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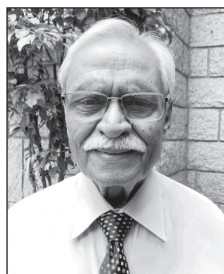
No. 10

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

*“When He Is Revealed,
We Shall Be Like Him”*

THE APOSTLE JOHN WROTE CHRISTIANS, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:1, 2).



In a sense all humans are children of God, since we have all descended from Adam, the first man, whom God had created in the beginning. Acts 17:29 says, “we are the offspring of God.” But Adam sinned by disobeying God’s command, and thereby he lost his right to be a child God. Like Adam, the Bible says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23). Notice, it does not say that all are sinners by birth or have been born with the sin of Adam. But it says, “all have sinned.” One sins when one, like Adam, disobeys God’s commandments. (Ezekiel 18:20). We also read, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4). Also, in the epistle of James we read, “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). To Adam, in the beginning, God had said, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17).

Adam died, in spiritual sense, when he disobeyed God's command. Death means separation, or breaking of relationship. Just as, when soul departs from the body that brings death. God is the source of spiritual life, which Adam lost. He was living as long as he was with God in His fellowship. But when he sinned he died spiritually. He forfeited his right to be a child of God. All have, likewise, the Bible says, sinned, and are dead in their trespasses and sins. (Isaiah 59:1,2; Ephesians 2:1).

Yet, the Bible teaches, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). When Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by the will and foreknowledge of God died on the cross (Acts 2:23) for our sins, (1 Corinthians 15:3), He bore our sins in His body, and paid the wages of our sins. (1 Peter 2:24). He is the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10). Christ, by shedding His blood on the cross for our sins, cancelled our debt. (Colossians 1:14). Thus He restored our right to be the children of God. We read, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12). The apostle Paul exhorted, "For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26, 27). So according to the Bible, all who have believed in Christ and repented of their sins and have been baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38; 8:35-38; Romans 6:3, 4; Mark 16:16) are children of God.

To children of God, John said, "now we are children of God....but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him." The apostle Paul added to that, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." (Philippians 3:20,21).

In the beginning, when Christ was in heaven, He was God, without a physical body. God is Spirit. (John 4:24). "In the beginning" reads John 1:1, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So the Word, the second Person in the Godhead, was God. Verse 14, in the same chapter, says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Notice, "the Word", who was with God, and was God, became flesh, that is, a human. In other words, God became man. He was not a man, but He became man. So on earth Jesus Christ was "God-Man". God, the Word, had put on Himself a human body. Let's read from Philippians 2:6-8 to get a more clear understanding, "Who being in the form of God," speaking of Christ, it

says, “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” The Word, God, became flesh; was born with a physical body as a man. He lived on earth as a man. He died as a man. He was raised, on the third day, as a man (John 20:27). Thereafter, He lived on earth for forty days as a man (Luke 24:40-42), before going back to the Father in heaven, as a man. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” Jesus Christ today is in heaven with God as our Mediator, between God and men, He is the Man Christ Jesus. He did not cease being God when He had come to the earth as the Savior of man; likewise, He did not cease being man when He returned back to the Father in heaven.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:50, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” From Philippians 3:21 we read that when Christ will come from heaven He will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body. Inferentially, when Christ returned to heaven he was given a glorious spiritual body, that is, He did not enter heaven with His earthly physical body, but with a new glorious body. At His appearing, therefore, He will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, fit to live in heaven. As Christians, therefore, we know, who we are, now children of God, and what we shall be in the hereafter, we shall be like Him. Therefore, the apostle Paul, so rightly said, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

—Sunny David

BIBLE STUDY

J.C. Choate

IT WOULD SEEM THAT THERE would be no need for a lesson on the study of the Bible but we will see that there most certainly is a need for one. Why? In order to focus attention on a number of things.

To begin with, whether it be in Sunday morning worship or Bible study that is taking place in the home, it should be just that. For how could it be Bible study if the Bible was not studied? This is just to emphasize the fact that there is no place for the manuals, creeds, and disciplines of men in a period of Bible study. The Bible is the book that man needs to know, and a study of it will help one to see



that the creeds of men are contrary to the Lord's will.

We are to keep in mind also that we are to study the Bible in every worship service to God. It is one of the main items or acts of worship. By studying the scriptures one is drawn closer to the Lord. He learns about God. He studies about Christ and learns that he was willing to offer himself up for the sins of the world. He will discover how the church was established, and will learn God's laws that should govern his life. Such study will better prepare him to live the Christian life and will enable him to teach others both publicly and privately.

One needs to study the Bible at home, and that, daily. He is to feast upon the word, or else he will die spiritually. Surely one cannot live only on the spiritual food that he receives on the Lord's day. This is important but he needs to partake of it every day. As one reads the written word of God, in this way the Lord speaks to him and reveals unto him what he should do to be faithful and to go to heaven. Surely, this is of importance to every Christian.

The apostle Paul said, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). Please notice what Paul just said. First: study. That is, concentrate, meditate, ponder that which has been written. Next, he admonishes the individual; he says to "Study to show thyself approved unto God...." One shouldn't be so concerned about the other fellow that he neglects himself. Thirdly, he points out that we should study in order that we might be approved of God, for how can one be approved of the Lord if he fails or refuses to study? Going on, he says that we should study in order that we might be workmen. If we know what the Bible teaches then we can do a greater work for the Lord. If we study the scriptures as we ought then it will keep us from being ashamed. We'll see that there is really no need to be ashamed of God, of Christ, of the gospel, of the church, and of Christianity. And finally, he says that we ought to study in order that we might rightly divide the word of truth. Why do many people go back to the Law of Moses and try to bind the Ten Commandments on the people today? It is because they have not studied the Bible and therefore have not learned to rightly divide the word of truth. So Paul has a lot to say about studying the scriptures and we need to heed his admonition. If we should, we would be less ignorant about many important things. In order to gain more from our Bible study, whether in worship or in our home, let us notice some rules for Bible study:

1. Who is speaking? Always ask this question when reading a verse of scripture. Was it Moses, Christ, Paul, or who? This will help us to better understand the message.

2. When was it spoken? Was it spoken under the Law of Moses or under the Law of Christ? This makes a great difference, and in order to properly understand the scriptures, they must be rightly divided according to time and laws involved.

3. To whom is the writer speaking? Was he speaking to someone of his day or is he speaking to us?

4. Be systematic in your study. Do not just open the Bible anywhere and begin to read but study the Bible by book, or by subject.

5. Is it figurative or literal? You'll have to watch the language of the Bible and not accept the literal passages to be figurative and the figurative ones to be literal. Some people want to make everything literal. We must judge carefully by the context so that we may understand what is meant.

6. Use some good common sense. The Bible teaches by command, example, and necessary inference. Don't jump to conclusions and make the Bible teach something it doesn't, or array the scriptures against each other. They do not con-tradict, but rather they harmonize.

7. Always read the context. Do not take one verse of scripture and isolate it from all other passages just to try to make it justify some theory that you have. Study diligently to learn all the Bible has to say on a given subject, and then accept it fully.

Yes, we have a great deal to learn about the Bible, and how to study the Bible. All of us, regardless of how much we have studied the scriptures, need to study more and more both in worship and in our homes. The more we understand the Bible, the better we will be able to apply its teachings to our lives.

WALKING WITH GOD

Johnny Ramsey

THE BURNING QUESTION OF AMOS 3:3 continues to haunt us many centuries after the ancient prophet wrote, *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* Walking with our Creator through the storms of life often demands sacrifice, surrender and suffering. If we are not content to go where He leads, we will surely miss the verdant fields of splendor and challenge, and the glories of eternity with Him.

What a tragedy to take the easy road of convenience, and ultimate failure, when we could have the sweet comradeship of the Maker of us all. The inspired psalmist comforts those whose decision-making is wisest and best: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff,*

they comfort me” (Psa. 23:4).

The “path of least resistance” makes a mockery of the genuine reward awaiting those who gladly bear the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ! A thrilling song warms our hearts:

Into the heart of Jesus

Deeper and deeper I go,

Longing to know the reason

Why He should love me so.

No one has ever given himself to the cause of the Savior without blessings beyond measure flooding his very soul. A famous stage song is something valuable to recall:

Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart,

And you will never walk alone.

We should be like the willow tree that is able to bend without breaking under the weight of the storm that may come our way. If there were not difficulties, there could be no triumphs! Walking with God should cause us to be more like the Creator in the realm of giving. He so loved He gave the very best which heaven had—Jesus Christ! Learning as we traverse the journey of life, we then will give generously, also, as 2 Cor. 9:7 proclaims: “*Let each man give according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*”

Following the Lord means that we will wind up where He is, on the golden, street in glory, for all eternity. “*And the street of the city was pure gold... And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb*” (Rev. 21:21-23). An old gospel song expresses this hope beautifully:

There my Savior awaits,

And He opens the gate,

To the beautiful garden of Prayer.

Years ago I read this memorable poem for the first time. Perhaps it will help us all to make wise decisions as we contemplate eternal values.

SURRENDER

I said, “Let me walk in the fields.”

He said, “No, walk in the town.”

I said, “There are no flowers there.”

He said, “No flowers, but a crown.”

I said, “But the skies are black,

There is nothing but noise and din.”

And he wept as He sent me back,

“There is more,” He said, “There is sin.”

I said, “But the air is thick,

*And fogs are veiling the sun.”
He answered, “Yet souls are sick,
And souls in the dark undone.”
I said, “I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say.”
He answered, “Choose tonight,
If I am to miss you, or they.”
I pleaded for time to be given.
He said, “Is it hard to decide?
It will not seem hard in heaven,
To have followed the steps of your Guide.”
I cast one look at the fields,
Then set my face to the town.
He said, “My child, do you yield?
Will you have the flowers or the crown?”
Then into His hand went mine,
And into my heart came He.
And I walked in the light divine,
The path I had feared to see. (Selected)*

Blessed Be God

T. Pierce Brown

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

PROBABLY ON THE AVERAGE OF at least three times a day I thank God in wonder and amazement at the multitude and magnitude of blessings bestowed upon me personally as I participate in the various efforts to evangelize—take the good news—to people everywhere. As I go all over the nation, I try to emphasize that we are to be concerned not only with taking the Gospel to every home, but to every person in every nation.

A part of those blessings are the responses of thousands of students of correspondence Bible courses, the letters from hundreds of preachers who respond to something they have read which has apparently helped them. God placed in almost every person the desire to feel useful. To find that God has permitted us to be useful in accomplishing the task which is so important that Christ died for our sins, it is thrilling and humbling.

As I read Paul's glorious words of praise in Ephesians 1:3, it occurred to me that I was simply experiencing in a small degree what Paul had in a large degree. He was expressing as a concrete reality that which many of us are aware of only as a theoretical possibility.

Let us examine some thoughts in that verse that should express the feeling of every Christian. First, *"Blessed be God"* To bless God is to express adoration, veneration, and gratitude for Him, and to acknowledge His excellency in all respects. When we feel, as Paul did, an overwhelming gratitude for the infinite love and grace bestowed on us, we must cry out, *"Blessed be God."*

But let us note a point that is vital and arresting. It is not simply God as God to whom Paul gave this ascription of praise. It was to *".... the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...."* The blessedness of this relationship to the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ made all others pale into insignificance. When Jesus said in John 14:6, *"No man cometh to the Father but by me,"* He is suggesting something of this thought. We can have no meaningful relationship with God except through Christ. Note also the tense of the verb. It is not simply that He will bless us, but *"He hath blessed us."* Verse four elaborates on that: *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love."*

It is a truth of staggering proportion that before the foundation of the world — before Adam was created — God had a plan for redeeming mankind through Jesus Christ. The church was not an afterthought, dragged in as an alternative plan because the Jews surprised God and rejected His Son as the King of His proposed kingdom, as premillennialists teach. It was predestined before the foundation of the world that those who trusted in Jesus (verse 12) would be saved.

This trust in Jesus involved, because of the very nature and meaning of the term "trust," the willing submission to the authority and will of Christ. If a person should go to a doctor anywhere in the world, and the doctor should say, "Do not worry about a thing. Just trust in me, and I will cure you," nobody would assume he meant, "You will be cured the moment you have faith in me, and are willing to take my prescription." "Just trust in me" would properly be understood to mean, "Rely on my word, and take the prescriptions as I direct." If one did not have to pay the doctor, he would understand that his being cured of the disease would be by grace through faith. Although he could not be cured by any plan he could devise, or medicine he could invent, it would still be achieved only if, as, and when he took the medicine which the doctor prescribed. Why this simple truth cannot be as easily seen in the case of the Great Physician is one of the greatest mysteries of the day.

This truth is made even more impressive when we see that the place where He blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places is in Christ. Note that it is not only *through* Christ, but *in* Christ.

To be required to name all the spiritual blessings Paul had in mind might be an impossible task, but to meditate on just a few of them, each one more valuable than all the world, is a thrilling experience. In Christ we have remission of all sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the right to call God our Father, the promise that no sincere prayer will be ignored, the protection against the fiery darts of the Evil one so that no temptation can be given us that is too heavy for us to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13), constant cleansing of sins as we walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7), an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3), and many other exceeding great and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4).

It is a tragedy beyond imagination that the religious world has so perverted the Gospel that, although many religious leaders admit and teach that these blessings are in Christ, few, if any, tell their followers what the Bible says about how one gets into Christ. Those of us who preach the Gospel are sometimes falsely accused of believing that Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 teach that baptism is the only thing we need to do in order to get into Christ. That is not true, but it is the transition act which, if properly preceded by a loving, trusting, penitent, obedient faith, does get us into the relationship with Christ where all these spiritual blessings are.

To obey the Lord just to receive these blessings is not the highest motive we can have. The highest motives we can have are to do what we do through love, in order to glorify God. Each of us needs to be more deeply aware of these blessings in order for us to continue to glorify God and properly praise Him for those blessings.

Some Thoughts On Unity

Don W. Walker

THE PSALMIST WROTE, "*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*" (Psalm 133:1). There are some things that are good, but not very pleasant. Proper church discipline would be an example. And again, there are some things that are pleasant, but not very good. Sin would be a good example of this point (Hebrews 11:25). Yet, "Brethren dwelling together in unity" is both good and pleasant.

It is such a rewarding feeling to know that what I have done has

brought glory to God. Yet, this feeling is multiplied when we realize the fellowship we have with those who are also bringing glory to Jehovah.

We can see the serious nature of unity in God's eyes when we realize what the Bible teaches concerning those who would disrupt unity. In Proverbs 6:16-19 we learn there are six things the Lord hates, "*Yea, seven are an abomination unto Him.*" The seventh thing mentioned is "*He that soweth discord among brethren.*" Paul wrote, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*" (Romans 16:17).

John would show the standard of fellowship when he wrote, "*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another*" (1 John 1:7). The doctrine of Christ plays a necessary role in fellowship. In fact, without His doctrine, there is no fellowship.

So it is, each one of us should live in such a way that we will be able to say, "*I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts*" (Psalm 119:63).

OBEY Them Which Have The Rule Over You

Glenn Colley

THERE IS AN ONGOING DEBATE these days about the authority of the group of men holding the office of elders (or bishops) in the church. Some believe that the elders have no authority, and that their leadership applies only in the sense of maintaining a good example, and no more. Others believe that elders have authority to make judgments relative to the spiritual well-being of the members in the flock they oversee, and that the members have an obligation to follow their leadership unless it conflicts with God's Word.

There are several interesting passages awaiting your consideration on this subject: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

We would also do well to consider Hebrews 13:17 which reads, "*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*" Anyone can see from this verse that we are commanded to obey **someone**. If this passage teaches obedience to the elders of the church, then in honest hearts the confusion over the authority of elders will be forever settled.

The word "obey" here is from the Greek word "peitho." According to Thayer, it comes from a root word meaning "to bind." Specifically in this passage it means, "To listen to, obey, yield to, comply with."

But who are we to obey according to this passage? Who is it who

has the “rule over you,” and watches “for your souls”? We find two other references in this chapter to the ones who have the rule over us: (verse 7) — *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”* (verse 24 — *“Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints....”*)

In Acts 20:28, where Paul is instructing the **elders of the church** from Ephesus, we read, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”* The elders can be correctly described as “overseers,” from a Greek word meaning “a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly.” That describes elders in the New Testament church.

While it is true that elders lead by example (1 Peter 5:3), it is also true that elders lead as overseers, and we, as members of the flock which they are among, must obey them. The exception to this teaching would of course be the case of elders requiring that which contradicts the Word of God. (Acts 5:29) — *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

Hebrews 13:17 clearly has reference to the overseers of the flock, the elders of the church.

We should thank God for godly elders. May we be humble Christians who *“remember them which have the rule”* over us (Hebrews 13:7). May we obey them, and submit ourselves (verse 17). Their responsibility is to *“watch for”* our souls (verse 17). One day, after the trumpet sounds its unmistakable blast, those elders will give account for the way they have overseen and cared for the flock which Christ, the Chief Shepherd, left in their care (1 Peter 5:4). May we hold up their hands so they may do their work *“with joy, and not with grief.”*

THE PURPOSE FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Maxie B. Boren

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT but that the church must exercise discipline in any given situation that calls for it. By inspiration, the apostle Paul **commanded** the church in Thessalonica to *“... withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us”* (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

An example of such “disorderly” (i.e., the word means to be “out of step” with God’s revealed will) conduct took place in Corinth in apostolic

times. A brother was guilty of gross immorality in carrying on a sexual affair with his father's wife. The church had taken no action, so Paul wrote them a letter in which he instructed them **by the authority of Christ** to take disciplinary action against the brother **so that his "spirit may be saved"** (1 Corinthians 5:5). This is obviously the first and foremost reason for church discipline — to save the soul of the one in sin (see James 5:19,20).

A second reason is for the sake of the church. When stringent measures were taken against Ananias and Sapphira, as recorded in Acts 5:1-11, the text informs us that "*great fear came upon the whole church.*" Brethren need to know that the church must remain pure as per the teachings of God's revelation, and that immoral conduct, false doctrine (Romans 16:17), and a "*divisive spirit*" (Titus 3:10) will not be tolerated.

After every reasonable effort has been made in a loving and tender way to restore an erring brother or sister, and that has failed, and the elders then deem it necessary to take disciplinary action, the church must follow the Biblical instruction laid down in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15.

LOVE THE TRUTH

E. Claude Gardner

BASIC TO TRANSLATING TRUTH INTO daily living is the acceptance of truth as absolute.

It is essential to believe that truth is the final authority in religious practices and in everyday religion. The truth is the expression of the divine will for mankind.

The truth is understandable, knowable, and available to us. No one can plead ignorance or confusion and assert that one cannot specifically know how to be saved, how to worship, and how to conduct oneself in order to go to heaven by God's grace.

In an age of acceptance of "relativism" and being "situational," we must be reminded that there are absolutes. Here are divine imperatives; Jesus used the strongest word possible — "must." He said, "*Ye **must** be born again*" (John 3:7). Again He commanded, "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him **must** worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24).

Here are other "musts": Acts 4:12; 9:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 11:6.

Jesus, "*the truth*" (John 14:6), taught that truth can be known when

He declared, "*And ye shall know the truth ...*" (John 8:32). He also stated that if one wants to know, or has the desire to understand, he will know. "*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself*" (John 7:17).

Cornelius had the desire to know God's will, and he found it (see Acts 10:33). If the Word of God cannot be known or understood sufficiently for us to be saved, it is because the Godhead either could not or would not give the divine will clearly. Who can accept either of these extremes?

The Written Truth must not be ignored with the foggy notion that we should follow the Living Word (Jesus). Actually the two are inseparable. To accept or reject Jesus is the same as accepting or rejecting the written truth. Our Lord warned, "*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48).

The written Word is more than giving general guidelines. It is not merely a "love letter." Basic principles, illustrations, narratives, and commands abound in the Scriptures.

The God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4), Christ the truth (John 14:6), and the Spirit of truth (John 14:17) endowed and inspired men to produce the Book of Truth (see 2 Peter 1:21). We must accept or reject the New Testament as the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. It has clear commands to obey and examples to follow. From these we learn how to become a Christian, how to worship, and how to organize a congregation. To deny that religious authority is ascertained by direct commands, necessary inferences, and approved apostolic examples puts one into theological confusion.

It is of no value to encourage translating truth into life until we teach how to ascertain authority. After we are able to accept the New Testament as our divine creed, we then strive to bridge the gap between what the truth teaches and our personal practices. Belief of the truth without action and involvement in daily living is of no value. We should strive to get our "theory and practice" closer together, because it is important for us and also for others we may influence (see Matthew 5:16).

One's attitude toward the truth will determine the acceptance or rejection of it. This thought was eloquently presented by N. B. Hardeman in his sermon, "The Reception of Any Truth Depends Upon Our Attitude Toward It." He asked, "... what is your attitude tonight toward the Bible with reference to its being a book of *Absolute Authority*? Is the Bible just a book of general directions, outlining the general policy, with all details to be worked out by "sanctified common sense, or is the Bible specific in those things that would lead a man out of darkness into the kingdom

of God? Is it specific and does it go into detail with reference to how the child of God ought to worship the Father?"

J. D. Thomas has written, "What we do say, however, is that the use of commands, examples and proper inferences are valid ways of learning God's will about certain things, especially those that impart information about essential obedience (man's response to God's requirements)."

Is It Or Isn't It?

David Deffenbaugh

"ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Is it capable of making the "man of God" perfect, or isn't it?

"According as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). Did God give us "all things," or didn't He?

Many notables (and not-so-notables) in the religious world claim that God has spoken directly to them. This is a claim to which many have responded with disbelief and efforts of refutation. Among this same select group to whom God has supposedly spoken there is also the claim of direction and guidance given by the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word. Because of these claims and those who attempt to refute them, there is also left a group of people who just aren't sure about it.

Let's consider what we do know for sure. We know that what the Bible claims for itself is true. Therefore, the Bible is able to make us "perfect," and God has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." If these are both true (and they are), then the Bible must be the final and complete and perfect revelation of God to man. If it is not, then no reference to "perfect" or "complete" or "all things" could be made. But we can say emphatically that God and the Holy Spirit do not act in the way which some people claim. How can we be so emphatic? Because if God does speak directly to man today and the Holy Spirit does direct the lives of people independent of the Word, then Paul and Peter were sadly misinformed when they wrote the words cited at the outset of this article.

Is the Word able to do what it claims to do, or isn't it? The claims of the Bible and the claims of these people cannot both be true. The claims of the Bible, if true, exclude any further or separate guidance or

messages from God. The claims of these people, if true, exclude the Bible from being the final, complete, and perfect revelation of God to man. **Is it, or isn't it?**

THE SACRED WRITING (HOLY SCRIPTURES) *(PSALM 19:7-14)*

Don L. Norwood

The Scriptures were written and preserved by God's divine providence so that mankind could come to know for himself God's will (John 20:30,31; Luke 1:3,4; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 John 5:13; 1 Timothy 3:14,15).

God's Holy Spirit inspired (guided) the men whom God chose to write the Holy Scriptures (2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Samuel 23:2). Christ Himself endorsed the Old Testament Scriptures as being divine (Luke 24: 27,44,45). Consider some of the scriptural names that are applied to the Sacred Writings (Romans 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Timothy 4:2; 2 Peter 3:16).

We are warned concerning what will happen to persons who wrest or twist the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16). The New Testament explains that a person must love the truth (the New Testament is the whole body of truth brought to mankind through Jesus Christ — John 14:6; John 1:17), or God will cause the person to be deluded, and thus to believe a lie and be damned as a result.

God instructed the Hebrew people: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up"* (Deuteronomy 6:5-7).

The New Testament Scriptures teach that a Christian has *".... all things that pertain to life and godliness in the knowledge of him who called you by his own grace and virtue"* (2 Peter 1:3). This knowledge can be found only in the Scriptures of the New Testament. The Apostles of Christ were guided by the Holy Spirit into revealing all the truth (John 14:26; John 16:13; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

The kings of Israel were commanded by the Lord to have a written copy of God's law at hand all the time and to be very careful to do as it taught (Deuteronomy 17:14-19).

Human beings have the free moral choice of learning and believing God's Word (Holy Scriptures, the Bible) or not to do so. However, Christ

said that those who believe the Gospel and obey it will be saved, and that those who disbelieve will be condemned (Mark 16:15,16; John 3:36).

The Bible (at least parts of it) is three thousand years old. It was written over a period of about 1600 years by men inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. It never contradicts itself, and its historical accuracy is perfect. It tells openly about the good and the bad deeds of people mentioned in it. The prophecies recorded in it have come to pass just as was predicted centuries before. It even named people long before they were born and told what they would do. No ordinary human being could write such things.

As the Psalmist wrote: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105). Man cannot guide his own life in a manner that God will accept (read Jeremiah 10:23 and Proverbs 14:12). Without the guidance from the Word of the Son of God (Christ), mankind will be hopelessly lost and condemned to an eternal punishment with the Devil and his angels (Ephesians 2:1-3,11,12; John 3:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

How precious, then, are the Sacred Writings to all mankind? Surely nothing compares with the value of these words of God, and man's learning and doing as they instruct.

The Silence Of The Scriptures

Owen Cosgrove

THERE ARE TWO MARVELOUS aspects of the Holy Bible: what it says and what it does not say.

The restraint of the Scriptures is very impressive to me. If I had been an eyewitness of the Lord's life and had been writing a Gospel account by mere human power, I would have been tempted to write details of His physical stature and appearance and other items that would have become spiritual distractions through the centuries. The Scriptures are complete. They say just enough and they do not say too much. Anything that I would do to "touch them up" would only defile them.

Going beyond the Scriptures can be just as serious as falling short of them. The Bible warns against leaving out part of the Word, but it also cautions against adding to it (Revelation 22:18-20; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 9-11).

The early restorers pleaded, "Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." Man is not free to make up his own rules that go beyond the Word of God.

How many times have you heard someone defend an unscriptural practice by saying, “The Bible does not say not to”? A doctor’s prescription does not have to tell the pharmacist what NOT to put into the medicine. To add unauthorized chemicals or elements is to alter the prescription.

While historically we have urged “calling Bible things by Bible names and doing Bible things in Bible ways,” many congregations and preachers seem bent on inventing catchy names, titles, phrases, programs, and ministries that are inclined to go beyond mere descriptions of Biblical activities. They tend to add a whole new terminology to our work that clashes with the simplicity and the honest directness of the Bible. They belie our appeal for pure Biblical terminology.

Respect for the Word of God involves appreciation for what it does not say, as well as for what it says.

THE BOOK OF BOOKS

Dalton Key

THE BIBLE IS BY FAR the best book in all the world. It merits our reverence, our respect, our love, our belief, and our complete trust. It deserves our subjection and our willing obedience. Without this book we would be as helpless, hopeless nomads traveling the rocky road to eternity with no purpose, no map, and no guide. Were it not for God’s book, the Bible, we would know nothing of divine law, will, and love; we would know nothing of God’s eternal purpose for man; we would be ignorant of Christ’s sacrifice, shed blood, intercession, and advocacy. Without the Bible we would not know of our own sin, our need for salvation; we would be without knowledge of our eternal nature and promised destiny.

The word “Bible-” is not found within the pages of God’s eternal revelation to mankind. This matchless book refers to itself as the law (Psalm 119:97; James 1:25), the word (Psalm 119:11), the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11), scripture (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 3:16; Acts 17:11), doctrine (2 John 9; 2 Timothy 4:2,3), and truth (John 8:32; 17:17). The Bible describes itself as a sword (Ephesians 6:17), a fire and a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29), a seed (Luke 8:11), a lamp (Psalm 119:105), and a light (Psalm 119:105).

The Bible is not a “dead letter.” According to the Hebrews writer, God’s Word is both quick (alive) and powerful (Hebrews 4:12). It was by the word of God that the worlds were framed and the heavens were made (Hebrews 11:3; Psalm 33:6). The Bible quickens (Psalm 119:50),

begets (James 1:18), cleanses (Psalm 119:9), purifies (1 Peter 1:22), converts (Psalm 19:7), saves (Acts 11:14; James 1:21), pricks and cuts the heart (Acts 2:36-38; Hebrews 4:12), and will judge us in the last day (John 12:48; Revelation 20:12).

The Bible stands alone. It is unlike the books of men in that it is inerrant (Psalm 19:7; 33:4), verbally and wholly inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13), and eternal (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:24,25). While the books of men rise and fall with respect to public acceptance and popularity, the Bible has throughout the years sustained a “best seller” status. Other works are undergoing constant revision, yet God’s book is every bit as relevant today as it was when first etched out by the inspired penmen.

Through the ages, many and various attitudes have been held by men toward this Book of Books. Some have rejected it, some have waged war against it, some have been apathetic toward it, and some others have loved, cherished, and respected it. King Jehoiakim cut and burned his Bible because he didn’t care to hear or do what it demanded of him (Jeremiah 36:23). Unlike this wicked king, David loved God’s Word to the point of making it his constant meditation (Psalm 119:97).

What is your attitude toward the Bible?

What Conversion Does

Ronnie Lowe

AFTER A PERSON BECOMES A Christian, what then? Is it proper to continue in the same old way? Absolutely not! Paul writes that in baptism we die to sin, and *“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* (Rom. 6:1-6). As a Christian I am a new creature, and that needs to be obvious in my life (2 Cor. 5:17).

Nowhere is this principle of change more evident than in the case of Saul of Tarsus. He was a Roman-born Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, and was sent to Jerusalem to learn from Gamaliel, the greatest teacher of the law at the time. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Council. He had consented to the death of Stephen and stood nearby, holding the garments of those who stoned him. Saul *“made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison”* (Acts 8:3). Furthermore, it is recorded that he was *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”* (9:1).

While traveling to Damascus to further persecute the saints, Saul experienced an event which would change his life forever — he saw the Lord. This persecutor of the church would soon become the one

most persecuted for the church. In defending his right to be an apostle, he later wrote:

“Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

How do we explain such dedication—such a transformation? The answer is simple; Paul had died and his life was hid in Christ (Col. 3:3). Paul described it this way: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gal. 2:20). This is what conversion is all about—dying to self and living for God. He saw the risen Lord, and gave his life to Him.

When I recognize that Christ is Lord, I make a decision to give my life to Him. Because of my belief in who He is, I will turn away from sin (repentance, Lk. 13:1-5). I will confess to others what I believe concerning Christ (Rom. 10:9,10). I will be baptized (immersed in water) for the remission of my sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16), and God will add me to His church (Acts 2:37-41).

As a new Christian I now live for a new Master. No longer do I serve just myself; I must now live for God. For the remainder of my life I will seek to follow the will of God and walk in the steps of Jesus. Only when I follow Him in this life can I look forward to being like Him and living with Him for eternity.

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Hardeman Nichols

I PASSED BY A FIELD where huge tractors and bulldozers were working. A nice crop was out in the middle of that field ready to be harvested; but the machines were cleaning out the corners and fences that had grown up in trees and brush. Along those fences, no longer visible, were thickets

that were now growing almost fifty feet out into the field. It was not difficult to deduce what had happened. Little by little, someone had given over to the thorns and brush, and it had taken only a few short years for them to grow into tall timber which had taken over a large portion of that field.

How much we need that lesson! If we do not give proper care, Satan will begin to move in on us little by little. He makes his encroachments slowly, and we neglect to see them as real dangers. Judas stole from the treasury of the disciples; and later he could not resist selling our Lord for the price of a slave.

The person who takes “a little drink now and then” never intends to become a problem drinker and never thinks it is possible that such drinking will lead little by little to one’s becoming an alcoholic. But from whence do alcoholics come? No one ever planned to become one! They are gradually entangled until they find themselves enslaved. “*At the last,*” says Solomon about such a danger as alcohol, “*it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder*” (Prov. 23:31-32). Better to leave it totally alone and not even to look at it, says that scripture.

Back to the field. That farmer was having to spend an awesome amount of money and time and effort to do now what could have been done so easily when the thicket was only a sprouting edge. The Bible teaches us likewise: “*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip*” (Heb. 2:1).

Whatever the costs, when it is our own soul and we have given in to sin’s invasive powers, it is worth everything to root up and clean out evils that have moved in. And this work of repentance should not be done little by little gradually. Do it totally now.

CONTENTMENT

Royce Frederick

“I KNOW HOW TO BE abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:12-13).

The apostle Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he penned those words. If a prisoner living under the Roman government could find contentment in the first century, why do many of us fail to find contentment in the twentyfirst century?

Some people confuse contentment with **satisfaction of all their**

desires. They think they will be content when all their desires have been fulfilled, so they proceed to chase the wind. They fail to notice a common phenomenon: instead of decreasing, our desires often increase as we desperately attempt to fulfill them. In the words of one land-owner, "Actually, my desires are very simple. All I want is the land which borders mine." At best, the person who aims to satisfy his desires will only find brief moments of satisfaction along the way. That is not the contentment of which Paul wrote.

Some people confuse contentment with **total indifference toward life's events.** The Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece believed that a truly mature person never allows himself to be affected by pleasures or sorrows. Paul did not have that kind of attitude. He freely mentions his tears and joys (2 Cor. 2:3-4). It is not a sign of maturity to be stone-hearted. Sin and sorrow, righteousness and joy touch the heart of a Christian. Contentment is not the same as indifference.

Biblical contentment is **an humble, undisturbed dependence upon Christ,** regardless of what may come our way in life. It is an attitude which cannot be swayed by fortune nor misfortune. It is a ready acceptance of whatever God may permit, or cause, in our life.

As one wise person said, "A contented man is **one** who enjoys the scenery along the detour!"

Imitating The Christ

David Thurman

I WAS READING ABOUT A very interesting church of Christ the other day. It seems they have several speakers in their assemblies. In fact, any one of their preachers may get up at any time and begin to preach, without even waiting for the others to finish! Meanwhile, the various song leaders are starting songs whenever they feel like it, even if someone is preaching or another song is being sung. These spontaneous outbursts may interrupt a prayer that is being led.

A closer look behind the scenes in this church tells us where their real problems lie. These Christians don't get along! There are various cliques in the congregation. Each group dislikes and looks down on the other groups. Some are very talented speakers, others very talented elders or deacons. But none of the groups get along with each other. They are so chaotic in their assemblies and ministries that they even have the reputation for tolerating a sexual situation that appalls the local community. Even the morally corrupt society around this church cannot tolerate its actions.

Welcome to the Corinthian Church of Christ. This church was afflicted

with all these problems, and more. Paul writes the first letter to the Corinthians to address these problems. In so doing, the apostle offers many solutions. Among those solutions is this one: *“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul tells the church that they are to imitate him, but only as he imitates Jesus. Paul knew that a life lived as Jesus lived would defeat the problems in Corinth. A life lived like that of Jesus will defeat all of Satan’s plans. A life lived like Jesus lived will satisfy God in all situations and will soothe the problems any church might face.

Imitate His Compassion

One of the great characteristics of Jesus was His ability to feel tenderness toward those around Him. *“And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’ And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand and touched Him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; Be cleansed’”* (Mark 1:40-41). Touching lepers was considered both evil and foolish. It was evil because it made the person who touched the leper unclean according to the law. It was considered foolish because of the risk of catching the disease. Jesus was willing to risk both dangers by reaching out to a man who had not been touched, perhaps for years. He had not been hugged by a child or a wife. He had not shook anyone’s hand. Who knows how long he had gone without human contact. But Jesus was too compassionate to heal him from afar. He touched him to heal him.

It was just this sort of love that moved Jesus at the Last Supper. *“Jesus rose from supper, and laid aside his garments; and taking a towel, girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet”* (John 13:4-5). Jesus understood the needs of His disciples. He knew of their arguments over greatness and status. He wanted them to see what love could do. He wanted them to see what love must do. Jesus was moved by love to give up His status and humble Himself to serve others, even men who did not appreciate or understand His actions.

To imitate Christ in this way would solve all the Corinthian’s problems. Compassion would compel them to see beyond their own wants and perhaps understand the needs of others. Love would make them humble and wait their turn in the assemblies. Love would make them kind and gentle toward their foolish brothers.

To imitate Christ in this way would solve church problems today as well. If church members could risk reaching out to the unworthy, even those shunned by society, perhaps the church would solve its problem of not growing. If members would find ways to “wash the feet” of other members (especially those who don’t appreciate or understand the effort) perhaps church squabbles would end. Most of all, if people could see that the compassion of Jesus was much more powerful in His life than His sense

of status, perhaps Christians today could learn to be humble.

Imitate His Submissiveness

When Paul encouraged the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitated Jesus, he must have had in mind the Lord's constant submission to the will of God. When Jesus was baptized, John was unwilling to be the one to immerse Jesus. John knew Jesus was pure and did not need baptism. *"But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness'"* (Matt. 3:15). Jesus went to John not for the purpose of being forgiven, but because it was the right thing to do. Jesus was always committed to doing what was right, even if it didn't make sense to others. The Lord was going to submit to God in all things, no matter what others thought or what it did to Him.

The attitude of submission is most clearly seen in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"And He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.' And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground, and began praying that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, 'Abba! 'Father! All things are possible for Thee. Remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt'"* (Mark 14:34-36). Jesus was agonizing over his impending death. Obviously, He was unsettled about the task ahead. He even asks God to let Him off the hook. But, while asking for a reprieve, He still wanted God to make the choice. He was going to obey God, not give in to His own wants.

Wouldn't that attitude fix just about every church problem? If believers could only do what is right, then the Corinthian types of problems would disappear. If believers would merely submit to God's will instead of doing what they want, church squabbles would end. There is no Christian anywhere that believes it is right to be hateful, or right to be cruel, or right to back bite. If we would only do what is right, then we would treat each other right! Christians who don't treat each other right are not imitating Jesus, but Satan.

Imitate His Love For The Lost

Somehow the Corinthians had gotten real busy arguing among themselves. This must have distracted them from reaching out to the lost. One great characteristic of Jesus was that He never let traditions keep Him from His mission: saving the lost. This grew out of His love, *"He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd"* (Mark 8:34). Jesus couldn't look at lost people without feeling a sense of tenderness for their condition. On this occasion He was trying to get away to be alone with His disciples. Yet when the crowd followed, Jesus took time to teach and feed them. Jesus knew His

work was for people just like that, people who were without direction in life.

Jesus' hunger for the lost was greater than His concern for His reputation among the religious. *"Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay in your house". And he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly. And when they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner'"* (Luke 19:5-7). Jesus found Zaccheus sitting in a tree just to get a glimpse of the Christ. The Master was delighted to go to him, enter his house, and eat at his table. This put Jesus in hot water with the religious people. They thought a real follower of God would not do such a thing. But Jesus loved the lost too much to let traditional thinking stop Him from His work. As He says, *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). As He sat at a sinner's table, Jesus explained that this was where He belonged!

Christians today would do well to imitate Jesus in this attitude. We need to put aside any thinking, any tradition, any attitude that would prevent us from seeking the lost. As we submit to God's will in all things, let us learn to put away our thinking and tradition that keep us from going to sinners. Let us put aside any human methods that keep the lost from responding to the Savior. Jesus taught us by His lifestyle that saving the lost is more important than our traditions.

Imitate His Death

Jesus willingly went to the cross. He did this out of love for others. He did this because God commanded it. He did this to seek the lost. Now Jesus asks every one of us to submit to the same sort of death. *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matt. 16:24). Jesus asks each of us to follow in His steps, to do as He did. We do this by denying our wants and submitting to God's will. We do this by loving people and seeking the lost. But the process begins with self-denial and death to self.

Paul tells the Romans about this process. *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:3-4). Imitating Jesus means accepting death as the way to life. But the death He asks of us is not physical, it is spiritual. This death is accomplished by submitting to the will of God (as Jesus always did) and being baptized. Once immersed into His death, you too can have a new life, a life built on your imitation of Jesus. Come to Him today!
