

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 54

January 2024

No. 9

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A NET



IN ONE OF HIS PARABLES Jesus taught: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into the vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:47-50).

The kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God and the church of Christ are inter-related terms as Christ used them in Matthew 16:18, 19. It is essential to see the inter-relationship of the church of Christ and the kingdom of Christ in order to understand the meaning of Christ's teaching in His parable. The church of Christ and the kingdom of God are not two different things but are one and the same thing. Those who had believed in Christ and were baptized for the remission of their sins, after repentance, were added to the church (Acts 2:38,41,47); or were conveyed into God's kingdom (Colossians 1:13), at the same time. Not only did Christ promise to build His church, but He also told the disciples that God's kingdom would be established while they would still be living on earth (Mark 9:1). Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus told him, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5). In Mark 16:16, Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47), or

enter the kingdom of God, through the same process. The church Christ established in the beginning, in the year 33, A.D., in the city of Jerusalem, according to His promise, is the kingdom of God on earth.

In the parable under consideration, Christ was teaching, that the kingdom of God or His church is like a large net which has been cast into the vast sea, which is the world, by the preaching of the gospel. Like the net, the kingdom attracts people of all varied motives and characters, it gathers of “every kind”. In a net there could be trash, rubbish, weeds, vermins, etc., as well as fishes. The fact that all kinds are in the net shows the proximity of the good and the bad in the kingdom on earth. But there is a time coming when the net will be full, and drawn to the shore, then there will be a separation between the good and the bad that were gathered in it. While the net is in the sea, it is not known what is in it; it is drawn to the shore for the sake of the good ones that are in it. So shall it be at the end of the world or on the day of the judgment of all. (Acts 17:31). It will be the day of separation between the good and the bad. While the good ones will be gathered into one place for the eternal kingdom of God, the wicked or the bad will be cast or thrown into the furnace of fire, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 3:11). Furthermore, what is being taught so plainly is, that membership in the church is prerequisite to entry into the eternal kingdom in heaven. Too, remember, the church that Christ built is under discussion and not denominational bodies. The enclosed fishes of every kind are members of the church. But not all will be saved. A great many are in the net, the church, who must be accounted as “bad”, not fit for the heavenly kingdom, who will suffer the eternal banishment. In “the parable of the tares” Christ said, “Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” **Notice, Jesus said, on the day of reckoning the angels, “will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness.”** In the visible church or kingdom on earth there are all kinds, good and bad together. But there is a time coming when the net will be full, and drawn to the shore, then there will be separation between the good and the bad that were gathered in it.

At the end, when Christ will come to receive His kingdom and to deliver the same to the Father in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:24), so that it will become the eternal kingdom in heaven; it will be the purged kingdom, not having spot or wrinkle or any impurity in it. (Ephesians 5:27). The apostle Paul, therefore, told the members of the church at

Corinth: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). They were in the net, God’s kingdom on earth, but those who practice such things will not inherit the eternal kingdom of heaven. (Galatians 5:19-21).

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

J.C. Choate



THE CHURCH IS SIMPLY A group of people called out or set apart for a special purpose. The church of Christ is composed of a body of people who believe in Christ and are determined to follow his teachings and his will.

Many years before the church ever came into existence such men as Isaiah, Joel, and Daniel prophesied that it would be established, where it would be established, who would establish it, when it would be established, and the purpose of its establishment. Isaiah said, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2, 3).

Joel wrote, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; And upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28, 29). Then Daniel made the statement, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . .” (Daniel 2:44). There are many other prophecies that could be used but we will pass now to the days of Christ to find some of the Lord’s promises that the church would be established. Christ said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Please note that it had not been established yet and even the Lord points to it in a future sense. That is, it would be established

some time after the time he made these statements. After Peter confessed him as being the Son of God, he said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). He tells Peter here that he will build his church on the confession that he made. What was that confession? That he was the Son of God. So the church was to be built upon Christ, not upon Peter. Also, notice who promised to build the church. Christ said, "I will build my church . . ." Hence, the church of Christ. Not a man-made church wearing a man-made name, but the church belonging to Christ, wearing his name.

In Mark 9:1 he said, "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Now notice, the Lord makes a promise here concerning the kingdom, or the church, which are the same. He says that some of the very people who were present at that time would still be living when the kingdom, or the church, came in power. So it was near at hand. It hadn't been established yet, but it would soon be there.

When we turn to Acts, chapter two, we read of the establishment of the church. The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. That is, the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit and they had the power to speak in different tongues or languages and perform miracles. Well, that fulfills Mark 9:1. But to absolutely settle the matter, Peter himself said, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). Then he goes on to quote Joel, chapter two, concerning the pouring out of the Spirit and the kingdom coming with power.

In the next place, a kingdom was set up that would never be destroyed. Paul said in Hebrews 12:28 that a kingdom had been set up that could not be moved. That kingdom or church still stands and will stand forever. Thus, Daniel 2:44 was fulfilled.

Then finally, Isaiah 2:2, 3 was fulfilled with the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. The place was Jerusalem. The time was about A.D. 33. The kingdom or church was established. The gospel was preached and all who obeyed it were added to the church (Acts 2:47). But what did the Lord say in Matthew 16:18? He said that he would establish his church, and he did through his apostles. Further, it was founded upon a rock, and Christ was that rock (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Neither John nor Peter established a church but Christ did. Now whose church should one be a member of? Christ's church, of course. No other church was authorized or established with God's approval. He seeks followers only one way — through his kingdom.

There are many man-made churches but they are worthless. Christ

has the true church. He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18), Saviour of it (Ephesians 5:23), foundation of it (I Corinthians 3:11). It wears his name (Rom. 16:16) and he is coming back for it one day (Ephesians 5:27). Now why should anyone want to be a member of any other church when he can be a member of Christ's church?

But how can one know the difference between a manmade church and the church of Christ? That is simple. If it was not established in the city of Jerusalem then it is not the right one. If it was not established in A. D. 33 then it is too young. If it doesn't wear the name of Christ then it does not belong to Christ. If it does not follow the New Testament as its only guide, it is not following Christ.

Paul says there is but one church, or body (Ephesians 4:4). That's the one Christ established.

DOES “UNEQUALLY YOKED” ALWAYS APPLY TO MARRIAGE?

Glenn Colley

IT HAS LONG BEEN MY view that 2 Corinthians 6:14 can, but doesn't necessarily, apply to the marriage of a Christian to an unbeliever. The verse says, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”*

What is prohibited here? Does this teaching forbid a Christian from marrying an unbeliever? Would it further forbid a believer from **staying** married to an unbeliever? These are good questions.

First, examine key words. **“Unequally yoked together”** comes from one Greek word, “HETEROZUGEO.” This is the only time the word occurs in the New Testament. Thayer says of this word, “Yoked with a different yoke; used in Leviticus 19:19 of the union of beasts of different kinds, e.g. an ox and an ass ... to have fellowship with one who is not an equal.”

It is important to see that what Paul is forbidding is not being yoked together with unbelievers, but rather being unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

Consider then, this interpretation: Paul is teaching that while we naturally interact with unbelievers in a variety of ways, we must not give any unbeliever the authority to command us to do wrong. The Lord must **always** be our Master. The picture of being unequally yoked would be one in which the believer was yoked together with a larger, stronger

unbeliever who could guide the union at will.

This interpretation makes good sense. If Paul was forbidding ALL relationships or covenants with unbelievers, not only would it be wrong to marry one, it would also be wrong to become a business partner with one, or even DO business with one!

Having said this, let's raise this question: **Can** it be a sin for a Christian to marry an unbeliever? The answer, using this verse alone, would have to be yes. When the believing mate gives the unbelieving mate the permission to lead him or her into unrighteousness, the believer has sinned. He or she is unequally yoked to that unbeliever. Those of us who have been part of the church for many years have seen this scenario played over and over in the lives of Christians who married unbelievers, and then soon forsook the Lord and His church. All Christians must be married to Christ first, and our allegiance belongs to Him.

This is the situation Paul had in mind in the first Corinthian letter, chapter seven. In verse 13 he penned, *"And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now they are holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"*

Is the believing wife to leave her unbelieving husband? No. Are they really married in the eyes of God, and therefore their children legitimate? Yes. Suppose the unbelieving husband bitterly resents the believing wife's Christianity and decides he can't live with her and her righteousness. Is she under bondage to his wishes? Must she follow his ungodliness? The Apostle answers "No." If he feels he must depart, let him. That believing wife must remain faithful to Christ even if it means her husband leaves. Incidentally, this situation would not free her to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

I do not consider the Christian's decision to marry a non-Christian a wise decision. Hard days will likely follow. However, if you are married to an unbelieving mate, I want to encourage you to commit to memory 1 Peter 3:1-2: *"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation (faithful Christian lifestyle, GC), coupled with fear."*

Hold to the unchanging hand. Seek the conversion of your unbelieving mate, and never give up. Let your mate know that following Christ is the

most important goal in your life. One day you may enjoy the warm embrace of that husband or wife as he or she leaves the refreshing waters of baptism. That is my hope and prayer.

FAITH And JOY

Wayne Jackson

IT IS EASY TO BE HAPPY when all is well. It is difficult to rejoice in tragedy—some think that it is very nearly impossible. The prophet Habakkuk suggests otherwise.

When Habakkuk had been confronted with the reality of the impending Babylonian invasion, he was sick to the bone. His body trembled and his lips quivered. Each day, with deep dread, he awaited the promised judgment upon his nation. In that time of terror no crops would be harvested; flocks and herds would vanish. What devastation there would be (Habakkuk 3:16, 17).

Habakkuk could not divorce himself from his human emotions, but he determined that they would not dominate him. In the midst of his darkness he could courageously say: “. . . *there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation*” (Habakkuk 3:18).

What a brilliant flash of faith! And what a lesson we can learn from it. Habakkuk’s confident affirmation heralds this truth. Joy is an inward quality of choice. It does not depend upon external circumstances. It is grounded in a relationship with the Creator. Hard times may come, but if we know that we are with God, and that He is with us, our souls can be bathed in joy. Consider Habakkuk 3:18 carefully, and remember that joy depends upon the internal, not the external; it is intellectual, not circumstantial. This is the Christian view of life’s events. One cannot but recall these words of an unknown poet:

*I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne’er a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!*

YOU WILL WANT TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Charles Curtis

IN ACTS CHAPTER 24, Felix and his wife desired to hear Paul concerning the faith in Christ. *“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, ‘Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee’”* (Acts 24:25).

Many people would like to be a Christian, but they do as did Felix; they put it off too long. Let me in love point out to you three times that I am sure you will want to be a Christian.

You will want to be a Christian when you die! *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). Whether we like to think about it or not, we must all die someday, unless the Lord should return first. I have never heard anyone say that he regretted a life of service to Christ, but I have heard regrets in regard to a life of sin.

You will want to be a Christian in the memory of your loved ones! There is no pleasure in the memory of a loved one or a friend that dies in sin, thus away from God. Precious memories linger in our hearts in regard to the lives of those who have gone on before, having died while walking in the Faith.

You will want to be a Christian at the Judgment! When all men appear before Christ to receive the decision that has been sealed by the way they have lived and thought, I want to be found a Christian. If I wait until then, it will be too late. Jesus will cease to be my Savior and become my Judge.

In order to be a Christian at the times mentioned above, you must become one now, while you have a “today” in which to obey.

THE SIN OF LUST

John Stacy

SEVERAL CENTURIES AGO LUCIAN SAID, “We live in a time when shame has vanished from the earth.” Demosthenes exclaimed, “We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for the day-to-day needs of the body, and wives for legitimate children.” The Roman Seneca wrote, “Roman women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. Chastity is ugly. Innocence is not rare, it does not exist!” We can see

from these statements that immorality was ingrained in pagan life. Things are not much different today.

Paul wrote, "*The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh*" (Galatians 5:17). The word lust means "a strong desire, an inordinate affection, a passionate craving for pleasure, or to covet."

We must consider the different kinds of lusts found in Scripture. Obviously, there is the "*lust of the flesh.*" "*Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul* (1 Peter 2:11). We lust after food, drink, money, power, position, recognition, drugs, etc.

John writes of the "*lust of the eye*" (1 John 2:16). Peter wrote of those who had eyes full of adultery (2 Peter 2:14). Christ said, "*Whosoever shall look upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*" (Matthew 5:28). Solomon suffered from the lust of the eyes. Whatever his eyes desired, he kept not from them (Ecclesiastes 2:10).

Secondly, what are sources of lust? The devil is a major source. Jesus said to the Jews of His day, ". . . *the lusts of your father* [the devil], *it is your will to do.* . . ." (John 8:44).

Fashion provides a source of lust. This is why Paul told women to adorn themselves in modest apparel (1 Timothy 2:9).

Pornography, movies, television, and books have flooded our homes and minds with a tidal wave of Satanic trash! Add to these things dancing and today's music, with its filthy lyrics, and mix them with drugs and alcohol, and you know full well why lust is king in the lives of untold millions.

Thirdly, how can we overcome lust? We must crucify the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof (Galatians 5:24). We must also be reborn, born of water and of the Spirit, that we might enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5). Then we must live "*soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*" (Titus 2:12). That would involve controlling the mind, "*For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7).

Lust can be overcome through discipline. Paul wrote, "*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Finally, consider the consequences of unbridled or unrestrained lust. In some places there are more abortions than births. Unrestrained lust is widespread and people don't want to face up to the terrible consequences. More innocent babies have been killed by abortion in the U. S. A. alone since 1973 than the total number of people killed during the Nazi holocaust!

Adultery is another bitter fruit of lust. So are divorce and the

destruction of homes that arise from adultery. Herpes and other venereal diseases that characterize those who engage in adultery are out of control.

We are seeing in our world today what Isaiah 5:20 spoke about. The prophet said, *“Woe unto them that call good evil and evil good.”* What used to be evil is now called good. What used to be good is now considered evil in our generation! How tragic!

Ezra 9:6 says, *“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee my God, for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.”* The people of God used to be ashamed of ungodly lust. They used to blush. Have we lost the ability to feel shame and blush?

Jude 7 sounds a most somber warning: *“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”* This verse is just as applicable today as it was in Bible times. If not, why not?

In conclusion, we tolerate today that which was shocking a few years ago. We laugh at these things and even enjoy them now. We have pushed God out of our hearts, so now sin is *sickness*, drunkenness is *alcoholism*, perversion is *an alternative life style*, immorality is *the new morality*, pornography is *adult entertainment*, and murder is *abortion*. There is only one thing for this lustful, lewd generation to do — **Repent!**

The Most Dangerous Sin

Gordon Hogan

THE STORY IS TOLD OF a young mother who left her baby in the shade of a big tree and went on her way working in the field nearby. Being busy, she forgot her child. When she finally returned, the summer sun had been shining for some time in the baby's face and blinded it for life. The mother meant no harm, but she and her baby had to pay heavily for her neglect.

The Bible repeatedly warns of the danger of neglect. Of all sins, the sin of negligence is the most dangerous. In the following paragraphs we will relate some reasons why this is true.

Neglect is dangerous because of its deceptive nature. God's people recognize murder, lying, drunkenness, adultery, and stealing as great sins, but are often deluded concerning neglect of the many deeds of righteousness that should be attended to. We are alarmed concerning sins of commission, but fail to become alarmed with sins of omission.

Neglect is dangerous because it requires no effort. Energy is required to involve a person in the sins of commission, but no effort in the sins of omission. For instance, it takes no effort to avoid those in need, ignore teaching all those to whom we have an opportunity to proclaim the truth, to fail to attend worship and Bible study periods, or to avoid doing whatever we have the ability to do in the service of God.

Neglect is dangerous because it is at the root of other sins. A cultivated field is free of weeds, but a neglected field is soon filled with weeds and thorns. The very best preventive against all forms of evil is the proper performance of our duty. When David of the Old Testament became idle, he was led into adultery with Bathsheba. When idle, we are liable to become fault-finders and sowers of discord among the people of God.

Neglect is dangerous because it is contrary to the spirit and purpose of the Gospel. The law of Israel said, "Thou shalt not." The Gospel says, "Thou shalt." The aim of many today is merely to "be good," but the Lord wants us to "do good," as well as "be good" (Acts 10:38).

Neglect is dangerous because negligent people will be lost. This truth is borne out when we read Matthew 25:14-30. The servant of this parable was not charged with cruelty or immorality or dishonesty, yet he was cursed—cursed because he buried his talent, neglected his opportunity. You have heard the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Now we are asking, "What must I do to be lost?" In one word, "Nothing!"

If a boy falls into a fast, rushing river, he must put forth effort in order to be saved, but no effort is required to be lost. Man is already lost in sin (Romans 3:23). He needs only to neglect the means of his salvation to be eternally lost.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Basil Overton

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT all are sinners (Romans 3:23). Surely this means all who are accountable to God, and would not include infants and small children who have not reached an age of accountability. Neither would mentally-deficient people be included.

The Bible also teaches that sinners are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Everyone needs to know the meaning of this.

BLOOD OF CHRIST INCORRUPTIBLE

To Christians, the Spirit said: "For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain

conversation (manner of life) received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Obviously, Peter did not mean that the literal blood of Jesus was not corruptible. The Bible teaches that life is in the blood (Leviticus 17). Often in the Bible the word blood is used to refer to life (Ezekiel 3:16-21; Matthew 27:4, 24,25; Acts 5:28).

THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST’S BLOOD

The blood of Jesus is significant only because He lived a perfect life (1 Peter 2:22-25). The reason His blood can save all from their sins is because His life was so much greater than the life of all whom He can save.

The writer of Hebrews asked this question to contrast the blood of animals and the blood of Christ: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

Paul told the Ephesian brethren that they were once away from God because of their sins, but that they had been made near to God by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12,13). Paul also explained: “In whom (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

Without controversy, precious is the blood of Christ! Because He died and shed His blood we can have the remission of our sins. But, to be saved by His blood there are certain conditions that we must meet. If there were no conditions then all would be saved, because God’s word says that Christ died for all of mankind (John.3:16; 1 John 2:2; Hebrews 2:9).

WHERE DOES THE BLOOD OF CHRIST SAVE?

God’s Son died and shed His blood, and this suffering is accepted by God as punishment for our sins, if we meet His conditions of pardon. “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ...” (Isaiah 53:5). It is because Jesus shed His blood that God pardons the sinner who obeys His will (Hebrews 5:8,9). But, where does the sinner reach the saving power of the blood of Christ?

The Bible says that redemption by the blood of Christ is in Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Hence, no one can be saved by the blood of Christ out of Christ! It is not enough to tell people that the blood of Christ saves; we must also tell them with equal clarity where the blood of Christ saves, and how to reach the place where it saves!

To get into Christ where the blood of Christ saves, one must believe

that Christ is the Savior (John 8:24). Those who thus believe must also repent of their sins, and then be baptized into Christ, where they can be saved by the blood of Christ.

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3, 4).

One cannot reach the benefits of the death of Christ until he is baptized into His death. This is exactly why we urge people to obey the Gospel; we urge them to be baptized into Christ and into His death. Baptism puts one into Christ, or into His body, which is His church (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

The same obedience that makes one a Christian at the same time makes one a member of the church of the New Testament. Gospel obedience will not make one a member of a denomination, but of the Lord’s church. The blood saves in the body of Christ, His church.

WHO CAN BE—AND IS— ACCEPTED OF GOD?

Robert L. Moss

“WHO CAN BE—AND IS—accepted of God?” This question is important. It deals directly with the salvation of one’s soul, for the soul cannot be saved and dwell eternally with God if it is not first accepted of God. Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, answers our question: “... *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him*” (Acts 10:34,35).

Not only did Peter state the fact that God is no respecter of persons, but Paul also realized this, stating, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:12).

The Scriptures reveal that all people have the opportunity of salvation through the Gospel. Paul stated that God “... *will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). Other passages note that “*all*” may come unto Jesus (Matthew 11:28);

that “*whosoever will*” may come (Revelation 22:17); and “*all that obey Him*” (Jesus) may be saved (Hebrews 5:9).

Peter said that the fear of God is essential to being accepted of Him. Romans 1:18 warns of the condemnation of those who reject the supremacy of God.

Peter stated that in order for one to be accepted of God, he/she must work righteousness. We are told that righteousness does not come by the law (Old Testament law), but by faith (Revelation 3:22; 4:13; Philippians 3:9). We are also told that righteousness is found in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 2:29). Therefore, one must get into Christ through faith. “*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). Romans 6:3,4 further defines how our salvation is achieved through a living, acting, working faith. “Working righteousness” demands obedience to God’s teachings in the New Testament.

We conclude, therefore, that everyone who fears God and works righteousness, may be—and *is*—accepted of Him.

GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Ray Hawk

BEFORE I BECAME A member of the body of Christ, I visited with a woman’s husband who was a member of the church of Christ and dying of cancer. He told me, “Preacher, the church of Christ religion is a good one to live by, but a poor one to die by.” That man’s problem, and the dilemma in the mind of many others is, “How can I be saved when I have not lived a sinlessly perfect life?”

The problem with that question is that the one asking is looking at salvation from the view of the Old Testament. The Law of Moses demanded sinless perfection. Paul bemoaned the fact that he could not measure up to that standard (Romans 7:10, 15, 19). No one but Jesus did. The idea that we must live perfect lives or have more good points than we have bad ones, is not New Testament Christianity. We are not saved by the works of the Law, nor by a good point — bad point system, but by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Even under the Law of Moses, God showed that one could not be saved separate and apart from Him. The first time one sinned, he was just as guilty as someone who had broken all the commandments (“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,” James 2:10). Since the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins, there was no justification in the Law or its works (Hebrews

10:1-4; Galatians 2:16). How then could Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, or others be saved? By grace through faith. "The just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Some think grace is restricted to the New Testament. No so. Noah found "grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). Those who lived by faith under God's grace in the Old Testament "obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39, 40). In Jesus, those who lived by faith under the Patriarchal and Mosaic systems, are made one with us (Ephesians 1:10). Regardless of what one has done, when he believes the Gospel of Christ, repents of his past sins. Confesses the precious name of Jesus, and is buried with his Lord in baptism, he is saved by God (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9, 10; Romans 6:3, 4). That is salvation by grace through faith. Christians are not saved because they live sinless lives, but because they walk in the light. From Adam to Christ, men were saved by grace through faith. From the cross to our day, men are saved by grace through faith. As Paul puts it, "from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17).

Abraham was called "The Friend of God," yet he did not live a sinless life (James 2:23). If Abraham was saved without sinless perfection, we are too.

No matter how good a person is, when he is confronted with the perfection, glory, and majesty of God, he cries out as did Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). That does not mean we are lost. In and of ourselves we are undone. Our hope rests in God's grace through our faith. May we learn to appreciate God's love, mercy, and grace. When we do, we will not make the statement which that dying member of the church did back in 1956.

Moving Ahead To Finish Our Faith

Garell L. Forehand

MOST OF THOSE WHO will read this article will have already recognized the intense need for each accountable human being to respond to God with faith. How else could this concept be viewed by Bible believers in light of the tremendous amount of evidence in its favor? Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). At the commissioning of His apostles, He also said, "He who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Paul was led by God to tell Christians that they had been justified (or made righteous) "by faith"

(Romans 5:1). The Hebrews writer pointedly declared, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). There is just no denying the necessity of faith in order that accountable people may obtain true hope of salvation.

But having read and accepted that much of the story, it appears that probably a majority of people in the religious world today have not yet finished the biblical account on the subject of faith toward God. You see, it is possible for a farmer to sow his fields and to never harvest them. It is possible for a runner to start a race, but to never complete it. And the Bible makes clear that it is possible for an individual to begin the faith process, feeling that his response is adequate, but to have left the process unfinished and incapable of completing his salvation.

Let’s notice a couple of examples. John 12:42, 43 reveals, “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Clearly, those Jewish rulers had begun the faith process toward Jesus Christ. But faith is not finished until it leads one to obey the requirements of faith. Jesus has made clear to us that confessing Him is a part of the process of finishing faith (Matthew 10:32, 33). And those two elements of response are separate from one another (e.g., you believe with the heart, and you confess with the mouth, Romans 10:10), though they are both contingent upon one another in finishing the required response to the Lord.

Another compelling example is brought to our attention in the inspired epistle of James. “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -and tremble!” (James 2:19). Several examples in the first part of the book of Mark demonstrate that potent belief in God and His Son by the demons. They accept the reality of Christ’s existence and authority. They even will go the next step of confessing Jesus to be God’s Son (Mark 5:7, 8). But their deep-seated intellectual faith did not provide the obedience in their lives required by God of all those who will come to Him for salvation.

James indicates that if you intellectually believe in the true God, then you are on the right track of completing the process of faith; and that is good, to that degree. But he goes on to indicate the vanity of stopping at that point. Saving faith is just not finished when one arrives at that moment.

There Is No Difference

T. Pierce Brown

PAUL, IN SPEAKING OF THE salvation of the Jew and Gentile, said in Romans 3:22, "...*There is no difference.*" There are many things in which there is difference, but it may be of value for us to consider the common lot of mankind and think of some things in which there is no difference. It may not only help us to sympathize with those in sorrow, or help those in trouble, but also aid those in a search for salvation.

First, there is no basic difference in the physical processes and needs of mankind, whether he be rich or poor, black or white, wise or foolish, old or young, Indian, African, or American. We all have sorrow and gladness, hope and despair, fear and courage, love and hate. Those are common, although they may not be about the same things or to the same degree.

Second, there is no difference in the fact of sin in every accountable person. Romans 3:23 says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" All mankind needs Christ as a Savior. Many times we have heard persons say, "Sin is sin, and there is no difference in sin, for it will all cause you to be lost." It is true that sin is sin, and any sin of which one does not repent and of which he is not forgiven will cost him his soul. It is true that there is no difference in the FACT of sin. It is not true, however, that there is no difference in the kinds or degrees of sin. It is not simply the case that mine are little and yours are big. We have heard persons pray something like this: "Lord, save the lost from their sins, and forgive us of our mistakes and shortcomings." So, it is not that you have sins and I have merely mistakes and shortcomings. Yet, no one can read the Bible thoughtfully without being aware that there is a difference in the kinds and degrees of sin. Jesus said to Pilate in John 19:11, "... *They that delivered me unto thee had a greater sin.*" Matthew 21:31 indicates that the sin of self-righteous hypocrisy is worse in some respects than harlotry. It is also clear that Jesus measures the punishment to fit the sin, for He says in Luke 12:47, "*And that servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*" In Matthew 12:38-40 He shows that there will be "greater condemnation" for some than for others. The point in this article is that there is no difference in the fact that every person sins. Whether the sin is looked upon as great or small, it will cause us to be lost until we are saved by the blood of Christ as we accept His gracious offer on His terms.

Third, there is no difference in the fact of God's love for each

of us. He may love us in different ways, or in different amounts. But regardless of how bad your sin, He loves you and wants you to be saved. It is still hard for me to grasp that fantastic truth. Man cannot fall so low that God will not love and save him if he will repent and turn to God in God's appointed way. It is true that men may become so depraved and refuse to have God in their knowledge that God will give them up to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:22). It is also true that God "... *is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

Fourth, there is no difference in the plan of salvation for all mankind. When Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me*" (John 14:6), He left us no alternatives. It is still true that if one does not believe in Jesus, he will die in his sins (John 8:24). It is still true that if one does not repent, he will perish (Luke 13:3). It is still true that if one is unwilling to confess Christ as Lord, he has no promise of salvation (Romans 10:10). It is still true that baptism (the kind authorized by Christ) saves us (1 Peter 3:21). If you have not done those things, we hope you will realize that it makes no difference what else you do, you have no promise of salvation from God.

We Can Never Leave The Fundamentals

Wendell Winkler

A BUILDER WILL LAY A GOOD foundation, and then build his superstructure. However, when the building is completed he does not remove the foundation. If anything, he will strengthen it.

In like manner, in the field of mathematics, the student may study algebra, geometry, trigonometry, multiplication, and division.

Similarly, in studying our Bibles, we must "*go on unto perfection*" (Hebrews 6:1). We must "*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord*" (2 Peter 3:18). We must learn the meat of the Word (Hebrews 5:12-14). But, we must never forsake or depreciate the basic fundamentals of the doctrine of Christ. Rather, we must emphasize and re-emphasize them. If we do not know what the Bible teaches on basic Bible themes, we need to learn such. If we have studied them extensively, we still need to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance (2 Peter 1:12-15). After years of thorough and extensive study of the Sacred Text, David Lipscomb was studying the subject of baptism one day when

he was discovered doing so by a student. The student expressed to brother Lipscomb his surprise that he would be studying such a fundamental theme. Brother Lipscomb replied to the young man, "I'm afraid there is still something about the subject I do not know." We can never leave the fundamentals.

Then let us never forget that each new generation must be taught anew the fundamentals. Only herein does our safety lie! Seriously, may we remain cognizant that we are only one generation from apostasy.

THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew 13:44-46

Gary C. Hampton

THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

THESE PARABLES ARE SHORT and simple, yet powerful. In the first, a man found a treasure in a field. He then hid it and went to buy the field so that he could possess the treasure. In those days it was common for one to hide treasure in the ground for safekeeping. If the one who hid it died, the treasure's whereabouts might not be known. Some have suggested that hiding the treasure again was unethical. However, Edersheim says in *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, "It was, at least, in entire accordance with the Jewish law ... The law went so far as to adjudge to the purchaser of fruits anything found among these fruits."

In the second parable, a merchant was seeking beautiful pearls. When he found one of great value, he sold everything to buy it. While the man who found the treasure in the field likely did so by accident, this merchant knew he was looking for valuable pearls. The truth can be found accidentally or very intentionally. McGarvey suggests that the Samaritan woman was an example of the former and the Ethiopian eunuch of the latter (John 4; Acts 8). It does not matter how one finds it, as long as he recognizes its potential and gives up all to possess it.

THE SUPREME VALUE OF THE KINGDOM CALLS US TO SACRIFICE ALL

The kingdom of God is worth more than all other possessions. Its value can be seen in the purchase price Jesus paid, His own blood (Acts 20:28)! One can see the worth of the kingdom by comparing the greatest possible wealth with losing one's soul (Matthew 16:24). Knowing the true value of the kingdom should motivate one to seek it as the top

priority in his life. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33). The Lord had noted the importance of following God as one’s only master, because divided loyalty would cause one to fail (verse 24).

Once one realizes the true value of the kingdom, he will have an unquenchable desire to possess it. In fact, he will sacrifice all else to have the kingdom in his life (Matthew 16:24, 25). Paul described himself as a Jew of the highest standing. Yet, he willingly counted everything as loss in order to gain Christ (Philippians 3:7, 8). He also urged the brethren at Rome to present their bodies as living sacrifices—a reasonable service—which would be acceptable to God (Romans 12:1,2).

THE JOY OF POSSESSING THE KINGDOM

The man who found the hidden treasure reacted in a noteworthy way. *“And for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”* We have already seen that Paul gave up much to be a part of Christ’s kingdom. Yet, he could write in Philippians 4:4, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”* He learned contentment in times of abasement or plenty. Want did not keep joy from Paul, because he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him (Philippians 4:10-13). One can rejoice in giving up all else because he has found something of ultimate value!

Perhaps the pearl merchant of Christ’s story gives us insight into the source of joy. He had a single purpose. When he found the object of that purpose, all else was surrendered to obtain the pearl (compare Philippians 3:13, 14). If we would experience the ultimate joy, we must focus on the single goal of heaven. Like the Ethiopian, those finding the will of God will not want to be hindered in their obedience. Once such is completed, they too will go on their way rejoicing (Acts 8:26-39)!

The ONE Body

Bill Nicks

THAT THERE IS ONE BODY and only one body, the church, is made clear in the New Testament in Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 12: 13,20; and Ephesians 4:4-6. In the latter passage, the same emphasis is given to the unity of the church as to the unity of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

IS THE BIBLE THE INFALLIBLE WORD OF GOD?

If so, and we earnestly believe it is, then there is no truth to the propositions that there are many true gods and many true churches.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 8:5ff, *“For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him.”* In the same vein, there are many that are called churches, but there is only one true church, and that is the one built by Christ and described in the New Testament (Matthew 16:18).

Someone may say, “Do you mean your denomination is the only true church?” No, far from it. We are contending that the church revealed in the Bible is the only right church. There is a pattern revealed in the New Testament revealing every facet of the church of Christ (2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 2:1,7,8; Romans 6:17f). The church is a monarchy ruled over by Christ, the *“King of kings and the Lord of lords”* (1 Timothy 6:15). He has all preeminence (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18), since He died for the church (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the church is not a denomination at all, but is non-denominational and undenominational. Denominations feel they are branches of His body, but in reality, they are placing themselves in competition with and in rivalry to the body of Christ. Their man-given names and man-written creeds indicate their dissatisfaction with the names and doctrines given in the Bible.

THE CHANGELESS CHURCH

W. Douglass Harris

MANY IN THE CHURCH today are clamoring for change. They are saying that unless the church changes and becomes more contemporary that it cannot survive. This clamor is almost paradoxical, because man is constantly searching for the unchangeable - that which is constant, certain, and secure. Among those things which are unchangeable is the Lord's church. It is unchangeable in its essential features. Methods and expedients may change as good judgment dictates, but its divine structure can never be changed with God's approval.

A SUBJECT OF INSPIRATION

The changeless nature of the church is a subject of divine inspiration. Daniel predicted that it would never be destroyed and would stand forever (Daniel 2:44). It is affirmed by the writer of Hebrews that his readers had received a kingdom that could not be shaken (changed), or moved (Hebrews 12:28). This concept also conforms to the teaching of the Lord, the builder of the church of the New Testament (Matthew 16:18).

WHY THE CHURCH IS CHANGELESS?

1. It is the culmination of God's eternal purpose. To the Ephesians Paul affirmed that *"to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Ephesians 3:10, 11). The church is not an afterthought of God, or an accident or contingency that He was forced into as a substitute for the kingdom. In fact, the Scriptures teach that they are one and the same (see Matthew 16:18, 19; Colossians 1:13). God purposed the church from the beginning. What God designs He never needs to change. He does not reach conclusions by experimentation. He knows before He starts whether or not and how a thing works. The church is changeless because its architect designed it perfectly.

2. Sin, which made it necessary, has not changed. The church is composed of people who have been saved from the practice of sin (Acts 2:47; 1 John 5:19). The church is the sinner's only access to God (Ephesians 2:16-18; 3:12). As long as sin exists, the need for the unchangeable church will continue. It was designed to give sinners access to salvation from sin, and that need has not changed.

3. The blood, which made its existence possible, has not changed. It was purchased by the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). Churches not purchased by the blood of Christ can be changed structurally, but Christ's church is as changeless as His blood (Hebrews 10:11,12,14).

*"I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode;
The church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood."*

—Timothy Dwight

4. Christ, its head, is changeless (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18). *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever"* (Hebrews 13:8). When knowledgeable members are asked as to who the head of the church of Christ is, the answer today is as it has been for centuries, "Christ is the only head of the church." For nearly 2,000 years the divine church has not changed heads, and it will not change heads as long as time shall last. The church authorized by God has a living head, not a dead head whose remains are preserved in some tomb today. This gives Christianity a distinction that no other religion has. In Christ, the unchangeable head, resides all the executive, legislative, and judicial authority over the church.

DOES GOD WANT THE CHURCH TO GROW

Jerry Jenkins

BY STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES one can determine that God does want His family to grow. Is the goal of the church today one of quality and not quantity? Is church growth a legitimate concept? Is it appropriate for the church to aim at numerical growth in membership?

Church growth is a desire of God. God's concern for lost people originated in the Garden of Eden. His very first words to man after the fall were: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:19). God hurts when those made in His image are not in accord with Him.

God sent His Son to die at Calvary and resurrected Him so that all might have the opportunity to become His followers. What we call the "Great Commission" is so important that a form occurs in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. It emphasizes God's desire for the salvation of the lost.

In Matthew's account there are four action words: go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. The goal that Jesus set for His followers is to make disciples. The going is not the fulfillment, neither is the baptizing or teaching. For too long we have been content to baptize without enough emphasis on the teaching necessary to make a disciple.

In more recent years the concept of "discipleship" has become a term denoting undue restrictions by some; however, it was not this which Christ intended. Christ's disciples are those whose lives are committed to Jesus, who have repented of sin, been baptized for the forgiveness of sin, and are responsible members of His family. Church growth occurs when people become disciples of the Lord and when the borders of the Kingdom of God are expanded by successful evangelistic efforts.

God has much interest in church growth. Church growth is the result of God working through us with the Gospel. The church is important to God, for it is through the church that men pass as they make their way to heaven. All those saved are added to the church by the Lord, and in the church His children are to glorify His name. Is the church growing as God desires? If not, we had better make some significant changes!

IN ORDER TO SERVE, ELDERS MUST LEAD

Ron Bryant

OUR FAVORITE WORD FOR those men who are charged by God to serve the local church, watching for the souls of the saints, is “elders.” We apparently prefer this term or another very similar (“eldership”) to all the other terms given in the New Testament. Elders were to be appointed in every local church (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1).

Elders have been given the responsibility by the God of heaven to lead, to shepherd, to tend, to feed, to oversee, to watch for the souls of those given to their charge (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1ff; 1 Timothy 3:1ff; Titus 1:5ff; Hebrews 13:17). One cannot be loyal to the New Testament and deny that the elders have this divinely appointed authority to serve the spiritual needs of the local church. Nor must elders court special interest groups or individuals to receive permission to lead.

But, **lead they must!** As leaders they must be out front calling to the disciples that follow; equipping, enabling, and encouraging those they serve. Part of their leading is a matter of delegation, wherein they entrust others with responsibility, respecting them and allowing them to lead and to serve in appointed and necessary endeavors. They also call them to a recognition of the vital role each one plays in service.

The elders are able to encourage good work and to call others to greater commitment as they lead, set the tone, serve as examples, function as mentors in the family of God. **But, they must lead!** The church is not a democracy, in which leaders check the wishes of the group and then follow the majority. Men who accept the responsibility of elders *must lead!*

No congregation can do everything well, but every congregation can do more to the glory of God and in reaching the lost. Elders must lead, if they are to be servants of God. They must equip others to lead in meeting the needs they confront, even appointing them to those matters. Fortunate is the congregation that has godly men who serve them and lead them, as the servants of God, as elders, as shepherds.