

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

**Vol. 55**

**July 2024**

**No. 3**

## Editorial

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

**UNLESS ONE IS BORN OF WATER  
AND THE SPIRIT HE CANNOT  
ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

IN SPEAKING TO NICODEMUS Christ told him, "Most assuredly, I say unto you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:3-8).



The new spiritual birth, without which no one can enter God's kingdom, is not accomplished by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said, "unless one is born again," He put the responsibility on the individual person, every person, man and woman, to be born again. If man was wholly passive in the new birth, it would be incorrect to tell him, he must be born again. In giving the illustration of the wind, Jesus shows the comparison between hearing the wind and hearing the Spirit. Jesus did not use this illustration of the wind to give an example of the mystery of the new birth, or to show that the new birth is brought about in some incomprehensible manner, but to point out that man is "born of the Spirit" by hearing and obeying the Spirit's message. The

wind cannot be seen, yet we hear its sound and we see the effects of it. This is also true of the Holy Spirit.

When we turn to the second chapter of the book of Acts, we observe the apostles spoke, “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The people heard the Spirit speak through the apostles, and the message of the Spirit when believed and obeyed produced the new birth. Man is born again by hearing and obeying the Spirit, as He works through the word. There is nothing mysterious or miraculous about it. It is not a mystical or miraculous experience, “better felt than told,” as some believe and teach.

In all cases of conversion, as listed in the book of Acts, which is also called “the book of conversion,” we do not read that it took a direct operation of the Holy Spirit to convert one individual. In every case, people were converted by the power of the word of God, or preaching of the gospel. (Mark 16:15,16). They all heard the word of God preached to them, believed it, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and were baptized for the remission of their sins. (Acts 2:37-41; 8:12; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 22:16). This put them into the kingdom of God (Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:13). And this is the way people enter the kingdom of God today.

There are other passages which clearly teach that baptism is a part of the new birth. Titus 3:5 says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” This shows that baptism is included in the process of regeneration. However, the renewal of the Holy Spirit is an essential part in the process of regeneration, but it is not all of it, to complete the process the individual must be baptized in water, or born of water. After one is renewed, or begotten, by the Holy Spirit, through the word of God, he is by birth of water introduced into a new state of being. This is called the “New Birth” of the water and the Spirit.

From Romans 6: 3-4, we learn that one is buried with Christ in baptism, and not only this, but he is raised from the grave of water of baptism to “walk in newness of life.” If one is saved before baptism, why is it that he does not walk in “newness of life” until after he is baptized? The apostle Peter, therefore, rightly said, that baptism “saves us.” (1 Peter 3:21). This verse also teaches that baptism is not a work of man’s righteousness. Baptism is a work of God’s righteousness. (Matthew 3:13-15).

Some have tried to interpret water as referring to the physical birth and the Holy Spirit to the spiritual birth, as though there are two separate births are talked about. This is done to get rid of any connection of baptism with the new birth. But Christ is not teaching that one has to be

born physically. Rather He is teaching that the new birth involves not only the outward birth of water (baptism), but the inward change that is affected when the Holy Spirit creates faith through the word in Jesus Christ in the heart of the individual leading him to that full change of life and allegiance that is accomplished when one is baptized into Christ.

The persistence and ingenious efforts of men to take baptism out of this teaching of Christ are in vain, for there is no way it can be made to disappear. "Born of water" refers to baptism, and there is absolutely nothing else connected with Christianity to which it could refer. In Christianity water is never used in any ordinance or ceremony except in the act of baptism. It is the only religious act pertaining to salvation in which water is used. For centuries, from the beginning of the gospel, "born of water" was never otherwise construed than as reference to baptism. It is only quite recently, since the Lutheran's Protestant Reformation that the interpretation of this verse have been devised to exclude its obvious reference to baptism by those who have sought to conform this text to Luther's erroneous theory of justification by faith alone.

## HEARING

**J.C. Choate**

IF ONE HEARS A RUMOR, can he place much dependence in it? Can he say that it is the truth? The answer is no. The same is true also in the realm of spiritual matters. You may hear many things but unless they are based upon the word of God then they are of no value to you or to anyone else. As a matter of fact, believing error could cause you to be lost eternally.



To begin with, we should want to know the truth above everything. Error may tickle one's ears but it will not save him. There may be many things that you would like to do, but unless you are guided by the truth, your deeds would be in vain. What is truth? Christ said, in speaking to God. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). So, that which God has spoken is the truth and Christ adds, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

You should not listen to man but to God, to Christ, to the scriptures. God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). Again we read, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews

1:1, 2). Now at one time God spoke through Moses and the prophets but in these last days he spoke to us through his Son. Are we living in the last days? (Acts 2:16, 17). Yes, and have been since the death of Christ. So we are to hear him. How are we to hear him? Through a wee small voice? By a vision? In reading the creeds of men? No, but by accepting those things that are written. John wrote, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30, 31).

There are several methods of hearing the truth. One may hear by reading the scriptures. In other words, one may hear Paul, Peter, John, and other preachers as he reads the scriptures or has someone read them to him. In the next place, one may hear the will of the Lord by listening to a faithful gospel preacher proclaim the word. But even then he should not accept the preacher's words just because he said them. He should always return to the scriptures to see if the truth is really being preached. And then again, one may hear the message of salvation as he reads a gospel tract, paper, sermon, etc.

Realizing the importance of hearing the truth, and the truth only, Christ said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are that which testify of me" (John 5:39). Again, 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). We read also that the people of Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica because they searched the scriptures to see if those things they heard were the truth (Acts 17:10, 11).

In every case of conversion in the New Testament you'll find that the people first of all had to hear the truth of God. On hearing the truth, faith was produced in their hearts (Romans 10:17). This is the way it is done today.

Although it is important to hear, let us be sure to keep in mind that it is equally important that one hear the right thing, the truth. Again, it is not enough just to hear. Many have heard the truth, but they are not saved. Why? Because if one is to be saved he must act upon that which he has heard. One might hear that he'll receive a new house if he'll go by a certain business office to claim it, but if he never goes then he'll never get it. One may hear of salvation through Christ but unless he applies what he has heard to his life then it will do him no good.

Be eager to hear but weigh carefully that which you hear. Don't accept a thing just because it sounds good. Ponder it, investigate it, and then if you find that it is the truth, accept it, treasure it, and obey it.

# THE PRUDENT PAUSE

Tim Nichols

WE LIVE IN A TIME in which restraint and self-discipline are not widely considered to be virtues. Impulse guides behavior more than reason. The gap between the impulse and the resulting action is sometimes so small that, to many, it seems not to exist. Many seem to be willing to pronounce any **act** justified if the **impulse** that prompted it is in any way justified.

But we are accountable to God for our actions whether the world recognizes our accountability or does not. When tempted to do a thing that is wrong, we are equipped with the God-given ability to pause and think before acting. What happens during that pause may have eternal consequences. The Philadelphia Youth Study Center used to have this slogan: “The difference between the delinquent and the non-delinquent youth is the pause between the temptation and the act.” The slogan is just as true if we delete the word “youth.”

As we pause in the midst of temptation we ought to remind ourselves that we do not usually have to act swiftly. We sometimes make rash decisions rather than allow ourselves to choose our actions or words slowly and deliberately (Proverbs 6:18; Romans 3:15; James 1:19). Slow down. Widen the gap between the impulse and the action.

Take the time to think about the earthly consequences of your actions. How will your actions affect your family, the church, your friends, or your own reputation? Do you want to live with those consequences?

Take the time to consider all of your options. Under pressure we sometimes develop “tunnel vision.” We see only one course of action when, in fact, there are many options available to us. Look for them. At least one of your options will always be morally right (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Take the time to consider the eternal consequences (Revelation 21:8). The fear motive may not be the “highest” motive in the rating system that some brethren use, but we ought to be grateful that God has revealed both His goodness and His severity (Romans 11:22). If a knowledge of God’s wrath helps us to gain one ounce of resolve to do right and avoid evil, then we ought to be pleased to have such knowledge.

Take the time to contemplate the goodness of God. He is the source of every good gift (James 1:17). He loved you enough to give His Son that you might have eternal life (John 3:16). Pause to think of the debt of gratitude that you owe.

Pause to consider God’s Word. It contains divine guidance that can

keep you from evil (Psalm 119:9-16). Sometimes in the midst of temptation, when tempers or passions are hottest, we search the Word of God less when we need it most. It is during such times that we would do well to heed the words of our Heavenly Father, Who said, *“Be still, and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10).

---

## GOD’S CARE

Don W. Walker

***“THOUGH HE FALL, HE SHALL not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:24, 25).***

The fact of God’s constant care is displayed all the way through the Sacred Text. Peter wrote that we should be found *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”* (1 Peter 5:7). The writer of Hebrews records these comforting words. *“...he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me”* (Hebrews 13:5,6).

We thrill to the words of the Psalmist when he wrote, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1). One of the most well-known of the Psalms also centers around this wonderful thought. *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want ...”* (Psalm 23). When Jesus challenged the apostles with the great commission He promised, *“... and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:20).

All of these passages and many more should give us strength and courage to press on in this chaotic and wicked world. When I truly understand and believe that *“all things work together for good to them that love God”* (Romans 8:28), then I will follow through with His desires, knowing that *“If God is for us”* no one can be against us victoriously (Romans 8:31).

Appreciating the all-seeing eye of God and the provisions for victory that He has provided (Psalm 139 and 1 Corinthians 15:57) will give us confidence in what we can accomplish for good.

When we are overwhelmed with the every day rigors of life, we must remember that we have to *“lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and... run with patience the race that is set before us”* (Hebrews 12:1).

---

# DISREGARDING THE DIRECTIONS

Bill McFarland

ONE OF THE MOST MOVING accounts in all the Gospel record is the story of the Lord's cleansing of the leper, as told in Mark 1:40-45. Mark vividly tells us how the leper came confessing his convictions that Jesus could make him clean. The Lord, moved with compassion, reached out to touch him and heal him. He then strictly charged the man to say nothing to anyone and to do the things the law of Moses required.

The story, however, does not end there. Despite the Lord's instructions, this fellow went out *"and began to publish it much, and to spread abroad the matter"* (Mark. 1:45).

I can understand why he might have done it. He must have been so excited over what had happened that he felt he just had to tell people. Maybe what the Lord said just had not made any impression on him. But the fact of the matter is that the Lord's direction can't be disregarded without unfavorable consequences. In this case the result was that Jesus' ministry was hampered. What the leper did caused such a stir that the Lord could no more enter openly into a city to teach.

Today if we are not careful, we begin to assume that certain of the Lord's directions don't make much difference. We decide to do what WE think is fitting. The thought seems to be that unless WE see some good reason for obeying the Lord, we need not do so.

What we need to remember is this: there are always reasons for what the Lord asks of His people. His ways are good and wise. When His will is ignored there are always consequences, either for ourselves or for others.

---

## SALT AND LIGHT

Wayne Barrier

CHRISTIANS ARE DESCRIBED IN MANY different ways in the Bible. These descriptions range from "peculiar people" to "saints" and "ambassadors." Each descriptive term helps the student of God's word understand the way Christians should worship, live, think, relate to each other, and deal with the world. The description of believers as recorded in Matthew 5:13-16 is especially important as Christians often find themselves as a minority in society. Jesus says:

*"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

These verses of Scripture are among many that indicate that Christians will often find themselves in the minority. Human reasoning and conventional wisdom tell us that we must be in the majority, and aligned with the "group having consensus" to have influence and power to effect the behavior and belief of others. Jesus teaches otherwise. These verses are especially encouraging as we struggle with the seemingly overwhelming majority who are not Christians.

First, if we are "salt with flavor," we can do just as a small quantity of salt when used to flavor and preserve food. We can change the majority. We can keep our flavor by maintaining our faith in God. We tend to become discouraged and retreat when we realize we're in the minority position as a faithful Christian. We must realize our responsibility in this situation. If we don't, we are good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Christians are not only the salt of the earth, but the light of the world. A small candle can give enough light for many to find their way in darkness. A few faithful Christians can make a lot of light in a world of darkness. Christians must let their lights shine so others can know how to live in light too. Today's world is filled with darkness — every sin imaginable. Christians are the only hope that the darkness can be penetrated. We can stop some of the merciless killing, human abuse, dishonesty, godless-ness, infidelity, and the multitude of other sins destroying the world and the quality of life today.

Our lights cannot be seen and our salt will not be spread where needed without effort. As Christians we are commanded in Matthew 28:19,20 to *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Going and teaching requires sacrifice and effort. Christians have a great responsibility and wonderful opportunity to give light to the world and hope to the hopeless. Being a minority is not a dis-advantage. Christians have God's help, always.



# COUNT IT ALL JOY

Frances Parr

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT tasks a Christian undertakes, it would seem, is to follow the advice in James 1:2 *“count it all joy whenever you fall into various trials.”* How can anyone feel joyful when a beloved relative dies, one’s home burns to the ground, the job is lost which supports the family, or any of the millions of problems people are forced to endure in earthly life?

When terrible things happen to people striving to pattern themselves after Jesus it is puzzling, to say the least. Jesus Himself said in John 10:10 that He had come so that we might not only have life, but have it more abundantly. Is there a conflict between His words and the message of James?

Reading further in the first chapter of James one can see a pattern emerging. An exercise in a college language course is to take a sentence and use the last word as the beginning of another thought. This process is followed until a full cycle is achieved. James used this method in verses 2-6 to illustrate the growth of a Christian. Trials are tests, testing reveals faith, faith encourages perseverance or patience, patience produces maturity, and in maturity there is wisdom.

He then goes on to build on the thought again. If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God. Wisdom is not a miraculous gift from Him. He teaches it lesson by lesson, using the method above. In the work place it has been named apprenticeship, training for service, on-the-job training, and various other descriptive titles. God instituted it — learning by doing.

Jesus, in heaven equal to God, became flesh and blood on earth. One of the reasons for this was so that He could endure, first-hand, the trials and tribulations of humans. Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15 says He was tempted in every way, such as we are, and suffered because of those temptations. Having felt exactly as we do, He is able to understand and help those who are tempted or have problems of any kind.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:7-16 that Christ gave “gifts” to His followers. Listed are those “gifted” as prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They were to prepare God’s people, or the church, for works of service. He wanted Christians to learn and practice these works until they were united and mature in the fullness of Him.

As we pass through the events — pleasant and excruciating — of this life, why not consider that we can benefit from “on-the-job training,” so to speak? A mother who has lost a child can empathize completely

with another woman who has suffered this tragedy. She can say, “I understand how you feel; I’ve been there, too.”

A man who has been out of work and tried to cope with feeding, clothing, and sheltering his family during a time when no money was coming in can fully share the anguish when a friend loses his job. While anyone in the Family of Christ can sympathize and feel sorrow at another’s unfortunate situation, the one who has been there is personally able to understand more completely.

The Bible has scores of illustrations of God testing His special people. He wanted them to learn how strong or weak they were. In school, teachers test students to determine their levels of learning. Each one of us daily tests many things, for the same reason God tested His children. In the kitchen, a finger is tapped in the middle of a cake to see if it is done. When the winter wind is frigid, a person checks doors and windows, making sure they are tightly shut. Games testing ourselves in Biblical knowledge are both fun and rewarding. The list could go on and on.

This is not to say that in times of adversity a person should feel that God is responsible or looking on with approval. We are told, however, that no matter what the nature of the problem, God can cause it to work for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

If trials are viewed in the perspective of being another step in the equipping or preparing for service to others, one can indeed “*count it all joy*”. Nobody can be happy about soul-wrenching events in their lives. It is possible, however, to realize that the experiences of each day can be used in more and more extensive service to the Master.

*“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you. To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen”* (1 Peter 5:10,11).

---

## ***It’s Great To Serve***

**Tom Kelton**

THE ROLE OF A SERVANT is not one most people seek. Serving seems automatically to put one in a lower position than those being served. But being a servant is the ideal for the Christian. In Philippians 2:3,4 Paul wrote, “*Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*”

Often we do what we do to advance ourselves. Sometimes our

service is performed for purely selfish reasons. Our desire for personal prestige is sometimes an even stronger motivation than our desire for wealth. It means a great deal to us to be admired, respected, and esteemed. We want others to know how important we are.

When we are determined to conquer or defeat others, we put ourselves in competition with everyone else. Even the disciples were not free from this temptation. There was intense competition among them. When they argued who was the greatest, Jesus said, *"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant."* But what Jesus said seemed to them to be a mistake. Even after three years of close association with the Master, the disciples still found this strange teaching difficult to understand.

On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus demonstrated what it means to be a servant. He took a towel and basin of water and washed the disciples' feet. He said, *"I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you ... A servant is not greater than his master"* (John 13:15,16). It seems contradictory that immediately after this incident, when Jesus performed a slave's duty and identified serving with true greatness, He said, *"Now is the Son of Man glorified and in him God is glorified."*

Maybe Jesus was able to be so humble because He never lost sight of who He was. He was able to humble Himself and become nothing because He knew with certainty that He was the Son of God. If we can remember who we are, follow the example of Jesus, and humble ourselves, we will achieve true greatness.

---

## *You Know Not What You Ask*

**Owen Cosgrove**

Everything was beginning to happen at once — the faultfinding questions, the triumphal entry, the second cleansing of the Temple, the crucifixion — so much was going on. The time was passing so quickly.

Egos were rampant. *"Who's the greatest?" "You are not going to wash my feet." "To what purpose was this waste? We could have added that money to the treasury ..." "If all should be offended, I will never be offended."*

Even Zebedee's wife, bowing and scraping in obeisance, had a very selfish motive. *"I want you to make my boys First and Second Vice President in your new kingdom."* How often are our ambitions totally out of touch with reality and spirituality?

*"Are you able to drink of the cup I am about to drink?"* Jesus asked

*"We are able,"* they replied. They had no idea what they were saying. They couldn't even stay awake during His agony in Gethsemane.

The betrayal, Peter's denial, the mob, the trials, the scourging the crown of thorns, the beatings, the ridicule, the disgrace, the disappointment, the fatigue, the excruciating pain — oh, so little we often realize what pain and burdens others bear! So is the cross to everyone who seeks Christianity as a fun trip down glory road. So is everyone who is more interested in being a "big shot" than a humble servant in Christ's kingdom.

"The rulers of the Gentiles love to appear to be important — but this is not what I want for you. For you two who have made this request and for you others who are so indignant, I want you to learn to be servants and to sacrifice of yourselves."

Within ten years, James lay dead, killed by the sword by the authority of Herod Agrippa I. Years later the beloved apostle John, exiled to Patmos wrote the stately, magnificent, and majestic book of Revelation, made all the more rich and grand by the bitterness and loneliness of persecution suffered almost from the very inception of the church.

"Father, forgive us of our pride. Forgive us of egotism and vainglory. Thank you for Your love for us in whatever suffering we must bear for Your cause. Help us from it to appreciate more than ever what our Savior has done for us. In His Name. Amen."

---

## ***What Does It Mean To Be Faithful To Christ?***

**Don L. Norwood**

*FAITHFULNESS TO THE LORD means that a person will completely trust the Lord and show this trust by doing one's best to obey the Lord's Word. Christ Himself is the prime example of this kind of faithfulness (Hebrews 3:1-6; Hebrews 5:7-9). A person must be convinced that he or she is lost in sin (all responsible people are lost in sin until they are reconciled unto God in Christ, Romans 3:23; John 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:1-3; John 3:36). He or she must learn the Gospel facts, that Christ came and gave His life to save everyone. That person then must choose to become obedient to Christ and be saved, or ignore the Gospel and continue to be lost. In deciding to obey Christ, one must come to realize that it requires complete obedience with the whole heart (Luke 14:25-33; Matthew 16:24,25). One must realize that repentance requires that*

the person turn to God with a desire to learn and obey His will (Matthew 7:21; Romans 12:1,2).

*Doing the Lord's will requires some suffering along life's journey* (1 Peter 1:3-9; 5:5-11; 4:16-18). In these times of suffering one must be faithful to the Lord and be patient about it (James 1:12). Being faithful to the Lord requires that a person put away certain attitudes of mind and replace these with an attitude that the Lord teaches (Colossians 3:5-17; Ephesians 4:17-32). Being faithful requires that one put away the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and do the works that are taught by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24; Titus 3:3-8).

*Being faithful to the Lord requires that we learn to love everyone, even our enemies* (Matthew 5:43-48). This love (Greek: Agape) causes us always to act in others' best interest and seek to do them good, even when they behave in an undeserving manner.

*To be obedient to Christ, one must assemble with the local church of Christ regularly and worship with the spirit and the understanding* (John 4:23,24; Hebrews 10:23-30; 1 Corinthians 14:14,15). To be faithful one must take advantage of every opportunity to study and learn the Lord's will (Ephesians 5:15-17; 2 Timothy 2:15). To be faithful to the Lord, we must all do our best to learn to teach others the Lord's Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 24-26). We must also do our own part in building up (edifying) our brethren (Ephesians 4:15,16; Galatians 6:2-5).

If a member of the Lord's body misses the assemblies of the church unless he is too ill or otherwise unable to attend, that person is NOT faithful to the Lord. Christ's Word (the whole New Testament) is the law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12). Transgression of His teaching is sin (1 John 3:4). If we willfully sin, then we separate ourselves from His blood that cleanses us of sin (Hebrews 10:26). When a person neglects to worship regularly and neglects to study the Word of the Lord, that person fails to "... *eat the flesh of the son of man and drink His blood*" (John 6:48-58). This means to learn and assimilate His Word in our minds and to remember His great sacrifice for us when He died upon the cross (see John 6:52-58). When we fail to assemble to break bread (commune with the Lord and His people, 1 Corinthians 10:16,17) and feed on the Lord's Word, we tread under foot the Son of God and count the blood of His covenant of none effect (read Hebrews 10:23-30).

Yes, we must be faithful until the time of our death (Hebrews 3:12-14). If we will be, we will inherit the crown of eternal life (James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). We must not neglect so great a salvation (Hebrews 2:3).

# DOING THE FATHER'S WILL

## MATTHEW 21:23-32

Gary C. Hampton

### A Challenge To Christ's Authority

JESUS WAS WALKING IN THE temple area when the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people confronted Him (Mark 11:27). They came at this time to expose Jesus as one who had no authority to teach in or cleanse the temple. It was likely their hope to retake their place as the dominant religious force in the lives of the Jewish people. So, they asked Him where He got His authority to do the things He did.

Jesus promised to answer if they would answer one question from Him. He asked them whether John's baptism was from heaven or men. The problem for these members of the Sanhedrin was readily apparent. If they said John baptized under heaven's authority, He would ask them why they did not believe him. They, after all, had neither been baptized by him nor yielded to the one who came after him, that is, Jesus (John 1:6,7,15,32-34; 3:22-36; 10:40-42). If they said his authority was from men, they would be faced with the anger of the multitudes who believed him. So, they said they did not know. By so answering, they showed an unwillingness to yield to those empowered by God. Therefore, Jesus said He would not answer their question.

### The Repentant Son

Jesus then told a parable about a father with two sons. The sons clearly represent the two classes of people among the Jews of Christ's day. The first class was that of the common Jewish people. In the parable, the father went to his first son and asked him to go into his vineyard and work. Though he was asked nicely, the son said, "*I will not*," The publicans and harlots had rejected God's will, as could be seen by their sinful lives. Like this son, they openly refused to do God's bidding.

Later, the first son repented and went to work in his father's vineyard. Similarly, the publicans and harlots had yielded to the teachings of John (Matthew 3:1-6). When Jesus passed through Jericho, He met a publican named Zacchaeus. This man determined to make restitution for any wrongs he had done the people, and got to hear Jesus say, "*Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham*" (Luke 19:1-10). In other words, the common folks repented and went when they heard God's Word proclaimed.

## **The Son Who Refused To Do The Father's Will**

The second son represents the chief priests, scribes, and elders. When the father asked this son to go work in his vineyard, he immediately said he would. However, he never went. The Pharisees and others who considered themselves to be of the religious elite appeared to be anxious to do as God instructed. Yet, their lives showed disrespect for the Father's wishes (Matthew 3:7-12). Matthew 23 is a record of Jesus' scathing denunciation of their hypocritical response. They pretended to be quite religious while inwardly harboring vile sins.

## **Trapped By Their Own Response**

When Jesus asked which of the sons did the will of the father, they had to say the first. The answer now given to the Lord exposes the actions of the Sanhedrin as opposed to those of the publicans and harlots.

The religious leaders viewed the common people, especially the publicans and harlots, as having no special knowledge of God's will. They saw them as being ignorant of God's Word. They clearly did not see their response as giving anyone credibility (John 7:45-49).

## **Refusing God's Spokesman**

Despite all of this, the publicans and harlots had recognized John as a prophet. They had heeded his call to repentance. The religious leaders had failed to respond to God's call either before or after those they viewed as common sinners. The Pharisees demanded strict adherence to their demands for righteousness. John lived a righteous life. Yet, they refused to accept John as a spokesman in authority from God. The Lord knew such rejection showed the nature of their heart. There was no need for Him to openly proclaim that His authority had come from God. They would reject Him just as they had the Baptizer.

## **God Still Calls Us To Work In His Vineyard**

It is important that readers today see the parable as still applicable. All men today must still be called to repentance (Luke 24:46,47; 1 Timothy 2:4). It is not enough to be a good moral person. Instead, each one who would be saved must obey the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). Just as the father asked his sons to work "today," we must respond now to the Gospel call (Proverbs 27:1; 2 Corinthians 6:2). Further, it is possible to appear to be righteous to those around us without ever intending to do the will of the Father. We must recognize Jesus as God's spokesman for our time, and yield to the message He brought down from the Father (Hebrews 1:1-4). He made sure all truth was delivered by sending the Holy Spirit. We can know all that is necessary to have eternal life and be God-like (John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:3).

# THERE IS A GOD

E. Claude Gardner

LOOK ALL AROUND YOU AND see the earth, water, mountains, rocks, trees, and myriad plants, animals, and human beings. They are tangible: they exist. How did they come into reality? One can make only two choices. There is a Supreme Being, the one living God who created the universe and all things in it. The other choice is that of the atheist who denies God. If there is no Creator, it would follow that our world somehow came into being as a matter of chance. The decision should be easy, because it is more reasonable to believe in God than to deny God and attempt to explain our origins on the basis of chance and accident. *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God"* (Psalm 14:1).

Man and mountains did not make themselves, but it is self-evident they must have had a Maker, which is Almighty God. He is *"the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein"* (Acts 14:15). All Nature exclaims that God exists, for the psalmist sang, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1).

The first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, starts with the assumption that God exists, and no arguments are given to prove it. Surely as man is made *"in the image of God"* (Genesis 1:27), he must come to the understanding that there is a God. Mankind universally worships a higher power than himself.

But some who accept a higher power believe in many gods. People fall prostrate before gods of wood and stone. Some worship other human beings; others worship animals, rivers, the sun, moon and stars; still others worship Satan. The Bible calls upon us to worship *"the Lord thy God and him only shall thou serve"* (Matthew 4:10). Worship of the one true God forbids worship of icons, saints, popes, and ancestors.

The one eternal God is described in the Bible in a manner that we know He loves us, gives us hope and comfort, and has a desire and plan to eventually take us to heaven to live with Him eternally. Jesus said, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8). *"...your Father (God) also is merciful"* (Luke 6:36). *The apostle Paul speaks of "the goodness of God"* (Romans 2:4). God offers one a new life of hope and forgiveness. A person can have a new beginning as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Who is the God of the Bible? He is holy, righteous, good, just, faithful



in His promises, sovereign ruler, invisible, perfect, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-present, and from everlasting (2 Timothy 1:17; James 1:17; Matthew 19:17; 1 Peter 4:19; John 4:24; Acts 10:34,35; 1 Peter 1:16; Hebrews 4:13, 1 Corinthians 10:26 and hundreds of other passages). He is worthy. We should bow down to Him in humble adoration.

Any and all nations that “forget God” are bound for crumbling and extinction (Psalm 9:17). This is as true for modern nations as it was for the ancient civilizations of Rome, Greece, and Chaldea.

God is one and one only, but He is made manifest in Three Persons: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:4-6).

God made man and placed him on this beautiful earth for a purpose — to seek and glorify God. Paul preached about God in Athens and declared, *“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is the Lord of heaven and earth — and hath made of one blood all nations of men — that they should seek the Lord”* (Acts 17:24,26,27). Our reason for being on earth is to seek God and to serve Him. When we come to Him with an obedient faith we will have a great reward in heaven. *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”* (Hebrews 11:6).

Do you believe in the personal, almighty God? If so, will you diligently seek Him by confessing your faith, turning from sin and Satan, and being immersed in water *“for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38)? Then you will have God as your Father, you will be one of God’s children, and you will have brothers and sisters in the church, which is the family of God (Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:14-15; Romans 12:4,5). You will become a Christian (1 Peter 4:16).

---

## CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS

Leon Barnes

CHRIST IS AT THE VERY heart of Christianity. Even the church gets its importance because of its relationship to Christ. He is the builder of the church (Matthew 16:18). He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The church is His body and *“the fullness of him who fills all in all”* (Ephesians 1:22,23). In Colossians 1:18 we read, *“He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.”* The only ‘other time the word “preeminence” is found in Scripture is in the book of 3 John, when the reference is made to Diotrephes loving to have the preeminence among the brethren, and there that spirit is condemned.

Every aspect of the church's life is to place Christ at the very center. When we worship, we take the communion supper to remember His death, burial, and resurrection. When we sing, it is praise to God for the marvelous grace He showed in giving Christ as the atonement for our sins. When we pray, it is through the name and authority of Jesus, the Christ. The preaching should be centered in Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Even the organization of the church puts Christ as the head over all things to the church.

If we, as the body of Christ, keep the focus on Christ, the Lord and Savior, it will have a unifying effect on the entire church. It is when we take Christ from the spotlight and place one another under the light of examination that real troubles begin. Christ's life is perfect. All of ours have mistakes, and many of them are very obvious.

But, understand, Christ-centeredness does not mean a failure to emphasize what Christ has taught in His Word. He is the one with all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). It is by the words of the Lord we will be judged in the last day (John 12:48). Respect for Christ must lead to submission to His will for our lives. *"Do you not know, to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants you are, whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?"* (Romans 6:16).

It is true, we need to shine the light on the Christ instead of on the church. It is true, He is to be the focus, rather than ourselves. But, it is not true that such a focus will do away with, or even lessen, the importance of either the church or the Scriptures. It certainly does not lessen the need for complete obedience to God.

What it will do is change our means of evangelism from "My church is better than yours" to *"Come see a man who told me all things I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"* The more those who come are led to focus on the greatness of our God and the marvel of His grace, the less the danger that they will be disappointed to learn that we, as the church, are not everything they thought we would be. We truly serve a perfect Lord, but we are not a perfect church, and we never have been.

---

## *"CALL HIS NAME EMMANUEL"*

**Lewis G. Hale**

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD told Joseph, *"A virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us"* (Matthew 1:23).

## Big Bang?

In science it has long been accepted that “nothing comes from nothing.” Yet, today many scientists have accepted the “Big Bang” theory. It assumes that there was once nothing, just a huge vacuum. Then there was a great explosion, and all existing matter came into being. Over a period of time it began to take form and design, even intelligence. All this from nothing! Yet, we are considered to be unintelligent to think that at one time there was nothing but an Almighty God, who in love and wisdom created all things.

## God Is Revealed

This God revealed Himself to His creation. It is reasonable that a Creator would let His creation know what is expected of him, how to live, how to please the Creator. At first, all revelation was spoken. In the days of Moses, it began to be written down. This continued through the works of the prophets and the New Testament writers. This revelation we call the Bible.

## Revealed Through His Son

In God's good time, He sent His Son to earth to become a man, to live and die as a human being. This Son is a revelation of God. Jesus said that the one who has seen Him has seen the Father. This Jesus was called “Emmanuel” because He was “*God with us*” (Matthew 1:23). He now reigns at the right hand of God. But, strangely enough, He also dwells in the heart of every Christian.

---

# THE CITY OF DAMASCUS

G.F. Raines

DAMASCUS, THE VERY ANCIENT capital of Syria in Asia, is said to be the oldest continuously populated city in the entire world. This city is renowned in the Christian world primarily because it was the city in which Saul of Tarsus was baptized into Christ. Please read Acts 22:1-16.

For many years, Damascus was a notable center of wealth, education, and power. The metalwork, silk brocades, steel sword blades, and wooden mosaics of Damascus are famous throughout the civilized world.

Josephus, the greatest of the uninspired Jewish historians, says that Damascus was founded by Uz, the son of Aram and grandson of Shem, a son of Noah!

Some of the historic things in Damascus have been preserved and are visited by many people every year; for example, the arch of the Temple of Jupiter, the palace and harem of the early Turkish rulers, the street called “Straight,” and the old wall.

Jupiter (Zeus) in ancient mythology was the god of thunder, lightning, and rain, and was the king of all other gods.

J.W. McGarvey says: “The street called Straight is still unmistakably identified in Damascus by its contrast with all the other streets of the city; for while all the others are very crooked, making curves or abrupt angles at intervals of from fifty to one hundred yards, this runs nearly a mile with only five slight angles.”

The wall of Damascus is memorable because it frustrated the intention of certain Jews who meant to kill Paul because he had preached Christ in the synagogues just after his conversion:

*“But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket” (Acts 9:22-25.)*

---

## KNOWING THE TRUTH

**Max Patterson**

CARL SAGAN, IN HIS BOOK, *Broca's Brain*, says on page 283, “Religion has been scarred in its confrontation with science, and many people — but by no means all — are reluctant to accept a body of theological belief that is too obviously in conflict with what else we know.”

The above quotation is a prime example of ever learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth. No one doubts the intellectual capacity of education of such men — in their field. But perhaps Mr. Sagan has never been confronted with the “compelling evidence” that some of us know is available concerning God and Religion. He may never have examined this evidence because of personal prejudice, and may never have heard the facts.

There is not now, nor has there ever been, a conflict between true science and true Bible teaching. There is plenty of conflict between pseudo-science (e.g. the theory of evolution), and religion. Sometimes we are so blind with prejudice we only **think** we know. Maybe this is why Sagan refuses to discuss these matters with some of our brethren who are knowledgeable in this field.

Biblical prophecy has not been scarred by science. The science of archaeology has actually been very helpful in confirming the prophecies and historical facts of the Bible.

Sometimes people don't have the facts. However, that doesn't mean the facts do not exist. Too, scientific proof is often based on the ability to repeat the happening. Through repeated experimentation, one is able to observe or measure certain things happening.

How are we going to use this method to prove that George Washington lived? Or, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead? One cannot use scientific proof, because this type of thing is outside the realm of scientific proof. However, there are other ways of knowing that are well established and accepted. We simply need to learn to interpret the facts that are available and to reason correctly about them.

Knowledge based on observation is not the only knowledge we have. There are other ways of knowing. For example, I cannot know by observation that Abraham Lincoln lived. However, I can take the available evidence from that time (paintings or drawings of him, the testimony of eye witnesses who saw him and talked to him, his work, etc.) and it is enough to convince a reasonable mind that he existed. In the same way I can examine the eleven different groups (one group numbering more than 500) that saw Jesus after He was raised from the dead, plus other historical data, and be convinced that Jesus was raised.

What we need, desire, and want is honest people who are willing to examine all the facts, not part of the facts, or a set of manipulated facts, and then one can build a life on truth. *"You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32).

---

## HEADS AND BODIES SEPARATED

**Basil Overton**

CAN ANYONE RECALL EVER SEEING a human head moving around not connected to a human body, or a human body moving around not connected to a human head? If all human bodies and heads were disconnected, neither the heads nor the bodies would continue to live.

The New Testament portrays Jesus as the head of His body, which is His church. There are those who think they can have Jesus without having His church, but that is not possible. If you have Jesus, you will also have His church. You will be in His church, and you will honor Him as head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18).

Nobody can preach the true Christ who does not preach His church.

If one preaches on Christ's love, he would have to preach that Christ

loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

If one preaches Christ as Savior, he will have to preach that He is the Savior of His body, which is His church (Ephesians 5:23).

If one preaches on the blood of Christ, he will have to preach that He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28).

If one preaches on Christ as king, he will have to tell that He is king over His kingdom, which is the church (Colossians 1:13,18; 3:15).

One cannot preach the true Christ without preaching His church! Even so, one cannot be in Christ and not be in His church! One cannot be in Christ until he is baptized into Christ! (See Romans 6:3,4).

---

## **CAN YOU PROVE YOUR LOVE OF GOD?**

**Dillard Thurman**

FROM EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS, I've been challenged with the words: "Can you prove it?" That was usually a "stopper," for it demanded proof I was not able to produce. I might argue long and loud, knowing I was right; but not being able to produce proof, I would have to "give ground." To this day I hear children applying pressure on playmates with this same challenge: "Can you prove it?" There are things which cannot be proved by rhetoric and logic. Rather, they are proved by demonstration. "Actions speak louder than words!" For instance, do you love your wife? your husband? your children? Can you prove it? How? Claims and boasting fall flat if only words are used! But jewelry, a nice tie, and special gifts speak volumes!

### **WE PROVE LOVE BY GIVING!**

When Paul wrote the saints at Corinth concerning aiding the poor saints at Jerusalem, he set forth the highest motive for giving: *"I speak not by commandment, but by the occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love."* (2 Cor. 8:8). They were going to demonstrate their love by what they gave! To emphasize this, he further wrote: *"Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf."* (v. 24). Herein Paul was highlighting a principle that God's word had emphasized from the beginning: that love is manifest by what it gives! The only way a young man convinces a lady he loves her is by what he is willing to give; whether it be money, jewelry, perfume, or time. What he gives proves the sincerity of his love!

## HOW GOD PROVED HIS LOVE FOR US?

If you think that man is overly restricted in proving his love, consider that the love of God has the same restrictions! God could not prove to man the worth of His divine love save by what He gave! John, the beloved disciple, wrote, *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* (1 Jno. 4:9-10). This gift transcends all others, even as God's love is incomparable! *"But God commended his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom. 5:8). There is found the indisputable proof of God's love! God's love for all mankind was proved by what He gave!

If you could borrow Jacob's Ladder, and climb to the portals of heaven, and ask the angels, Gabriel and Michael, just how much God loved us, they could offer no stronger proof than that found in Jno. 3:16: — *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* We would never have known how much God really loved us were it not for this proof! But because of this, we can say with Paul: *"Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"* (2 Cor. 9:15).

Would we have been moved to obey and reverence God if He had only "talked about loving us? If there had been no expression of that love in what God DID, we would still be saying as children, "Can you prove it?" But we can hold no misgivings about His love for us! *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* (Rom. 8:32) He has epitomized all that is good in our lives: *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (Jas. 1:17). God's love is everywhere evident, and everywhere proved!

## HOW CHRIST PROVED HIS LOVE?

That Jesus might prove the sincerity of His love, He said: *"Greater love that no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (Jno. 15:13). This was the proof of His love for His own! He also taught this in His words: *"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep."* (Jno. 10:11). After Jesus had died on the cross for man, His disciples could not question the merits of His love! Study carefully the words of Phil. 2:5-8—*"Who being in the form of God... equal with God... made no reputation ... took form of a servant... made in likeness of men... humbled himself... became obedient unto death on the cross."* Surely this proves the sincerity of His love unto all! Paul emphasized this once



again: *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."* (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul had just told them to prove the sincerity of their love by their giving, and then shows how Christ proved His love by His unspeakable gift to man!

### LOVING AND GIVING ARE JOINED!

Sacrificial love moves us to love in return, and be willing to sacrifice ourselves for His cause! *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."* (1 Jno. 3:16). Did you notice that 1 Jno. 3:16 shows God proving His love, and 1 Jno. 3:16 shows how we prove ours! Paul wrote, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."* (Eph. 5:25). Do you see how that love and giving are joined together inseparably? Because Christ loved, He gave. And because He loved and gave, we also must love and give! This is most clearly seen in Paul's statement: *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* (Gal. 2:20). Paul's whole life had been given into that Cause for which Jesus gave His life!

### HOW WE PROVE OUR LOVE?

God the Father and Christ the Son have proved the sincerity of their love by their giving! Thus we are charged: *"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour."* (Eph. 5:1-2). It was only by giving that God and His Son proved their love: we must prove ours the same way! Paul told the elders of Ephesus, *"I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35). Our giving to God proves the sincerity of our love, and Paul tied them together in this charge: *"Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love toward us, see that ye abound in this grace also."* (2 Cor. 8:7). Everything hinges on love, and that love is proved by our giving! And as we assert our love of God, it must be joined with love for our fellowman! *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"* (1 Jno. 4:20). And after all is said and done, your love is proved by your giving! God could prove His no other way!