

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

GOD'S WAY IS THE ONLY RIGHT WAY

THIS WORLD IS FULL OF problems, personal, financial, family, emotional, relationship, etc. But there is no problem greater than the sin problem, which is the problem of every individual universally. Wherever there is man sin is there. From the beginning, from the time of Adam and Eve, our first parents, all have sinned against God. (Romans 3:23). Sin is not living according to God's will, man's Creator. (1 John 3:4). Although no one is born with sin. When a baby is born he/she is born without sin. Just as Adam and Eve were created by God in the beginning without sin, with a sinless soul. But all have sinned, and everyone sins by his or her own choice. In the book of James, the writer explains how one becomes a sinner, it says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full grown, brings forth death." (James 1:14-15). This is how Adam and Eve became sinners in the beginning, and this is how every individual sins today.



The Bible also says, that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), that is to say that sin is not without its wages, because sin separates man from God. That separation is called death, which, in fact is spiritual alienation of man from God. (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

Sin resides in the heart or mind of an individual, where it has its beginning. Proverbs 4:23 therefore says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." Jesus taught, "For out

of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man....” (Matthew 15:19-20). He also taught, “You have heard, that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you” said Jesus, “that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28). And the same would be true in the case of a woman. Thus, Christ made the lustful thought as sinful as the overt act. In the light of this, who is innocent?

So when we look at sin from this standpoint, we know that it is definitely true that all accountable beings, who know the difference between right and wrong, except little children (Matthew 18:3; 19:14), are sinners, because all have entertained evil thoughts in their heart or mind, and have fallen to the temptation to do the wrong.

Therefore, from God’s standard all are under condemnation, because all have sinned. Sin has separated and alienated every man and woman from God. Sin is like a wall between man and God, as the prophet Isaiah said, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

God, who in the beginning had created humans, “in His own image and in His own likeness” (Genesis 1:26-27), was therefore greatly concerned about the eternal consequences of man’s soul when man sinned. Humans, says Acts 17:29, are “the offspring of God.” Having been created in the likeness and in the image of God, all humans are eternal beings. This means, we are and we shall always be. Like God, we will exist forever in the eternity. But where?

Christ taught that in eternity there are only two places, one is the place of eternal punishment and the other is where there is eternal life. (Matthew 25:46). God wants all people to enter into eternal life in heaven. And to make it possible God sent His living Word from heaven to earth to save man and to redeem man from sin, because sin cannot enter heaven. The Bible says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, according to the will of God, through His death on the cross became the propitiation or the atoning payment for the sins of the world. (1 John 4:10). According to the Bible, when Christ was dying on the cross God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; not imputing their trespasses to them. In fact, 2 Corinthians 5:21 reads, “For He made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might

become the righteousness of God in Him.” Man cannot make Himself worthy of heaven by his own efforts, nothing he can do or give to atone for his sins. (Isaiah 64:6). Only in Christ one can become righteousness of God. Because He is the one who has paid the penalty of man’s sins. So Christ rightly proclaimed before returning back to heaven, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6).

Because the loving heavenly Father, our Creator God, has done this great and most wonderful thing for the whole world (John 3:16), the Bible declares, at Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.....” There is nothing, therefore, in this world more important for a man or a woman to do than to make sure that he/she is in Christ Jesus before leaving this earth to live in eternity. The apostle Paul in Galatians 3:26, 27 told the Christians, “For you are all sons (children) of God through faith in Christ Jesus, For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” The will of God today for all is to believe in Christ, the Son of God, Who left heaven, became a man died on the cross by the will of God to be the propitiation for the sins of the world, repent of all wrongs, and be baptized (immersed in water by the authority of Christ) for the remission of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:35-39; Romans 6:3.4).

Work Of The Church

J.C. Choate



WHAT IS THE WORK of the church? Surely there is some purpose behind its existence. It must have a function, or a work, to do. It does. However, it is not the work of the church to go in business, buying and selling for profit. The work of the church does not consist of entering the employment business and hiring everyone who wants to preach and thus send them out. The church is not in the business of giving away everything that it can obtain just for the sake of giving it away. It is not the work of the church to go into the school business and thus operate schools all over the country. These things we have mentioned are certainly important and must be considered but they are not the first obligation of the Lord’s body. Yes, the church has a work to do but it is not always that which many think it is.

The work of the church is the greatest work in all the world. It is

the only institution that can do it, and as a result, glorify the God of heaven. This is the work the Lord has ordained that the church should do, and to try to do it through some other means is purely out of harmony with the will of God, or just failing to do it will result in his disapproval.

The work of the church is really two fold. First, it is to preach the gospel that souls may be saved, and second it is to help the poor and those in need. Aside from these two functions the church is not primarily obligated.

Let's begin by noticing first of all the duty of the church to preach the gospel. Christ himself said in the great commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15, 16). In Matthew's record of this same commission he says that the Lord said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28: 19). So this is the chief duty of the church, that is, to go. We are to go into all the world, to every nation, and finally to every creature, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ that souls might be saved.

The Lord didn't say how we should go, but he did say go. He didn't give a particular method of preaching the gospel, but he did say to preach the gospel. Note, we are not to teach opinions, the doctrines of men, etc., but only the gospel. We may preach it in the pulpit, by tracts through the newspaper, by a correspondence course, by radio, by television, or in many other ways, but regardless of the way we chose, we are to preach the gospel in its purity. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:2 that we are to preach the word. Preach what? Only the word of God.

Everything the church does, every good work performed, every sermon, yes everything, is done with the thought in mind of saving souls. And that is why we are to preach the gospel. We are to do it in order that our souls may be saved and in order that other souls might be saved. We are saved in order that we might help to save others, and so it goes with all Christians.

The work of the church doesn't stop here, and verily the next phase is simply a continuation of the first part. The church is to be instrumental in helping those in need. When the Lord was on the earth he was continually concerned about the poor and those in need of help and he would have us to be likewise concerned. If we ever get to the place that we do not about others or that we are not concerned about their needs then surely we do not have the spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9).

Now in helping others we must strive to help those who are truly in need and those who are deserving. (1 Timothy 5). Otherwise it is possible to spend all of one's time in helping those who are not worthy, for some people are all too willing to take advantage of the goodness of the church.

The church can do just so much. That is, it can help only as it has the means and the ability to help. But whenever possible, food should be provided for the hungry, clothes to cover the naked and cold, and shelter for those are left outside. Such help also includes caring for the sick and afflicted, seeing after the homeless and the aged. For James said. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27)

Each man should first remember that it is his obligation before God to provide the best he is able for himself and for his family. Then if help must be received, the church can make up what is lacking. (1 Timothy 5:8). Someone has said that you can't get an individual interested in spiritual matters as long as he is hungry, cold, and in dire need of the material things. Surely this is true and this is one reason why the church seeks to do this type of work. We are concerned about the physical body but we are more concerned about the spiritual being.

Remember, the Lord would have all to be saved. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But man can be saved only as he has the opportunity to hear the gospel and obey it. Whether it be through preaching a sermon or helping the poor, the truth is being proclaimed. This is the work of the church.

GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS

Johnny Ramsey

MOST EVENING NEWS PROGRAMS on our televisions contain most of the bad news of the world. A small percentage of news reports may contain relatively good reports, but they are rare, indeed. However, there is a wonderful and beautiful message of hope and joy in the precious proclamation of the life and death of our Lord. Verily, the gospel is great news of a risen Savior who has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-3). This powerful story of love and peace is truly glad tidings to warm our hearts and give us reason for life in the here and now (Mark 10:30). This, alone, should block out the dreary gloom so rampant about us.

We have a wonderful Savior who cared enough to leave the bliss of glory (1 John 4:14) to die at Calvary so that we could be redeemed. He shed His blood on the cross to make it possible for us to escape the penalty sin brings (Rom. 6:23; 1 Pet. 2:24). That is the best news the world could ever hear. The gospel also provides us with our dearest friend (John 15:13) to brighten our day and defeat any pessimism that would cloud the sunshine of our existence. In deepest sorrow, heartache and loneliness, our Master cares: "*Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you*" (1 Pet. 5:7). What glorious news!

*There's not a friend
Like the lowly Jesus.
No, not one!*

Children of God also rejoice in our relationship with Jesus as the Master Teacher. He knows what is in man (John 2:25), and, as a result, He can guide us into the verdant path of holiness and integrity with the wonderful words of life (John 6:68). Nicodemus declared, "*Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God*" (John 3:2). And when officers were sent to arrest Jesus, they came back empty-handed, saying, "*Never man so spake*" (John 7:46). Jesus was truly "A man sent from God with teaching beyond compare." The gospel is the good news because it brings comfort to soothe broken hearts and to wipe away our tears. In Isa. 38:5, Jehovah told a very sad king, "*I have heard your prayers. I have seen your tears.*"

"*The God of all comfort*" (2 Cor. 1:3) will sustain us in grief and loss. Till the end of time, He will be with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). There really is a lot of good news available. Why not turn off the gloom and doom of television reports and open up the Bible and find the power of God to lead you and calm your troubled soul? There is true satisfaction when we surrender our very being to the glad tidings of truth. When we learn to serve the Lord in the beauty of godliness, new vistas of radiant sunshine flood our lives with positive thinking and joyous service. What a friend we have in Jesus! May we never overlook our tremendous blessings in Christ.

How Do You Understand Baptism?

David Marube

ACCORDING TO PAUL IN ROMANS chapter six, when we are baptized three things happen:

(1) We die with Christ (verse 3). This is the one area that is often

ignored by many people when they are baptized. They are buried with Christ in water without first being crucified with Christ. What does it mean to “die with Christ”? No doubt it means to “die to self.” S.D. Gordon expresses it this way: “In every redeemed heart there is a throne and a cross. If self is on your throne, Jesus is on the cross ... If self is your king, if self is on your throne, Jesus is on the cross ... Let self be on the cross and Jesus on the throne.”

Surely we need to deal with the question—*Did I crucify self on the cross before I was buried in water during baptism (Colossians 3:5-7)?* Self cannot allow one to act like a Christian while self is alive and on the throne!

(2) We are buried with Christ (verse 4). This makes it very clear that baptism is a burial, and it requires much water to be done biblically (Acts 8:38; John 3:23).

(3) We rise with Christ to walk in newness of life (verse 4). After baptism, we become new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17) who have put off our old selves (Ephesians 4:22). Surely we ought to appear new in comparison to what we were before we became Christians.

How do you understand baptism? If you have not yet been baptized, why not make that decision now, so that you may become a member of the body of Christ (His church), where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1), and where are found all spiritual blessings, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:3, 7)? If you have been baptized, were you crucified with Christ before you were buried with Him? Are you walking in newness of life? If so, **GREAT!**

Should We Try To Restore The New Testament Church?

Cecil May, Jr.

WHEN WE SPEAK OF “restoring the New Testament church” we refer to the attempt to be today what the New Testament tells us the church ought to be. Yes, the goal should be pursued.

“Restoring the New Testament church” has never, to my knowledge, been used to mean duplicating a particular first century congregation with its human failings.

We are to seek to restore, rather, what God requires the church to be and to do. We should restore, for example, what the church at Corinth would have become by putting into practice the corrections Paul made in his letters to them. We are to attempt to conform, not to the church as it was in any particular local manifestation, but to the

church as Christ desired it to be in every location.

Have we already restored the church, or are we in a never-completed process of restoration?

Certainly there are places where the church has so apostatized that there has ceased to be a church of God in that location. Whenever the Gospel is faithfully preached there, those who gladly receive the Word and are baptized are added by the Lord to His church. The church is “restored” in that place.

There is a sense, however, in which restoring the New Testament church is an ongoing, never completed process. The human element in the church has never been perfect. The church at Corinth was a church of God, but it still needed to restore the apostolic doctrines to its teaching and practice if it was to continue to be a faithful church. The apostle commanded them to continue that process of restoration.

We do need to continue seeking to restore the New Testament church by bringing it back into being wherever it is not, by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. We need to continue the process of restoring New Testament understandings, attitudes, teaching, and practice everywhere and in all things which Christ, the Head, instructs His Body to do and to be.

Distinctions Are Essential

Hollis Miller

A MAN ONCE TOLD me that his mother had become a religious fanatic. Before questioning the man’s judgment, it might be advisable to study the Pharisees of the New Testament. So concerned were they with keeping every tedious detail of their assembled traditions that they were rendered both blind and deaf to the teaching of Jesus. It is possible to become a religious fanatic, if by the term one means meticulous attention to endless matters that are neither taught nor sanctioned by the Scriptures.

But relatively few individuals in the modern world become religious fanatics. The opposite is more often the rule. I recently read a cartoon in which one individual was asking another: “Do you think it necessary for a Christian to regularly attend worship?” The individual being asked replied, “I never knew a Christian who did not want to.” That cartoon is an excellent catapult for projecting us into many questions. For example: “Is it necessary for a Christian to feed one who is hungry; love and care for his family; or be merciful and forgiving?” It is difficult to find a stopping place for such questions, isn’t it?

The Christian spirit is nowhere represented in the Bible as one which seeks to avoid pleasing and serving the Lord. Rather, it is always pictured as a spirit of willing and obedient surrender. Paul put it this way: *“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:8).

With regard to serving the Lord, one who finds himself asking such questions as “Must I?” or “Do I have to?” needs to review the commitment of his heart.

RESCUED!

Gary Moore

PSALM 18 IS DAVID'S song of praise in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies. He sang:

“I love Thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18:1-3).

Rescued! There is not a word with any greater impact. Being rescued from anything calls for rejoicing. David's song is actually our song, for we, too, have been delivered through the blood of Jesus Christ. Because of His finished work at Calvary, we have been:

(1) Rescued from the wages of sin. *“And you were **dead in** your trespasses and sins ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of **His great** love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* (Ephesians 2:1,4,5).

(2) Rescued from the enemy of death. *“But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’... but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15:54, 55, 57).

(3) Rescued from the enemy of uselessness. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:8-10).

On a dark and lonely afternoon nearly two thousand years ago, a

man of Nazareth, named Jesus, hung from a cruel cross and cried forth, *“It is finished!”* And Heaven cried forth, *“Rescued,”* giving you and me a song of praise to sing eternally!

WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS?

Tom L. Childers

THE BIBLE SAYS, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* (Romans 8:35). Does Paul mean that, regardless of what happens, God will always love His people? Or does Paul affirm that he is not going to allow the things that happen to him to cause him to quit loving the Lord?

Paul describes the suffering a Christian must endure: *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18).

Next, Paul says we are saved by hope: *“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?”* (Romans 8:24). Hope is what Christians must do.

Then Paul asks the question: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* (Romans 8:35). The *“who”* can also be translated as *“what things.”*

Next, Paul lists a catalogue of things that could separate the Christian from God. Paul says there is someone who is pleading our case (Romans 8:26, 27). There is help for us in dealing with trials and tribulations. Paul says God is for us (Romans 8:31). Paul says we are conquerors of all these things (Romans 8:37). He says that he is persuaded that nothing will cause him to separate himself from the love he has for God (Romans 8:38). He does say that the only way he would give up his faith would be if it would bring about the salvation of the Jews (Romans 9:4).

All the things mentioned are things without. Nothing is here said of what corrupting influences may do to the heart. No powers of persecutions can compel one to stop loving God; if he quits, he does it of his own accord. Love cannot be destroyed by force of imperial command, but it may wax cold. Some even depart from their first love (Revelation 2:4). Paul recognized that people depart from the faith, but he was persuaded that no evils coming on us from without could destroy the love of God.

If this is really the case, then, as a Christian who loves the Lord, I will not allow:

- The accidental death or terminal disease of a loved one to destroy my faith in God.
- The sins of my children to so embarrass and discourage me that I will quit the Lord and His church.
- An unfaithful spouse to so unsettle me that I will give up the faith.
- The mistreatment of those in the church or out to cause me to give up and quit.
- The losing of a job or position to so disillusion me that I will stop serving the Lord.
- Poor health or aches and pains to cause me to give up on the goodness of God.
- The weaknesses, shortcomings, disappointments, and hypocrisies of brethren to disillusion me and weaken my faith in Jesus.

I know not what the future holds, but I am like the apostle Paul, in that I am persuaded that I will never, ever, ever stop loving the Lord and believing in His goodness and mercy. With the Lord's help, may it ever be so.

“... NOT TO BE HIGH-MINDED...”

Don L. Norwood

CHRISTIANS ARE WARNED IN THE New Testament not to be “high-minded,” trusting in material wealth and feeling puffed up with self-importance. The expression “high-minded” used in the text under consideration can also be translated “proud” or “puffed up.”

This same attitude keeps a person from being humble before God and man. It keeps him from being willing to confess wrong and to repent when he needs to. It also keeps one from seeking and granting forgiveness.

We humans, even though we may be genuine Christians, will always need God's mercy and forgiveness (Romans 3:23). And God has made it very clear to us in His Word that He will only forgive us if we sincerely forgive others from our hearts (Mark 11:25, 26; Matthew 6:14, 15).

Jesus made it clear in His parable in Matthew 18:23-35 that if we do not forgive each other, we will not be forgiven by the Lord. Moreover, we will be/eternally lost and paying the debt.

The “pride of life” is a worldly attitude and is not what the Father would have us display in order to keep a right relationship with Him (1 John 2:15-17). It is one of the things that we must put away if we are to inherit eternal life with God.

Jesus’ parable about the wayward (or prodigal) son (Luke 15:10-32) points out to us the great need for humility, complete honesty with ourselves, and the willingness to admit wrongdoing, and then to sincerely repent. Also, He teaches the necessity of openly confessing the wrong that one has done. The father was eager to forgive and to receive him happily back in the home and family when he (the father) saw that the son had really repented. This shows us that God is ready and willing to forgive when we humbly repent and confess the wrong. This kind of humble attitude will always make it easier for us to forgive and to be forgiven.

When Do Our Sacrifices Actually Count?

Garell L. Forehand

OUR GOD HAS ALWAYS required sacrificial service from mankind. From the time of Abel, sacrifice has been uniformly set before us as the God-appointed way that we approach our Creator.

Of course, sacrifices from sinful people have ever been the means whereby appropriation of the one great sacrifice becomes possible. If a sacrificial offering is accepted by God, it is clearly because of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. *“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure ... Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Hebrews 10:4-6, 9, 10).

In response to that single effectual sacrifice, man has been called upon to offer the God-ordained sacrifices, while depending upon Christ’s payment. *“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord”* (Psalm 4:5). That is completely different from offering the sacrifices, and putting one’s trust in the sacrifices he offers!

Christians are called upon to *“offer up spiritual sacrifices”* that are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). We are informed that doing good and sharing are sacrifices with which God is well-pleased (Hebrews 13:16). We are even taught to offer our own bodies

as living sacrifices to the Lord (Romans 12:1). But how may we be assured that our sacrifices are truly acceptable to God?

When We Are Truly Penitent. True sacrifice to God is a response to Him because of our own sin. At its 'roots' is actually a desire for reconciliation that has been lost due to our transgressions. To be acceptable, our sacrifices must spring from pure motivation. David understood this principle, and he humbly confessed his sin to God. *"For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise ... Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering"* (Psalm 51:16-17, 19).

When We Are Being Obedient To God. Sacrifice is certainly a condition of obedience, but never a substitute for it. Upon accusing King Saul of not having obeyed the voice of the Lord, the prophet asked: *"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry"* (1 Sam. 15:22, 23).

When We Are Ourselves Merciful. Sacrifice is an appeal to mercy. It would be the height of hypocrisy for one to sacrificially approach God for His mercy while at the same time refusing to offer mercy to others. When the Pharisees grew offended at Christ's eating with the "sinners" of the people, Jesus told them: *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"* (Mt. 9:12, 13).

We Are Set Apart

Dale Grissom

CHRISTIANS ARE SET APART from the world in a spiritual sense. We have committed our lives to Christ and are looking for another home—a home in heaven. Because of this commitment, Satan works night and day to entice Christians to turn from Christ and follow him. Satan knows his time is limited; he knows that when Christ comes again, he and his followers (those who have refused to repent) will be put into the devil's hell to suffer forever.

It is so sad when one of God's children turns away from the hope of heaven and sells his soul for the pleasure of sin. God has made the supreme sacrifice: He gave His Son to die for us. If we turn from the

joy of living for Christ, we will make a terrible mistake.

I believe that the reason some Christians go back into the world is because they haven't fully given themselves to Christ. When one obeys the Gospel and begins to live for Christ, he must continue to study the Word and grow as a Christian. Christians need a very active prayer life to help us become stronger in our convictions. We need to become concerned about the souls of others and reach out to them to help them learn about Christ and what they must do to be saved.

It is difficult to imagine anyone who has enjoyed all the blessings Christians receive ever turning his back upon the Lord and neglecting to tell others the story about Jesus. The hope of salvation is such a blessing to those who have obeyed the Gospel! Wouldn't it be wonderful to know you had helped someone to obey the Gospel? God uses His children to teach others; we are the earthen vessels. We must be about our heavenly Father's business.

THE BIBLICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD'S GRACE AND MY GIVING

Dick Sztanyo

IS THERE A CONNECTION between the grace of God and giving? Some would probably say, "No!" Others might suggest that there is some connection, but that it is not very strong. I submit to you, however, that the connection between grace and giving is actually inseparable.

1. God is a gracious Lord who gives. In 2 Corinthians 8:9-15, one discovers the most extensive discussion of giving in the New Testament. Read these important words with me: *"Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich ... And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed ... Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift"* (2 Corinthians 8:1,9; 9:8, 15).

Among other things, the grace of God provided the gift of Jesus Christ (see Titus 2:11ff; John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 9:15). This was the culmination of years of history, all of which has its root in the graciousness of God! Moreover, all of it represents a God who graciously gives every good gift to His children (see James 1:17). Indeed, as Jesus Himself put it, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

2. We must, therefore, be gracious people who give. Read the Scriptures again with me: *"We urged Titus that... he would complete in you this gracious work as well. But just as you abound in everything,*

in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also” (2 Corinthians 8:6,7).

When we give to support the work of preaching, we are abounding in graciousness. Likewise, we are gracious when we give our time to our families and our friends, when we give a “cup of cold water” to another in the name of Christ, when we assist others in obeying the Gospel, etc. There is an inseparable connection between grace and giving. We must seek to be like our Father in both areas (see Ephesians 5:1).

How Can We Have TRUE Self-Esteem?

Mark Hall

WE ALL SEEK SELF-ESTEEM, but for most of us it proves to be elusive. There are several reasons for this, one of which is the fact that we live in a world that is constantly forcing us to compare ourselves to other people who are more successful, better dressed, have better cars, more perfect families, and fewer hang-ups than we. We are bombarded by commercials which tell us that we can find our true selves only by wearing the right jeans, using the right deodorant, and drinking the right soft drink.

How can we possibly feel good about ourselves when someone is continually telling us we don't meet the standard?

How? First, we need to realize that none of these things that our society values can bring any real worth into our lives. In 1 John 2:16, God says, “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*”

Second, we need to recognize these superficial “values” for what they are: traps that Satan set long ago and that people continue to fall into (and Christians are no exception) day after day, century after century.

The key to the problem of self-esteem is that self-esteem is not really what we need at all. What we need is God-esteem, focusing on Him and then seeing ourselves through His eyes. God has created each one of us with *intrinsic* value. The Genesis account tells us that we were made in the *image of God*. He demonstrated His own estimation of our worth by loving us enough to send Christ to us while we were still in our sins.

In Colossians we read concerning Christ, “*For in Him, all the fullness*

of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete.” As we seek after God and desire to have Him as our savior and friend, we can know that in Him we have everything we need to make our lives whole. When I, individually, acknowledge God for who He is—His power and glory, His grace and love—and realize that He cared enough for me to send His own Son to die for me, how can I not feel convinced that I have value?

As His children, we have fullness in Him through Christ, and *in Him we lack nothing at all.*

SOME PLAIN FACTS

David Pharr

THIS PERMISSIVE AGE HAS produced a generation which neither knows nor cares about Bible principles of morality. Chastity, the sanctity of marriage, and purity of heart almost seem to be relics of another age. Our young people are growing up under constant suggestions from the media and many of their friends that in moral matters “each can do his own thing.” Many people of more mature years are also affected. Here are some plain facts for young and old.

Fornication is Sin. This means every kind of illicit sexual activity. The Bible is plain. Those who practice fornication cannot go to Heaven (Galatians 5:19-21).

Homosexual activities are contrary to nature and God (Romans 1:27). What is called “gay” will result in the damnation of Hell.

Pornography is a medium for lust and lasciviousness. This applies to suggestiveness, lewdness, nudity, etc., whether in printing, movies, or television. Jesus said, “*But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*” (Matthew 5:28).

Things done in secret are never hidden. Actions too shameful to describe are sometimes done in secret (Ephesians 5:12). Modern situations which provide privacy cause many to feel their sins are secret. God sees it all (Proverbs 15:3). Every secret thing will be brought into judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Love is not an excuse for Sin. A typical defense for illicit sex is, “We love each other.” At best this is self-deception. Love involves honor. In the highest sense of love, one will not cause the one he/she loves to do that which will put him/her in danger of the fires of Hell. One should be honest enough to call things by their right names. It’s not love, it’s lust (Romans 13:14)!

Married love is God's plan for sexual fulfillment (Hebrews 13:4).

The duties and privileges of the marriage relationship are clear (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Husbands and wives are required by law (God's law) to love each other (Ephesians 5:25, 28; Colossians 3:18, 19). Couples who "fall out of love" are not following God's plan.

Marriage is for life. No teaching of Christ is more plain than this (Matthew 19:3-9). Regardless of what counselors, lawyers, or judges might say, one who causes the breakup of marriage for any cause except fornication sins against God. If he/she marries another (except when the mate who was put away was guilty of fornication), it is adultery.

There are situations (caused by sinful attitudes, selfishness, hatefulness, etc.) when a couple cannot stay together, but they are still married to each other. Even if under civil law they are divorced, they are not free to marry others. The same restrictions of fidelity apply as if they were still together. They have no more right to "date" or to consider another marriage than they would if they were happily living together (see 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11).

There is never a marriage breakup without sin being involved. Both may not be guilty, but sin is an essential ingredient to divorce. It is tragic how casually some men and women hurt their mates, ruin their homes, and break the hearts of their children. It is more tragic when we consider the awful and eternal consequences of such callous disregard of the will of God (Hebrews 10:30, 31).

Marriages which are guided by the principles of Christ are happy marriages. Because human beings are involved, there are often some stresses and strains, but principles as in Ephesians 4:32 and 5:22, 23, 1 Peter 3:1-8, Acts 20:35, and Matthew 6:33 and 7:12 will show the way to overcome problems and to build happiness.

AFFINITY WITH SIN

Frank Chesser

"NOW JEHOASHAPHAT HAD RICHES and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab" (2 Chronicles 18:1). Ahab was the seventh and one of the most wicked kings of Israel. Incited by Jezebel, he drove Israel to such depths of sin that even the mighty confrontation on Mt. Carmel was unable to shake loose its deep roots in idolatry. Of him the record states, *"Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16:33).*

Jehoshaphat was the fourth and one of the most righteous kings of Judah. He sought after the Lord and walked in His commandments. He commissioned princes, priests and Levites to go throughout Judah and teach the people the law of the Lord (2 Chronicles 17). However, he made a costly mistake when he allied himself with Ahab. Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab was sealed by the marriage of Jehoram his son, to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Though difficult to envision, the son of one of the most righteous kings of Judah became the son-in-law of one of the most infamous couples in the history of mankind. Note the tragic consequences of Jehoshaphat's affinity with Ahab:

COMMITMENT TO WAR

Having been wined and dined in ostentatious fashion, Jehoshaphat did not hesitate to join Ahab in battle against Syria. This decision almost cost him his life. As the enemy compassed about him, *"Jehoshaphat cried out and the Lord helped him, and God moved them to depart from him"* (2 Chronicles 18:31). Only by divine intervention was Jehoshaphat spared an untimely death. God's mercy saved Lot from the brimstone of Sodom, and that same trait of Deity rescued Jehoshaphat from the sword of Syria.

Kinship with sin always means war. It creates war in the heart, making it *"like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt"* (Isaiah 57:20). It produces war in the home, for *"unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it"* (Psalm 127:1). It yields war in the church as it foments *"envying and strife and divisions"* among brethren (1 Corinthians 3:3). It is the basis of war among nations. Thus David prayed, *"Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man; Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war"* (Psalm 140:1-2).

HEARKENED TO FALSE PROPHETS INSTEAD OF GOD

Having devoted little thought to the matter, Jehoshaphat agreed to join Ahab in battle. Desiring to calm his fears over his decision, Ahab sought to pacify him with four hundred false prophets who encouraged them to go against Syria with God's blessings. Yet unsatisfied, Jehoshaphat asked, *"Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him?"* Reluctantly, Ahab sent for Micaiah, who foretold Ahab's death and Israel's defeat should they proceed with their plans. Rejecting the word of God, Jehoshaphat hearkened to a lying spirit and suffered the wrath of the Lord.

HIS FAMILY AND JUDAH SUFFERED SEVERELY

At Jehoshaphat's death the royal scepter fell to Jehoram. Inspiration declares that the influence of Athaliah played a major role in his extreme wickedness. He commenced his reign by killing his six brothers and various princes in Israel. He permeated Judah with idolatry and "compelled" the people to commit fornication. Divine judgment brought suffering to Judah and death to Jehoram and all of his sons except for Ahaziah. At Jehoram's death, Ahaziah took the throne and continued the wicked ways of his father. When he was slain, Athaliah usurped the throne and gave the southern kingdom its own "Jezebel." She inaugurated her reign in blood by murdering all potential heirs to the throne, including her own grandchildren, and set out to make Baal the national god of Judah.

Therefore, as a result of Jehoshaphat's affinity with Ahab, his ruling son killed all of his other sons; his daughter-in-law murdered his great-grandchildren and others; his ruling son and grandson were so corrupt that both were destroyed by the hand of divine judgment; and for fifteen years Judah suffered inconceivable spiritual damage under his son, grandson, and daughter-in-law. Such are the inevitable results when man forms an "affinity with sin."

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

T. Pierce Brown

ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL stories illustrating the mind of Christ is His experience in overcoming temptations on the mountain with the Devil. How can I develop a Christ-like mind and be able to do likewise?

First, there must be a deliberate choice to be led by and filled with the Spirit. This simply means that when one finds a command or desire of God in any area, no matter what his conscious desire or preference is, he deliberately chooses, as Christ did, "*Not MY will, but THINE be done*" (Matthew 26:39). Of course, this means that the principles herein mentioned do not apply to one who is not a Christian.

Second, we must notice 1 Corinthians 10:13, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" But how does one accept and appropriate that promise?

As a foundation principle, he has to be aware of the promise and have it in his conscious and subconscious mind to be able to rely on it. It is also important to be "*filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18, 19)

by letting “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). That word “richly” suggests a deep and broad familiarity with the Word, and a constant practice of its contents. When you are familiar enough with the Scriptures, you will discover that there is no temptation that can come to you that a Scripture does not fit. If you are consciously relying on God’s promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13, the Devil will simply not have enough power to overcome you.

This is the specific way you “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7). You have noted that Jesus quoted Scripture to the Devil when He was tempted, but you may not have been aware that the principle of “*letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly*” will give you the same kind of power. You will simply be “*strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man*” (Ephesians 3:16) so that you will not fall.

“WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?”

Jack W. Carter

SEVERAL YEARS AGO A VERY sweet Christian girl told me about an incident with a young man who had been asking to date her.

He was not a member of the church, and they just didn’t have anything in common. She had turned him down twice, and now she said “no” to attending a rock music concert with him.

In mock exasperation the young man asked, “What do you do for fun? You don’t dance, you don’t drink alcohol, you don’t attend rock concerts *What* do you do for fun?”

Her response was a classic message from all Christians with conviction. She told him, “For fun I get up in the morning without feeling embarrassed, ashamed, and guilty about what I did the night before.” The young man had nothing more to say.

It is true. That is fun! Come to think of it, there are many things in her life that are fun. She is married now to a fine Christian man. They have a little girl and are building an outstanding Christian home together.

She is having fun every day not having to live with the affliction of deep scars and regrets from her past. It is fun getting all prettied up each afternoon to receive a husband home from work, knowing that he won’t be stopping off at a local bar for a few drinks with the fellows.

It is fun knowing that while he is away from her, his Christian conduct won’t allow infidelity, or even flirting. It is fun watching him hold his little girl on his lap with loving, protecting arms. It is fun knowing that her little girl will never see her father in a drunken stupor or

experimenting with drugs. It is fun living with the assurance that the home will be led by a spiritual leader who will guide the family members toward heaven.

The list of fun things for Christians is endless *What do you do for fun?*

What A Blind Man Saw

David Thurman

IMAGINE HAVING YOUR LIFE all figured out. You have dreamed of a certain career all your life (such as being a lawyer). You never wavered in your dream, and all your efforts since you first decided to go into law have moved you in the direction of becoming an attorney. You work hard at it and advance faster and further than your friends and contemporaries. Then, in your early 30's, on the brink of achieving your goals, you give it all up. You just walk away. You act as if none of it mattered any more.

This scenario may be hard to imagine, but it actually took place about 2000 years ago. *"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who art thou, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, but rise and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.' And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."* (Acts 9:1-9, NASB). Saul steps right out of the scenario described above. Saul had worked hard to achieve his status among the Jews. He had spent his life with one goal in mind: to become influential in Jerusalem among the leaders of the Jews. When Christianity appeared, Saul saw an opportunity to serve God (by stopping the blasphemers) and to further his own career (by making a name for himself among the Jews). But it all changed on the road to Damascus, when Saul was struck blind. While blind, he saw his life and his ambitions clearly. While blind, he saw as never before.

HE SAW JESUS WAS THE CHRIST

"I am Jesus whom you persecute" is what Jesus said to Him. Saul had

worked so hard to stop the spread of this new religion. He just couldn't accept the idea of this Jesus being the long anticipated Messiah. But on that day Saul realized that Jesus was the Christ after all. We can only imagine how shocked Saul was at the moment he understood this. He saw the direction of his life was wrong. He saw that all his efforts to persecute the church were sinful. He saw that his concept of the Messiah was in error. Saul saw clearly that Jesus was the Christ when he was blind.

Many would be shocked one day to realize that Jesus is who He claims to be. There is much talk about Jesus. There are many books written about Him. Many use His name to curse or swear. I think many of these people (like Saul) would be shocked to know Jesus was not an impostor, but is actually the Son of God. Like Saul these modern day skeptics might be dumbfounded to know that the Jesus they take for granted is the Christ. The Jesus they speak of so casually is risen from the dead. The Jesus they seldom take time to consider is the Son of the Living God.

HE SAW JESUS AND THE CHURCH ARE ONE

Saul was out to get the church. He had letters authorizing him to arrest both men and women. Yet, when Jesus spoke to Saul he said, *"I am Jesus, whom you persecute"*. Saul realized that in persecuting the people of Jesus, he was persecuting Jesus Himself. He saw that Jesus and the church are one. What Saul did to the church he did to Jesus, what he did to Jesus he did to the church.

Again, today this realization might surprise people. So many want Jesus and His saving grace. Yet, those same people often act and speak as if the church were unimportant or of no value. *"And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all"* (Eph. 1:22-23). Jesus is head of the church. The church is His body. The church is the fulness of Christ. Some ridicule the church, calling it an institution corrupted by man's influence. These sorts of people want God, but no institution. But Saul would tell them that the church and Jesus are one. To reject the church of Jesus Christ is to reject the Christ.

Others accept the need for the church, but treat it with indifference or neglect. They seldom attend a worship service. They seldom give to support the church. They fail to get involved with any of its ministries. They want to be married in the church, buried by the church, even want their children immersed in the church. They want all the trappings of a religious relationship with Jesus, but they reject the Christ by rejecting His people, the body of Jesus, His church.

Still others are active in the church. In their zeal to serve the cause of the kingdom, these people take strong stands, label other brothers and sisters, even attack those with whom they disagree. Like Saul they often go to other places and churches in order to continue to disrupt what they dislike or that

with which they disagree. But again, they fail to realize that in attacking the people of God (even one individual) they are attacking the Christ. Saul could not eat or drink for three days. His guilt must have been enormous. Many today would lose their appetites if they could only see what Saul saw when he was blind. When we hurt the people of Jesus, we hurt Jesus.

HE SAW HE WAS A SINNER

As Saul pursued his dream of rising in the ranks of the Jews he was convinced he was right with God. He worked to hurt the cause of Christ believing he was doing what God wanted. When he saw Jesus on that dusty road, he realized that he had been wrong all along. Saul fell to the ground, blinded and unable to eat or drink, no doubt because his guilt was overwhelming. For a man who had spent his life content that his walk with God was righteous, discovering he was actually a sinner out of step with God must have been crippling. For the first time in his life Saul was sure he did not know God and it floored him.

Many people are like this. They go through life thinking they are pretty good people. They believe in a loving God who would not condemn anyone, at least not anyone as nice as they are. But that attitude fails to understand the depth and nature of sin. *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23). All of us have sinned. All of us, no matter what we think of our lives, have disappointed God. When we see Jesus as the Son of God, we realize that we are sinners. We are out of step with God, we are lost. This realization stunned Saul. It may stun you. While he was blind Saul saw himself clearly, for the first time in his life.

HE SAW HE NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING

Jesus told Saul to go into Damascus and await instructions as to what to do. Saul got up, was led into the city, and later a man named Ananias came to him. Ananias said, *“The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name”* (Acts 22:14-16). Saul had seen Jesus personally. Saul had *“heard an utterance from His mouth”* while on the road. Yet, there was more for him to do to be saved. Three days later a preacher comes to him, tells him of God’s plans for him, and then commands him to be baptized. Saul saw he needed to do something to be saved.

Many today believe there is nothing to salvation except a personal experience with Jesus. But that did not work for Saul. Saul had the talk with Jesus. Saul realized who Jesus was. Saul saw his need for salvation. But, he still needed to have his sins washed away. Just because people come to believe in the Savior does not mean they are saved. Like Saul, they need to

be told what to do. They also need to “*arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins*”. Saul was blind, but he saw that he needed more than his faith in Jesus to save him. He needed to be immersed.

DON'T WAIT TO BE BLIND

The account of Saul's conversion reminds us of the need to be open to the message of God. No matter who we are, or how long we have served God, we must accept that we can learn more, know more and perhaps (like Saul) need to surrender to God as never before. Saul didn't see any of this until he was blind. In his blindness he saw things he had never seen before. He saw Jesus as God's Son. He saw the church as one with Jesus. He saw himself as a sinner. He saw he needed to do something to be saved. But in your life, don't wait to be blinded to see so clearly. Do what God commands today.

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I Sunny David, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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