered the city but not the consummative phase in which there will be no more sin. Before the great Day of Judgment arrives (Revelation 20:11-15), we know that the forces of evil gather around the “beloved city,” surrounding it in trying their best to destroy it (Revelation 20:9). Therefore, we must put on the whole armor of God and withstand all the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-18), and we must stand fast to defend the walls of the New Jerusalem from the attacks!

CONCLUSION

Are you spiritually separated from God? Why not obey the Gospel so that you can be placed in a right relationship with Him? You will be raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). You will be justified by the **blood** of the Son of God (Romans 5:9). You will have entered into the inaugurated phase of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13). You will have obtained salvation through His name (Acts 4:12). You will have entered into the inaugurated phase of the city of God (Hebrews 12:22-24). Live faithfully so that when you die physically you can

experience a physical resurrection unto everlasting life (John 5:28-29), of being able to enter into the consummative phase of the kingdom of God (2 Peter 1:5-11), of being able to enter into the consummative phase of the city of God (Hebrews 13:14) and of obtaining final salvation (1 Peter 1:5).

Cotton Candy Preaching

Louis Rushmore

EMPTY ORATORY, COTTON CANDY and meringue are each sweet tasting, and yet, none of them have any nutritional value. They simply are not healthy! In fact, a diet of such is toxic!

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. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5 NKJV).

This first century exhortation is no less needed today in the twenty-first century. Next to false teaching (1 John 4:1), hollow homilies, fluffy with “smooth words and flattering speech” (Romans 16:18), which are undergirded by philosophy and endless personal analysis, immeasurably harm the collective of the church and Christians individually.

Alas, however, rare is the preacher or teacher these days who will in a straightforward manner undertake the pronouncement of a portion of “**the whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27). Book, chapter and verse preaching is neither any longer promulgated nor tolerated by the majority of present-day preachers or teachers and their auditors. Gone are the days when the pulpit and the lectern concentrated chiefly on conveying God’s message. The churches of Christ need more of the kind of preaching for which Ezra and his assistants were noted. “**So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading**” (Nehemiah 8:8). No finer model of preaching and of teaching exists than what one can discern from Nehemiah 8:1-8.

Our babies in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1; Hebrews 5:13) **are starving!** They go hungry at the feet of the very ones who have been

designated to feed them the Word of God—preachers (Romans 10:14). Furthermore, where are the elders who, ultimately, are responsible for feeding the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2 KJV)?

We wonder in complete amazement that our brethren believe a little bit of everything and not much of anything. Often, they do not know from where we came, who we are, where we are going or how to get there. It is no wonder, then, that few demonstrate in their lives a distinction from the ungodly world ruled by Satan (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Instead, Christians are supposed to be “*a peculiar people*” (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9 KJV), unlike those all around us with “**filthy language**” (Colossians 3:8), who conduct themselves immorally, lack true purpose in life and have no genuine heavenly aspirations.

Statistically, the Lord’s church is disappearing! It is evaporating! The churches of Christ—Christians who compose it—are being dissolved by the ungodly world. Sin is the solvent that eats away at one’s Christianity, and on a large scale, sin is consuming the Lord’s church.

Rather than idly observe what appears to be the inevitable demise of true Christianity in many communities, faithful Christians—armed with God’s Word and strong conviction derived therefrom—must preach plainly and unapologetically the Gospel of Jesus Christ—without appealing to empty oratory, cotton candy and meringue. Sweet fluff and puff sermons and Bible classes that **do not “convince, rebuke [and] exhort”** are a large part of how we arrived in the despicable circumstances confronting the Lord’s church in our day. The apostle Paul said, “**For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27 NKJV). The apostle Peter wrote, “**as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby**” (1 Peter 2:2).

The solution we need begins with a desire by the church to adopt a diet of God’s Word, beginning with the “**milk**” and graduating to the “**meat**” (Hebrews 5:12-6:2). Equally important, preachers, teachers and elders need to make sure that the milk and the meat of God’s Word are amply provided—without admixture of man’s ideas (Colossians 2:23), other gospels (Galatians 1:6-10) or amusements. “**For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing**” (Acts 17:21). “**And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

Respect For Parents

Charles E. Burch

WHEN GOD GAVE THE Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, the fifth one reads as follows: *“Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee”* (Exodus 20:12). Not only did God command those under the Law of Moses to honor their parents, but also under the Law of Christ Paul wrote, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth”* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

God also set forth capital punishment for the stubborn and rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Christ referred to this when He said, *“...He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death”* (Matthew 15:4). Solomon wrote, *“Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old”* (Proverbs 23:22).

God has placed a responsibility upon all to love, honor, respect, and help their parents. But the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day came up with a way to get around this command. In rebuking them, Jesus said, *“But ye say, whatsoever shall say to his father or his mother, it is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition”* (Matthew 15:5,6). Instead of helping their aged parents with the means at their command, they claimed that it had been offered to God. Mark wrote, *“It is corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free”* (Mark 7:11). “Corban” means a thing solemnly set apart by a formal vow to the sacred use of the service of God, hence it could not be used by or for any other person. Their traditions had invented a secret reserve beneath this form of words, which they could use for themselves. Jesus accused them of making *“void the word of God because of your traditions”* (Matthew 15:6).

What about today? There is probably more disrespect in our permissive society today than ever before. Yet, it is just as much a sin as it was when the law was given. We hear a lot about child abuse, and this is awful. But parent abuse doesn't make headlines very often. We can be disrespectful to our parents by our language, by what we say, how we say it, and even by the way we live.

God demands that we respect authority and teach our children that respect.

THE ENDURING WORD

Rodney Nulph

THINGS JUST DON'T LAST! Most items we purchase today are simply disposable, and usually we dispose of them more quickly than we hoped. From children's toys to automobiles, things do not last and endure. However, one of the great evidences that the Bible is from God is the lasting nature of it. God's Word has gone *face to face* with numerous obstacles, and yet, the Word of God remains! The Bible is truly the enduring Word. Consider the following.

The Bible has endured **time**. The apostle Peter referred to the Bible as *“the living and abiding Word of God”* (1 Peter 1:23). God's wonderful Book has endured century after century without fail. The original writings of Scripture were penned upon parchments, papyrus and other very fragile materials. While those materials were transient, the message was not! The Scriptures that we lovingly hold today were meticulously hand copied by scribes for generation after generation, and yet, these sacred writings remain without flaw or error. Early man was somewhat limited in his resources, but in spite of those limitations, the power of God shines through as His Word has remained intact. Of all the writings of antiquity, no other book has as much textual evidence as does the Bible. Only a few copies of Julius Caesar's works remain, but thousands of manuscripts of the Scriptures endure. Mankind has only one or two copies of Aristotle, Plato, Tacitus and other ancient authors, but the Bible is extensively documented and remains a complete whole. Interestingly, we have more reliable ancient texts of God's Word than we do of the works of Shakespeare! “Compared to other ancient books (and modern books too) the text of the New Testament has incredible attestation”. While time has depleted and destroyed the works of man, God's Masterpiece—the Bible—endures!

The Bible has endured **torture**. The nature of mankind does not change. Throughout the centuries, mankind has attempted to torture the Word of God so vehemently that it would cease to exist. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, used his penknife to cut the scroll of God's Word and burned it in the fire (Jeremiah 36:20-26). However, Jeremiah was guided to rewrite the prophecy. Amazingly, the king is dead and buried, but the Word of God remains (Jeremiah 22:18-19)! In the 3rd century after Christ walked this earth, Diocletian, the Roman emperor, persecuted the church and claimed to have eradicated the name of Jesus. Some 30 years later, another emperor was printing the Word of God and distributing it throughout the Roman empire, while,

amazingly, using Roman funds to do so! Voltaire, a French philosopher, boasted a prediction that within 100 years of his lifetime, the Bible would be forgotten. Within just a few years of Voltaire's death, the Geneva Bible society used Voltaire's printing press and his house to print the Word of God. Where is Voltaire today? Today, the Bible fills our world! Communism tried to extinguish God's Word and failed as well. While the Bible has been tortured on numerous fronts, the truth still remains as the Psalmist of old predicted, "**Forever, oh Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven**" (Psalm 119:89).

The Bible has endured **tests**. The Bible has been scrutinized and analyzed in many futile attempts to disprove it. Some dishonest folks will ignorantly label the Bible as unreliable and undependable without evidence to prove those accusations. In fact, some have claimed that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch because there was no written alphabet at that time. Yet, through the shovel of archaeologists, it has been discovered that such alphabets did exist. Others have tried to discredit the Bible because of some historical truths it mentions, which were not known outside of Inspiration's pages. Such examples would include the Hittite nation, the kingship of David and the governorship of Pontius Pilate. However, as the years passed, these truths have been found during archaeological excavations, and once again, God's Word has been proved to be true. It can stand under any test given by mortal man!

We can rely upon the trustworthiness of the Sacred Text. Things come and go, and they just do not last. However, God's Word endures and remains! "**...The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth forever**" (1 Peter 1:24b-25a).

It's the World That is on Trial

Clem Thurman

A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN was coerced by a friend into visiting an art gallery. He spent some time "tagging along" as his friend studied with enthusiasm and great appreciation the works of the masters. All the time the businessman was just bored to tears. Finally, as they departed, he stated to an attendant, "In my opinion, this has all been a waste of time. There is nothing of interest here." The attendant replied, "Sir, these pieces of art are no longer on trial. The visitor is!"

It was nearly twenty centuries ago that Jesus faced the illegal courts of his mock trial. The centuries since then have vindicated His life and His work. Jesus is no longer on trial—the world is. The evaluation of the Christ cannot be placed merely upon His sinless life and perfect example. Nor can it be drawn from the institution which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and the effect it has had on the world. The true evaluation will be the sum total of all the influences released in the world, plus the factors of salvation viewed from eternity! No frail man, in the impotency of human foibles, can accurately weigh these matters. Christ is no longer on trial. The world is.

WHEN JESUS WAS REJECTED BEFORE PILATE

The world was on trial when Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate. The true verdict was rendered by the Holy Spirit in these words, "*He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God*" (John 1:11-12). It was the world that was "*weighed and found wanting.*" As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, "*For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him. He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil*" (John 3:17-19).

Almighty God placed His stamp of divine approval on His Christ, and Jesus is no longer on trial. Peter preached to those who had condemned Jesus, "*Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay*" (Acts 2:22-23). Was Jesus on trial before Pilate? or were His murderers? Jesus was clearly vindicated, in that God raised Him from the dead. Peter preached it, "*This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses ... God hath made him both Lord and, Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified*" (Acts 2:32,36).

WHEN PEOPLE RIDICULE CHRIST AND THE BIBLE

With the passing of time, each generation is placed on trial before God. And each succeeding generation passes under condemnation

if they do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Some even claim that Christ and His gospel have failed. The truth is, Jesus Christ never has failed any person—but man has often failed Him! Surely it is fallible and faulty judgment that would allow prejudice and preconceived ideas to bias the mind. But it happens. And it happens especially and specifically among the critics of Jesus. Basing their ideas and expectations on unreliable traditions and opinions of men, they express their disappointment with Jesus.

Jesus told the Jews of His day, *“This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:8-9). Don’t blame Jesus for the unfulfilled promises which He never made. Don’t blame Jesus for a plan which He never gave. Too many, rather than weighing Christ from divine evidence present in the inspired word of God, have taken old wives’ tales and some preacher’s word for what to believe and do. From this hodge-podge of contradicting evidence they have reached the wrong conclusion. But it isn’t the fault of Jesus. When one shall turn from men to God, he shall find Jesus to be *“both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36). Such honest seekers of truth, through real faith, will then declare with Peter, *“Lord, thou hast the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68).

WHEN PEOPLE DEMAND MIRACLES FROM GOD

Many conclude that Christ has failed them when their prayers for miraculous intervention do not produce signs and wonders today. But God does not promise such miracles today. In fact, He plainly shows that the miraculous has ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-10; etc.). People who have built their expectations on the miraculous have done so on the claims of false prophets, not on the promises of Jesus Christ. If a loved one dies, in spite of many prayers being offered, some conclude that Christ has failed. But the Lord never promised that He would give us everything we ask! Some expect God to guide them in every decision of life with some kind of miracle. Friend, the Lord never promised that, and it is unscriptural to expect it.

In talking with a friend recently, he remarked that it would take a miracle to save his wife, and that he was praying for that miracle. But the Bible says, *“Pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man availeth much in its working”* (James 5:16). I firmly believe in prayer. I also firmly believe that every healing is the result of God’s power. But I just as firmly believe that God is able to heal WITHOUT miracles as He healed by means of miracles through the apostles. When people expected—yea, demanded—

a miracle from Jesus, He replied: *“An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign”* (Matt. 12:39). Now, who is on trial?

WHEN PEOPLE TRUST IN DENOMINATIONS

Many people extol the system we call denominationalism. Some are openly “Thankful that we can each have the church of our choice.” But what does Jesus say? *“Neither for these [the apostles] only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me”* (John 17:20-21). One complained to me recently, “The fact that there is so much division and confusion in religion just demonstrates to me the failure of the Bible.” But, again, Christ is not on trial—the world is. Christ is not the author of division, the world is responsible for the denominations that exist. The failure is not because the Christ or the Bible failed, but because the world has ignored the Bible to establish their own system.

Jesus promised, *“I will build my church”* (Matt. 16:18). He built only one church. He purposed that church, from eternity (Eph. 3:10-11). He died on the cross and shed His blood to purchase that church (Acts 20:28). Jesus saves people, and He adds the saved to that church (Acts 2:47). *“He is the head of the body, the church”* (Col. 1:18), *“Head over all things to the church, which is his body”* (Eph. 1:22-23), *“There is one body”* (Eph. 4:4). Christ and the church are one, just as a husband and wife are one (Eph. 5:22-33), for that church is His bride. Jesus and His church are not on trial. The world is. When the will of the Lord is followed, His church is the result. When the world insists on its own way, denominationalism is the result.

WHEN PEOPLE FAIL TO OBEY THE LORD

Many seem to expect the Lord to save them and take care of them, whether they pay any attention to Him or not. It is really a very strange kind of “faith.” The truth is, *“He that turneth away his ear from the hearing of the law, even his prayer is abomination”* (Prov. 28:9). Jesus promises salvation, help, encouragement, protection and everything else we need. But His promises are conditional—conditioned upon our doing what He tells us. He set the pattern: *“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things suffered; and being made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation”* (Heb. 5:8-9). Jesus has never promised one blessing to one who will not obey. Not one!

Every promised blessing is based on our doing His will.

Jesus still asks, “*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). He plainly stated, “*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 7:21). It is still true, “*Ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth*” (1 Pet. 1:22). Too many folk live for themselves, and charting their own course, find themselves in deep trouble. Then they call for the Lord to bail them out—when, had they lived as He directs, they wouldn’t have been in trouble in the first place. Make no mistake, Christ is willing to forgive us and help us—no matter what terrible mistakes we have made. But it is just like the prodigal son coming home (Luke 15). Jesus doesn’t offer his forgiveness and help while we remain in the hogpen of sin. Only when we are willing to leave the hogpen of our own will and come home according to His will in simple trust and submission, will He forgive and heal.

No greater vanity nor folly can be found than in those who try to accuse Christ of failure in order to hide their own mistakes and stubbornness. The doctor’s prescription cannot be impugned while we refuse to take the medicine. Yet those who refuse to obey the gospel of Christ point to counterfeit and spurious churches and “hypocrites in the church” as their proof that Christ has failed. Well, Christ is not on trial—the world is. Jesus said, “*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48). When you think you have put Christ on trial, God reverses the position: “*Because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31). After we are raised from the dead and standing before God, we will more fully realize that Jesus is no longer on trial. We are.

IMITATING CHRIST

Harvey Porter

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 2 IS a truly great passage of Scripture, beginning first with the statement, “*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ.*” Paul said in Romans 6:3 that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus “... *were baptized into His*

death.” In verse 5 he added that in this “... *we were united with him in His death.*” This is like marriage. Each draws on the strength and love of the partner. They share the same life. How could we describe the “encouragement” we receive from knowing we are united with Christ? It is so great that it is indescribable. Yes, there is tremendous encouragement realizing that we are in Christ.

Second, Paul said, “... *if any comfort from His love ...*” What a source of strength to know that someone loves us. But to know that Christ loves us is far greater. Indeed, this is real comfort.

Third, Paul wrote, “... *if any fellowship with the Spirit...*” This is the Holy Spirit who dwells in God’s children. The very Spirit of God and Jesus dwells in us to comfort us and help us.

Then Paul reminded the church of the “*tenderness and compassion*” they enjoyed in God’s family. We all want this. Young and old alike, even animals, understand tenderness. It is a universal language.

Paul said all of these things to exhort the Philippian Christians to act this way toward one another. He concluded by saying, “... *then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose ...*” Every congregation must practice these things. Paul continues by saying, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves*” (verse 3).

These great teachings will work in any century and in any culture. Let’s all give earnest attention to these words.

HINDRANCES TO THANKSGIVING

Colin McKee

CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE ALWAYS thankful. However, the truth of the matter is that we are often unthankful; we frequently go about our everyday affairs without thinking of where our blessings come from or of how we should be grateful for life and all things we enjoy. Israel is a tragic example of ingratitude. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul mentions several things that hindered them from being thankful.

1. They lusted after evil (verse 6). They were not thankful for what they had, nor the good that God had provided. Their discontent

prompted them to seek things that God had prohibited, things which destroyed their spirituality.

2. They were idolatrous (verse 7). Their minds were divided. Their loyalty was shattered. They turned from the divine power of the Creator and manifested the lowest form of ingratitude: "... *nor were thankful*" (Romans 1:21).

3. They focused on the sensual (verse 8). They became base, giving license to their fleshly desires. Those who live on the level of brute beasts will not likely be thankful.

4. They tempted Christ (verse 9). They were not satisfied with the food and provisions that God sent; they were not thankful for the daily bread He gave.

Let us avoid the terrible mistakes Israel made; let us rather be thankful.

Don't Give Up!

D.R. Boggs

THE LIFE THAT GOD has planned for us is one of endurance in the working of righteousness. He asks for our faithfulness to the end of this life. Whatever may come to us, peace or persecution, we are asked to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and stay committed to Him.

The devil has many tricks to attempt to convince us that Christianity is not worth the effort. Sometimes it is to make life so difficult that we want to give up, and thus lose eternal life. Sometimes it is an attempt to convince us that there is nothing difficult about right living, and cause us to become complacent and quit before the end.

God says that nothing is more valuable than the life eternal. That gift is granted to those who overcome. It is the reward for steadfastness regardless of the circumstances. Many have made the beginning, only to decide that the reward is not worth the cost. They have fainted along the way and lost the crown of righteousness. Perseverance to the end is an absolute necessity.

God has not promised that all of our brothers and sisters will act the way they should all of the time. If we put our confidence and measure of faithfulness in the trust of frail humans, we will be disappointed. Our Christianity cannot be based upon the social

approval of others. It can only be based upon faithfulness to the Word of God. It is nice to have the association and approval of others. However, one's salvation is not measured in that way. It is measured by whether we continued in well-doing according to God's measure. If we hope to hear God's blessing in judgment, we must not grow weary in righteousness. If circumstances should so require that we be the only one who stands for right, we must stand with God. Don't give up! Stay faithful to God!

The Happy Man

Johnny Ramsey

THE BOOK OF PSALMS TELLS us a lot about genuine happiness. In the very first stanza of that noble section of Old Testament Scripture, we learn the source of true happiness: "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night*" (Psa. 1:1-2). We later find this illustration of joy, "*Blessed [happy] is the man whose sin is covered*" (Psa. 32:1). It is abundantly clear that peace and contentment belong to the one who is cleansed from iniquity (Isa. 1:18). Nothing brings greater tranquility than being right with God. The psalmist reminds us of this indelible truth, "*Happy are the people whose God is Jehovah*" (Psa. 144:15).

When we put our trust in our Creator, we know that He can even turn a curse into a blessing (Neh. 13:2). Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, but later became the means of life for the entire family. He made it clear that God took something which his brothers did with evil intent and turned it into something good: "*God did send me before you to preserve life ... But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*" (Gen. 45:5; 50:20).

Sometimes evil people claim that the Lord appeared to them and told them to commit a crime, even to the extent of killing other people, but the Bible rebukes such heresy. Recently, in Florida, four people bombed three abortion clinics. Notice the press clipping that reported the incidents: "They said God spoke to them and they responded to His revelation." The truth is that the Lord teaches us to love our enemies and never to retaliate (Matt. 5; Rom. 12). If

anyone spoke to those people, it was Satan, whom Jesus called *“the father of lies”* (John 8:44). We should always stand in awe of *“the mighty one”* (Psa. 33:8) and always trust in His goodness (Psa. 34:8) as we praise Him *“all day long”* (Psa. 35:28).

Humble submission to the will of heaven will always achieve more than an arrogant spirit. Someone has well stated these challenging words: “The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe.” We find the principle well stated in Psa. 36:7, *“Therefore, the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.”* The power of the truly meek and quiet spirit can be magnified by reading Psa. 37—one of the magnificent sections of the Bible. Who will inherit the blessings this earth affords? *“I have been young, and now am old; I yet have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread”* (Psa. 37:25). Never forget the old saying the proves to be a blessing: “Help me to understand that nothing will come my way that God and I together cannot handle.” Sometimes our happiness is hindered by our own poor decisions. The inspired writer affirms this, *“My wounds are repulsive and corrupt because of my foolishness”* (Psa. 38:5).

Many heartaches come our way because we stepped out of the light (John 8:12) and fell into the miry clay of the world’s darkness (Psa. 40:2). Were it not for the glorious grace of our Redeemer, we would be overwhelmed by the quicksand of sin. When earthly friends forsake us (Psa. 41:9), we should doubly rejoice that we have a Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). He has promised to be with us, *“I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?”* (Heb. 13:5-6).

The happy man is the one who longs for God, even as the wild animal pants after the fresh water of the brook (Psa. 42:1). If we are not happy—even in the midst of a frenetic and debauched world—we need to get back to God for the joy of His salvation! The happy man thanks God for, and uses, whatever life provides (Job 13:15).