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Editorial

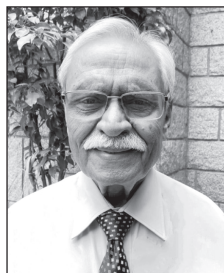
What Does the Bible Teach?

GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO REPENTANCE

GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY concerned about the people whom He made in His own likeness and after His own image. (Genesis 1:26, 27). He knows that man, like God, is immortal; and He knows the destiny of all humanity: either heaven or hell. God has loved man always and has provided for all his needs. He has been kind to let man know from the beginning what course he should follow; both physically and spiritually. Yet, in every age man has drifted away from God's direction, and has followed an entirely different path.

In spite of man's stubbornness and unfaithfulness, God's concern for man has never changed. One of the wonderful characteristics of man's Creator is that He is longsuffering toward mankind. (2 Peter 3:9). The end of man's earthly life is as certain as his very existence. When man's physical earthly life is over, only two things remain: eternal condemnation in hell or the eternal life in heaven, as Jesus taught in Matthew 25:46. The Creator God, the Bible says, has appointed for all humans, "to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). None can escape death and no one will be able to avoid God's judgment.

When God had created Adam and Eve, the first human pair, and placed them in the garden of Eden, He gave them the freedom



to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. God did not create man like a robot, but with the freedom to choose between right and wrong, between obedience and disobedience. When God commanded Adam, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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 2:16,17). What was that forbidden fruit, people of all ages have asked this question? That fruit could be any fruit. What was good for Adam to do? Not to eat. Obey God’s command. What was evil or wrong? To disobey God’s specific command, which Adam did. “Whoever commits sin,” reads 1 John 3:4, “also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” Creating man in the beginning with the power to choose, God knew that He was granting man the potential for sinning, but He didn’t take away their ability to choose. Rather, He warned them that they must not go beyond His will; and that in the day they disobey Him they would die; that is, they would be separated from the source of life, the spiritual life, and would consequently begin to die physically. When man sinned by disobeying God’s command, God didn’t prevent him from making his own decision, even though it was a wrong one. Since God created man in His own likeness; like God, man is a free moral being.

Evil is present everywhere even today; in much more vigor and variety. Today we are living in the age of digital media and A.I. God won’t reach down personally from heaven and force people to stop watching or reading whatever is on the cell phone or smart phone or whatever is shown in television. He didn’t do that in the garden with Adam and Eve. He let them choose for themselves. God has told us what we should do and what we should not do. It is our responsibility—not God’s—to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. (James 1:27). “Do not love the world or the things in the world,” says the Bible, in 1 John 2:15-17, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of flesh, the lust of eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” What controls your life? What is the motivative source of your life? Is it God’s will as is found in His Book, the Bible? Or is it the world?

— Sunny David

BAPTISM

J.C. Choate



WE COME NOW TO THE act of baptism which remits one's sins and puts him into the church. It is no more unusual or more important than any other command found in the Bible. It is simply the last step that one takes in order to enter Christ, and since God has commanded it, we must obey.

Baptism alone does not save any more than faith only saves but one cannot be saved apart from either act. One believes **unto** Christ, repents **unto** Christ, confesses **unto** Christ, and then is baptized **into** him. In other words, every act brings one a little closer, but one does not have salvation until he does all the Lord has asked. To illustrate, one may be a number of feet away from the door of the house. Taking the first step does not put him into the house, but by taking another step and another step he finally comes to the last step and that one puts him **into** the house. Neither can he say that the last step alone did the job because it was necessary to take the preliminary steps in order to take the one that put him through the door. I am sure you can see the point. Paul says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized **into** Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3). Again he said, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Now, how does one get into Christ? Is it by faith only? Is it through repentance? According to the Bible it is by the act of baptism. If you have not been baptized according to the Bible you are not in Christ. You may say you are but you are not. Further, to say that you are saved without baptism is to say that you are saved out of Christ, without Christ. But who would believe it?

The same act that puts one into Christ, at the same time puts him into the body of Christ or the church of Christ. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (or church) whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13). It is in this manner that the Lord adds to his church (Acts 2:47).

What is baptism? Some say it is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion and one can take his choice. However, when one investigates he finds that sprinkling is just sprinkling and pouring is just pouring. Neither one can be properly referred to as baptism. The word baptism goes back to the Greek word *baptizo* which means to immerse, to bury, to

dip, etc. In this case it is a burial in water (Romans 6:3, 4; Colossians 2:12; Acts 8). In order to keep sprinkling and pouring out of the picture, realize that the Bible itself defines baptism as a burial (Colossians 2:12), and Paul says that there is but one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). Now what is it? There is just one baptism and it is a burial. That is all there ever was and that is all there will ever be, whether we will accept it or not. If you have been sprinkled or poured then you have never been baptized. You may think you were and you may be told you were but according to the Bible you were not. Now whose word will you accept? What man says or what the Bible teaches?

According to the Scriptures one must be baptized to be saved. Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Peter said, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Note, both Christ and Peter say that baptism saves. Will you say that baptism does not save? Why does it save? Because the Lord said so, and that should be enough reason for it. And yet, he didn't say, and the Bible does not teach, that 'baptism only' saves.

Where is there an example of baptism being commanded? Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2: 38). He told Cornelius and his household that they should be baptized (Acts 10:48). Saul was told to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). So most certainly we have examples showing that people were commanded to be baptized and stating the reason why they were to be baptized. In fact, in every case of conversion under the New Testament law, the people were told to be baptized. Read Acts, chapters 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, and 16.

Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. One dies to his sins, is buried with his Lord by baptism, and then is resurrected from the watery grave to walk in newness of life. Read Romans 6 very closely.

In the act of baptism there is the new birth. The Lord said one must be born again and that is of water and of the Spirit. "Of water" refers to baptism and "of the Spirit" means according to the will of God (John 3).

Surely then it is not asking too much to ask one to do what the Lord commanded. Follow the example of the eunuch and be baptized and then you can go on your way rejoicing (Acts 8). But not until.

Lessons From The Catacombs Of Rome

Wayne Jackson

THE TERM “CATACOMB” DERIVES from a compound Greek term with the components *kata* (down) and *kymbe* (hollow). The word is used of that vast network of tombs beneath the city of Rome (and at other places as well) where ancient Christians buried their dead — and even met for worship during times of severe persecution. It has been estimated that this maze of corridors and burial vaults, if strung together, would stretch out some 600 miles. Estimates of the number of tombs vary from 1,750,000 to 4,000,000; they represent the burial of Romans from the 2nd to the 5th centuries A.D. There are a number of valuable lessons from the catacombs.

Historicity of Christ: The catacombs are filled with art works (ancient graffiti) which testify to the martyrs’ deep faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Epitaph inscriptions like this one are frequent: “Victorina, in peace and in Christ.” Common among the inscriptions was the sign of the fish. The Greek word for fish (*ichthus*), became an acrostic symbol for: *Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior*. Surely the ancient martyrs had a better sense of whether Jesus Christ was an actual historical character than some modern atheist.

The Scriptures: The fact that much of the art work in the catacombs was taken from various accounts in the Bible — both Old Testament and New Testament — reveals now widely the Scriptures must have been circulated in those early centuries of the church’s history. There are representations of Adam and Eve, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, Moses’ miracle of bringing water from the rock, Daniel in the lions’ den, Jonah, the visit of the Wise Men, Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd, etc.

There is another point to be made. Many of the names mentioned in the epistles of Paul are found carved upon the walls of the catacombs. This does not mean, of course, that they represent the actual people in Paul’s correspondence; it does suggest that the biblical record is an accurate reflection of the nomenclature of that day, and thus possesses an aura of authenticity.

The Miracles of Jesus: The New Testament represents Jesus as a miracle worker. Some thirty-five individual miracles are ascribed to Him, in addition to numerous generic references (see John 20:30,31). Many modern scholars, yielding to the influence of skeptics like David

Hume (1711-1776), deny that Jesus performed miracles.

Clearly, though, the primitive Christians were convinced of the Lord's miracle-working powers. Among the art works of the catacombs, there are depictions of Jesus' baptism, with the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. There are reproductions of the healing of the paralytic man (Mark 2), and the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11). There are reflections of the water-to-wine miracle at the wedding in Cana (John 2), as well as the feeding of the great multitude with the loaves and fish (John 6).

The Growth of the Church: A consideration of the material in the book of Acts shows how explosive the growth of the early church was, and the saints in Rome were no small part of this. The faith of the Roman Christians was widely known (Romans 1:8; 16:19). Blaiklock says: "The most conservative interpretation of the Catacomb burial figures would, therefore, suggest that ... one-fifth of Rome's people in the middle Empire were Christians, and it is possible that the proportion was at times much greater." There is another factor to be considered as well. The tombs of the catacombs represent about ten generations of believers. This would suggest that the early devotees of Christianity passed the Gospel along to their offspring. It's called "vertical evangelism."

Christianity and Intellectualism: Atheism alleges that the Christian faith is only for the ignorant and those who are void of reason. Gibbon charged that the early church consisted almost exclusively of "the dregs of the populace." The catacomb evidence has shown, though, that Christianity invaded the ranks of the middle and upper classes, and made an impact even among the intellectuals. Many of the tombs appear to have belonged to families of the aristocracy (see Acts 17:4).

Persecution: The Lord had promised that His followers would be persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12). In A.D. 64, Nero launched a vicious reign of terror against the church, as did subsequent Caesars. The Christians went underground (amongst the tombs—where the superstitious Romans would not follow) to worship. Amazingly, though, the catacomb graffiti reveal no images of sorrow or complaining; rather, a vibrant spirit of joy and triumph is everywhere evidenced. What faith those saints possessed!

Apostasy: The record of the catacombs is not entirely positive. Just as Paul predicted that there would be an apostasy from the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:1ff; 1 Timothy 4:1ff), so the record of the tombs reveals a drifting from the primitive faith. For example, there is graffiti testimony that encourages prayers to and for those who are dead (which later becomes fully developed in Catholicism). Though the Christians constructed baptisteries in the catacombs, there is one picture where

“baptism” is being administered by the pouring of water. But there is also a heathen god in the scene — which reveals a woefully compromised faith. Pristine Christianity was eventually corrupted. Eternal vigilance is the price of truth!

Characteristics Of The Inspired Word

William Woodson

THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE VERSES concerning the nature and characteristics of the Word of God are: *“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 all good works”* (2 Timothy 3:16,17). As one considers his/her reading, understanding, appreciation, and submission to God’s Word, a noting of these characteristics may be helpful. These are listed briefly.

1. Scripture is the **written** will of God. The very term Scripture derives from the idea of writing: hence, the written Word. Thus it is fixed, allows transmission from one time to another, and enables continued study for understanding and insight.
2. Scripture is **inspired of God**. What was written was the product of God’s superintendence by the Holy Spirit, and it was/is His Word, not the word of man. We learn from and appreciate the greatness of Moses, David, Paul, Peter, etc., but, in fact, the words are the words of God by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.
3. Scripture is profitable for **doctrine**. The teaching one does in the spread of God’s will, to convert the lost and edify the church, seeks to guide the reader and hearer in better understanding the meaning of God’s will. This is the center of the teaching and preaching God’s people are to do.
4. Scripture is profitable for **reproof**. When mistakes are made concerning God’s will, in doctrine and/or conduct, there is a need for firmness in admonition that correction is to be made. Concern and love are to be present; but genuine regard for God’s truth and righteousness, when spurned by anyone, is to be made clear as well.
5. Scripture is profitable for **correction**. The guidance of Scripture shows how one is to return to and serve God. The prodigal is guided not only concerning how to return home, but also how to conduct his/her life upon that return.
6. Scripture is profitable for **instruction in righteousness**. A

growing and maturing of life and love should characterize the child of God. This growth process is nurtured and guided by the truth of Scripture.

7. Scripture produces, when truly followed, the man of God **thoroughly furnished to every good work**. Scripture, while intended for intellectual grasp and appreciation in teaching and maturing, is not confined to intellectualism alone. There is the application of the Word in personal development, loyalty, service, and reverence for God and others. The equipping means for such a life of service is the Scripture truly understood and followed.

These verses provide a remarkable insight into the characteristics of the Word of God. It is well to consider such qualities of the Bible as we love, study, and follow it.

TRUTH

The Word of God is **truth** — John 17:17.

The **truth** can set us free — John 8:32.

The **truth** can be understood — Ephesians 3:3,4.

The **truth** of God is flawless — Psalm 19:7.

Truth is powerful — Hebrews 4:12,13.

Truth is able to cleanse us — Psalm 119:9.

Truth can build one up — Acts 20:32.

Truth can convert — Matthew 13:15.

Truth will endure forever — Matthew 24:35.

Do not add to the **truth** — Revelation 22:18,19.

Do not take away from the **truth** — Revelation 22:18,19.

Do not pervert the **truth** — Galatians 1:8,9.

We must preach the **truth** — 2 Timothy 4:2.

We must stand fast in the **truth** — 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

We must handle the **truth** right — 2 Corinthians 4:2.

We will be judged by the **truth** — John 12:48.

GOD'S WHOLE COUNSEL

Hollis Miller

SELDOM DOES A SINGLE WORD, phrase, or sentence exhaust all the Bible has to say about a subject. For example, Paul instructed the Philippians to think about certain positive things, but the balance of biblical teaching makes it plain that Christians are also to think about

other things (Philippians 4:8).

Timothy was instructed by Paul to teach brethren that the love of money is a root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). By this, however, the apostle did not mean that a Christian should not pursue acquisition of necessary material things. Elsewhere in the New Testament Christians are taught to work that they might have excess to share with those in need (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11). Paul himself was a tentmaker in order that he might earn money to support himself. Loving money and being sufficiently frugal so as to have means of livelihood in whatever society a Christian may live are not equal to each other.

Some teachings of the Bible are meant to express general principles by which the Lord's people are to govern their lives. The principles are not to be forced to the point of absurdity. I have never met a Christian who believed his or her bank account should be opened to every fraudulent, slothful individual who might ask to borrow from it (Matthew 5:42). Total abandonment of good judgment in handling requests for loans could easily disable one with regard to discharging other Christian responsibilities, such as having the funds to care for one's own (1 Timothy 5:8).

The teaching of Jesus that His disciples are to turn the other cheek is a principle of human relationship, and not a command that Christians must permit evil men to do to them whatever they choose to do without objection (Matthew 5:39). Paul resisted Elymas as well as the servants of the high priest who struck him on the mouth (Acts 13:8-11; 23:1-5). It is obvious that the apostle did not understand the teaching of the Lord to mean that he should say or do nothing.

When the teachings of the Bible are permitted to explain themselves in the larger context, the whole counsel of God will then be every Christian's guide.

THE FLOOD: NOT LOCAL, BUT GLOBAL

Bill Nicks

THOSE WHO ARGUE FOR A local flood in the days of Noah, as recorded in Genesis, are usually believers in evolution. To sustain their theory, they must reject the obvious supernatural act of creation, as well as the supernatural events connected with the flood.

Peter says, *"Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished"* (2 Peter 3:6). The word "overflowed" is from the

word **kataklusmos**, from which our English word “cataclysm” is derived.

The flood was a great hydraulic and tectonic upheaval, in which the waters underneath the earth were “*broken up*” (Genesis 7:11) and the “*windows of heaven were opened*.” In this supernatural act, the Lord split the crust of the earth with waters beneath the earth, which caused, along with rainfall for 40 days, waters to raise the ark and cover the mountains.

By observing the words of the inspired writer Moses, we may gather these simple facts which show of necessity that there was a global flood.

1. If it were a local flood, Noah could have moved to a higher ground, and animals could have fled away from the waters.
2. The text says the mountains were covered “*fifteen cubits upward*,” which means the waters prevailed above the highest mountain more than 22 feet. This could not have been a mere local flood. All flesh died in the flood except those in the ark.
3. The token of God’s covenant that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood was the rainbow, which we may still view today as a symbol of God’s faithfulness. But this would be meaningless if it were a local flood, because this kind of flood is still common in our world today. See Genesis 9:8-17. But God’s promise is sure — there will never be another global flood. Rather, the world will one day be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:10-12).

There is a God in heaven (Daniel 2:28), who created the “*heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). The flood was a supernatural intervention into the natural laws of the earth, just as was the virgin birth of Christ and His resurrection from the dead.

It is best to take the Bible at face value, accept it as the Word of the living God, and believe it with all your heart. That kind of faith will lead one to salvation in Christ and eternal life in the world to come.

IS CONSCIENCE A SAFE GUIDE?

Basil Overton

“*THERE IS A WAY THAT seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Proverbs 16:25). There are many who think, that it does not matter what one believes or does in religion, just so he follows his conscience. But this philosophy exalts one’s conscience above the Word of God; this philosophy makes one’s conscience his guide instead of the Bible. Instead of conscience being a *safe guide*, it

must be *safely guided* by the Word of God. Conscience approves or disapproves, as it has been instructed. If conscience has been instructed wrongly, it may approve of things that are wrong, or even disapprove of things that are right. A misguided conscience can mislead; this is often the case.

Surely, almost all of us have had the experience of honestly taking the wrong road in traveling, going several miles, feeling all the time that we were on the right road. Just to *feel* that we are right in religion does not *make* us right. We have to check the “road map” to heaven—the Bible—to find out what is really right. If we do not do this, and instead just follow conscience, we thus exalt conscience above God’s Word.

Conscience must be properly instructed by God’s Word before it can guide correctly. If one travels in his car on the wrong road, he turns around when he discovers his error, and proceeds to find the right road. He would surely not get angry at the person who told him he was on the wrong road, but would likely be grateful to him.

Friend, do not depend on the guidance of your feelings; look in God’s road map, the Bible, and see if you are on the right road. *“For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew 7:13,14).

Why Does God ALLOW Human Suffering?

Kevin L. Moore

THERE ARE SOME THINGS GOD cannot do. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2), He cannot be unjust (Deuteronomy 32:4). and He cannot do what is logically impossible. In order to bring about the greatest state of goodness in the world, God had to create some specific goods whose existence necessarily entails the possibility of certain evils. Human beings were designed with the ability to think and the freedom to choose. Although we often take these things for granted, anyone who has ever been a slave or a prisoner will tell you that freedom is one of the most precious commodities a person can have. Being a God of love (1 John 4:8). He does not force us to act against our wills, but grants us freedom. Freedom involves choice, and choice includes not only the possibility of making right decisions, but also wrong ones. It is **impossible** for God to have made man a free moral agent, and yet take away his

capability of making wrong choices.

Now God has given us an instruction book to guide us in the right direction (2 Timothy 3:16,17), but when people disregard God's directives and make bad decisions, pain and suffering are often the result. It is man, not God, who has created slavery, whips, guns, bombs, death camps, liquor, pornography, and so on. The blessing of freedom, when it is misused, accounts for the majority of human misery.

Most people consider something to be good if it brings pleasure, and bad if it causes pain, but this is shallow and shortsighted. The imperfections of this world serve a purpose in allowing individuals to grow and develop into mature, responsible beings in a way that would otherwise not be possible. *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope"* (Romans 5:3,4). God's desire for his creatures seems to be, not the suffering itself, but the positive and beneficial effects.

Pain, loss, and hardship also help to create an acknowledgement of human weakness and a need for God in one's life. Pride and arrogance are self-destructive traits (Proverbs 16:18), but suffering has a way of helping us put things in perspective. It is said that when a man is flat on his back, the only direction he can look is up. *"My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever"* (Psalm 73:26).

Life in this physical world is a brief, and necessary, preparation for eternity. The trials we face help us to avoid complacency and to look forward to that place where *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). More than a perfect world, God desires a loving relationship with His creation. Out of suffering, pain, hardship, and loss God can and will accomplish His good purpose (Romans 8:28-39).

How Do You SAY "THANK YOU" To God?

Tom Holland

MOST OF US WERE TAUGHT the importance of saying "thank you" when people did good things for us or said nice things to us. Remember the song for children about "two little magic words" that would "open any door with ease"? One of the words was "thanks" and the other little word was "please."

Some insensitive people or some ungrateful people may not think

to say **thanks**. However, one attribute of a noble character is the awareness of responding to goodness with an expression of appreciation.

But how does one say “thank you” to God? I can’t call Him on the telephone and say, “thank you.” I can’t write Him a letter or send Him a thank-you card. So how do I get the message of my gratitude to a gracious God? There are basically two ways to thank God: **thanksgiving** and **thanksgiving**. These are complementary.

The Bible is very plain in instructing God’s people to give thanks in prayer. In Philippians an inspired apostle said, *“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Philippians 4:6).

God created meats *“to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth”* because *“every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving”* (1 Timothy 4:3,4).

The Lord Jesus gave a good example of saying “thank you” to God. Before Jesus ate food He first gave thanks (John 6:11). Jesus said, *“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth”* (Matthew 11:25).

So how do we say “thank you” to God? We **say** “thank you” in prayer and hymns of gratitude to Him.

And we live a life pleasing to God, so that our very behavior shows our **thanksgiving** in response to all that He does for us, day by day.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

Byron Nichols

GOOD PEOPLE TALK ABOUT conditions and circumstances in the world and say, “God is in control,” implying that everything that is occurring is according to God’s will and plan.

Surely all who believe in God believe that He is indeed in control of the world. However, we cannot accept the idea that God’s being in control means that He causes, wants, or is pleased with everything that happens. If so, everyone is merely a robot, having no choice or power of self-will.

If His being in control means that God causes everything to happen that happens, then God causes all sins to be committed, He caused Judas to betray Christ, Moses to* strike the rock and thus be unable to enter the promised land of Canaan, Adam and Eve to sin and be expelled from Eden, Nadab and Abihu to offer strange fire, etc., etc., etc.

Romans 8:28 tells us that God can and does make good results come out of bad circumstances, but it doesn’t say that He causes the

bad circumstances. God was in control in the life of Joseph so that the evil things done to him ultimately led to his being in a position of tremendous power and influence (Genesis 37-47), but God's control did not cause the evil.

Surely we don't believe that God actually desires that thousands die and many more suffer greatly in other ways as a direct result of war today, yet we can most assuredly believe that He sometimes uses His people to render special service in His name as a result of wars. For example, the greatest mission activity on the part of the church in modern times came about as a result of Christians serving in the military in World War II and seeing firsthand the tremendous spiritual needs of people ravaged by war.

Is it possible that we would feel guilty for thinking that God is not directly controlling everything that takes place in His universe? Would that make Him to be less than all powerful? Friends, the owner of any large company will most certainly delegate much authority and responsibility to others beneath him, but that owner still maintains the power to alter any decision implemented by any of his subordinates. God has chosen to work in somewhat the same way. He has delegated control of nations to kings, presidents, parliaments, etc., but they are all His subordinates, although few of them seem to realize that fact.

If God is directly in control of everything, why pray to Him in behalf of that which is good and of those in high places in government, etc.? Would not such prayers be useless, since God would already have things going the way He wanted them? Praying to God and asking Him to change anything would be futile. Yet, He makes it quite clear in the Scriptures that He wants His people to pray—Luke 18:1 (we ought always to pray); Colossians 4:2 (continue in prayer); Philippians 4:6 (let requests be made known to God); 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (pray without ceasing); James 5:16 (the earnest prayer of a righteous man avails much). Furthermore, God has promised to answer our prayers—Matthew 6:5,6 (pray in secret, but He will reward openly); Matthew 7:7-11 (if we will ask, God will give us good things); John 15:7,16 (our requests to God through Christ will be granted).

It would seem that if God were in complete control, His will would constantly and consistently be done. However, in 2 Peter 3:9 we find Peter saying that God *"is longsuffering toward us, not willing (desiring) that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* It thus is made clear that God's will (desire) is that all should repent and be saved. Has that ever come about in the past? No. Is it happening now? No. Is there reason to believe it will occur in the future? None at all. Matthew 7:13 and 14, Matthew 18:8,9,34, and 35, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9,

and many other passages reveal that God's will is going to be spurned by many, even the majority, throughout the existence of the earth.

Friends, we are not guilty of denying the power of God when we accept the fact that He does not exercise constant control of everything in the world. God IS in control, but He is not causing men to do evil and abuse others and violate His written will, the Bible. He IS in control — He has the power to end the existence of this world any time He may determine to do so. In the meantime, He is allowing men to exercise their free moral agency and be wicked if they so choose, but the time will most certainly come when He will put an end to it all. Until then, let us not be guilty, either intentionally or unintentionally, of trying to make God responsible for all that happens in the world.

BIG BROTHER

David Thurman

WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, every day we have to deal with the challenge of death. The news media headline stories that involve auto accidents, or war casualties. If there is a murder somewhere, or a kidnapping, it quickly becomes national news.

We even deal with death in more subtle ways. Many of us take prescriptions every day, all to make us healthier and delay the inevitable moment of death. We avoid the topic of death in many ways, but still, death is always around us.

Of all the world religions, none is more willing to face death than Christianity. Christians accept death, and face it with confidence and dignity. Instead of avoiding the topic of death, we put it right up front and turn to God to help us cope. In fact, only Christians have this kind of confidence, and it is all because God sent us a Big Brother to help us face life and death.

"Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:14-18).

Jesus comes among His brothers as an older brother, one with more experiences, one who has faced the same challenges we have. Jesus took on our nature, becoming like us, in order to help us overcome the causes and consequences of death. Jesus becoming human is remarkable, for these reasons.

IT IS SOBERING - ALL FLESH DIES

Jesus became like us, flesh and blood. Many people still struggle with how Jesus could be both God and human. But the Bible says plainly that He shared in our nature, becoming like His brothers. Jesus was fully human. He got tired and slept. He got hungry and ate. He experienced the full range of human emotions. He experienced life just as you do.

This is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. All world religions talk about how man can approach God. In Christianity, it was God who approached man. Instead of a God who sits back and makes demands on people, we believe in a God who reached out, even taking on the nature of man, in order to free us from the penalty of death.

What is most remarkable about Jesus becoming human is that this made Him subject to death as well. All flesh eventually dies. By taking on human form, Jesus became subject to death. He was willing to empty Himself to the point of accepting death. In fact, He was sinless and did not have to die. *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb 4:15). But, by becoming human, He was faced with the realities of life and death that we face. Being a Christian is the best life since we have an older brother who has faced death just like we have to.

IT IS SAVING - HE PAYS FOR SIN

Jesus came as a merciful high priest who would make propitiation for the sins of the people. That may sound like a big word, but in fact it merely means that Jesus paid for our sins. He took the cost and penalty for the mistakes you and I have made. He was sinless, but He was willing to die (as does all flesh) to pay for our sins. When Jesus became human and lived without sin, He was then able to offer Himself as the sacrifice for your sins.

Again, this is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. All other religions in the world teach us what man is supposed to do to find God. In Christ we are told what God did for us. Instead of us making a path to God, God opened the door and even went so far as to send His only Son to save us. We don't do for God, He does for us! *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners,*

Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:8-10). God saw us in our sin, loved us in spite of our sin, and sent His Son to take away our sin. By becoming flesh and blood, Jesus was able to pay for the sins of the world. So we can echo the words of John the baptizer, *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). ‘

IT IS SUSTAINING: WE CAN FACE LIFE

By sharing in man's nature, Jesus was able to change life for those who follow Him. Notice what changes. First, the fear of death is removed. People still struggle with the idea of death. We avoid the topic, we clean up the process, even making the deceased look "as life like" as possible. Most people, if they spoke honestly, would admit to being afraid of death.

But Jesus came and faced death for us. By taking on evil and its consequences, He removed the fear of death for those who choose to follow Him. *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15:56-57). So, Christians face death without fear, because we know God, through Jesus, has overcome death and its dread.

But, notice also that we can face life's temptations because of Jesus. He faced temptation when He suffered for us. Life was not easy for Him or kind to Him. You see, we can not only face death because of Jesus, we can face life. We can handle the struggles, the challenges, the temptations that come at us. Outside of our Big Brother, we are on our own attempting to get through life (and death) on our own power and wisdom. But, in Christ, we have a Brother who has blazed the trail for us, showing us how to face life's struggles and how to face death itself. Only Christianity offers this sort of power to both live and die as God wants.

No matter what you are facing, Jesus stands ready to help you. No matter what you fear, Jesus is near to help calm you. No matter what your failures are, Jesus will forgive you and help you succeed next time. In Jesus, you have a brother who is ready to help you.

SO: EMBRACE DEATH NOW

One of the greatest aspects of being a Christian is that we get to choose death, and we can choose it now. This is not the physical death that will come to every person, but it is a spiritual death that we can choose right now. And if you choose death now, the physical death that is coming will hold no power over you. *"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. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:3-7).

This is why baptism is so important. You can die to sin right now by being baptized into Jesus Christ. When you do, you get a new life from Him, a life that is free of sin and free of the fear of death. For, as Paul says, if you are united with Him in His death at baptism, you can be sure you will be with Him in His resurrection. Your confidence in facing life and death will not come from how good you are, but from the fact you trusted in Jesus to save you and you died to sin in baptism.

SO: EMBRACE JESUS AS YOUR BROTHER

The bottom line for you is simple. Are you going to keep trying to find God on your own, or are you going to rely on Jesus to show you the way? He became flesh and blood in order to remove the fear of death from your life. On your own you will never find an answer to the inevitability of death. But, in Jesus, you die right now and let Him give you a new life. You can erase the fear of death by trusting in Jesus. All you need to do is what He commanded all of us to do. *“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). Come to Jesus, be baptized today, and find the resources you need to face life, and even death itself.

POWER OF CHRIST

Johnny Ramsey

CHRISTIANITY IS CHALLENGING BECAUSE IT is built upon the deity of the Master. Jesus was not just a man: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth”* (John 1:1-3,14). In reply to the questioning Jews, He said, *“Before Abraham was born, I am”* (John 8:58). To unbelieving critics

who objected to His claims of familiarity with God, He further stated, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30).

Jesus has the words of eternal life (John 6:68), a name above all others (Phil. 2:9) and a glory which is unsurpassed (John 14:6). To the *"King of kings"* (1 Tim. 6:15) we owe allegiance that propels us into a sojourn that people of the temporal world cannot fathom (Acts 4:13). Even Napoleon, in his famous speech to Gen. Bertrand, admitted that *"the spirit of Christ overawes me."* As another leader of men later wrote, so we believe as well, that our blessed Lord Jesus supercedes all rulers, armies, navies and heroes that ever lived in power, splendor and influence.

THE POWER OF EVANGELISM

The impact of Christianity challenges us also because it is promulgated by the great commission and not by some bombastic plan set forth by mankind. The parting words of the Savior, prior to His going back to heaven, are so simple, yet profound. Jesus told the apostles: *"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned"* (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16).

Jesus sent His disciples into the world with no weapons, no threats. *"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal"* (2 Cor. 10:3). They had only the message of salvation. But that was enough! Nothing could have permeated the Roman Empire so successfully as the humble servants of the crucified Nazarene pressing the claims of the Messiah upon that profligate society. The early saints *"went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4), and soon the message of redemption covered the ancient world as the waters cover the sea.

THE POWER OF A PURE LIFE

Christianity demands our very best because it is demonstrated by purity of life. The basic and fundamental values of the religion of Christ can best be seen in His life: *"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.... Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him"* (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21). It was said of Jesus that *"He went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38). So do His followers, as they *"follow his steps"* (1 Pet. 2:21). The

same values seen in the life of Jesus are seen in the dedicated demeanor of fervent disciples of the Lord.

Too many times the world receives a faulty impression of the way of the cross because of our failure to portray the ethics of godliness. From the writing of the apostle Paul, we learn anew of the intense value and power of a life that magnifies Christ and shares the message of the Redeemer with others (Phil. 1:12-20). Oh, what demands the gospel places upon the devotees of the Savior! The words of a gospel song ought to ring in the ears of every dedicated Christian:

*Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity.
May His spirit divine, all my being refine.
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*

Christianity is great because it brings hope, joy and optimism into the daily walk of children of the heavenly Father. Trusting in the Creator (Prov. 3:5), instead of earth's vain trinkets, gives us the enrichment that only the hope of heaven can bequeath to us. Hope includes faith, but it also is assurance. We have that assurance because of Jesus: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Christians never look back to a life of sin, but ever press on to the beautiful home of the soul. As parents, we choose early in life to indelibly etch into the mural and fabric of our children's lives that we *"Look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God... Look for a better country, that is, a heavenly country"* (Heb. 11:10,16).

*A careful man I ought to be,
A little fellow follows me;
I do not dare to go astray,
For fear he'll go the self-same way.*

Let us all rise up to meet the challenge of true Christianity. With a firm commitment and a deep resolve, we will one day do it, by the grace of God. And when the saints go marching in to glory, we will join in that heavenly chorus.

A SMILE

Demar Elam

OH, HOW GREAT IS THE value of a smile on the face of a Christian! If we could only grasp the value of a smile, we would smile a lot more often.

I looked into the face of a teenager this past week, and my heart ached. That face had no smile. Rather, rebellion and resentment and hate seemed to be etched in that young face. A smile on a face says volumes about what is in the heart. It has been said about a smile: "A smile costs nothing but gives much. It enriches those who receive without making poorer those who give. It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it, and none is so poor but that he can be made rich by it. A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in business, and is the countersign of the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and it is nature's best antidote for trouble. Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile as much as he who has not more to give."

The wise man wrote, "*A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*" (Proverbs 15:13). Don't we realize the truthfulness of this from our everyday experience of life? A cheerful countenance, manifested by a warm, friendly smile, is indicative of a happy heart.

Solomon also said, "*...he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*" (Proverbs 15:15). Joy and happiness are being searched and longed for by the human race, but in most cases they are never attained. People continue looking for them in the wrong places.

In Christ we are instructed to "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice*" (Philippians 4:4). Rejoicing is what God intended for those who accept His Son and live a life on a higher plain. Traveling the upper road will produce the peace of God in the heart of man; "*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:7). The peace of God in our hearts will produce smiles on our faces!

Paul said to the Philippians in Philippians 4:8, "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely,*

whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Surely, when our minds dwell on these things, we cannot help but wear a smile on our face.

LIVING THE WAY I PRAY

*I knelt to pray when day was done.
And prayed: "O God bless every one;
Lift from each saddened heart the pain,
And the sick be well again."
And carelessly went on my way.
The whole day long I did not try
To wipe the tear from any eye;
I did not try to share the load
Of any brother on the road;
I did not even go to see
The sick man just next door to me.
Yet again when day was done
I prayed "O Lord, bless everyone;"
But as I prayed, into my ear
There came a voice that whispered clear,
"Pause, hypocrite, before you pray,
Who have you tried to bless today?
God's sweetest blessings always go
By hands that serve Him here below."
And then I hid my face and cried,
"Forgive me, God, for I have lied,
Let me but live another day
And I will live the way I pray. Amen."*

— Anonymous

WHEN YOU PRAY

Bill McFarland

A DISCIPLE SAID, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). This man knew he needed to pray, and he wanted to do so. Yet, he felt that his attempts were inadequate and that he needed to learn to do better.

Many of us can identify with that disciple. We have struggled with

the pressing distractions and the dull routines which discourage genuine prayer. What can we do?

1. **Be specific.** Don't just drift through a list of generalities. Jesus taught the man who questioned Him to pray with purpose and to call things by name (see Luke 11:2-4).
2. **Be yourself.** Real prayer is simple and it deals with daily concerns. One does not need to use a different voice, nor words and phrases which he would not ordinarily use.
3. **Be unselfish.** A person is asking amiss if his focus is his own pleasure (James 4:3). Balance your petitions with praise, thanksgiving, and intercession. In this way, prayer will bring you closer to the Father's will.
4. **Be fervent.** Sincerely pour your heart out to God. Deal with things which are urgently important to you. Ask, seek, and knock (Luke 11:9,10).
5. **Be confident.** Ask in faith, nothing doubting (James 1:6). Rest assured that your heavenly Father will answer your prayer in the way that is best. He hears, cares, and acts in our best interest (1 John 5:14,15).

Our Lord was a man of prayer, and we must be people of prayer. Perhaps these principles can help us "*...always to pray, and not to faint*" (Luke 18:1).

HIS PRECIOUS PROMISES

Jeril (Polly) Cline

AS SURELY AS THE WARMTH of spring follows the cold of winter, His precious promises assure that abundant life will spring forth after the long wintry trial of our faith. In the Father's wisdom, this time of testing has at its heart our greater good, stronger faith, maturer character.

We rejoice, then, for this tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts, through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

He has, in fact, granted to us His precious and magnificent promises in order that by them we might become partakers of His divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust (2 Peter 1:4).

So we persevere under trial, knowing that once we have been approved, we will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12).

And we recognize the discipline of the Lord as a true sign of our belonging to Him, for He disciplines those who are His (Hebrews 12:8,9). Not only this, but He disciplines for our good, that we may share His holiness. Though it is not pleasant, He has promised that by it we are being trained, and afterwards it will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).

So, we entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator Who will do what is right (1 Peter 4:19). This allows us to keep placing our faith and confidence in Him, though the world may not understand, though our family may not understand, though our friends may not understand ... just as Christ did and those around Him misunderstood (1 Peter 2:23).

Yet we know that His precious promise to us is that He will not allow more than we can bear, but with each trial/temptation will provide the way of escape, that we may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

So we ABIDE. We abide in Him and His promises. We abide in His Word. We hold still and quit squirming and quietly ABIDE (John 15:4,7). And by abiding in His Word, by becoming obedient to all we know He wants of us, we abide in His love (John 15:10).

And we are not afraid of the pruning, for it is natural for the branch that is unhealthy, wild, or diseased to be pruned by the loving Gardener. He prunes, and that is enough for us. We trust His knowledge of what needs to be done in our lives. We know that He will do only what will restore health, conform us to His character, rid us of that which continues to sap our spiritual strength, that we might bear more fruit to His glory (John 15:1,2).

Besides this, we have come to know that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). In fact, apart from Him nothing can come into being at all (John 1:3)!

So, we are not ashamed of Him or His precious promises, for we are convinced that He is able to guard that which we have entrusted to Him till that day when all will be made clear (2 Timothy 1:12).
