

*Silence  
Can Be  
Sinful*  
(Volume 3)

*Winford Claiborne*

**International Gospel Hour**  
% West Fayetteville Church of Christ  
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## *Dedication*

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### *Jeremy Baker*

One of the most caring Christians I have ever known.

Good family man.

Active deacon.

Excellent basketball player.

A take charge guy.

A dear friend and fellow worker.

Fortunate to have Jennifer and Mackenzie.

Would to God there were more Jeremy Bakers!



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## *Introduction*

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**I**n the 1970s and 1980s millions of young people around the nation wore bracelets with the initials WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? – on there is no point in our speculating about what Jesus would do. The only way we can know what Jesus would do is what He did. That really is not a difficult task. We can learn about Jesus by examining Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the epistles to understand what the Holy Spirit said Jesus did. Those inspired books will tell us what Jesus did and said so that we can know what he should do and say. Since He is our great example, we need to imitate His thinking and His behavior. Paul explained, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

What would Jesus say about adultery? He would insist that adultery is not only a physical act, but a mental one as well. In His great Sermon on the Mount, our Lord spoke very plainly about adultery.

You have heard that it was said by them of old time,  
You shall not commit adultery: but I say unto you,  
that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her  
has committed adultery with her already in his  
heart (Matt. 5:27-28).

Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples violated the traditions of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate. Jesus said to the Pharisees:

Are you also yet without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatsoever enters in at the mouth goes into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things

which defile a man: but he with unwashed hands does not defile a man (Matt. 15:3, 16-20).

What would Jesus say about the necessity of keeping God's commandments? He said to His disciples:

Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, you that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

If anyone has difficulty understanding our Lord's words, they need to read these words: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). If we do not keep His commandments, does that not mean that we do not love Him? How else could these words be interpreted? Jesus also said: "You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). Can we be the Lord's friends if we do not keep His commandments? If we must keep the Lord's commandments, how can anyone argue that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone?

What did Jesus say about marriage, divorce and remarriage?

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command



to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He says unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whosoever marries her is put away commits adultery (Matt. 19:3-9).

We know Jesus worshipped regularly. Luke tells what occurred in his hometown. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read" (Luke 4:16). Would Jesus approve of any kind of worship so long as the worshippers were sincere and honest? We do not have to wonder. The woman of Samaria said to Jesus:

Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain: and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus says unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews (John 4:19-22).

If Jesus had wanted to be politically correct and not offend the woman, He would have told the woman that it really does not matter where or how you worship. He could not do that because that was not the truth.

Would Jesus be silent when churches were in danger apostatizing or had already apostatized? He said to the church at Ephesus:

Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from whence you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

The church at Sardis had a reputation of being alive. But Jesus said, you "are dead" (Rev. 3:1). Would Jesus ever tell a church you make me want to vomit? He told the church at Laodicea: "So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). The Greek word translated "spew" means to vomit or to reject with disgust.

Did Jesus want all people to be saved? If He did not, why would He say: "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28)? "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Since all "had sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), does that not mean that Jesus wanted all the people to be saved? Would Jesus ever tell anyone that he would be lost? We know what He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Enter in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there are who find it (Matt. 7:14).

Our Lord concluded His Sermon on the Mount of Olives by saying: "And these (that is, the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46).

God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, You shall surely die; and you give him not warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from the wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul (Ezek. 3:16-19).

God also said to the prophet Ezekiel: "So you, O Son of man, I have set you a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, you shall hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me." (Ezek. 33:7).

I want to be able to say with the apostle Paul: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:6-7). I do not want to stand before the Lord in final judgment and Him say to me: "You knew right from wrong, but you did not have the courage to make the distinction."

My first two books on the topic, "Silence Can Be Sinful," dealt primarily with moral issues, such as, abortion, homosexuality, eugenics, human experimentation, cohabitation, racism, and marriage perversions. Is it not also vital to speak on New Testament baptism, the place of Christ in the scheme of human redemption, church discipline, denominationalism, biblical exclusivism and similar topics?

During the past several months I have been severely handicapped because of a copper deficiency in my system. I have had to depend on a number of people to be able to get around, to preach in meetings and to speak on lectureships. One of the elders at West Fayetteville Church of Christ, Don Wallace, my sons Doron and Danny, have been of tremendous help to me. I have told both of my sons that their mother would be very proud of the way they have cared for their father. Jeremy Baker, one of the deacons at the West Fayetteville Church of Christ, gets me up in the morning, gets me dressed, takes me to breakfast, then comes at night and puts me to bed. He has driven me to gospel meetings and to lectureships, to doctors appointments and to other appointments. My own sons would have taken care of their father, but they live some distance from me. But nobody could have been more gracious and helpful than Jeremy. So I dedicate this book to Jeremy Baker. He and his wife Jennifer and their beautiful daughter, Mackenzie, have been a tremendous blessing and inspiration to me. I thank God for all who have been so good to me.



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## Chapter 1

### Am I Become Your Enemy?

The language Paul used in Galatians is some of the harshest in the entire New Testament. The situation demanded it or the Holy Spirit would not have inspired Paul to use it. I shall take time to read a few brief passages from this epistle. In the very first chapter Paul expressed astonishment at the direction some of the Galatians had taken.

I marvel that you are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Do you get the impression from this passage that it does not matter what you believe so long as you are honest?

Paul asked:

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you (Gal. 3:1)?

The Greek word translated "foolish" literally means without understanding. The New English Bible renders the Greek "stupid." J. B. Philips translates the Greek: "O you dear idiots of Galatia!" Paul was not speaking of their intellectual abilities but of their spiritual discernment. They either did not know what was transpiring in the provinces of Galatia or they did not care. This is a very serious indictment of the Christians in Galatia.

Paul expressed concern for the spiritual welfare of the Galatians. He said, no doubt, with great sorrow:

But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how can you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain (Gal. 4:9-11).

Is it possible that any of the modern so-called "positive preachers" would have used this kind of language? Can you imagine Joel Osteen's saying: "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain?"

The following may be one of the best known passages in Galatians: "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth" (Gal. 4:16)? What was the truth Paul had been telling the Galatians? He wanted the Christians in the provinces of Galatia to know they could not be justified by the Law of Moses. There is certainly more in this powerful book than that, but that is the major thrust of Galatians. After calling the Galatians "foolish" or "stupid," he asked:

This only would I learn of you, Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish (or senseless)? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain, if it yet be in vain? He therefore who ministers to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2-5)?

Since the Galatians had been freed from the bondage of the Mosaic covenant, how could they "turn again to the weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9)?

Paul knew the danger the Galatians were facing. He warned them:



Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man who is circumcised, that he is debtor to do the whole law. Christ has become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4).

Two comments on this passage are in order. Paul was not condemning circumcision as a health measure or as a traditional custom. He strongly opposed circumcision as necessary for becoming a Christian. He was teaching very plainly that one does not have to be a Jew to become a Christian. As long as circumcision was not required of those who obeyed the gospel, it really amounted to nothing. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision." What does matter? Being a new creature (Gal. 6:15). Paul told the Corinthians: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19).

If Christians attempt to be justified by the Law of Moses, they have fallen from grace. Can a man really fall from grace? If he cannot, why did Paul say that those who seek to be justified by the law "are fallen from grace?" The Greek word translated "have fallen" means to fall away from or to fall out of. In his great set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), Dr. A. T. Robertson comments: "'You left the sphere of grace in Christ and took your stand in the sphere of law' as your hope of salvation." The Galatians were guilty "of substituting law for Christ as the agent of salvation" (volume 4, p. 309).

Paul was not the first person who was ever accused of being someone's enemy because he taught the truth. After King Ahab had stolen Naboth's vineyard, God sent the prophet Elijah to the king. God commanded Elijah:

You shall speak unto him (Ahab), saying, Thus says the Lord, Have you killed, and also taken possession? And you shall speak unto him, saying, Thus says the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your blood, even yours. And Ahab said unto Elijah, Have you found me, O my enemy? And he (Elijah) answered, I have found you: because you have sold yourself to work evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings 21:19-20).

What a tragedy that the king of Israel should consider God's great prophet his enemy!

The nation of Israel — the ten tribes in the north — had become extremely corrupt. God sent Amos, a faithful prophet from Judah — the two tribes in the south — to preach to Israel. By the direct inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, Amos predicted: "The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." Amaziah informed Jeroboam of the preaching of Amos. He accused Amos of conspiring against the house of Israel. He said that the land was no longer able to bear his words. Amos had predicted that Jeroboam would die by the sword and the nation "would surely be led away captive out of their own land" (Amos 7:8-11).

Amaziah the priest was not a true shepherd of the Israelite people. He was a hireling. He said to Amos: "O you seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court" (Amos 7:12-13). Amaziah did not call Amos the enemy of the king and of Israel, but he did accuse him of conspiracy (Amos 7:10).

There is not the slightest doubt that some of the Corinthians and some of the Galatians thought of Paul as being their enemy because he told them the truth. We know that Ahab believed of Elijah was his enemy. Amaziah does not use the word "enemy," but is that not really what he thought of Amos? Many of the people in the first century considered

John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ as their enemies? If that were not the case, why did they murder John and Jesus? Are there not people all across America who think of faithful gospel preachers as their enemies? If a preacher condemns drunkenness, greed, sexual immorality, and other sins, some people will condemn him as their enemy.

Now I must change the question I have been discussing with you. Paul's question for the Galatians was: "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth" (Gal. 4:16)? My question for you to consider is: Could I become your enemy because I do not tell you the truth? Some of the Galatian Christians believed Paul was their enemy because he told them the truth. He was not their enemy. He was the best friend they could have had. But if he had not told the truth, he would have really been their enemy. Is that not what Paul meant when he told the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus: "I take you to record this day, that I am free from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27)? If Paul had failed to declare all the counsel of God at Ephesus and elsewhere, he would have been their enemy.

One of the central themes of the entire Bible is creation. The word of God affirms: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Time after time, inspired men of God spoke of divine creation. Contrary to Charles Darwin, the plants, the animals and man did not evolve. They were created.

God created the great whales, and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged creature after his kind: and God saw that it was good....So God created man in his image, in the image created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:21, 27).

The apostle Paul wrote of Christ's involvement in the creation. Christ:

...is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by all things consist (Col. 1:15-17).

Did God's Holy Spirit know more about the beginning of the universe than modern evolutionists? The Psalmist declared: "Let them (that is, the sun, the moon, and the stars) praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created" (Psa. 148:5). Since Jesus Christ was with the Father in the beginning (John 1:2), did he know how the universe came into existence? In his Sermon on the Mount of Olives, Jesus told his disciples:

And in those days (that is, the time of Jerusalem's destruction) shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation, which God created unto this time, neither shall be (Mark 13:19).

Jesus asked some Pharisees: "Have you not read, that he who made them at the beginning, made them male and female" (Matt. 19:4)?

Are preachers and theologians enemies of the human family when they fail to preach what the Bible says about creation? It absolutely baffles me when men and women who claim to be Christians endorse evolution. There is not the slightest doubt that evolution contradicts the Bible from beginning to end. How can people claim to be Christians when they ignore or distort what the Bible teaches—and not just on creation? And it makes you wonder if modern evolutionists have read the literary works of men who have demonstrated the impossibility of organic evolution or any other kind of evolution.

Today (May 25, 2010) Megan Kelly announced on the *Fox News Channel* that President Obama had met with some political leaders and said he was not going to do much about

making our borders secure. Are preachers aware of what is involved in illegal immigration? Do they know that every illegal immigrant is a criminal? That is what the word "illegal" means. Do preachers, priests and rabbis care that many of the illegal and destructive drugs come into the United States from Mexico? Do preachers have any interest in reducing the violent crime many of the illegal immigrants are committing? Does it matter to preachers that illegal immigration is bankrupting states along our southern border and elsewhere? And does it make a difference that Filippe Calderon rules over one of the most corrupt governments on the face of the earth? And just think of the gall he had in criticizing Arizona for violation of illegal immigrant's "civil rights!"

Do not preachers, priests and rabbis know they are enemies of our citizens when sit on the sidelines, figuratively speaking, and allow criminals to pour into this country and not have the courage to condemn it? And do not say that I am anti-immigration. But I am anti-criminals. And since our leaders in Washington do not have the courage to stop the destruction illegal immigrants are wreaking in our nation, what choice do the states have but to make some attempt to stop this utter stupidity? Our nation cannot countenance criminal activity. Preachers become enemies of our people when they are silent on this topic.

Would the Apostle Paul have become an enemy of the Christians at Corinth if he had failed to preach the whole counsel of God to them? Paul severely criticized the church at Corinth for its sectarian spirit (1 Cor. 1:12-13). He accused them of being carnally minded because of the division in the church. In fact, he said they were acting like babies (1 Cor. 3:1-3). He was deeply troubled that the church was harboring in its fellowship a man who was sleeping with his fathers' wife (1 Cor. 5:1-3). Paul denounced the Corinthians because of their behavior surrounding the Lord's Supper. Would Paul have been an enemy of the Corinthian Christians had he followed the example of Joel Osteen or Robert Schuler

and said nothing about the sins that were destroying that church?

The Corinthians almost certainly thought of Paul as their enemy. How can a preacher be your friend when he tells you that you are acting like babies, that you are not going to heaven if you do not repent of the sins that separate you from God, that your conduct around the Lord's Table has made you weak and sickly and that you are not handling the supernatural gifts in a godly manner? Was Paul their enemy? Do you remember what occurred as a result of Paul's powerful epistle to the Corinthians? He does not leave us to guess.

For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it: for I perceive that the same epistle has made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance: for you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation not to be regretted: but the sorrow of the world works death (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

Paul was the friend of the Corinthians because he condemned their sinful behavior. Had he not told them of their sins and the danger of not going to heaven, he would not have been their friend.

But Jesus Christ would never been as harsh as Paul or would he? If you have read our Lord's letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, you know how very critical he was of the churches at Ephesus, at Sardis and at Laodicea. He told the Ephesians that they had left their first love (Rev. 2:4). The church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive. Jesus Christ had a different view. He said to the members at Sardis: You are dead (Rev. 3:1). The members of the church at Laodicea were saying: "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17). The Lord told the lukewarm Laodiceans: "I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16).

The original Greek is considerably more graphic than the English in the King James Version. Jesus said: "I will vomit you out of my mouth." That is not very cultured language, is it? Did our Lord's criticisms of the three churches I have mentioned mean he was their enemy?

Modern worshippers, like those on Trinity Broadcasting Network and on the Inspiration Channel, do not want anyone objecting to what they do in worship. But the Lord himself was extremely critical of the behavior of some of the worshippers in his day. He urged his disciples not to sound the trumpet when they prayed, like some of the Jewish worshippers were doing. He told them not to give to be seen of men. When they fasted, they were not to be of a sad countenance and disfigure their faces, as the hypocrites were doing. Does that mean that we can worship in vain (Matt. 15:19)? Would our Lord have been a friend to the disciples had he not told them how to worship?

We are witnessing in our day a de-emphasis on heaven. In his very irrational book, **If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus** (New York: Harper, 2010), Philip Gulley, a Universalist, says we should not shirk our earthly duties "to focus on a world we have no verifiable proof even exists." He believes that doing so "is misguided" (p. 177). He asks: "What if saving the earth were more important than saving our souls" (p. 178)? If Gulley made sense, why would Jesus ask: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:26)? If we fail to preach what the Bible teaches about heaven or about any other topic, we are enemies of our listeners.





## Chapter 2

### Apostasy In 2 Peter

Did you know that the King James Version never uses the word "apostasy" or the word "apostate?" Could the reason be that many of the King James translators were Calvinists? Calvinists do not believe a child of God can so sin as to be eternally lost. Most modern versions use these words which the King James Version avoids. For example, the English Standard Version employs the word "apostasies" (plural) one time, the word "apostasy" (singular) two times and the word "apostate" one time. Surely honest scholars would not allow their beliefs to influence how they translate a document, or would they?

The Greek word meaning to fall away or to apostatize appears fifteen times in the New Testament. In the King James Version it is translated "departed," "fall away," "drew away" and "refrain." I urge you to listen to one verse from Hebrews. The author of this great book warned his readers: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). The Greek word translated "departing" is *apostenai* from which we derive the English word "apostasy." So how could any unbiased reading of the New Testament ever maintain that a child of God cannot apostatize?

The book of Hebrews constantly warns Christians about falling away. In fact, I have spoken several times on this program on the topic, "Salvation and Apostasy in Hebrews." Today's study will focus on "Apostasy in 2 Peter." I urge you to turn in your Bible to 2 Peter 2 and study this very important topic with me. If it were not possible for Christians to apostatize, why does the Apostle Peter bother to warn them of the danger of false teachers? Please listen with an open mind.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you who privily (or secretly) shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned (or well-turned) words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

The false teachers Peter described had two primary motivations: money and sex. Peter accused them of:

...having eyes full of adultery, and cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: who have forsaken the right way, and gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.... They are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever.

The false teachers promised their listeners liberty, but “they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage” (2 Pet. 2:14-15, 17, 19).

It ought to be obvious from the context that the false teachers had obeyed the gospel and had been faithful to the Lord. How can we reach that conclusion? The Apostle Peter explains:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning (2 Pet. 2:20).

That kind of language would never be used of those who were still alien sinners. Non-Christians have never “escaped

the pollutions of the world." Like the Ephesians before they obeyed the gospel, they are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

The people Peter had in mind had "escaped the pollutions of the world." The word "pollutions" means defilements or uncleanness. The English Standard Version renders the Greek "lust of defiling passion." Peter has already explained that their "eyes were full of adultery" (2 Pet. 2:14). Incidentally, the word in the Greek is not "adultery," but adulteress. This is a vivid picture of the man who cannot see a woman without having lascivious thoughts of her. Does that remind you of some modern television evangelists?

The false teachers had "escaped the pollutions of this world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." If you have read Peter's second letter, you know the emphasis he places on knowledge. Some form of the word "know" appears sixteen times in 2 Peter. Six of those times Peter used the intensified form of the word. That means that we can have sure knowledge. Peter concluded this short epistle by admonishing his readers: "But grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Knowledge of God's word is absolutely essential for those who want to escape the pollutions of this world and become a Christians.

Christ explains how men are drawn to him by the Father.

No man can come unto me, except the Father who sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. As it is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore who has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me (John 6:44-45).

You cannot avoid seeing how men come to Christ. They must hear the word of God and obey it.

If the doctrine of universalism were true, none of what I have read to you would make any sense. If all men are going to be saved, even if they do not know Christ and obey his will, their attitude toward the gospel will have no effect on their salvation. I am not endowed with any special foresight, but I believe many in the religious world, including some left-leaning members of the body of Christ, will ultimately endorse universalism. Two Quaker preachers, Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, have written a book promoting universalism. Their book has the title, **If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person** (San Francisco: Harper, 2003). Gulley and Mulholland quote a number of prominent people to try to sustain the ridiculous doctrine of universalism. Dr. Benjamin Rush affirmed:

The Universal doctrine prevails more and more in our country, particularly among persons eminent for their piety, in whom it is not mere speculation but a principle of action in the heart prompting to practical goodness (p. 221).

They also quote Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the wife of Robert Browning: "Universalism is the most beautiful word in the English language" (p. 222). It may be a beautiful word, but it is an inexcusably false doctrine. William Barclay, the distinguished Scottish theologian, said concerning universalism:

The only victory love can enjoy is the day when the offer of love is answered by the return of love. The only possible final triumph is a universe loved by and in love with God (p. 223).

Madeline L'Engle insists:

All will be redeemed in God's fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and to accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones (p. 223).

One verse of scripture completely destroys the doctrine of universalism. "These (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:46). Frankly, I prefer what Jesus taught to the vain imaginations of Dr. Benjamin Rush, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Barclay or Madeline L'Engle or anyone else.

The false teachers Peter had in mind had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They later "became entangled again therein and overcome." The word "entangled" literally means to in-weave. Paul used the same word in his second letter to Timothy. "No man who wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). Paul exhorted the Roman Christians:

Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

When a Christian becomes entangled in worldly affairs, he can be overcome. The word "overcome" means to be inferior, to be enslaved. Peter used the same word in verse 19.

While they (that is, the false teachers) promise them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, the same is he brought into bondage.

What a tragedy when people believe they are being made free when they actually are becoming slaves!

When Christians return to the "weak and beggarly elements" of the world, "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." The last state is worse with them than the first. But what difference would it make if a child of God cannot fall from grace? I have a question for the person who believes in universalism. If all men will be saved regardless

of his behavior, how could one state be worse than any other? You should have no difficulty understanding that these verses were designed to warn Christians about the danger of falling away.

The Apostle Peter argues:

For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Pet. 2:21).

Please take note of Peter's emphasis on knowing. The word "known" in this verse is an intensified form of the word "know." That form of the word means full or complete knowledge. These were people who had come to a complete understanding of the gospel. They were not like the ones Jesus mentioned in the Parable of the Sower. Some of the seed fell on rocky soil. Their understanding was shallow and in time of temptation they fell away (Luke 8:13). The people in 2 Peter 2 were those who had heard the gospel, believed and obeyed it from the heart.

When men and women know the way of righteousness and then turn back into the world, they are in danger of hell fire. The man who never hears the gospel is not in the same danger as the ones who obey the gospel and then forsake the Lord. That is unquestionably the message the author of Hebrews wanted his readers to understand.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received its recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation (Heb. 2:1-3)?

Some Calvinist preachers argue that the people Peter had in mind had never actually become Christians. I have

already shown that "they had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 2:20). Verse 21 says they had known the way of righteousness. They had not just known about the way of righteousness; they had known it, that is, they had experienced it. They were members of the church of Jesus Christ. Then they turned from the holy commandment. The word "turn" means to turn back or to return. The "holy commandment delivered to them" was the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Peter uses two of the most disturbing figures you can imagine of those who became apostates.

But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog has turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:22).

This is not a pretty picture of backsliders, but it is God's view. If the context means anything, the Apostle Peter had in mind those who had honestly obeyed the gospel. They were the ones who had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They were the ones who had known the way of righteousness. How could anyone claim they were not truly saved? How can Calvinists or anyone else attempt to sustain the doctrine of once in grace, always in grace in view of this passage?

Dr. A. T. Robertson was one of the world's greatest Greek scholars. During his long tenure at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, he wrote about seventy-five books. There is hardly a day I do not use his scholarly set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman). Dr. Robertson was a Calvinist, but recognized that the Bible teaches the possibility of apostasy. He comments on the people represented by the seed that fell on the rocky soil. "Ostensibly they were sincere and had made a real start in the life of faith" (volume 2, p. 114).

The late Dr. Dale Moody also taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. In his book, **The Word of**

**Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), Dr. Moody says that A. T. Robertson was a major influence on his views of apostasy (p. 353, fn). Dr. Moody states dogmatically: "Apostasy is not a term imposed upon the New Testament; it is a New Testament term in both a special and a general sense" (p. 348). He quotes Dr. Robertson as saying about the people who could be drawn away by the grievous wolves (Acts 20:30): "There is a false optimism that is complacently blind as well as a despondent pessimism that gives up the fight" (p. 349). Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians that after he had preached to others he himself might be a castaway (or a reject)" (1 Cor. 9:27). Dr. Robertson commented:

Most writers take Paul to refer to the possibility of his rejection in his personal salvation at the end of the race....It is a humbling thought for us all to see this wholesome fear instead of a smug complacency in this greatest of all heralds of Christ (p. 350).

As early as 1917, Dr. Robertson was teaching that a child of God can apostatize. In his book, **Paul's Joy in Christ: Studies in Philippians** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970, a Reprint), Dr. Robertson says very plainly:

There are always timid souls who lose heart in times of persecution. Some even go to the extent of apostasy when the cause seems lost. The early Christian centuries furnish examples of those who renounced Christ for Caesar under the pressure of the Roman state (p. 78).

The person who obeys the gospel and then turns his back on the Lord is like a dog returning to his vomit. Such a picture is nauseating, but it is what the Lord thinks of those who apostatize from the faith. Peter borrowed this figure from the book of Proverbs. "As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly" (Prov. 26:11). Surely a little dog as sweet as my Missy would not return to her vomit. As a matter of fact, he has done so.



I grew up on a farm that raised hogs. I was the one in my family that took care of the hogs. An old sow would be washed clean by rain, and then she would go to the dirtiest mud hole she could find and lie down in it. Peter said that Christians who apostatize are like that sow that returns to her wallowing in the mire. We do not know the origin of this proverb, but it probably originated with the Gentiles. All who grew up with hogs understand the nature of hogs. We know they will return to the muddiest pond they can find.

But is not the Apostle Peter exaggerating when he used these two proverbs? If you have studied the Old Testament, you know how God regarded his own people when they turned their backs on him. Jeremiah provides some insight into God's displeasure with his unfaithful children.

Be astonished, O you heavens, and be horribly afraid, be very desolate, says the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and have hewed to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:12-13).

2 Peter 2 was not written specifically to refute the Calvinistic doctrine of once saved, always saved, although it does that very effectively. The Holy Spirit guided Peter to warn Christians lest they fall away from grace. We must use our time and effort to grow in grace and in knowledge so we shall not be tempted to depart from the faith. That means we must study God's word and apply it to every phase of our lives. It also means we must worship with God's faithful Children so we can strengthen each other. We must follow the Lord's advice in the Sermon on the Mount. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things—the material blessings—shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Should we not imitate our Lord's example? He told some Pharisees: "He who sent me is with me: the Father has not left me alone; for I do always that please him" (John 8:29). If we imitate Christ, we shall never fall.



### Chapter 3

## Are Gospel Preachers Pestilent Fellows?

The great prophets of the Old Testament and faithful preachers in the New have not always been received—even by God’s own people—with great enthusiasm. After God had led the Israelites to the banks of the Red Sea, they were afraid because of the approach of the Egyptian army. They asked Moses:

Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore have you dealt with us, to carry us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than we should die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:11-12).

This was not the only time the Israelites objected the leadership of Moses and of other great leaders.

There were a number of times in the life of the Apostle Paul when he was maligned, abused and almost killed. While Paul and Silas were preaching in Thessalonica, they were taken before the rulers of the city and accused of turning the world upside down. The Jews said that Paul and Silas were disobeying the decrees of Caesar because they were preaching another king, one Jesus (Acts 17:6-7). Toward the end of Paul’s life, he was tried before Felix. The Jews brought with them an attorney by the name of Tertullus to prosecute Paul. Tertullus told Felix: “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

The word “pestilent” means pest or plague. The word appears only two other times in the New Testament. In his

Sermon on the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted: "Nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in different places" (Matt. 24:7). The English Standard Version translates the Greek "plague." Charles Williams renders the word "pest." In their very scholarly volume, **The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), Cleon Rogers, Jr. and Cleon Rogers III say the word was "used of birds of prey or people who are dangerous to the public; a public menace" (p. 297).

Was the Apostle Paul really a pestilent fellow, a public menace? If you have read the life of Paul as recorded in the book of Acts and in his epistles, you should have no difficulty answering my question. Let us examine some examples from the book of Acts and from some of his epistles. Not long after Paul had obeyed the gospel and had begun to preach the One whom he had persecuted, he encountered a sorcerer and a false prophet by the name of Bar-jesus or Elymas. Sergius Paulus, a deputy or a proconsul, called for Paul and Barnabas and wanted to hear the word of God. The sorcerer opposed Paul and Barnabas and sought to turn away the deputy from the faith. Paul filled with the Holy Spirit set his eyes on the sorcerer and said:

O full of all subtlety (or deceit) and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all unrighteousness, will you cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord (Acts 13:6-10)?

Is it likely that the sorcerer thought of Paul as a "pestilent fellow?" We are not told what he thought, but we understand enough about human nature to know he was not happy with Paul's characterization of him. If he had had the power, he probably would have physically attacked Paul, but the Lord blinded him so he could not see the sun for a season. He had to seek someone to lead him by the hand (Acts 13:13). If I and my fellow preachers strongly condemn the behavior of

sorcerers, psychics, astrologers, and such deceivers, would people in the New Age movement think of us as “pestilent fellows?”

In the city of Philippi, there was a young woman who was “possessed with a spirit of divination.” Some of the men of Philippi were making money from her soothsaying or fortune-telling. The young woman followed Paul and Silas, and cried, saying, “These men are servants of the most high God, who show unto us the way of salvation.” Paul and Silas were annoyed by the woman’s testimony. Paul commanded the spirit to come out of her. He came out the same hour. The men who were using the young woman for making money were angry and brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates, saying, “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble out city. And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.” The magistrates commanded that their deputies beat Paul and Silas. They then imprisoned these faithful gospel preachers (Acts 16:16-22).

The men of Philippi were upset because Paul and Silas interfered with their money-making scheme. Did they think Paul and Silas were “pestilent fellows?” There can hardly be any doubt about it. When preachers in our day speak out against beverage alcohol, against gambling, against pornography and against similar evils, the people who promote these activities get angry and even bring lawsuits against them. Several years ago, some of the people of Jackson, Tennessee, sued some of the churches for opposing the legalization of alcohol by the drink. The court required the churches to open their financial records so they could determine how much money the churches had spent in fighting alcohol by the drink. The United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case. The ruling of the local court stood.

Paul used every opportunity available to preach the gospel of Christ. While he was in Athens, Greece, he became indignant because he saw that the city was wholly given to idolatry. “He disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and

with devout persons, and in the market place daily with them who met with him." Among the people he encountered at Athens were some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Some of the philosophers asked: "What will this babblers say" (Acts 17:16-18)? The word "babbler" is a fascinating word. It literally means a seed-picker." Rogers and Rogers say: It was a "slang term first used of birds that pick up grain, then of men who pick up odds and ends in the market, and then to men who were zealous seekers of the second rate at second hand, and finally to generally worthless persons" (p. 274).

The Athenian philosophers also accused Paul of being a "setter forth of strange gods" because he "preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). The Athenians were probably not too upset with Paul and Silas because "they spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21). When they heard Paul's sermon on the resurrection of the dead, "some mocked, and others said, We will hear you again on this matter." There were some in Athens who "clung to Paul, and believed: among which were Dionysius the Areopagite, and Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:32-34).

Most of those ancient cities like Athens, Corinth and Ephesus were filled with idol temples. While Paul was in the city of Ephesus, there was considerable confusion about his preaching. Please listen to Luke's account of what occurred.

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain to the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, you know by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover you see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away much people, saying, There are no gods made with hands; so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the

great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worships (Acts 19:23-27).

Did Demetrius and the other silversmiths think of Paul and Silas as “pestilent fellows?” The sacred text does not use that kind of language, but this we know: The silversmiths inspired a mob to try to counteract what Paul was preaching. For two solid hours, the Ephesians screamed “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:34). Paul, his companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, might have been killed by the people of Ephesus, but the town clerk knew he and other leaders might be in danger for the uproar of that day. He had the good sense to dismiss the assembly (Acts 19:35-41). But there is no doubt Demetrius and the other silversmiths thought of Paul and his companions as “pestilent fellows.”

There is more in the book of Acts, but let us turn for a few minutes to Paul’s, John’s and Jude’s epistles. Paul wrote three letters to the church at Corinth. Only two of those letters have been preserved. 1 Corinthians outlines some of the serious problems facing the church. The members of the church were creating confusion around the Lord’s Table. They had actually perverted the very purpose of the Lord’s Supper. How would Joel Osteen or Robert Schuler handle a situation like the one at Corinth? Do you honestly believe either of them would say:

Now in this that I declare unto you, that you come together not for the better, but for the worse....  
What shall I say unto you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not (1 Cor. 11:17, 22)?

Was Paul just being a pestilent fellow when he told the Corinthians: “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (or more literally, have died) (1 Cor. 11:30)?

Did the church at Corinth need the message of Paul’s first letter? If they did not, why did the Holy Spirit guide Paul in writing it? It must have grieved Paul to have speak

so harshly to people he loved so dearly, but to be faithful to his calling, he had no choice. Did the letter accomplish the purpose for which the Holy Spirit gave it? If you have read 2 Corinthians, you know the changes 1 Corinthians produced in the attitudes and conduct of the Corinthians. Paul explains what occurred among the Corinthian Christians.

For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it: for I perceive that the same epistle has made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but you sorrowed to repentance: for you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation not to be regretted: but the sorrow of this world works death (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

If churches today need strong messages about moral behavior, about the work and worship of the church, and about other vital matters, how can preachers justify not telling them what they need to hear? Paul told the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus:

I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, and have shown you, and have taught you publicly and from house to house....Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 26-27).

In very simple language, Paul assured the Ephesians that he had preached to them everything they needed.

Every preacher on earth will have to give an account for what he preaches and how he preaches it. That was Paul's reason for telling a young preacher:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own



lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, itching ears; and they shall turn away from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry. For I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is a hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto them also who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:2-8).

I have one question based on Paul's inspired advice to Timothy: What does it mean to "do the work of an evangelist?"

A few brief excerpts from Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus should help us understand why Paul was called a "pestilent fellow." He urged Timothy to hold:

Faith and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning the faith have made shipwreck: of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

Paul demanded of Timothy:

Shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as does a canker (or gangrene): of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:16-18).

I have no doubt there was sorrow in Paul's heart when he told Timothy: "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10)). Paul warned Titus:

There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole

houses, teaching things that they ought not for filthy lucre's sake. One of them, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth (Tit. 1:10-14).

The Apostle John is often called "the apostle of love." Maybe Joel Osteen and Robert Schuler think they are showing love by not exposing false teachers and false philosophy. Have they ever read John's epistles? In his letter to the elect lady, John warned:

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things which we have wrought, but that we receive the full reward. Whosoever transgresses and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he who bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 7-11).

There was a brother in the early church who as a dictator. John could not endure such behavior without exposing the man for what he was.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember the deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbids them who would, and casts them out of the church (3 John 9-10).

Do you believe preachers ought to discuss topics like those Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus and which John discussed in his two brief epistles? If they do not, is it because modern preachers believe they know more than inspired writers or is it because those subjects are too negative? Should not modern preachers imitate the great prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ and the faithful preachers of the New? Maybe modern preachers do not want to be called “pestilent fellows.” I certainly would prefer not to be called a “pest,” but if I know my own heart, I want to be faithful. I do not want the Lord to say to me in the final judgment: “You knew what was right and wrong, but you did not have the courage to preach what you knew.”

Both Joel Osteen and Robert Schuler have wide television audiences. They are in a position to influence great numbers of people for good. And much of what they preach is true. But there are dozens of controversial issues they deliberately avoid. Katie Curic asked Joel Osteen why he did not discuss some of the controversial topics other evangelicals emphasize. He said the Lord had called him to be positive. Do you not find it odd that God never called any of the Old Testament prophets or any of the Testament preachers to be positive? They all preached great positive truths, but they also challenged the false teachers of their day. Do you remember how Jude – the Lord’s brother – described some of the false teachers in the first century?

These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 12-13).

Does not such harshness prove that Jude did not love the people to whom he wrote? Jude pled with his readers:

But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 20-23).

Even if we preachers are called “pestilent fellows,” we must preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

## Chapter 4

# Baptism And Salvation

One of our listeners to the International Gospel Hour strongly objected to my lessons on grace and faith. He argues with some vigor: "It's all by God's grace." Have you ever wondered about the full implications of that Calvinist position? If our salvation is all by grace, there are only two positions anyone can hold: Either everyone will be saved or no one will be saved. Why would I make such a statement? Peter told the house of Cornelius: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he who fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted of him" (Acts 10:34-35). If God will save you by his grace alone, he will save me by his grace alone. If he will save us by his grace alone, he will save everybody in the universe by his grace alone since he is no respecter of persons.

Besides, if we are saved by grace alone, what difference does it make what I believe or what I preach? My correspondent affirms: "But after your sermon on Sunday night, I now know you are 'BLIND!' and deceived as all other preachers who deny the truth, but soon all you false prophets will be visited by your leader (the anti-Christ) who will lead you into your home (Hell). I'm being very blunt in the hopes it will stir you up and shake you to receive the truth, so you have now had your witness, if you further reject the truth then Jesus will turn you over to a 'reprobate' mind, because you refuse to acknowledge the (real) truth. I will pray that your eyes may be opened, but you'd better do it soon, because the Rapture is just about to break out on humanity. Please receive the truth now so you will hear Jesus's voice when he calls you home. I trust you will." At least, my correspondent did not beat around the bush, did he? I have no difficulty understanding what he said.

I plan to take time later to speak on the so-called "rapture, but I shall say just a few words about it today. Did you notice that he said: "The Rapture is just about to break out on humanity?" I wonder where he learned that. Is he aware that false teachers have been making such predictions for years? In fact, one man wrote a little book with the title, **88 Reasons Why the Rapture Is in '88**. I believe he missed all eighty-eight. A man in North Carolina wrote a book with the title, **101 Reasons Why the Rapture Is in '88**. All his reasons were wrong also. Why do not people like Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, Hal Lindsey and such speculators quit predicting the end of the world? The end of the world could be millions and millions of years in the future. Not one verse of scripture would be wrong if Christ does not return for ages.

But the so-called "rapture" is not my main focus today. My correspondent wrote very succinctly:

Baptism has nothing to do with it; it's all by God's grace. Baptism is purely meant to kill the fleshly man so that the spiritual man could live in us. That spiritual man is Jesus Christ who comes into our fleshly hearts after we have crucified the lusts, and desires of the flesh.

Jesus comes into our "fleshly hearts?" Do you see any contradictions in this brief excerpt? He insists that baptism has nothing to do with salvation. He then says: "Baptism is purely meant to kill the fleshly man so that the spiritual man could live in us." Does not killing the fleshly man have something to do with our salvation? The apostle Paul must have thought that killing our fleshly appetites and desires had much to do with our salvation. Please listen to Paul.

Mortify (or put to death) therefore your members that are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience (Col. 3:5-6).

A careful reading of Galatians 5:13-18 should convince anyone of the necessity of "killing the fleshly man so the spiritual man could live in us."

I want to return to what my correspondent wrote about baptism and salvation. He said very plainly and forcefully: "Baptism has NOTHING to do with it; it's all by God's grace." Let us first examine the conversion of the Corinthians. The city of Corinth contained some of the most depraved, debauched and devilish people on the face of the earth. Paul describes in no uncertain terms the moral and spiritual condition of the Corinthians before they obeyed the gospel. "Do you not know," he asked,

...that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

As you can easily discern, the Corinthians had been members of the Hall of Shame and Degradation. They had engaged in virtually every evil under the sun.

Would you be surprised that Paul could ever call these people "saints" (1 Cor. 1:2)? How could such people ever become "saints?" I can tell you exactly what happened and when it happened. The apostle Paul had been in Athens, Greece, but traveled to the city of Corinth, another Greek city. Since he came from a Jewish background, the leaders in the synagogue at Corinth invited him to speak. We do not know all he said, but we know the thrust of his message. "And when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:1-5). Paul's powerful preaching resulted in a number of conversions. "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and

many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).

Two comments on what occurred at Corinth are in order. When they were baptized, they ceased being idolaters, sexually immoral people, thieves and drunkards. Paul said they had been grossly immoral, "But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). When the Corinthians were baptized, they became saints of the most high God. In addition, they were added to the Lord's church. Paul explains:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

In the case of the Corinthians, baptism in the name of Christ washed, sanctified and justified them. It also made them members of the church of Jesus Christ.

You cannot be unaware of the fact that the records of some conversions in Acts of the Apostles do not mention – not even one time – some of the steps that led to conversion. For example, Luke says nothing about the Jews' faith prior to their obedience to the gospel. But is there any doubt the Jews on Pentecost believed that Jesus was their Messiah, the Savior of the world? If they had not believed, would they have asked Peter and the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? Their faith led them to inquire about God's plan for saving them, but it did save them. If they were already saved when they believed on the Lord, why did they ask the apostles what they had to do? Can you not see from this example that faith alone does not save?

In answer to the Jews' question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?", the apostle Peter by divine inspiration answered,



Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they who gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:38-41).

Some questions on this passage are in order. The Jews already believed, as I have established. Why did they need to be baptized or was that pure ritual? Did the baptism of the Jews “kill the fleshly man so that the spiritual man could live in” them? This we know beyond the shadow of any doubt: they were baptized for the remission of their sins. Have you ever examined Acts 2:38 in the New Revised Standard Version? It reads: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

When the Jews believed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God, repented of their alien sins and were baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins, were they born again? If they were not born again, what else did they have to do to be born again? If they had not responded to Peter’s command to be baptized, would they have been born again? Did you know – and I am sure most of you do – that no apostle or early preacher ever told anyone to be born again, as Jesus told Nicodemus? Why do you suppose that is so? The reason is very simple: the Holy Spirit interpreted Christ’s message to Nicodemus by commanding men and women from Pentecost onward to be baptized – not to be born again. When they believed and were baptized, they were born again or more precisely from above.

I remember receiving a letter from a seventeen-year-old boy. He objected to what I had read from the scriptures about

baptism. He then asserted: "The Bible nowhere says that baptism saves." My current correspondent does not use that kind of language, but is it not obvious what he believes? He says baptism has nothing to do with salvation. I responded to the seventeen-year-old by citing what the apostle Peter said about baptism. He mentioned the fact that "eight souls were saved by water." He then made an application of that example.

The like figure whereunto even baptism does 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 Pet. 3:20-21).

I have some questions for my correspondent and for all who are listening to this study. Does baptism save or does it not save? If it does not save, why did Peter insist that it does? Some theologians have argued that baptism saves figuratively. If one is not baptized, will he be lost figuratively? The English Standard Version translates verse 21 as follows: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." We know the water of the flood saved Noah and his family from destruction. I have one final question based on 1 Peter 3:21: "In what sense does baptism save?"

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus must have made an enormous impact on the early church. Saul had been one of the most persistent persecutors of the Lord's church. He was bitterly opposed to the church because he honestly believed Jesus was an imposter and that Christianity was a false religion (1 Tim. 1:13). Luke records that Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest and imprison members of the body of Christ when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him. The Lord asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" Christ responded: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting: it

is hard for you to kick against the pricks.” “And he (Saul) trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Our Lord instructed Saul: “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do” (Acts 9:3-6).

The Lord called a preacher by the name of Ananias and told him to locate Saul of Tarsus. Ananias was reluctant to go to Saul because he knew Saul’s reputation for persecuting Christians. Saul tells us exactly what happened when Ananias came to him.

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, brother Saul, receive your sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know his will and see that Just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth. For you shall be a witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard.

Please listen carefully. Ananias asked, “And now why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:12-16). Did baptism wash away Saul’s sins? If it did not, what did Ananias mean by telling Saul that baptism would wash away his sins? Did Ananias make a false promise to Saul?

All of us know that Saul took the name Paul and became a great apostle for the Lord. Now a question: “How did the apostle Paul interpret baptism – his own and everyone else’s? That really is a very easy question to answer. Paul told the Roman Christians what he and they had experienced when they were baptized. Please take note of the plural pronouns as I read to you from the Roman letter.

Do you not know, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised

up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:3-6).

Paul lists three facts of the gospel – Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. He then wrote about the relationship of baptism to those three facts. “Do you not know,” he asks,

...that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey: whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that was delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).

What had Paul and the Roman Christians experienced? They died to sin; they were buried with the Lord in baptism; they were raised to a new life. If they had not been buried with the Lord in baptism, could they have been raised to a new life?

Dr. Charles Ryrie taught at Dallas Theological Seminary for many years. He wrote a little book with the title, **A Survey of Bible Doctrine** (Moody Press, 1972). In that little book, Dr. Ryrie has a brief discussion of Romans 6. He writes:

Though it is not an easy concept to understand, Paul says that our union with Christ by baptism involves sharing His death so that we are dead to sin. The baptism must be that of the Holy Spirit, for no water, in whatever amount, could accomplish what is said to have been accomplished in this passage (p. 123).

It is my considered judgment that Dr. Ryrie would never have called the baptism of Romans 6 baptism of the Holy Spirit

had he not already made up his mind it could not have been water baptism. And what does the amount of water have to do with it? It is the act of obedience – not the amount of water that is used, although there must be enough water to immerse a person. I wonder how Dr. Ryrie and other Calvinists get around Peter’s question at the house of Cornelius? The apostle Peter asked,

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:47-48).

And how about the water in Acts 8? Philip the evangelist preached Jesus to an Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch asked Philip:

See here is water; what hinders me from being baptized? And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Please take note of what happened. “And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him” (Acts 8:35, 36-38). Was “water” the Holy Spirit, as some Calvinists foolishly maintain Jesus had in mind in John 3:5? No, it was water.

I have two other passages from Paul’s epistles I must mention in closing our study today on “Baptism and Salvation.” The churches of Galatia were experiencing problems with false teachers – teachers who were attempting to synthesize Judaism and Christianity. They apparently wanted to take what they considered the best elements of both religions and make a better religion. Paul strongly objected to the Judaizing teachers among the Galatian churches of Christ. He informed them: “Wherefore the law (of Moses) was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith has come, we are not longer under a schoolmaster.” Please listen carefully and

honestly. "But you are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:24-27). I have one question to ask you about this passage. Is it necessary to put on Christ? If it is necessary to put on Christ, it is necessary to be baptized. It is in baptism, according to divine inspiration, that we put on Christ.

In his letter to the church at Colosse, Paul has a brief discussion of baptism. Paul told the Colossians: you were: "Buried with him by baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through faith in the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). Paul charged the Colossians: "If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

## Chapter 5

### Bible's View Of Itself

One of the most intense controversies in the religious world is over the nature of biblical inspiration. Liberal theologians like John Shelby Spong and Leslie Weatherhead vigorously deny the inspiration of the Bible. The very titles of two of Spong's books show his attitude toward scripture. In 1991 Spong wrote the book, **Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: a Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco). Spong insists: "The biblical writers had no sense at all of the sweep of historic times, nor did they have any concept even of the size of the earth" (p. 37). I have no doubt that it is true, but Moses, Isaiah, Peter and Paul were not really the true authors of scripture. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Did the Holy Spirit have a sense of the sweep of historic times? Did he know the size of the earth? The truth of scripture did not rest on the knowledge of the men who were the human authors. It depended on the supernatural guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

One of Spong's most recent books, **Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), is one of the most vicious attacks against scripture I have ever read. His book is far more damaging to the cause of Christ than the writings of atheists like Robert Green Ingersoll and Mark Twain. Spong pretends not to be a Bible-basher (p. xiii of the Preface). He claims to "have had a lifetime love affair with the Bible" (p. 5). Yet he accuses the Bible of having "left a trail of pain, horror, blood and death that is undeniable" (p. 4). He insists: "Perhaps the strangest claim ever made for any written document in history is that words are or somehow contain the

'Word of God'" (p. 15). He denies that Moses wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. He claims that: "Moses had been dead for three hundred years before the first verse of the Torah achieved written form" (p. 19). His book is literally full of such unfounded and destructive foolishness.

Leslie Weatherhead's book, *The Christian Agnostic* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), expresses amazement at teachers who insist on men's reading the Bible. He argues that we can "get so much more spiritual help from other books. He compares the book of Revelation to a "boarding-school plum pudding, where the plums are scarce and far apart" (p. 192). Most of us preachers say, "The Bible says." Weatherhead quotes C. Blumhardt as saying,

It may say what it likes in the Bible – on this point I am greater than the Bible. I admit it is in the Bible, but in the end I must know what is true of God, and not what a man once put into such and such words two thousand years ago (p. 196).

*The Tennessean* (Wednesday, January 17, 2007) published an article with the title, "Baptist groups unite to address crime, social ills." Anita Wadhvani, a staff writer for the newspaper, wrote the article. She reported that Jimmy Carter and other disaffected Baptists, including Bill Clinton, are seeking to rehabilitate the negative image of the Southern Baptist Convention. The groups have formed a new association called New Baptist Covenant. The article lists some of the goals of the new organization. I shall mention only one of those goals.

We want to be biblical – especially in our view of the Bible. That means we dare not claim less for the Bible than it claims for itself. The Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching. Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretation of the Bible (7-A).



I agree that those who claim to be Christians should seek to be biblical. We dare "not claim less for the Bible than it claims for itself." But is it true that the Bible never "claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching?" Our lesson today is entitled "The Bible's View of Itself." But first I must make a few comments on the word "inerrancy." I am fully aware, as I believe most serious Bible students are, that the word "inerrancy" does not appear in the sacred text. Does that mean the Bible writers did not claim inerrancy for their writings? The Bible does not use the word "trinity," but is that not what Christ meant when he commanded his apostles: "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19-20)? The Bible never uses the word "incarnation," but that word correctly describes what occurred when Jesus Christ took on human flesh.

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:17).

And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).

What did the Bible writers claim about their writings? Did they believe they were inerrantly revealing the very word of God? Have you ever taken the time to study the times Moses claimed to be speaking the very words of God? I am fully aware that some people claim to be speaking for God when it is obvious they are inventing their own messages. Is that what Moses did? I shall read several passages from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses told the Israelites:

The Lord spoke unto us in Horeb, saying, You have dwelt long enough in this mount....And the Lord said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you, lest you be smitten before your enemies (Deut. 1:6, 42).

But the Lord was angry with me, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice you; speak no more on this matter (Deut. 3:26).

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 5:6).

Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were some of the most courageous and dynamic preachers who ever lived. They claimed to deliver God's message in God's words to God's people. I shall take time to give you just a few examples. Isaiah informed the Israelites:

Thus says the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One in Israel; for your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King (Isa. 43:14-15).

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

About 150 years after Isaiah prophesied, God raised up Jeremiah to carry on the prophetic tradition. You probably remember that Jeremiah did not think he was capable of accepting the great task God had planned for him.

But the Lord said unto me, Say not I am a child: for you shall go to all that I shall send you, and whatsoever I command you you shall speak (Jer. 1:7).

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah, that enter in at these

gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place (Jer. 7:1-3).

Over and over, the prophet Ezekiel claims to be speaking for the Lord.

And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear the word of the Lord; thus says the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing (Ezek. 13:1-3).

Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord God unto Jerusalem: Your birth and your nativity are in the land of Canaan: you father was an Amorite and your mother was a Hittite (Ezek. 16:1-3).

Amos repeats the expression, "thus says the Lord," eight times in the first twenty-one verses of his prophecy. Was he just pretending to be speaking the words of the Lord or was he actually speaking for God? Amaziah the priest of Bethel was very unhappy with the preaching of Amos. He demanded of Amos:

Go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel and it is the king's court.

Amos responded in these well known words:

I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear the word of the Lord (Amos 7:10-16).

There are literally hundreds of times when the prophets used the formula, "Thus says the Lord" or "the word of the Lord came unto me." But let us turn now to the New Testament to understand the view of men like Paul and Peter.

Dr. Victor Paul Furnish served for many years as professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University in Dallas. His book, **The Moral Teaching of Paul** (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), asserts that "Paul was not conscious of contributing to scripture" (p. 15). He insists that Paul "was not writing for us" (p. 16). Let us examine Paul's writings to ascertain if Dr. Furnish's observations make sense.

It is almost universally agreed among New Testament scholars that 1 Thessalonians was the very first book of the New Testament. In his book, **Redating the New Testament** (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), Bishop John A. T. Robinson of the Church of England, one of the most liberal scholars in the world, dated 1 Thessalonians in 50 A. D. (p. 53). At that early date, there is no doubt Paul believed he was writing scripture. Please listen to these words:

You are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you who believe: as you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his children, that you would walk worthy of God, who has called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also we thank God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you who believe (1 Thess. 2:10-13).

If Dr. Furnish wishes, he can doubt the truth of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, but no honest person can deny that Paul believed he was writing scripture. In his outstanding set of books, **Word Pictures in the New**

**Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), Dr. A. T. Robertson comments on this powerful passage from 1 Thessalonians: "Paul had not a doubt he was proclaiming God's message" (volume 4, pp. 20-21).

There were false teachers among the churches of Galatia who were troubling those churches by attempting to combine certain elements of the Mosaic covenant with the gospel of Christ. Had Paul and other faithful preachers allowed that to occur, it would have been the death knell of the gospel among those churches. By divine inspiration, the apostle warned the Galatian Christians:

I marvel that you are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-12).

Was Paul being presumptuous and arrogant when he told the Galatians they would be accursed if they accepted any other gospel than the one he preached? He vigorously denied that his message came from man — either from within himself or from some other man. Like the apostles on the day of Pentecost, Paul was speaking as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance (Acts 2:4). Dr. Furnish and other liberals may think Paul was wrong, but his words in the passage from Galatians 1 are too plain for anyone to misunderstand or to

misinterpret. Paul claimed to have received the message he preached "by revelation of Jesus Christ." In that same chapter in Galatians, Paul told his fellow Christians that he had not gone up to Jerusalem to consult with the other apostles. That means the other apostles had not taught him the message he preached. God had communicated the word to Paul (Gal. 1:17).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul informed his readers that men unaided by God's Holy Spirit could not know what God has on His mind unless God chooses to reveal it. "As it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them who love him." So are men totally hopeless and helpless under those circumstances? The apostle Paul explains:

But God has revealed them (that is, the things God has prepared for them who love him) unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man that is in him? Even so the things of God no man knows, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given unto us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words that man's wisdom teaches, but that the Holy Spirit teaches; combining spiritual ideas with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:7-13).

I shall briefly summarize the great truths Paul taught the Corinthians. Men can know the mind of God only as God chooses to reveal his mind. The Holy Spirit searched the mind of God and revealed his mind to man. The revelation came to man in words that the Holy Spirit has taught. After listening to Paul's teaching in this very significant passage, is there any doubt in your mind that Paul believed he was writing scripture, that he was delivering the word of God in words that all of us can and must understand? I return to a question I asked a short time ago: What did the Bible writers

claim for their writings? I have given you examples both from the Old Testament and from the New. One responsibility remains before our time expires. What was the Jesus Christ's attitude toward his Bible, the Old Testament?

Liberal theologians, such as, John Shelby Spong, Leslie Weatherhead and Victor Paul Furnish, seem to delight in pointing out what they believe are errors or contradictions in the Bible. Is it significant that God' Son never did that—never? He often criticized his contemporaries for their misunderstanding or misuse of scripture. For example, he told the Sadducees: "You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). He asked the Pharisees on one occasion, "Why do you transgress the law of God by your tradition" (Matt. 15:3)? But not one time did our Lord ever tell any audience: "I know what Moses taught about the creation of man, but he was merely expressing the views that were prevalent in ancient Israel." Instead, Christ asked some Pharisees: "Have you not read, that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female" (Matt. 19:4)?

John quotes Jesus as saying to Thomas: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). If Jesus is what he claimed to be—"THE truth"—did he not know while he was on earth whether the Bible was truly the word of God or the invention of fallible men? The truth is: our Lord gave His endorsement to the entire body of scripture. He said to the disciples:

These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Jesus asked the Jews:

Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say you of him whom the Father has sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God (John 10:34-36)?

Please take note of two expressions in this reading from John. Jesus called the Old Testament "the word of God." He also said, "Scripture cannot be broken."

When Christ was preparing His disciples for His return to the Father, He promised He would send them another comforter. He told them:

Howbeit when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that will he speak: and he will show you things to come (1 John 16:7).

I close our lesson today with this observation: Jesus endorsed the Old Testament retrospectively (Luke 24:44) and the New Testament prospectively (John 16:7).



## Chapter 6

### Biblical Exclusion

Is there anything worse for millions of people in our culture than intolerance? If you believe you have THE truth, you are considered either arrogant or ignorant or both. But if you are a Christian or claim to be, how could you not believe you have the truth? Did not our Lord affirm: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? That view of truth did not originate with some philosopher or psychologist or theologian. It came from the very mind of God's Son – Jesus Christ our Lord. He even tells us what the truth is. In his high priestly prayer to the Father, he pled with God: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Whatever Peter or Paul or James or John wrote is the very word of God – the truth that makes us free.

The major publishing houses in our country seem to relish publishing books that promote universalism and other serious religious error. Harper Collins is one of the oldest and largest publishing houses in the United States. At one time Harper Collins published some of the greatest books on religion that men have written. In 2003 Harper Collins published Philip Gulley and James Mulholland's book, **If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco). There is no question that grace is true, but does that mean that God will save every person? Gulley and Mulholland claim to have visited prisons. They became "friends with murderers, rapists, and child molesters." They affirm: "As I made room for these people in my life here on earth, I had to consider making room for them in heaven" (p. 34). I did not know that Gulley and Mulholland had the authority to decide who would and who would not inherit the eternal city of God. I thought that was God's prerogative.

Former Pentecostal bishop, Carlton Pearson, has recently published a book with the title, **The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self** (New York: Atria Books, 2006). He argues that every person on earth will be saved. He asserts: "The whole world is saved, they just don't know it" (p. 1). He claims to have "discovered an ancient truth that would forever change" his life and perspective of God. "I had begun to preach the Gospel of Inclusion" (p. 2). His book was designed to show "that the Gospel of Inclusion is consistent with the words of Jesus and other apostolic writings" (p. 12).

My purpose in our study today is to demonstrate that the so-called "Gospel of Inclusion" is not "consistent with the words of Jesus and of apostolic writings." I shall first examine what Christ himself taught and then I shall discuss the writings of the apostles and other New Testament writers. What did Christ actually teach about those who will go to heaven and those who will be lost? Did Carlton Pearson know what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount? The following words are familiar to every Bible student.

Enter in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to life, and few there be who find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

What did Christ mean by the word "destruction?" If everybody is going to be saved, what difference could it make whether one enters the wide gate or the strait gate – whether one walks in the broad way or in the narrow way?

Did Jesus really mean what he said when he told his disciples?

Not every one who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name cast our

demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

When Jesus said he would tell some to depart from him, where were they going? Were they going to heaven in spite of their working iniquity? If that is what Jesus meant, his words are meaningless.

Jesus Christ teaches that God cares for all his creatures, including sparrows. A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God's knowing and caring. Human beings are of infinitely greater value than the sparrows. The very hairs of our heads are numbered. Our Lord then said to His disciples:

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him I will confess also before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10:29-33).

If Christ denies before the Father those who deny him on earth, will they go to heaven anyway? You may think Christ was wrong in his pronouncements, but you should have no difficulty understanding what he taught, unless you have already made up your mind about who will be saved.

In Matthew 25, Christ described the final judgment. He teaches that he will sit on the throne of his glory. Before him will be gathered all the nations of the earth. He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats. He will say to those on his right hand – those who have done his will:

Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand – those who failed to do his will: Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....And these (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting

punishment: but the righteous into life eternal  
(Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46).

How does Carlton Pearson get the Gospel of Inclusion from this passage? Is it possible he thinks Christ did not say it or did not mean it? Maybe Pearson is like Gulley and Mulholland who argue that they have no problem saying concerning certain passages: "I don't believe that to be true" (p. 200). If a person does not believe the words of the Son of God, how can he call himself a Christian?

Luke 13 tells of some Jews who were present while Jesus was preaching. They told him of some Galileans who were offering sacrifices to God. Pilate mingled the blood of the worshippers with their sacrifices. Jesus asked them:

Do you suppose that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, No; but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.

Jesus mentioned eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. He asked: "Do you think that they were sinners above all men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5). What does the word "perish" mean? Does it mean that the unrepentant are going to die physically? If that is what Jesus meant, he was not revealing any great truth. All men are going to die physically, unless they are alive when the Lord returns. The word "perish" (*apollumi* in Greek) means destroy and is so translated in many New Testament passages. Those who do not repent will be destroyed from the presence of God and from the throne of his glory.

Did you know that Jesus used the same Greek word in what many people like to call "the golden text of the Bible?"

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believes on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved

the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes on him is not condemned: but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:14-18).

Later in that same chapter, the Apostle John said:

He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who does not believe on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides in him (John 3:36).

The King James Version reads: "He who does not believe," but the Greek reads, "He who does not obey shall not see life." Does Carlton Pearson actually believe this passage teaches "the Gospel of Inclusion?"

I have one other passage from the very lips of Jesus Christ. He said to some of the Pharisees:

You are from beneath: you are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins (John 8:23-24).

Do the words of Jesus mean that the Pharisees would be lost if they did not believe in him? If they do not mean that, what do they mean?

We have seen what the Son of God has said about the "gospel of exclusion." Do apostolic writings agree with Jesus Christ that some people will be lost? It is not possible—I repeat, not possible—to read with understanding the letters of the New Testament writers—Paul, Peter, John, James and of Jude—and believe the message of Carlton Pearson's book, "The Gospel of Inclusion." I do not mean that observation to be unkind; nor do I question Carlton Pearson's sincerity,

but I shall show from apostolic writings what the Holy Spirit guided the Bible writers to teach that some people will be lost.

According to Paul, some people had become so wicked that "God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not convenient." The English Standard Version reads: "God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." The wicked knew the judgment of God that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them who do them (Rom. 1:28, 32). And Carlton Pearson believes such people are on their way to heaven? Has he ever read and does he believe what the Apostle John wrote?

He who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire: which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Paul teaches very plainly that God:

Will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality (he will give) eternal life: but unto them who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, (he will give) indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man who works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:6-11).

Is it incidental that Carlton Pearson completely ignores this powerful passage? And did not Paul tell the Romans: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23)?

The Apostle Paul asked the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, not effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

What did Paul mean by the statement, “the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” His letter was directed to the church. The church was not the kingdom he had in mind. Was he not speaking of “the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10)? Very simply: Paul was teaching that the ungodly are not going to heaven. How can universalists like Carlton Pearson, Philip Gulley and James Mulholland harmonize 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 with their “gospel of inclusion?” I plan to return to 1 Corinthians 6 in just a few minutes.

Paul provides some insight into the historical background of the Jewish people. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they disobeyed God and thousands of them died in the wilderness. Paul warned the Corinthians:

Neither be idolaters, as were some of them, as it is written, The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer (1 Cor. 10:5-10).

What was the Holy Spirit’s purpose in directing Paul to remind us of what happened to the Israelites? Fortunately, we do not have guess.

Now these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Wherefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:11-12).

If all men are going to be saved, what difference does it make if we fall? Will men's fall have any bearing on their eternal salvation?

All serious Bible students know about the confusion surrounding the Lord's Supper at Corinth. The Apostle Paul warned:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily (that is, in an unworthy manner), shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

Please listen carefully. "For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:27, 29). If eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner does not bring judgment on the guilty, why does Paul bother to discuss the perversion of the Lord's Supper?

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminded the members of the Lord's church:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

The word "terror" in this context points unquestionably to the fact that the disobedient will be lost.

There were false teachers in the churches of Galatia who were confusing the members of the church concerning the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the gospel of Christ. Those false teachers apparently believed that the gospel would be more effective in saving souls and building them up in the



holy faith if they adopted some of the teachings of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul warned those teachers:

I marvel that you are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but though we or angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Incidentally, the word “anathema” is one of the strongest words of condemnation in God’s holy book. The English Standard Version translates the Greek “accursed.” If Carlton Pearson can find “the gospel of inclusion” in these verses, he is a magician.

I have time to read a few verses from Ephesians.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as become saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because these things come the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience (Eph. 5:3-6).

Let us return to 1 Corinthians 6 for just a moment. Remember that the Corinthians had been guilty of heinous deeds – adultery, idolatry, drunkenness, etc. But there had been a radical change in their lives. Paul told them: “Such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Do you have any idea when the Corinthians ceased being adulterers, idolaters and

drunkards? In the book of Acts, Luke tells us what occurred at Corinth. The Apostle Paul had been preaching in Athens, but decided to visit Corinth, another Greek city.

He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. And when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:1-5).

Please listen to Luke's account of the response from the Corinthians.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

When they believed and were baptized, their old sins were washed away. They became new creatures in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:3-6).

If you are not a Christian, will you this very day imitate the obedience of the Corinthians and be on your way to heaven?

## Chapter 7

### Blessed Assurance

Fanny J. Crosby, blind from the age of six weeks, wrote hundreds and hundreds of hymns, including "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "Tell Me the Story of Jesus," "A Wonderful Savior," "Rescue the Perishing," "I Am Thine, O Lord," "To God Be the Glory" and many others. Like most of you in my audience today, I grew up singing her hymn, "Blessed Assurance." If you have not sung this beautiful hymn lately, I need to remind you of the comfort and inspiration this grand old hymn provides.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his spirit, washed in his blood. Perfect submission, perfect delight! Visions of rapture now burst on my sight; angels descending bring from above, echoes of mercy, whispers of love. Perfect submission, all is at rest; I in my Savior am happy and blest; watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love. This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long; this is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

Mrs. Crosby wrote this hymn in 1873.

The Greek noun rendered "assurance" is used very infrequently in the King James Version. I shall read some of the verses where the word is used. Paul informed the Colossians:

For I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ (Col. 2:1-2).

Paul told the Thessalonians:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake (1 Thess. 1:5).

The book of Hebrews is full of assurance, although it only uses the word two times.

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that you may be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb. 6:10-12).

The same author exhorted his readers:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:22).

The verb form of the word appears five times in the Greek New Testament. In introducing his account of the gospel, Luke wrote:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things that are surely believed among us...It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the first, to write unto you in order, most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:1, 3).

The expression, "most surely believed," is from the Greek verb. In the following passage, the Greek is rendered "being fully persuaded." Paul wrote concerning Abraham:

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to

God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was also able to perform (Rom. 4:20-21).

Later in the book of Romans, Paul used the same expression (Rom. 14:5).

In his letter to a young preacher, Paul exhorted: "Watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). In that same chapter, Paul informed Timothy of the hardships he had endured for the gospel's sake.

At my first answer (or defense) no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

In this chapter, the verb is rendered "make full proof of" (v. 5) and "might be fully known" (v. 17). Incidentally, the word "faith" has a secondary meaning of assurance and is so translated. Paul told the Athenian philosophers:

The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: because he has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all, in that he has raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

In view of modern ideas about truth, can we still have the assurance the Bible specifically and unequivocally claims to provide for the faithful? If the people within the so-called "Emerging Church Movement" were right – and they most definitely are not right – we could never sing the old songs, "Blessed Assurance," "I know the Lord Will Find a Way," "I Know My Name Is There," "I Know Whom I Have Believed," and similar hymns, with any confidence. We would have to

change the songs from "I Know" to "I Have a Hunch." Am I misrepresenting the beliefs of the leaders in the Emerging Church movement? Please listen to these examples.

John Shelby Spong's book, **Into the Whirlwind: The Future of the Church** (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1983), claims:

We are entering a brand new world where certainty more and more will be seen as a vice, and uncertainty as a virtue possessing integrity and a willingness to risk security in a quest for truth (p. 26).

If what the former Episcopal bishop says is true that "certainty more and more will be seen as a vice," it would be illogical to sing "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine." The Bible leaves absolutely no doubt we can know God and his will. The Apostle John has written: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Oddly enough, there are many ideas of which Spong is absolutely certain: Jesus was not born of a virgin; he did rise bodily from the grave; he did not ascend into heaven; the Bible is full of contradictions; the book of Daniel does not belong in the Bible; premarital sex is not necessarily wrong. Spong may not be certain of the great truths of God's inspired word, but there is no reason you and I cannot be. Did not Paul tell a young preacher: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12)? The tense of the verb means: "I have come to know and I still know whom I have believed." Incidentally, Spong is not in the Emerging Church movement, but he is a postmodernist. So are most of the leaders in that movement.

At one point in Christ's ministry, many of his disciples were turning back and walking no more with him. Jesus Christ asked the twelve:

Will you also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure

that thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God  
(John 6:66-69).

The tense of the verbs "believe" and "know" assure us: "We have come to faith and continue in it." "We have recognized the truth and are holding on to it" (Rogers & Rogers, p. 198). How could the apostles or anyone else experience "blessed assurance" if human beings cannot be absolutely sure? The author of Hebrews provides wonderful insight into the very nature of faith. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Charles Williams renders that verse. "Now faith is the assurance of things we hope for, the proof of the reality of the things we cannot see."

Brian McClaren is by far the most influential leader in the so-called "Emerging Church movement." One of his books, **A Generous Orthodoxy** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), denies that getting it right is of great importance.

From this viewpoint, 'getting it right' is beside the point: the point is 'being and doing good' as followers of Jesus in our unique time and place, fitting in with the ongoing story of God's saving love for planet earth (p. 192).

This brief excerpt raises a number of vital questions. Did Jesus teach that "getting it right" is beside the point? What did Jesus mean when he told some of the Jews who believed on him: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? Do you remember one of the reasons the church in Thessalonica had some serious problems? They did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.

For this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might condemned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

If “getting it right” were beside the point, what difference would it make whether the Thessalonians loved the truth or believed in a lie?

How would Brian McClaren or anyone else know the meaning of “being and doing good” if they do not get it right? Many modern theologians, like John Shelby Spong and Leslie Weatherhead, do not condemn premarital sex. Can we know we are being and doing good in sexual matters if we have little or no interest in “getting it right?” Paul told the Thessalonians: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess. 4:3). The word “fornication” would be better translated “sexual immorality.” The word clearly includes adultery (Matt. 19:9), incest (1 Cor. 5:1), premarital sex (1 Cor. 7:1-2) and homosexuality (Jude 7). The Bible and the Bible alone gives us infallible information on what being and doing good means.

In their book, **Adventures in Missing the Point** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), Brian McClaren and Tony Compolo urge Christians to drop any affair they may “have with certainty, proof, argument—and replace it with dialogue, conversation, intrigue and search” (p. 84). That is not the way our Lord approached his message and mission. The Jews strongly objected to the Lord’s claim to be equal with God (John 5:17). He did not say, “Let’s have a dialogue about it.” He made arguments to sustain what he had told the Jews. In addition, he listed a number of witnesses: John the Baptist, the works he performed, the scriptures and Moses. McClaren and Compolo need to read Dr. John R. W. Stott’s book, **Christ the Controversialist** (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 1970). Dr. Stott says that Jesus was not only a controversial figure; he engaged in controversy. When he did not agree with the Jewish leaders, he debated them (p. 7). Dr. Stott maintains:

The proper activity of professing Christians who disagree with one another is neither to ignore, nor to conceal, nor even to minimize their differences, but to debate them (p. 22).



The apostles did not drop any affair they had with certainty, proof and argument. The Apostle Paul demanded: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). I need to make two comments on the word "prove." The word means to test or to examine with the expectation of either accepting or rejecting. Paul exhorted the Roman Christians:

Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Proving a proposition requires reasoning and presenting legitimate arguments. The tense of the verb demands that Christians constantly prove what is good.

The Apostle John warned his readers:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

The word "prove" in this verse is the same as the word in Romans 12:2. Christians in every age must examine what preachers teach to ascertain if they are preaching the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The Apostle John also wrote:

For many deceivers have entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we may receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. He who bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 7-11).

Tony Compolo mentions the fact that in the past there have been arguments about evolution versus creation. "In the emerging culture," he argues,

We may say, 'Let's assume that evolution is true. Is it possible that evolution itself could be a creation of God, a process which God would create in order to create new things (p. 101)?

The answer to Compolo's question could not be simpler: No! There is a great gulf fixed between evolution and creation. Evolution destroys the very basis of the Bible's teaching on creation and on many other topics. The two ideas are absolutely incompatible. Compolo's observation reminds me of Michael Ruse's book, **Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?** (New York: Cambridge Press, 2001). The answer to Dr. Ruse's question is an emphatic NO. If a person is a died-in-the-wool Darwinian, he cannot be a Christian. If he is a committed Christian, he cannot be a Darwinian.

The "great and precious promises" of the gospel (2 Pet. 1:4) furnish the foundation for the blessed assurance genuine Christians enjoy. The Apostle Peter informed his readers: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, but is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). What are some of the "great and precious promises" God has made to fallen humanity? I have time to discuss briefly two of those promises – the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul tells us of the sinfulness of every human being on earth.

They have all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not none....For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:12, 23).

John says:

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defiles, neither whatsoever makes an abomination, or makes a lie: but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

If we are all sinners and sinners cannot enter into the heavenly home, how can we be forgiven and enter into the joys of our Lord?

Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

Jesus told some of his fellow Jews:

I said therefore unto you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you do not believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins (John 8:24).

Do these passages on faith mean we are saved by faith only? If they mean that, we have some very serious problems with the scriptures. The Bible specifically and unequivocally demands obedience. Paul asked the Roman Christians:

Do you not know, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).

When were the Roman Christians freed from sin? They were made free from sin when they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that was delivered to them. Does that sound like faith alone?

Jesus Christ began his personal ministry by telling his listeners: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). He continued to emphasize the necessity of repentance (Luke 13:3, 5). The apostles also preached repentance. Paul told the Athenian philosophers:

The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Jesus also taught that we must confess him before men so he will confess us to God in the last day (Matt. 10:32-33).

Our Lord promised: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). We must continue to walk in the light that we may continue to have the forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:7).

## Chapter 8

# Can Churches Apostatize?

We know beyond any doubt that individual Christians can apostatize or fall from grace. We know it because the scriptures make that truth abundantly clear. For a few minutes, let us do a word study. The Bible actually uses the word "apostasy" in warning Christians of the possibility of falling away from the faith. The Greek word from which the word "apostasy" is derived appears fifteen times in the New Testament. Three of those appearances are relevant for our discussion of apostasy. In his Parable of the Sower, Jesus spoke of the seed that fell on a rock. "As soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture." He explained the meaning of the seed that fell on a rock.

They on the rock are they, who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these having no root, which for a while believe, but in time of temptation fall away (Luke 8:6, 13).

The apostle Paul warned what would occur in the last days, that is, in the Christian era: "Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). The verb, "shall depart," comes from the same Greek word translated "fall away" in Luke 6:13. What did the author of Hebrews have in mind when he wrote: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12)?

In his outstanding set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1932), Dr. A. T. Robertson, the distinguished Calvinist Greek scholar, writes concerning the word "departing": The term, "falling away," means "to stand

off from, to step aside from the living God." Dr. Robertson quotes C. H. Dods as saying: "Remember that to apostatize from Christ is to apostatize from God." Dr. Robertson comments: "That is true today" (volume 5, p. 358).

The English word "apostasy" is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostasia*. The Greek word is used two times in the New Testament. The word is translated "forsake" in Acts 21:21 and "falling away" in the following verse: "Let no man deceive you: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3). I have one other verse I need to read about the possibility of an individual Christian's falling away. "Christ has become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Please listen to Dr. A. T. Robertson's comments on the expression, "fallen from grace." "'You did fall out of grace,'"

'you left the sphere of grace in Christ, and took your stand in the sphere of law' as your hope of salvation. Paul does not mince words and carries the logic to the end of the course. He is not, of course, speaking of occasional sins, but he has in mind a far more serious matter, that of substituting law for Christ as the agent of salvation (Volume 4, p. 309).

I began our study today by affirming: "We know that individual Christians can apostatize or fall from grace." I have established that truth from the words of our Lord and of the apostle Paul. I have another question relating to apostasy: "Can Churches Apostatize?" Are there ever any circumstances that would cause our Lord to say to a congregation: "I am cutting you off. You do not belong to me any more?" There is one sure way of establishing the fact that churches can apostatize, and that is, carefully examining what the scriptures teach. Does the Bible provide evidence that a church may so conduct its affairs that it will cease to be the church of Jesus

Christ? I invite you to listen carefully to our study of whether a church can apostatize.

Revelation 2 and 3 include letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor – Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Some of these churches were faithful in their service to God almighty. Others were in grave danger of apostatizing, although the word “apostasy” is not used in the King James Version in any of the seven letters. The Greek word *aphistemi* is used in Revelation 2:4. That word means to depart. Please remember that the letters to the seven churches were designed to be a warning to weak and sinful churches and encouragement to those churches that were always seeking God’s approval.

Jesus Christ commends the church at Ephesus for its many admirable qualities, such as, laboring to the point of exhaustion, endurance, keeping the church free from moral contamination, trying men who claimed to be apostles and proving them to be liars and not fainting in times of temptation. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The Lord also hated their deeds (Rev. 2:2-3, 6). Most of us would probably think of the church at Ephesus as being a faithful church, but the Lord said: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4). If our Calvinist friends are correct that men cannot fall from grace, what is so serious about the Ephesians’ having left their first love? The verb, “have left,” comes from the Greek *aphistemi* and is translated “fall away,” “shall depart” and “departing.” The tense of the verb shows they had already left.

Our Lord pleads with the Ephesian Christians.

Remember therefore from whence you have fallen, and repent, and to the first works: or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove the candlestick out of his place, except you repent (Rev. 2:5).

The verb, “have fallen,” comes from the Greek *pipto*. This Greek verb appears many times in the New Testament. It is always translated “fall” or “fall down.” For example, Paul urged the

Corinthians: "Wherefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). The tense of the verb, "have fallen," in Revelation 2:5 involves a state of completion. They were not in danger of falling; they had already fallen.

If Christians cannot fall from grace, I have difficulty understanding why our Lord would be so concerned about the condition of the church at Ephesus. But you know he was deeply troubled. He commanded them to remember (literally, keep on remembering) and repent. The tense of the verb "repent" demands an urgent response. They were to change their minds and their behavior immediately. If they failed to repent, would it have really mattered in the long run? Failure to repent might have been embarrassing, but it could not have affected their eternal salvation, that is, if they could not fall from grace.

If the danger were only hypothetical, why did our Lord tell the Ephesians: "Repent...or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove the candlestick out of his place, except you repent" (Rev. 2:5)? The expression, "or else," shows how serious the situation was. If the church did not repent of its lack of zeal for the cause of Christ, it would cease to belong to the Lord. It might have called itself the "church of Christ," but it would be deceiving itself. Was the church at Ephesus in danger of apostatizing? To some extent, it had already apostatized, but it was in danger of being cut off entirely from the Lord.

The members of the church at Pergamos held fast to the name of the Lord and had not denied their faith in Christ, in spite of the fact that one of their own, a man by the name of Antipas, had been killed for his faith in Christ (Rev. 3:13). There were some serious problems in the church.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there them who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.



The church also had some members who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans—a theological position the Lord hated (Rev. 3:14-15).

We have no way of identifying the people who held the doctrine of Balaam. But we know such behavior will separate people from God almighty. Please listen to the Holy Spirit's admonition to the Ephesian Christians.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becomes saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.... And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret (Eph. 4:3-5, 11-13).

If such people have no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God," does that mean they have apostatized? Can people go to heaven if they have no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God?"

Our Savior cannot countenance such conduct on the part of his people. He commanded the church at Pergamos: "Repent or else." The tense of the word "repent" is one of urgency. The Lord was demanding an immediate change in the direction of their thinking and their behavior. He attached the term, "or else," to the command to repent, as he had done in his letter to the Ephesians (Rev. 2:5). "Repent now," our Lord said, "or else I will come unto you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). If the Christians at Pergamos were not in any danger from the corrupt people among them, why did the Lord say, "I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth?"

Most Bible readers are familiar with the church of the

Laodiceans. Christ severely criticized them of being lukewarm and neither cold nor hot. He wished they were either cold or hot. "So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16). Christ does not accuse them of being sexually immoral, of worshiping idols or of teaching false doctrine. The Laodiceans did not care about their relationship to God or did not care enough. They made the Lord sick at his stomach, figuratively speaking. He threatened to spew them out of his mouth. The Greek word translated "spew" is *emesai* from which we get our word "emetic." An emetic is a substance that induces vomiting. In very simple language, Jesus told the Laodiceans they made him want to vomit.

Will our Lord vomit out his faithful children? You know he will not. We know that those who are in danger of being spewed out of the Lord's mouth are those who have apostatized. They were members of the body of Christ, but trusted in their wealth and position – not in the Lord. The Laodiceans boasted: "We are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." The Lord held a different view of them. "You do not know that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). The Lord exhorted them:

I counsel of you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent (Rev. 3:18-19).

The word "repent" is the same verb and in the same tense as the word Jesus used in his warning to the churches in Ephesus and Pergamos. Christ demanded that the Laodiceans repent immediately. Were they in danger of apostatizing or had they already apostatized?

I have no intention of specifically identifying some

former faithful churches of Christ that have now joined the ranks of the denominations. But I shall spell out what some churches have done and are still doing. I think of some churches of Christ that have decided to defy the Lord's prohibitions about women preachers. One church in the northeastern part of the United States has announced its intentions of using women in every aspect of the church's work. They endorse women preachers, in spite of the Paul's inspired advice to the contrary. Paul admonished: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12). Has that church apostatized from the faith?

The same church endorses having women elders. Did not Paul tell Timothy and Titus that a bishop or elder must be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6)? Do the leaders in that church believe they know more about the will of God than an inspired apostle? When it becomes acceptable in the sight of God for a woman to be the husband of one wife, women could qualify to be elders. That cannot happen. So churches that are concerned about following the New Testament pattern cannot have women preachers or elders or deacons or song leaders.

One church of Christ not only leans toward having women leaders in the church — it may already have them — it also has introduced instrumental music in its evening worship services and has employed a preacher who denies what the New Testament teaches on baptism and on other vital subjects. That congregation and others in our brotherhood seem to be determined to join with the denominations in ignoring biblical precepts and commands. From the information that church has published, it appears to want to increase church attendance so badly that it will corrupt New Testament worship to gain its goal.

Some churches of Christ have hired preachers who embrace some elements of Calvinism. For example, two preachers wrote a book in which they affirmed: We cannot add one whit to our salvation. If we claim to be able to do so, we are lying. Have these preachers ever considered such

words as “do,” “ought,” “work,” “abide,” “remain,” and “obey?” Surely all Christians have a strong desire to be awarded “glory, honor and peace.” Do you know what Paul teaches about our enjoying these wonderful blessings? They are given to “every man who works good, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile” (Rom. 2:10). Could that possibly mean that those who fail to work good will not be given glory, honor and peace? If it means that – and you know it cannot mean otherwise – how can anyone preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone?

Do you believe that we have to be righteous to inherit the kingdom of God? Paul strongly affirms that the unrighteous shall not to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). How do we become righteous? Is it wholly of God, as Calvinists and some apostate preachers among churches of Christ, teach? If righteousness has nothing to do with our conduct, what did the apostle John mean in the following verses? “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:29)? If we fail to do righteousness, are we still born of God?

Please listen again to the apostle John.

Little children, let no man deceive you: he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous....In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:7, 10).

What absolutely amazes me is how those who preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone totally ignore these and similar biblical passages. The late Dr. James Montgomery Boice, one of America’s most influential Evangelical theologians in the twentieth century, wrote two books: **Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?** (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001) and **The Doctrines of Grace** (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002). Dr. Boice was a very capable scholar and normally a very careful scholar, but not one time did he mention any

verse — either from Acts or from Romans or from 1 John — that demands that we do righteousness. Dr. R. C. Sproul, another of very prominent Evangelical scholar, wrote a book with the title, **Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995). Dr. Sproul makes no reference to doing righteousness.

I want it clearly understood that I am not questioning the honesty of James Montgomery Boice or of R. C. Sproul. But I cannot understand how anyone can overlook those passages from 1 John. Faithful preachers of the gospel from Pentecost onward have emphasized obeying the gospel. They have done so because the Bible does. Why are they changing in our day? Are they trying to fall in with the fleeting fashions of this world (Rom. 12:2)?

I have some questions for you to consider before our time expires today. What should you do if the church of which you are a member begins moving in the wrong direction? Do you remain with that church? Do you think perhaps you can lead it back to the old paths? You must decide at what point you can no longer have fellowship with a church that is apostatizing. You cannot remain silent when error is being taught and practiced. You can damage your spiritual standing with God if you continue have fellowship with an unfaithful church. Did you know that the word “fellowship” means having something in common? What do you have in common with churches that are preaching and practicing error? You should come out from such churches and seek to work and worship with one that follows the New Testament pattern. Churches as well as individuals can apostatize.



## Chapter 9

# Christ On David's Throne

While there are countless disagreements and controversies in the religious world, there is almost universal agreement among Bible believers that Christ would come into the world to sit on David's throne. What did the eighth century B. C. prophet have in mind when he wrote:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace shall be no end, upon on the throne of David, and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord will perform it (Isa. 9:6-7)?

I am very fortunate to have in my study some of the greatest commentaries ever written on the prophecy of Isaiah. I shall read brief excerpts from some of these scholarly commentaries. Dr. Edward Young was one of America's greatest Hebrew scholars. His commentary on **The Book of Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965) makes the following observations on the expression, "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom":

It had earlier been promised that David's throne would endure forever, and hence the description of Messiah's reign is identified with that of David (volume 1, p. 343).

In his **Exposition of Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), Dr. H. C. Leupold, a distinguished Lutheran scholar, affirms: "At this point he (that is, the child of Isaiah 9) is

definitely identified with the famous throne of David" (volume 1, p. 187). For many years, Dr. Joseph Addison Alexander taught at Princeton Theological Seminary. His book, **The Prophecies of Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976, a reprint, 1865), makes basically the same point as do Edward Young and H. C. Leupold. Please listen.

The endless increase of power and prosperity on the throne of David means of course that the Prince, whose reign was to be thus powerful and prosperous, would be a descendant of David. This is indeed a repetition and explanation of a promise given to David...and repeatedly referred to by him. Hence the Messiah is not only called the Branch or Son of David, but David himself. The two reigns are identified, not merely on account of an external resemblance or a typical relation, but because the one was really a restoration or continuation of the other (p. 204).

The angel of the Lord identified Jesus Christ as the Son of the Highest who would reign on the throne of David.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for you have found favor with God. And, behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. And he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:30-33).

For Bible believers, there should be no misunderstanding about Christ's coming into the world to reign on the throne of David.

But I have some questions for you to consider. When was Jesus to begin his reign on the throne of David? Is Christ already reigning on David's throne or does his reign begin at some indefinite time in the future? There are preachers and



theologians who insist that Christ is potentially king, but he is not king in act and in fact. Their argument goes somewhat as follows: Because the Jews rejected their king, God could not establish the kingdom the Old Testament prophets had predicted. Have those preachers forgotten Isaiah fifty-three?

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he does not open his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken (Isa. 53:7-8).

The Jews' rejection of Christ was no surprise to God. He knew all along the Jews would reject their king.

When our Lord was being tried before Pilate, the Roman governor asked Jesus, "Are you king of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, You have said so" (Matt. 27:11). Does Christ's answer mean he was confessing to Pilate that he was indeed the king of the Jews? Dr. A. T. Robertson's scholarly set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), affirms: "By his answer ('You have said so') Jesus confesses that he is" king of the Jews (volume 1, p. 225). In view of Christ's words, how can anyone deny that he is now king over his kingdom?

If Christ is not king now, what is the meaning of Paul's words to Timothy?

I give you charge in the sight of God, who quickens all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that you keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:13-15).

Christ will not become the “blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of Lords.” He is now the “King of kings and Lord of Lords.” The book of Revelation teaches the same truth.

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they who are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful (Rev. 17:14).

We know the prophets predicted that Christ would reign on David’s throne. We know that an angel of God told Mary that the Lord God would give unto her son the throne of David (Luke 1:32). We know that Christ confessed to Pilate that he came into the world to become king (Matt. 27:11). We also know that both Paul (1 Tim. 6:15) and John (Rev. 17:14) called Jesus Christ “King of kings and Lord of lords.” But I have not yet established the time the Lord began to reign over his kingdom. But before I do that, I must say a few words about the kingdom. Is the kingdom of God on earth now or must we wait at some future date for the kingdom? If the kingdom is not now on earth, Christ could not be a king.

Jesus promised his disciples:

Upon this rock (that is, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against. And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

Did Christ build one institution—the church—and give to the apostles the keys to another institution—the kingdom? In case you may be having difficulty answering my question, we must remember that the early members of the church were in the kingdom.

In his brief letter to the Christians at Colosse, Paul reminded them that they had been delivered (or rescued) from the “power of darkness” and “translated into the kingdom

of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Both verbs— "has delivered" and "has translated" are past tense. The delivery from the power of darkness and the translation into the kingdom God's dear Son had already occurred. The Christians at Colosse were not waiting for the delivery and translation; that had already taken place. At least, that is what the language of this verse requires. How could the Colossian Christians be translated (or transferred) into a kingdom that was still in the future?

The apostle John emphasized the same truth I have just read to you from Colossians 1:13. He informed his readers:

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9).

Did John really mean he was "in the kingdom of Jesus Christ?" If he were in the kingdom, the kingdom had to exist. It is not possible to be in a non-existent kingdom.

Now let us turn to Acts 2 to learn when Jesus began to reign on David's throne. Acts 2, as you almost certainly know, records the events that transpired on the birthday of the Lord's church. Luke tells us that Peter, the other apostles and thousands of Jews from many areas were present for the day of Pentecost. God himself endorsed by various miracles the apostle Peter's preaching. Peter quoted from the prophet Joel and said the events on that day were a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16-21). After Peter had quoted the words of Joel, he challenged the Jews:

You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves know.

He then indicted the Jews for their part in the crucifixion of Christ. Christ's enemies believed they had finally gotten rid of Christ when they killed him. But God raised him from the

dead. It simply was not possible that death could hold the Son of God. Peter told his audience that God had revealed to David that Jesus – not David – would be raised from the dead.

For David speaks concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was made glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known unto me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of the joy of thy countenance (Acts 2:22-28).

When the ancient Jews read those words from Psalm 16, they almost certainly believed David was predicting his own resurrection. If they believed that, the apostle Peter hastened to correct their misunderstanding. Please listen to Peter.

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his grave is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne (Acts 2:29-30).

How could language be simpler than that? Psalm 16 could not possibly be applied to David. David was still dead and in his tomb. By divine inspiration, king David, being a prophet of God, predicted the coming of Christ to sit on his throne.

If you think I may have exaggerated what David had in mind, please listen carefully.

He (that is, David) seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the

Holy Spirit, he has shed forth this, which you now see and hear. For David has not ascended into the heavens: but he says himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool (Acts 2:31-35).

Let me summarize very briefly what I have emphasized thus far. Isaiah foretold that Christ would sit on David's throne (Isa. 9:7). The angel of the Lord informed Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). The apostles Paul (1 Tim. 6:15) and John (Rev. 17:14) referred to Christ as "King of kings and Lord of Lords." Our Lord confessed to Pilate that he had come into the world to be king (Matt. 27:11). Peter's sermon on Pentecost quoted king David as affirming that God would raise up Christ to sit on David's throne (Acts 2:30).

Now please listen to the climax to the apostle Peter's sermon on Pentecost. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made this Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). We are aware of the meaning of the word "lord." It refers to one who has absolute authority over others. The apostle Matthew does not use the word "lord" in his record of the Great Commission, but what else could he have had in mind? Jesus said, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Christ asked his disciples, "Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say unto you" (Luke 6:46)?

The word "Christ" comes from the Greek *christos* which means the anointed one. The noun *christos* from the verb *chrio* which means to anoint. We know from our reading of the Old Testament that both priests and kings were anointed. But the context of Acts 2 does not apply to Christ's priesthood. Peter was speaking of Christ's reign on the throne of David. Christ was the anointed king sent from heaven to serve as King of kings and Lord of lords. The author of Hebrews commented: "But unto the Son he says, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom" (Heb. 1:8). Our Lord Jesus Christ "must reign,

till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

The Jews on Pentecost had sinned grievously by crucifying their own Messiah. Peter's sermon had cut or pierced them to the heart. They were fully aware of their sin against God. The Jews were honest enough to know of their failures and to seek relief from their guilt. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? Peter quoted Joel as saying, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). The Jews were calling on the name of the Lord by asking Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They wanted to know what to do to be saved. I am not going to insult your intelligence by telling you that they do not have to do anything to be saved. Tragically, that is what some Calvinist preachers teach. But not one preacher in the books of Acts ever taught that.

The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to tell the believing Jews on Pentecost:

Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort them saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation (Acts 2:38-41).

Incidentally, that last phrase is passive: "Be saved from this crooked generation."

When the Jews on Pentecost responded to the Lord's command by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:41), were they saved and citizens in the kingdom of heaven? The word "citizenship" is used of members of the body of Christ. Paul urged the Philippians:

Only let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that

you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

He also reminded the Philippians: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). The Greek verb, "let conversation," is from the word *politeuomai*. The word involves behaving as a good citizen. The word "conversation" is Philippians 3:20 is a noun, *politeuma*, and is usually translated "citizenship." These words prove beyond any doubt that we are now citizens in the kingdom of God – not will be citizens – but citizens here and now.

I have one final question for you. How does one become a citizen in the kingdom of heaven, the church of the living God? Even though our parents may be devout citizens of the kingdom, we do not become citizens of the kingdom because of their relationship to God. We must decide on our own to become Christians and render obedience to the gospel. Is that not what Jesus told Nicodemus? Our Lord said to this prominent Jewish ruler:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus says unto 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, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of the water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

Neither Peter or Paul or Philip or Ananias ever specifically told a man to be born again. Will you please give attention to what these men told alien sinners to do in order to become citizens in the kingdom of God? Peter commanded the believing Jews on Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Paul reminded the Galatians:

For you are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26-27).

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them....And when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:5, 12).

Ananias instructed Saul of Tarsus: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

If you are not a citizen in the kingdom of heaven, the church of the living God, will you confess your faith in Christ and be baptized into him this very day?



## Chapter 10

### Christ And His Bible

**D**r. Harold Lindsell, one of the founding professors of Fuller Theological Seminary, precipitated a scholarly controversy over the nature of biblical inspiration. In 1976 Dr. Lindsell published a book with the intriguing title, **The Battle for the Bible** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House). The thesis of Dr. Lindsell's book is very simple: If we compromise on the inerrancy of scripture, we will likely compromise on other biblical teachings. If the Bible is not inerrant, that is, if it has errors in it, where do we draw the line between what is true and what is not true? On the dust cover of Dr. Lindsell's book, W. A. Criswell affirms:

Dr. Lindsell has provided us with a remarkable diagnostic evaluation of the blow-by-blow encounter between those who accept the Bible as infallible and inerrant and those for whom subjective experience is the criterion by which the Bible is judged. In a scrupulously fair, thoroughly penetrating, missionary-minded endeavor, the editor of Christianity Today has provided for the evangelical world a challenge to remain faithful to the Book that has been the 'light to our path'.... Specificity and courage mark every page of this plea on behalf of the Holy Book.

In 1979 Dr. Lindsell took up his theme again in a book with the title, **The Bible in the Balance: A Further Look at the BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House). Dr. Lindsell gives us insight into the purpose of his newer book.

I wish to address myself to the objections and questions raised by those who disagree with me. Moreover, I wish to add to the case I presented in

the first book, so that even the most obdurate will have to admit there is a problem of belief regarding the trustworthiness of Scripture. Not only with matters having to do with history, science and the cosmos, but also theological matters having to do with faith and practice, both directly and indirectly (front dust cover).

One brief statement from Dr. Lindsell's second book outlines the seriousness of the battle for the Bible.

If the Bible contains both truth and error, it differs from no other book in the world. And if truth is mixed with error, who is to decide which parts are true and which parts are not true (p. 12)?

The first attack against the word of God did not originate with John Shelby Spong or with any other modern radical theologian. It came from the devil himself. He questioned the truthfulness or the appropriateness of what God told Adam and Eve. The English Standard Version quotes Satan as asking Eve, "Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'" (Gen. 3:1)? Satan's purpose was to convince Eve that God had not actually forbidden her to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or to show her how unconcerned God was for her welfare. In any case, Satan attacked what God actually said to Adam and Eve. He has continued to attack the Bible ever since.

One of the crucial questions relating to the nature of biblical inspiration is our Lord's attitude toward his Bible – the Old Testament. Dr. Lindsell's book, **The Battle for the Bible**, quotes Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, regarding the attitudes of liberal scholars who denied biblical infallibility:

H. J. Cadbury, Harvard professor and one of the more extreme New Testament critics of the last generation, once declared that he was far more sure as a mere historical fact that Jesus held to the common view of an infallible Bible than that Jesus

believed in his own messiahship. Adolph Harnack, greatest church historian of modern times, insists that Christ was one with His apostles, the Jews and the early Church, in complete commitment to the infallible authority of the Bible. John Knox, author of what is perhaps the most highly regarded recent life of Christ, states that there can be no question that this view of the Bible was taught by the Lord himself (p. 43).

I shall devote our study today to the topic, "Christ and His Bible."

All serious Bible students are familiar with our Lord's temptations in the wilderness. Christ had fasted forty days and forty nights and was very hungry. Satan said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Could Christ have turned the stones into bread? He created the universe and could have just as easily turned the stones into bread as he turned water into wine, if that had been the Lord's will. Instead, Jesus Christ told Satan: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:1-4). I shall not delineate the other two temptations, but I must remind you that Jesus responded in the same way to all three temptations: "It is written" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

What is the significance of the expression, "It is written?" Dr. R. C. H. Lenski's outstanding commentary, **The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel** (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), says concerning the term, "It is written":

The remarkable thing is that Jesus meets every assault with a word of Scripture: 'It is written,' (is) the perfect tense with the implication: 'and once written, now stands forever' (p. 144).

Dr. William Hendriksen's commentary on **The Gospel of Matthew** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973) makes this pertinent observation regarding Christ's use of scripture:

For him the Old Testament Scriptures, as interpreted by himself, were evidently the ultimate touchstone of the truth for life and doctrine, the final court of appeal for the reason (p. 227).

Christ used the scriptures to settle difficulties or misunderstandings among the Jews. The Pharisees came to Jesus with a question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause" (Matt. 19:3)? Among the Jews there were two basic positions regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. On one hand, the Jewish rabbi Hillel, the grandfather of Gamaliel, allowed divorce for almost any reason. For example, in the movie "Fiddler on the Roof," there is a scene where a rabbi told a group of men, "If your wife burns the bread, you can divorce her." Some of Hillel's followers believed a man could divorce his wife if she talked so loudly the neighbors could hear her.

On the other hand, Shammai, another Jewish rabbi, believed a man could divorce his wife only if she were guilty of some uncleanness. Shammai no doubt based his view on these words from the book of Deuteronomy.

When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house (Deut. 24:1).

The Pharisees seem to be asking our Lord, "Which of these Jewish rabbis is teaching the truth—Hillel or Shammai?"

Our Lord did not directly answer the Jews' question. Instead, he asked the Pharisees: "Have you not read?" What should the Jews have read to provide an answer to their own question? Jesus was asking them if they had read their Bible—our Old Testament. Please listen to our Lord's question.

Have you not read, that he who made them in the beginning made them male and female, and said,

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh (Matt. 19:4-5)?

Jesus Christ was referring to two passages from the book of Genesis. Our Lord quotes God the Father as saying:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Liberal biblical critics believe the first eleven chapters of Genesis constitute myths. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth and the life," did not have that view of the scriptures. He endorsed the Genesis account of the creation of man and of the distinction between the sexes. God created us male and female. Our Lord who has all authority in heaven and on earth bound on the human family the right relationship of the sexes. If the scriptures said nothing more about homosexuality, this would be adequate to furnish God's attitude toward such behavior. The Son of God forbade male-male and female-female sexual liaisons. From God's viewpoint, same-sex marriage is an oxymoron.

In Christ's discussion with the Pharisees, he also quoted and bound these words from Genesis: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they two shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The Holy Spirit directed Paul to write:

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh: but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh (Eph. 5:28-31).

The Sadducees, a less numerous but more powerful sect among the Jews, challenged our Lord's teaching on the resurrection of the dead. They said to Jesus,

Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers: and the first, when he married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her (Matt. 22:23-28).

The Sadducees almost certainly believed they had placed our Lord between a rock and a hard place. How could Christ escape the dilemma the Sadducees had presented to him?

Please listen to our Lord's response to the Sadducees.

You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:29-32).

Christ infers that the Sadducees would not have held such views of the resurrection had they been familiar with their own scriptures. He said very plainly: "You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."

He asked the Sadducees the same question he had asked the Pharisees: "Have you not read?" Jesus was telling the Jews that the word of God as revealed through Moses would have provided them with the information they needed concerning the resurrection of the dead. Please also notice that Jesus asked the Sadducees: "Have you not read that which was spoken

to you?" Moses had lived hundreds of years before Christ and the Sadducees were having this confrontation. And yet Jesus said to the Jews, "Moses spoke to you." In other words, the message contained in the law of Moses was still binding in the days of Christ's personal ministry. I plan to return to this passage before our time expires today.

Our Lord Jesus Christ used the prophecies of the Old Testament to outline his mission and message. Luke records:

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set a liberty them who are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:14-19).

Christ was quoting the words of Isaiah 61. I shall read the full text from Isaiah 61:1-3.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he has sent me to bind upon the broken-hearted, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

Have you ever taken note of Christ's specific endorsement of some of the most controversial Old Testament people, places and events? For example, Christ accepted the biblical account of the creation of man. He asked the Pharisees, "Have you not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female" (Matt. 19:4)? From Christ's vantage point, was there any possibility that evolution could explain the origin of human beings? From the beginning, God made them male and female. There really is nothing more ridiculous than trying to explain the origin of man by the process of organic or any other kind of evolution.

There was a time when liberal theologians accused Moses of inventing many of the characters discussed in the book of Genesis. They still have many objections to the Old Testament, but very few reputable writers have the audacity to deny the existence of the great Hebrew patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. In his discussion with the Sadducees, Jesus specifically mentioned Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 22:32). In the same chapter, he also referred to king David. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, liberal scholars had wondered if David actually lived and was really the king of Israel. Christ settled that question once and for all (Matt. 22:42).

Modernistic theologians and others have lampooned the idea that a whale could swallow a man. Let us examine the story as Jesus told it. The scribes and the Pharisees demanded of Jesus, "Master, we would see a sign." Christ said to them,

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall be no sign given to it, but the sign of Jonah: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:38-40).

Some comments on this passage are in order.

That Jesus believed the story cannot be questioned. In fact, if the story is just a myth and if Jesus accepted it as a



myth, can we believe the prediction about his resurrection? Besides, liberal theologians ought not to question an incident until they have fully investigated all the particulars of that situation. The word "whale" in the King James Version cannot be justified. Do you remember how the book of Jonah refers to the creature that swallowed Jonah? "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). The Old Testament account says nothing about a whale.

Dr. Jack Lewis's commentary on **The Gospel According to Matthew** (Austin: Sweet Publishing Company, 1976) says concerning the great fish:

The Hebrew word *dag* and the Greek word *ketos* designate sea creatures of undefined species. The King James Version and the Revised Standard Version create an unnecessary problem by their rendering *whale*. Whales are not in the Mediterranean and there is also the perpetual question whether or not one could swallow a man (volume 1, pp. 178-179).

Incidentally, Jack Lewis has a doctorate in Greek from Harvard and a doctorate in Hebrew from Hebrew Union. The English Standard Version translates the Greek *ketos* "great fish." The New American Standard Bible renders the Greek "sea monster," as do The New Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible.

Genesis 19 tells the story of the wickedness of Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plains. God sent a messenger to warn Lot of the impending destruction of those wicked cities. God's messenger said to Lot: "Escape for your life; look not behind you, neither stay in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed" (Gen. 19:17). Lot's family escaped from the city, "but his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (Gen. 19:26). Does anyone actually believe a human being could become a pillar of salt? Please listen to these words from the book of Luke.

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought and sold, they planted and built; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he that shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

Now listen carefully. Jesus said very simply: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:28-32). If Lot's wife did not turn to a pillar of salt, as the book of Genesis affirms, why did not Jesus correct that view? After all, he knew the story. Honesty demanded that he tell the truth about Lot's wife.

In that same chapter in Luke, Christ endorsed the Genesis account of the universal flood.

And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27).

There are other examples of Christ's use of persons, places and things from the Old Testament, but I shall have to reserve them for another lesson.

In his great Sermon on the Mount, Christ informed his apostles:

Think not that I come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-19).

Dr. Jack Lewis comments on the words “jot” and “tittle”: “The *iota* (“jot” in the King James Version), the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, while the *dot* (tittle in the King James Version) is perhaps a stroke on a Hebrew letter that distinguishes certain letters from other similar letters” (volume 1, p. 87). Of this we can be absolutely sure: Jesus Christ accepted the entire Old Testament as being divinely inspired.

Christ accused the Sadducees of not knowing the scriptures or the power of God. In that context, he stressed the importance of the tense of the verb “to be.” He quoted God as saying, “I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.” Christ added: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32). God did not say, “I was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.” He said, “I am the God of Abraham.” Liberal theologians may not fully understand what Jesus was teaching in this context, but his listeners knew. The Sadducees had no response to Christ’s argument. If they accepted the Old Testament, they had to agree that Christ’s argument was airtight.

I have given you examples of our Lord’s specific and unequivocal endorsement of people, places and incidents in the Old Testament. Now let us turn to his endorsement of the Old Testament as a whole. On one occasion, Jesus claimed: “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). The Jews were so angry they took up stones to kill him. Christ asked them, “Many good works I have shown unto you from my Father; for which of these good works do you stone me?” The Jews denied they were thinking of stoning him for doing good works, but for making himself God. Jesus asked the Jews:

Is it not written in your law, I said, You are gods?  
If he called them gods, unto whom the word of  
God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say  
you of him whom the Father sanctified, and sent  
into the world, You blaspheme: because I said, I  
am the Son of God? If I do not the works of the  
Father, do not believe me. But if I do, though you

do not believe me, believe the works: that you may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him (John 10:31-38).

Time will not allow a complete analysis of this text, but there is one expression in it we must not overlook in our examination of the topic, "Christ and His Bible." Jesus strongly affirmed: "Scripture cannot be broken." In 1944 Theodore Engelder wrote a book with the title, **Scripture Cannot Be Broken: Six Objections to Verbal Inspiration Examined in the Light of Scripture** (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House). One brief excerpt from W. F. Arndt's Preface to the book shows the position that Engelder took on Christ's attitude toward his Bible.

The truth is implied that whatever the Scriptures say is inviolable, that nothing of what they utter, let it appear ever so insignificant, may be regarded as erroneous (p. 4).

Luke was a Greek physician who wrote the book in the New Testament that bears his name. He records a meeting between Christ and two disciples who were traveling on the road to Emmaus. As those two disciples were walking along, they were discussing the events that had transpired in Jerusalem. Jesus approached the men and asked them what they were discussing. One of the men named Cleopas asked Christ, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there these days?" Jesus said to the men, "What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and in word before God and all the people." They then explained what they knew about the events surrounding his life and death.

Then he said to them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in

all the scriptures the things concerning himself  
(Luke 24:13-27).

Toward the end of Christ's conversation with the two men, he said to them,

These are the words that I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me (Luke 24:44).

The expression, the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms, encompasses the entire Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi. There is so much more I would like to say about our Lord's attitude toward and his use of the Old Testament scriptures, but time will not allow it today.

If Jesus Christ, the Son of almighty God, loved the Old Testament so much and used it so frequently, what should be our attitude toward God's word, including both the Old and the New Testaments? Paul's advice to the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus provides a wonderful answer to my question and a fitting close to our lesson today.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified (Acts 20:32).



## Chapter 11

# Christianity Is What It Is

If someone were to ask you to define New Testament Christianity, how would you respond? Do you believe there is such a definite entity as Christianity? Do you believe we can know what it is? If we cannot know the genuine article, how shall we be able to recognize counterfeits? As you know, there are hundreds of different groups in the United States and throughout the world that claim to be practicing Christianity. You also know that not all of these groups can be true to the New Testament. So how do we know what Christianity really is? Our lesson today has the title, "Christianity Is What It Is."

The subject of our lesson may sound somewhat strange to you, but I hope to make it meaningful before our time expires. All reasonable human beings know that we must follow the laws of logic to be able to communicate intelligently with one another. For example, one of the fundamental laws of logic is called the "law (or principle) of non-contradiction." This principle says that opposites cannot both be true at the same time and in the same way. Philosophers usually affirm: "Being cannot be nonbeing; for they are opposites." You do not have to read Plato or Aristotle to know the validity of the law of non-contradiction. There are many other laws of logic, such as, the principle of causality and the principle of the excluded middle. But I would like to emphasize briefly the principle of identity. In the **Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics** (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), Dr. Norman Geisler defines the principle of identify as follows: "A thing must be identical to itself. If it were not, then it would not be itself" (p. 250).

What Christianity is does not depend on what I think or what you think or what John Shelby Spong thinks. Christianity

is what it is regardless of your thoughts or mine or anyone else's. Dr. J. Gresham Machen was one of Evangelical's most capable scholars. He taught for years at Princeton University until Princeton's leadership decided to deny and to oppose most of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Dr. Machen departed from Princeton in 1929 to found Westminster Seminary and what is now the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Dr. Machen's book, **New Testament Greek for Beginners** (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), is probably the most popular textbook on the Greek language ever written. Many of us would have difficulty doing our work without Dr. Machen's Greek textbook. I keep it on a shelf beside my desk.

I shall read two rather lengthy excerpts from Dr. Machen's books that I believe will help us in understanding what Christianity is. The first excerpt comes from his book, **What Is Christianity?** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951). Please listen to this distinguished orthodox Presbyterian.

To say that Christianity is this or that is very different from saying that it ought to have been this or that, or that the ideal religion, whatever its name, would be this or that. Christianity is an historical phenomenon like the State of Pennsylvania or the United States of America or the Kingdom of Prussia or the Roman Empire, and it must be investigated by historical means. It may turn out to be a good thing or it may turn out to be a bad thing—that is another question—but if we are to tell what it is we must take a look at it as it has existed in the world (p. 18).

The second excerpt comes from Dr. Machen's book, **Christianity and Liberalism** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923). Dr. Machen asks, "Is it true, then, that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life?" He answers,



The question can be settled only by an examination of the beginnings of Christianity. Recognition of that fact does not involve any acceptance of Christian belief; it is a matter of common sense and common honesty. At the foundation of the life of every corporation is the incorporation paper, in which the objects of the corporation are set forth. Other objects may be vastly more desirable than those objects, but if the directors use the name and resources of the corporation to pursue the other objects they are acting *ultra vires* (that is, beyond the scope or in excess of the legal power of authority) of the corporation. So it is with Christianity. It is perfectly conceivable that the originators of the Christian movement had no right to legislate for subsequent generations; but at any rate they did have an inalienable right to legislate for all generations that should choose to bear the name 'Christian.' It is conceivable that Christianity may now have to be abandoned, and another religion substituted for it; but at any rate the question of what Christianity is can be determined only by an examination of the beginnings of Christianity (p. 20).

How anyone would even attempt to deny or to refute Dr. Machen's conclusions is beyond my comprehension. He is saying exactly what my topic suggests, "Christianity is what it is."

Before we examine some of the fundamentals of the faith, I shall refer to two books written by John Shelby Spong, former bishop of the Episcopal Church and one of the most radical theologians in the country. Not one of his books – not even one – makes any sense from a Christian viewpoint, although Spong claims to be a Christian and to have great affection for the Bible. One of Spong's books has the title, **Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998). John Shelby Spong has a legal right – although not a

moral right—to start his own religion. But it is the height of arrogance for any man to presume to change what God himself has revealed in his word. He is within his right as a human being to deny the scriptures, to ridicule those who believe the Bible to be the word of God, but he is has no right to change Christianity. What he would have left of Christianity after his revisions and alterations of the word would have no resemblance to New Testament Christianity. One brief statement from Spong's book will convince any open-minded person of his departure from the truth of God's word.

All evangelical and missionary activity designed to convert the heathen, are base born. They are expressions of our sense of superiority and our hostility toward those who are different (p. 225).

But did not our Lord command his apostles:

Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16)?

Does Spong know better than our Lord Jesus Christ?

Spong's second book is entitled **A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying & How a New Faith Is Being Born** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001). Does not John Shelby Spong realize that it is the liberal churches that are dying? Again I shall read just one brief statement from this book.

I do not believe that this Jesus could or did in any literal way raise the dead, overcome a medically diagnosed paralysis, or restore sight to a person born blind or to one in whom the ability to see had been physiologically destroyed" (p. 4).

Spong asks if a person can dismiss so much of Christianity, as he has arrogantly done, and remain in the Christian faith (p. 7). The answer is an unequivocal NO. Nobody can deny all or most of the fundamentals of the faith and still be a

Christian. He may still have some kind of religion, but it is not New Testament Christianity.

You can know for sure that I cannot in the short time that remains outline all or even most of the great truths of Christianity. But I must mention some of those that are under attack by liberal theologians like Spong and other members of the Jesus Seminar. I shall begin as Moses did in the book of Genesis: "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1). Am I saying that liberal theologians are denying the existence of God? No—although that is unquestionably true for some. I am arguing that many liberal theologians are denying the nature of the God of the Bible. In his book, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, Spong says the Jewish God of the Old Testament "was assumed to hate anyone that the nation of Israel hated" (p. 47). If a freshman seminary student made such a logical blunder, he would disqualify himself for further studies in theology. Spong denies that the God he worships is personal. The God we worship, according to Spong and Freud, came into existence because of human need—not because he actually exists.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is all-powerful, all-wise, all-benevolent, always present, eternal, unchangeable and personal. The following words from the Psalmist are echoed either implicitly or explicitly in every chapter of the Bible.

Where shall I go from thy Spirit? Or where shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hides not from thee; but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are alike to thee (Psa. 139:7-12).

Spong denies that God is personal, but the Bible writers

certainly believed it. So must all who would claim the honor of being Christians.

Moses also affirmed and the rest of the Bible confirms: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). I am fully aware of the evolution-creation controversy, but from a biblical viewpoint, the controversy was settled many thousands of years ago. There is no possibility of harmonizing the teaching of scripture with any theory of evolution, whether organic or theistic. John 1, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 teach very plainly that God created the world through Christ. I shall read only Paul's teaching in the Colossian letter. Christ:

...is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:15-17).

There is no way to fit evolution into these inspired words. God through Christ created all the animals and man.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Our Lord Jesus Christ endorsed that view (Matt. 19:3-6). Men did not evolve from the lower animals; the God of heaven created human beings. Evolution destroys the foundation of New Testament Christianity and makes men and women nothing more than highly evolved animals. Evolution is a blatant repudiation of New Testament Christianity – a fact that evolutionists almost universally accept, although some who

call themselves Christians deny. Can Christianity encompass evolution? Absolutely not!

The God who created the world, including man, ordained the marriage relationship. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Jesus quoted these words from Genesis 2 and then added: "Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:5-6). Paul stressed the same truth (Eph. 5:31). The marriage of one man and one woman – one male and one female – is God's plan and cannot be altered without bringing the wrath of God on our heads. New Testament Christianity endorses God's original plan as outlined in Genesis.

The book of Genesis records the story of man's fall into sin (Gen. 3). Would it surprise you some modern theologians believe that man fell upward, that the Bible's account is nothing more than myth? And before the foundation of the world, God had a plan in mind by which men could be reconciled to him. Is that not what Paul meant when he wrote:

Unto me, who are less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent (or for the purpose) that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to his eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11)?

God knew from eternity past that man would sin. He initiated a plan whereby man's sins could be forgiven and he could have the hope of eternal life.

The plan for saving man came to fruition when God sent Jesus Christ into the world to die for our sins.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

The apostle Paul explained how God gave his Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were sinners Christ died for us. Much more, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:6-10).

Liberal theologians deny that God sent his Son to die to redeem us from sin, but no true Christian can reject that truth. "Without the shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

Paul says that God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh: and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:3-4). Some liberal theologians accuse Paul of arguing that Christ became the Son of God at the time of his resurrection. That is an absolutely and inexcusably false position. That is not what Paul is teaching in Romans 1. The word "declared" is from the Greek *horizo* – the Greek word from which we derive our word "horizon." Dr. A. T. Robertson's set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), correctly states:

He was the Son of God in his preincarnate state...  
and still so after his Incarnation, but it was the

Resurrection of the dead that definitely marked Jesus off as God's Son and his prophecy that he would rise on the third day....The resurrection of Christ is the miracle of miracles (volume 4, p. 324).

Jesus Christ was deity before he came to this earth; he was deity while he walked among men; he is deity now.

The New Testament plainly teaches that God the Son became a man. "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). John the Baptist baptized our Lord Jesus Christ to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:13). Christ began his personal ministry by preaching: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Matthew outlines Christ's ministry as follows:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto them all sick people who were taken with different diseases and torments, and those who were possessed with demons, and those who were epileptics, and those who were paralytics; and he healed them (Matt. 4:23-24).

Christ's enemies—both Jews and Gentiles—crucified him primarily because he claimed to be God manifest in the flesh. While he was suspended between heaven and earth, he prayed for his enemies: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Christ's friend, Joseph of Arimathea, buried our Lord in Joseph's own new tomb. I am sure Christ's enemies thought they had ended both the life of Christ and the new movement he initiated. But he was raised on the third day and appeared to a number of people, including 500 people at one time (1 Cor. 15:6). He then ascended to the Father (Acts 1:9-11). He now reigns with his Father and will return at the end of the age to claim his own.

The apostles and other early Christians began to preach in every community in the then-known world. Their message included faith in God and in his Son Jesus Christ. Those who did not and do not believe in Christ will be condemned (John 8:24). Jesus and his apostles commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31). Jesus promised: If we confess him before men, he will confess us to the Father in the final day (Matt. 10:32-33). He also demanded that we be baptized to have our sins remitted (Mark 16:15-16).

Both Jesus and his apostles require that Christians be holy and righteous. Our Lord said to his disciples:

If a man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul (Matt. 16:24-26)?

If you are not a Christian or not a faithful Christian, will you not obey our Lord and Savior today?



## Chapter 12

### Christ's Return May 21, 2011

If it had been essential for our welfare – either earthly or eternal – for us to know when Christ will return, would not the Lord have told us the date? Since he did not tell us, we do not need to know. The truth is: He told us we cannot know when he is coming again. In his great Sermon on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave his disciples signs of the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:4-35). He then said as plainly as words can be used: “But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36). In these words, our Lord provided an answer to the disciples’ question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3)? He actually informed them there would be no signs.

Jesus said that only his Father knew when he would come the second time. Do you know the meaning of the word “only?” While he was on earth, Jesus did not know the time of his return (Mark 13:32). Do the modern dispensational prophets know more than Christ knew during his earthly pilgrimage? In my judgment, it is the very essence of arrogance for a mere mortal to claim to know what the Jesus denied that anyone can know. Yet the bookstores are filled with books which claim to know the general time of Christ’s second coming. Some dispensationalists have actually set the day. The truth is: nobody knows within a million years the time of Christ’s return.

*The Tennessean* (Wednesday, December 1, 2010) published an article with the title, “Billboards claim Jesus will return on May 21, 2011.” Will that be Eastern Daylight Saving Time or Central Daylight Saving Time? Will it be early in the morning or at noon or in the evening? If a person claims to know the day, should he not know the time of day? Can you understand

how utterly ridiculous such predictions are? Hundreds of predictions have been made since our Lord returned to the Father, but so far, they have been 100% wrong. Do these false prophets have any idea of the damage they do to the cause of Christ? Tragically, they furnish bait for all the enemies of New Testament Christianity. Do they not also understand that when a man makes a prediction that fails of fulfillment that he is a false prophet (Deut. 18:22)?

Who is sponsoring the billboards which claim Christ will return May 21, 2011? The answer is Harold Camping, founder of Family Radio. I do not mean to be unkind or judgmental, but no reputable scholar puts any trust in Harold Camping's speculations about end times. I have time to give you one example. Richard Abanes, the director of the Religious Information Center in Southern California, has written some outstanding books, including **American Militias, Journey into the Light and Cults, New Religious Movements and Your Family**. His book, **End-Time Visions: The Road to Armageddon** (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998)?, exposes many of the end-times predictions. He has a brief discussion of Harold Camping, the man behind the billboards advertising the time of Christ's second coming. Abanes says: "In his bestselling 562-page book, 1994?, Camping wrote: "When September 6, 1994 arrives, no one else can become saved, the end has come." Camping boldly and arrogantly declared: "No book ever written is as audacious and bold as one that claims to predict the timing of the end of the world, and that is precisely what this book does" (p. 94). He claimed to have discovered an "ever-so-slight miscalculation" and revised his date toward the middle of the month. He later pinpointed September 29 and then October 2 and still later he predicted the date would be March 31, 1995 (p. 95). The sad fact is that Camping was not ashamed of his foolish predictions.

Now he is at it again. Like many dispensationalists, Harold Camping claims to base his prediction on Luke 17:26: "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days

of the Son of man." Matthew records a similar statement. "But as the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37). How were the "days of Noah?" Is Christ teaching that before he comes back the world will become as wicked as it was in the days of Noah? The book of Genesis leaves no doubt about the wickedness that brought on the flood. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Is that what Jesus had in mind when he talked to his disciples about his second coming?

There is absolutely no reason for speculating about our Lord's meaning. He tells us in words no one should misunderstand.

And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27).

I must ask you a very simple question: What is wrong about eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage? If these activities are wrong, every person on earth is doomed to hell. Not every person marries or is given in marriage, but every person eats and drinks.

What Jesus Christ was teaching can hardly be ignored. Noah preached to his generation for many, many years. Did the people pay any attention to this "preacher of righteousness," as the Apostle Peter referred to Noah (2 Pet. 2:5)? They went about their usual activities as if nothing were going happen. They almost certainly thought that Noah was some kind of crackpot. There never had been a worldwide flood; so what pay any attention to this old man? When it dawned on them that Noah was right, it was too late for them to make the changes God demanded through Noah.

In his excellent **Commentary on the Gospel of Luke**

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), Norvel Geldenhuys says concerning the expression, "as it was in the days of Noah":

As in the time before the deluge, the great masses of people will, even up to the moment of His advent, be completely engrossed in earthly, material and evanescent affairs and will not be prepared for His coming (p. 441).

Leon Morris's commentary on **The Gospel According to Luke** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) mentions the sinfulness of the people before the flood and then says:

It is not this that Jesus stresses. There is nothing sinful about these activities He lists; they are the stuff of ordinary life. But that is just the point. Those men of old were so taken up in the ordinary affairs of life that they took no notice of Noah (p. 260).

I do not know of any scholarly commentary that takes a different view of the passage.

Doubts and speculations about the Lord's second coming were widespread even in the first century of the Christian era. The apostle Peter tells us what was occurring as early as 64 or 65 A. D. Please listen to the Apostle.

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking in their own lusts: and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation (2 Pet. 3:1-4).

The scoffers or mockers seemed to be saying: "Christ said he was going to come back. He has not come back; therefore he is not coming back." Those scoffers, like many of the scoffers in our day, desperately needed a course in logic.

Just because Christ had not returned at the time the epistle was written—about thirty-five or forty years after Christ ascended to the Father—had nothing to do with the promise. God operates on his time, not on the wishes or speculations of scoffers or even of people who think they can discern from the “signs of the times” when he is coming back.

The scoffers’ argument was simple, but very unreasonable. To be completely honest with you, a sillier argument has never been made. They were saying: “For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” The fathers were evidently the first century generation of Christians. There was no basis for the mockers’ beliefs that Christ would come back in thirty or forty years or even in ten thousand or a hundred thousand years after he left this earth. The scoffers and many modern dispensationalists claim to know much more than they do.

The scoffers were arguing from for the uniformity of nature, which incidentally, is what organic evolutionists do. But nature is not uniform. Besides, God has intervened many times on behalf of his people. Think of the great miracles he used to convince the Egyptian Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt. Think also of the miracles he performed to sustain the Jews through their wandering in that great and terrible wilderness.

The Apostle Peter severely criticized the scoffers for their irrational argument. “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water” (2 Pet. 3:5). The scoffers were not merely ignorant; they were “willingly ignorant.” The English Standard Version renders that expression, “For they deliberately overlook this fact.” In their very useful book, **The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), Cleon Rogers, Jr. and Cleon Rogers III comment on the meaning of the expression, “willingly ignorant”: “to escape notice, to be hidden from; for they shut their eyes to

the fact" (p. 588). Is the Apostle Peter saying: The scoffers could have known and should have known, but they chose not to understand? It is bad to be ignorant; it is far worse to be willingly ignorant.

What fact had the scoffers deliberately overlooked? They had ignored the flood of Noah's day. That fact proved beyond dispute that not "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." God himself determined that mankind had become so corrupt that he had no choice but to cleanse the earth of sinful men. The world that existed during Noah's earthly life:

...being overflowed with water perished....But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:6-7).

When theologians or others attempt to set a date for the end of the age, they need to remember these familiar words: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Most of us are very much conscious of time constraints. My schedule and the schedules of most Americans are regulated by time. God who has existed from eternity past and will exist for future eternity does not consider time as we do. That is the reason Peter told his readers:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

God always delivers on his promises, but he does not consult Harold Camping or John Hagee or Jack Van Impe or any modern prophet about the timing of the fulfillment of those promises. God promised the Israelites he would deliver from Egyptian bondage. Do you suspect that many of the Jews thought God had forgotten his promises? Were there scoffers among the Jewish people who were saying basically

what the scoffers in the Apostle Peter's day were saying: "He said he would deliver us from slavery? He has not kept his promise; therefore he is not going to deliver us."

Please understand that I am not questioning the Lord's second coming. If he is not going to return, as he promised, how can we trust his other promises? The false prophets desperately need to learn the truth Peter outlined in chapter 3, and that is, Christ is coming back, but the time of his coming is of no consequence. Please listen to these words.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

Let us take a few minutes to analyze what the Holy Spirit directed Peter to write.

This verse makes a number of affirmations I shall discuss briefly. Please notice that Peter said: "The day of the Lord will come." The fact that Jesus Christ is coming back to claim his own is one of the most inspiring and encouraging teachings in the New Testament. You are surely aware of the many passages which teach that Christ is coming back to receive his own. Paul assured the Thessalonians:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:14-18).

Peter also affirmed: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." Does that mean we do not and cannot know when he will come? In his Sermon on the Mount of Olives, our Lord himself elaborated on the point Peter made.

Watch therefore: for you do not know what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes (Matt. 24:42-44).

Jesus was not expressing any uncertainty about his coming. He was strongly affirming that human beings cannot know the time. Why have not men and women learned that truth? Why do they keep embarrassing themselves and their followers by showing so little respect for the Son of God and for his word?

When the Lord returns – not if he returns – "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." I need to examine the word "elements." W. E. Vine says the word:

...primarily signifies any first things from which others in a series, or a composite as a whole take their rise; the word denotes an element, a first principle....It is used of the letters of the alphabet, as elements of speech (volume 2, p. 352).

Peter affirmed: "The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

As important as those great truths are, there is one truth in this passage that is far more important. Peter encouraged his readers: Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Pet. 3:11). You cannot know the time of the Lord's return. And there is absolutely



nothing can do about it. But there is something every one of us can do, and that is, make sure we are ready for when he comes, if we are still living. We must always be prepared to meet the Lord in the judgment. Peter further encouraged his readers and all Christians: "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14).

What preparation should Christians make to meet the Lord? The Apostle Peter leaves absolutely no doubt. He demanded that we add the Christian graces—virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. He then observed:

If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But he who lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for it you do these things you shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:5-10).

If you do not do them, have you not already fallen?

What must non-Christians do to be ready for the Lord, if he comes during their lifetime or if they die before he returns? The alien sinner must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God (Acts 8:37). His faith must lead him to repent of his sins (Acts 17:30-31), confess Christ before men (Rom. 10:9-10) and be baptized for the remission of sins. Do you remember what Ananias, the God-sent preacher, told Saul of Tarsus, a penitent believer? "And now why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). I plead with all of us that we walk in the light as Jesus Christ is in the light that we may continue to have the remission of sins.



## Chapter 13

### Does God Accept Us Unconditionally?

The study of Christian evidences has been one of my special interests for more than a half century. I have read dozens and dozens of books on that topic and taught the subject on the college level. Some of my favorite books on Christian evidences were written by Josh McDowell. In 1972 Josh published a book with the title, **Evidence That Demands a Verdict** (Campus Crusade for Christ International). In 1975 he published a companion volume with the title, **More Evidence that Demands a Verdict** (Campus Crusade for Christ International). Since 1975 Josh has published a number of books on various topics, including several books especially designed for young people. Josh's book, **Right from Wrong** (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994) has a great amount of information that would help young people in making moral decisions.

In 2002 Josh McDowell with the aid Bob Hostetler wrote a book for young people and their parents. The new book, **Beyond Belief to Convictions** (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers), seeks to help parents ground their young people in a solid relationship with Christ. Like all of Josh's books, there is much good in this latest volume. I have read it with considerable profit. But there is one dangerous flaw in the book. Josh McDowell argues: "God accepts us unconditionally" (p. 86). He speaks of salvation as a gift and then affirms: The basis for receiving salvation means there is nothing we can do. "God accepts us without condition" (p. 87). I invite you to listen today as I discuss the question, "Does God Accept Us Unconditionally?"

Before I examine the question I have just announced, I must make a very simple explanation. I am not for one moment questioning Josh McDowell's sincerity, nor his complete

devotion to what he believes. I have absolutely no doubt that Josh is honest about his convictions and has a genuine desire to help parents help their children. But honesty and sincerity are not the tests of truth; the Bible is. We must have a "thus says the Lord" for what we preach and practice in the name of Christ. There is not a man on earth who can find authority for preaching that God unconditionally accepts us into the kingdom of the Son of his love. He loves us unconditionally, but he does not accept us unconditionally.

Josh McDowell repeatedly emphasizes that God accepts us without condition. But his own writings contradict that position. In the book, **Beyond Belief to Convictions**, he mentions conditions. He insists that a relationship with God is "available to anyone who responds to his offer...by believing and trusting in Christ" (p. 143). Are believing and trusting conditions for being accepted of God or are they mere suggestions? Josh quotes some verses from the book of Deuteronomy, although he uses **The New Living Translation** which is not a translation but a commentary. I shall read from the King James Version.

And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord your God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command you this day, that the Lord your God shall set you on high above all nations of the earth.... But it shall come to pass, if you will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day; that all the curses shall come upon you, and overtake you.... The Lord shall send upon you cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that you set your hand unto for to do, until you be destroyed, and until you perish quickly; because of the wickedness of your doings, whereby you have forsaken me (Deut. 28:1, 15, 20).

Does any of this sound to you as if God unconditionally accepts men and women?

Josh McDowell, like thousands of other denominational preachers, promotes the sinner's prayer as a means of receiving salvation. In the book, **The Best of Josh McDowell: A Ready Defense** (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1990), compiled by Bill Wilson, Josh outlines what he calls "four spiritual laws." Law four says we must receive Christ through faith. If we must do anything, our acceptance is not unconditional. He encourages his readers to receive Christ immediately through prayer. Faith is a condition, and in Josh's view, the sinner's prayer must also be a condition. Besides, why does he write so many books on Christian evidences if God's acceptance of us is unconditional? Is he not striving in his writings to convince his readers to believe in Christ? But if salvation is unconditional, one does not have to believe in Christ or the word "unconditional" has no meaning.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all discuss the fact that we must meet the conditions God has outlined in his word. Our Lord's invitation according to Matthew reads:

Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

Does the blessing of rest Jesus Christ promised in these beautiful and powerful words presuppose any conditions? If we must come to Christ, if we must take our yokes and learn of him, rest from our labors here and hereafter is not unconditional. If our acceptance were unconditional, we would not be required to come to Christ through faith and we would not have to take our yokes and learn of him.

Before our Lord ascended to the Father, he called his apostles to him and charged them:

Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved: but he who does not believe shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Did those who heard the preaching of the apostles and others have to respond in faith to the gospel message? What did the author of Hebrews mean when he wrote:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6)?

Did you notice the word "must" in this verse from Hebrews? The word "must" means it is necessary; it is essential. In very simple language, faith is a condition for salvation. But so is baptism, if Jesus meant what he said.

Luke tells of an incident involving the Roman governor Pilate. Some Galileans were offering sacrifices to God when Pilate mingled their blood with their sacrifices. Jesus asked his disciples, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?" Our Lord answered his own question: "I tell you, no: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." Christ also asked his disciples:

Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, do you think they were sinners above all men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:1-5).

Those who do not repent are going to perish. Does that sound like unconditional acceptance?

The book of John records the Parable of the Vine and the Branches. The language of that parable makes no sense if God accepts men and women unconditionally. Jesus told his disciples:

I am the vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit (John 15:1-2).

If God accepts us unconditionally, we may want to honor God by bearing fruit, but there is no necessity for doing so. And yet Jesus specifically and emphatically stated: "Every branch that does not bear fruit he takes away." Jesus commanded his followers: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me" (John 15:4). The tense of the verb in the expression, "except you abide in me," is present active and means keep on abiding in me. Is abiding in Jesus Christ optional? It would have to be optional, if God accepts us unconditionally.

Please notice these conditional statements from the Parable of the Vine and the Branches.

If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you....If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love....You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you (John 15:6-7, 10, 14).

If these statements mean what they say, we are not unconditionally made members of the body of Christ and we are not unconditionally kept by the power of God.

How can anyone read the book of Acts and embrace the position that God unconditionally accepts us? Acts does not record one conversion — not even one — where people are informed that God unconditionally accepts them. A brief review of some of the conversions in Acts of the Apostles will establish that truth beyond dispute. Please open your minds and examine with me some of the conversions from Acts.

Acts 2 tells of the spectacular events that occurred on the day of Pentecost. God performed wonderful miracles — the rushing of the mighty wind, the apostles' speaking in

languages they had never learned and the appearance of divided tongues like fire – to inaugurate the kingdom of God and to confirm the preaching of the apostles. Oddly enough, some of the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem explained the wonderful events by saying the apostles were drunk. Peter immediately discounted such ridiculous charges. He then preached about the Messiah the Jews had crucified. The Jews believed their murderous deed had put an effective end to Christ and to the movement he initiated. Peter explained that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Peter's preaching convicted thousands of Jews. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:1-37)?

If Peter and the other apostles had believed God unconditionally accepts people, how would they have answered the Jews' question? They would have been morally bound to say: "There is nothing you can do. God accepts you without conditions." Is that what Josh McDowell would have said to the Jews on Pentecost? Is that not the message most strict Calvinists would give? One Chattanooga preacher told of being asked by a young man, "What must I do to be saved?" The preacher said to the young man, "I am sorry, but there is nothing you can do." The young man responded, "You mean it is too late for me to be saved?" The preacher replied: "Oh no, I mean it is too late for you to **do** anything. God has already done it all." That is a good definition of what unconditional acceptance means, but it defies the teaching of God's book.

There is a serious problem with that answer: It is not the one Peter and the other apostles gave on the day of Pentecost. Peter by divine inspiration commanded the Jews:

Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:38-39).



What were the Jews on Pentecost wanting to know? They wanted to know what to do to be saved from their sins. What conditions did they have to meet to enjoy the remission of their sins? Peter mentioned two: repentance and baptism. Could the Jews have experienced the forgiveness of sins had they not repented of their sins and been baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins? If Peter meant what he said – and you know he did – they had to repent and be baptized.

After Stephen was brutally murdered, persecution against the church increased enormously. The disciples, except for the apostles, “were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.” The persecution that arose around Stephen did not interfere with the preaching of the gospel. In fact, it almost certainly spurred the early Christians to do more preaching than they had ever done.

Therefore they who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:1-5).

When Philip preached Christ, did he mention any conditions the Samaritans had to meet to be saved? Did the Samaritans have to do anything to be forgiven of their sins and added to the church of the living God? We do not have a complete record of Philip’s preaching, but we know three topics he discussed: the kingdom of God, the name of Jesus Christ and baptism. How can we arrive at that conclusion? The divine records says, “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

The apostle Paul made a brief visit to the city of Ephesus. The Ephesians wanted him to stay longer, but he said to them: “I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if the Lord will. And he sailed from Ephesus” (Acts 18:20-21). Sometime later Paul did return to Ephesus, as he had hoped to do. When he came to the Ephesus the second time, he met some disciples and

asked them, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" They had no idea what Paul had in mind. They said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether they be any Holy Spirit." Paul further inquired of the Ephesians:

Unto what then were you baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5).

Do you believe God would have accepted the Ephesians had they not been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus? If baptism were not a condition of God's accepting them, why go to all the trouble of being baptized a second time? They had been baptized unto John's baptism. That should have been adequate if New Testament baptism is not a condition of God's accepting men and women. Can you not understand how absolutely unscriptural is Josh McDowell's view that God accepts us unconditionally? Baptism was a condition of the Ephesians' being accepted as God's children or Paul engaged in foolish talk. If baptism were not essential to the salvation of the Ephesians, they engaged in a meaningless ritual. How can anyone teach or defend that position?

Time does not allow for an examination of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, of the Ethiopian eunuch, of Lydia, of the Philippian jailer, of Cornelius and of the Corinthians. But in every one of these cases of conversion, inspired teachers and preachers outlined the conditions the alien sinners had to meet to be saved. For example, when Saul of Tarsus asked the Lord, "What wilt thou have me to do?", the Lord sent a preacher by the name of Ananias to tell Saul: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 9:6; 22:16). Would God have accepted Saul had he not complied with the instructions the Holy Spirit gave through Ananias? Was baptism one option among many for Saul Tarsus?

In Peter's second letter, he commanded his readers: Add to your faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Were these mere suggestions or are they conditions of God's acceptance of our behavior? If you are not fully convinced in your mind, please listen further to the apostle Peter.

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he who lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins (2 Pet. 1:8-9).

The expression, "if these things be in you and abound," is conditional. What will failing to add the Christian graces mean for Christians? They will be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are not fruitful in the Lord's service, what will happen to us? Unfruitful branches are cut off, cast into the fire and burned (John 15:6).

Peter commanded his readers: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall" (2 Pet. 1:10). What if we do not grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? We have fallen already. Does the apostle Peter establish conditions for our continuing to be acceptable in the sight of God? You surely cannot miss the answer to that question. If we add the Christian graces, "an entrance shall be ministered unto" us "abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). If we do not add the Christians graces, we are barren, unfruitful, spiritually blind and have forgotten that we were purged from our old sins. Unconditional acceptance makes no sense in view of the scriptures we have examined.



## Chapter 14

### Does God Always Get What He Wants?

Recently *The Tennessean* published an article with the title, "Hell isn't that bad a place, book says." The article was written by Bob Smietana, the religion editor of the newspaper and was about Rob Bell's latest book, **Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived** (New York: Harper, 2011). There are some serious problems with the title of the book: It is deceptive, misleading and just plain false. Love does not always win. There is not a marriage counselor or a psychiatrist or a psychologist in the world who would agree with the title of the book. They know there are many loving spouses who have been permanently disappointed and even destroyed by someone they loved with all their hearts. If Rob Bell has ever read the book of Hosea, he should know that love does not always win. Does he not know how often the Israelites rejected the love of God? Did God's love win the members of the church at Sardis and at Laodicea?

There is one chapter in Bell's book entitled, "Does God Get What He Wants?" This question will serve as the basis for our study today. Bell asks: "Will all people be saved, or will God not get what he wants" (p. 98)? The answer to Bell's question ought to be plain to every serious student of the scriptures. All people will not be saved and God does not always get what he wants. Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit when he wrote that some had not obeyed the gospel (Rom. 10:16). If God always gets what he wants, would that not prove the doctrine of Universalism? There is not the slightest doubt that God wants every one to be saved. Paul said to a young preacher: "For this is good and acceptable

in the sight of God our Savior: who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). The Greek word translated "will" means would, desire or pleased. Dr. Hugo McCord renders the word "wants." God wants all men to be saved.

The critical issue in the religious world is: What kind of being is God? The scriptures make it very plain that God not only loves (John 3:16), but he is love (1 John 4:8, 16). But does God's love override man's free will? The only way that all people could be saved would be for God to deny the free will of men. We know he has not done that and never will. The Israelites had the choice of serving God or ignoring his will (Josh. 24:15). The people in our world can either come to Christ or they can spurn the Great Invitation (Matt. 11:28-30). The last chapter of the last book of the Bible tells of God's gracious offer of salvation to every person in the world. The Lord's invitation is very plain: "Let him who athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). But both the scriptures and our experience prove that men can and do reject God's gracious offer. God wants every one to believe in Christ and to obey the gospel, but that has not occurred and will not.

Since God is all wise, did he not have enough wisdom to reveal a plan by which every one could be saved? That is precisely what he has done. Jesus himself said concerning those who reject his gracious plan of salvation:

Then shall he say to them on the left hand (that is, the wicked), Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels....And these (the wicked) shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal (Matt. 25:31, 46).

God has given the plan to save every person on earth, but many people reject the grace of almighty God. That was Paul's reason for urging the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1).

Since God is all powerful, could he not force men and women to believe in his Son and to obey the gospel so that all people would be saved? The answer is No, that is, if God wanted men and women to worship him as free moral agents. If God forces us to obey the gospel and to worship him, we would be no more than machines. We are capable of loving God and doing his will. Machines cannot do that. God desires for all men to obey him, but he does not and will not in this life to force us to do it.

Since God is all good, does not his goodness require him to save every person? Do you remember what Paul told the Romans about God's goodness?

Behold, therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness: otherwise you shall also be cut off (Rom. 11:33).

Our salvation is not based solely on God's goodness. The author of Hebrews could hardly make that truth plainer.

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9).

Will God save those who do not obey him? If he will, these verses from Hebrews make no sense.

A brief survey of the Old Testament shows that God does not always get what he wants. God placed Adam and Eve in an earthly paradise.

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that it pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil....The Lord took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And

the Lord commanded the man, saying, 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 of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die (Gen. 2:8-9, 15-17).

Adam and Eve ate of "the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Is that what God wanted? If that is what he wanted, would that not make him responsible for sin's entrance into the world? If that is what God wanted, why did he pronounce a curse on Adam and on Eve (Gen. 3:16-17)? Did God want Adam to bring sin and death into the world? Please listen to Paul's discussion of Adam's sin and its consequences for the entire human family. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all men have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Does Rob Bell really believe that was what God wanted? If that really is what God wanted, would that not make him cruel and unloving, the very opposite of the way the Bible portrays him?

The Israelites made a tragic mistake by demanding a king instead of the government God wanted for his people. Saul from the southern tribe of Benjamin became the first king of Israel. There is no doubt that Saul was a man with great ability. He could have made a great king. Tragically, he failed to obey the Lord's will. God commanded Saul to take the army of Israel and destroy the Amalakites, the perennial enemy of God's people. And Saul almost obeyed the Lord. Instead of utterly destroying the Amalakites, he saved King Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle. Saul explained to the great prophet Samuel that he had "performed the commandment of the Lord." Samuel asked Saul: "What is the meaning then of the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen?" Saul told the great prophet of God:

They have brought them from the Amalakites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the



rest we have utterly destroyed (1 Sam. 15:6, 13-15).

Do you believe Saul did what God wanted him to do? If you believe that, maybe you have not read what Samuel told Saul.

And Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

We know God did not get what he wanted from King Saul.

After Saul was dethroned, David became the king of Israel. Most Bible students know that David was Israel's most influential king. The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is sitting on David's throne – not will sit on David's throne – but is now sitting on David's throne (Acts 2:29-36). In a sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul referred to David as the man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Surely the man after God's own heart would always do what God wanted. Did God want David to commit adultery with Bathsheba and then have her husband killed?

Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, took Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, and made her his wife. It does not take a Bible scholar to know that Herod was guilty of adultery. Did God get what he wanted from Herod Antipas? Did he want Herod to commit adultery and other sins? If he did, why did he send John the Baptist to Herod to tell him that he had no right to have his brother's Philip's wife (Matt. 14:1-4)?

The New Testament records other examples of people who ignored what God wanted. Did God want the Pharisees to be hypocrites (Matt. 23)? Did he want the Corinthians to misbehave and to bring shame on his name? Did he want

Hymenaeus and Alexander to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20)? Did he want Demas to desert the cause of Christ because he loved this present world (2 Tim. 4:10)? Did he want the Laodiceans to be lukewarm and neither hot nor cold (Rev. 3:15-16)? There are other examples in the New Testament, but let us spend the rest of our time today examining our Lord's own words.

The Sermon on the Mount is unquestionably the most famous sermon in the world. Tragically, the so-called "positive thinkers" have misunderstood, misconstrued and misapplied the great truths our Lord taught in this sermon. They apparently see only positive thoughts in the sermon. But even the positive thoughts have negative implications. For example, Jesus said to his disciples: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Will the impure in heart also see God? If they will, our Lord's words are illogical and meaningless.

Does God want his people to speak evil of others? We know they sometimes do it, but is that what God wants? Jesus told the disciples:

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say unto his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Matt. 5:21-22).

The word "Raca" means empty-headed, stupid.

Universalists, including Rob Bell, have trouble with these words from the Master's Sermon on the Mount:

Enter in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to life, and few there are who find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Is Jesus teaching that more people will walk in the broad way that leads to destruction than in the narrow way which leads to life? Is that what God wants?

What did our Lord mean when he said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter in to the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21)? Jesus makes it too plain for anyone to miss. He wants us to do the will of God. Have you ever examined the many times the word "do" appears in the New Testament? The word appears 576 times. A few examples will have to suffice for the time being. The believing Jews on Pentecost asked Peter and the other apostles: "Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)?

Why did not Peter tell the Jews what one Chattanooga preacher told a young man who wanted to know what to do to be saved: "Son, it is too late for you to do anything. God has already done it all?" Paul told the Corinthians: "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). James taught his readers: "Therefore to him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17). There is not a Bible student in the world who does not know that God wants us to do good. But all serious Bible students know that we do not always do good.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us what will happen in the in the final judgment.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast our demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you workers of iniquity (Matt. 7:22-23).

Our Lord does not tell us why those people will be rejected. Is it possible their behavior did not harmonize with their professed beliefs? If they did not perform those works to

glorify God, their conduct would not be acceptable. God wants men to serve him from the heart (Eph. 6:6).

We know Christ was not downplaying the absolute necessity of obeying the Lord. How do we know that? Please listen to Christ.

Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one who hears these sayings of mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:24-27).

Does the Lord want us to build on a rock or to build on the sand or does it make any difference? Do all of God's children always build on a rock? People who build on the sand are not doing what God wants. Please notice again what will happen to those who build on the sand. The house "fell and great was the fall of it." Jesus gave this brief parable so we can know how vital it is to do what God wants.

I have already mentioned the hypocrisy of some of the Pharisees. Jesus severely criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint, anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matt. 23:23).

Jesus concluded his criticism of the Pharisees with these harsh words: "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:33)? Do you get the impression that God got what he wanted from the Pharisees?

Our Lord's parables teach some challenging lessons. In the Parable of the Vine and the Branches, Jesus said: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). We know what the branches are. They are Christ's disciples (John 15:5). If Christians do not abide in Christ and "bear much fruit" (John 15:8), it makes no sense to insist that God always gets what he wants.

What does God want from you and me? The answers are very simple. He wants all men and women to believe in Christ and to obey the gospel. An examination of the book of Acts will conclusively prove that answer. When the believing Jews on Pentecost asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?", the Apostle Peter commanded them: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37-38). The Holy Spirit was guiding the Apostle Peter; so we know he commanded the Jews to do what God wanted them to do.

God wants us to abide by the moral values in his word. We must not yield to the temptations of the flesh. The Apostle John listed the ways men are tempted — "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." He then affirmed: These are of the world. "And the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). The Apostle Paul adds: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

God wants us to worship regularly. The author of Hebrews stresses that truth.

And let us consider one another to provoke to love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as you see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

Finally, God wants us to spread the gospel. That is reason for the existence of the International Gospel Hour. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

I close our study with this question: What will happen if God does not get what he wants?

## Chapter 15

### Eclectic Churches

The tragic events of 9/11 will live on for years and even centuries in the hearts of all Americans and of many other compassionate people throughout the world. It is inconceivable to many of us that individuals who claim to be religious and to love their God could be so morally and spiritually bankrupt. How can anyone kill thousands of their fellowmen just because they have different views of God and of morality? Have you ever heard preachers and others argue that what you believe does not matter so long as you are honest? The men who killed three thousand innocent people in New York, in Washington, D. C. and in Pennsylvania had strong and sincere beliefs, but very dangerous and stupid beliefs. Surely, no one who has an ounce of logic in his brain will ever be so foolish as to again make the argument that it does not matter what you believe so long as you are honest.

I did not personally know any of the victims killed on 9/11. I knew the name of at least one of those who were killed in Pennsylvania, but I had not met any of them. Some of their names and stories are etched in my mind and likely will remain there so long as I live. I suspect the same is true for many of you. One of the persons killed in the Pennsylvania crash has become a household name for many Americans. That name is Todd Beamer. I knew about the book *Lisa Beamer*, wife of Todd Beamer, wrote, but I had no intention of buying the book and reading it. My son Danny and his wife Gina bought the book and gave to me for father's day or for Christmas. That is not the kind of book I usually read, but I am glad I have read most of the book. As I read the book I wept because I could put myself in Lisa Beamer's shoes. I know the heartache of losing a spouse. The book has many commendable features. Lisa Beamer has great faith and determination. I applaud her for these qualities.

Lisa Beamer's book has the title, **Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage** (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2002). Lisa Beamer's co-author is a prominent ghostwriter by the name of Ken Abraham. I have several books Ken Abraham has co-written. There is one statement in Lisa Beamer's book I shall use as the basis for our lesson today. She says that when she and her husband moved to New Jersey, they visited several congregations before they finally settled on "Princeton Alliance Church, an eclectic congregation linked to the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination" (p. 105). Our lesson today is entitled: "Eclectic Churches." Please understand that I am not being hypercritical or questioning Todd and Lisa Beamer's sincerity, but the expression, "eclectic churches," provides me with an opportunity to discuss some very vital issues relating to the New Testament church. I sincerely invite you to think with me on that topic.

The word "eclectic" is derived from the Greek *eklektikos* and means electing, selecting or choosing. In other words, eclectic churches are those churches that are neither Methodist nor Baptist nor Roman Catholic nor Pentecostal. They may select doctrines or practices from any or from all of those denominations, but they do not belong to any of them. The eclectic churches decide what they will believe, teach and practice. No two eclectic churches will be exactly alike since they all presumably have the right and obligation to select the path or paths of their spiritual journey. Incidentally, many local churches would not identify themselves as eclectic churches, but in reality that is what they are. They decide on the basis of tradition or personal preferences or the culture what kind of churches they will be.

**Webster's Third New International Dictionary** defines "eclecticism" as follows:

The selection of practices or elements from various and diverse sources according to their presumed utility or validity, usually for the purpose of combining them into a satisfying or acceptable style, system of ideas, or set of practices (p. 720).



My concern in our study today is whether those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ have scriptural authority for selecting or choosing what they will teach and practice. If we are going to call ourselves Christians and claim to belong to the New Testament church, must we not teach and practice what the New Testament authorizes?

As you can readily discern, the major concern at issue is the matter of authority. After all, whose church is it anyway? Does the church belong to the members or to the Lord? Paul charged the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

The word "purchased" comes from the same Greek word rendered "peculiar people" in the King James Version and "people for his own possession" in the England Standard Version (1 Pet. 2:9). Paul demanded: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25). Since Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for the church, the church belongs to him. Would that not mean he is the one who determines what the church should preach and practice? No church can be eclectic and please the God who called us into his service.

Since Jesus Christ is the founder of the church, should he not have the authority to decide what his church should do? In a meeting with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am? The apostle Peter confessed: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus assured the apostles: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in heaven." He then promised them:

Upon this rock (that is, the truth that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God), I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto you the keys of the

kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:13-19).

The tenses of the verbs, "bind" and "loose" are absolutely vital to our understanding of this passage. Christ was not telling the apostles: "You decide what should be bound or loosed. Then I will examine what you have bound or loosed. I will then bind or loose it in heaven." Charles Williams correctly renders the Greek of verse 19.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.

Dr. Hugo McCord renders the Greek: "What you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and what you release on earth will have been released in heaven." In this scholarly set of books, **Word Pictures of the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), Dr. A. T. Robertson, one of the world's greatest Greek scholars, says the tense of the verbs is future perfect indicative, signifying a state of completion. "All this assumes, of course, that Peter's use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and the mind of Christ" (volume 1, p. 134). Peter had no more authority to bind or loose on his own than you and I have. He and the other apostles could bind and loose only what Christ had already bound and loosed.

No religious leader has the right to determine the nature and the function of the Lord's church. What the church is and what it must do were decided more two thousand years ago. Paul taught that truth very plainly in his great letter on the church.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the

world has been hidden in Christ: to the intent (or for the purpose) that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

The church is not some Johnny-come-lately so that modern preachers or priests or others can determine what the church must do in its service to God almighty. God decided that before the foundation of the world.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the church? Paul informed the Ephesians: God "has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul affirms that Jesus Christ "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" (Col. 1:18). Should the head of the church be the one who tells us what we must do to become members of his church, how we must live so we may enjoy fellowship with the Father, with the Son, with the Holy Spirit and with the faithful in Christ Jesus? John speaks explicitly to that question.

If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

Christ chose all of this a long time ago. We choose — either to obey his will or to rebel against it. We do not choose the way to serve God. We choose whether we will do it.

As all of us surely understand, there are areas of service where God has granted us the freedom to choose. For example, most churches have their Sunday morning Bible study at 9:00 or 9:30 and their worship services immediately following. When I was a very young preacher, I worked with one

congregation that had its worship services in the afternoon. The church could not afford a full-time preacher. That church had its services in the afternoon so some preacher could come to their services. I know a church in Alabama that has its worship services at 6:00 on Sunday morning. The church has made those arrangements to accommodate doctors, nurses, policemen and firemen in the area. Are we not given that freedom?

During my more than sixty years of preaching the gospel, I have been privileged to baptize people in farm ponds, in creeks and rivers, in a watering trough that a farmer used to water his cattle. During the past fifty years, most of the people I have baptized have been baptized in a pool in the church building. Has God ordained that we use a particular body of water for baptizing people? I remember hearing of persons who believed people had to be baptized in running water, since Jesus was baptized in running water. Do they believe they have to be baptized in the Jordan River since Jesus was baptized in the Jordan? There are many other matters of this nature, but time will not allow a further examination of them today.

Maybe we can profit by examining some of the practices eclectic churches have chosen. When the Titans professional football team moved to Nashville, members of some of the Nashville churches were concerned about missing the start of Titans' home games. The home games generally begin at 12:00 noon. So the leaders in those churches changed their worship services to Friday night or to Saturday night. Surely no one would want a little matter like worship on the Lord's day to interfere with the start of the Titans' home games! The leaders in those churches who made those decisions might resent being called "eclectic churches," but that is precisely what they are. Those leaders elected to violate the teaching of scripture to accommodate some of their members who have a greater desire to see the Titans play than to worship God according to his word.

Many churches in our land choose to exalt certain days, such as, Christmas and Easter. I would not interfere legally with their freedom to honor those days. As you know, if you will be completely honest with the scriptures, there is not a man or woman alive who can find scriptural authority for engaging in these practices. O I believe in the Lord's virgin birth and in his resurrection. But nobody knows when he was born. And even if we did, we are not given instructions about celebrating Christmas. We know Jesus was raised from the dead. Our worship every Lord's day is a biblical celebration of that great truth. Partaking of the Lord's supper – not the Eucharist – reminds the participants of "the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). Why do we presume on the Lord's patience by adding to or subtracting from what God has specifically revealed about the work and worship of the church?

In the religious culture of our country, there is enormous confusion over the government of the New Testament church. There is great work for deacons, for evangelists or preachers and for other members of the church, but only elders have the authority to direct the affairs of the local church. In his list of qualifications of elders, Paul mentioned a man's obligation to rule his own house. He then asked, "If a man does not know how to rule his own house, how can he rule (or govern) the church of God" (1 Tim. 3:4-5)? Deacons do not rule; preachers do not rule; members do not rule. The elders rule the church of our Lord. There is no authority for having a string of offices and positions from here to New Mexico. And yet some denominations have a number of offices that rival the government of the Roman Empire. In truth, some churches almost certainly copied the governmental structure of the Roman Empire. Do churches believe they have a right to choose what form of government the Lord's church should have?

Oddly enough, there are groups that claim to be the New Testament church that observe the Jewish passover.

I have never heard members of the church or anyone else attempt to defend such practices, but we know God does not approve of such conduct. If you have even the slightest doubt about the unscripturalness of observing any of the ceremonies and rituals of the Mosaic covenant, whether the sabbath, the passover or circumcision, please read Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. I have time to read one brief excerpt from Galatians.

But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how can you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain (Gal. 4:9-11).

Is God pleased with those who choose the days, months, times and years they will observe?

On other occasions on this program, I have mentioned the fact that some denominational churches in Nashville and in other places have used modern dance troupes in their worship services. I know most denominational churches would unquestionably oppose that activity. Please understand that I do not doubt the sincerity of those who oppose using dance troupes or dramas in the services of those churches. They have scriptural authority for their opposition. But there is just as much authority for using dance troupes or dramas as there is for using mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the New Testament church. Why endorse and practice instrumental music and oppose drama and dancing? Anyone who believes he can justify one and condemn the other is hereby challenged to do so.

I have indicated that one of the crucial issues in "eclectic churches" is authority. By what authority do churches imagine they have the right to choose what they will do and not do? Who gave them that authority? But there is another very serious matter involved in eclectic churches. They and all other churches must face the Judge of the universe and have

to give an account of what they have done and why they have done it. Do you believe that? Are you willing to stand on your record in such matters? If there were no final judgment, you and I could do whatever we liked and nobody would have any reason to question our teachings and practices. But there will be a final judgment at which time we shall have to give an account of our behavior.

A careful reading of the Old Testament would help us to know that God means what he says in his word. An acquaintance with Cain, Nadab and Abihu, Korah, Dathan and Abiram tells us in no uncertain terms that God will judge us for failing to abide by his word. The New Testament is no less explicit. Paul urged the members of the body of Christ at Colosse not to allow any man to rob them "of their reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels....And not holding fast to the Head" (Col. 2:18-19). Some of the false teachers, probably Gnostics, were engaging in practices that were contrary to God's will. They were observing the commandments of men. They were engaging in what Paul called "will worship" (Col. 2:22-23). Did you know that eclectic churches are practicing "will worship?" They are doing what the human will dictates – not what God's inspired will requires.

There is no greater honor in this world than to be a child of the living God. There is no greater responsibility than to do what God says do in the way he says do it.





## Chapter 16

# Denominationalism

**H**ave you ever wondered what this nation would be like if newspaper editors, columnists, reporters and television pundits were in charge of our national and state governments? Since they already have all the answers to our financial, political, social and moral questions, all they would have to do is simply enforce what they already know. There would be no need for conducting surveys to ascertain what the American people believe or desire. Since the experts in the media already know what we should do and how we should do it, there would be no need to hire experts in various fields or departments. If you think I might be exaggerating, listen carefully to the radio and television talking heads and read the editorials in your daily newspaper. You will not have to think about our nation's problems and opportunities. Just pay attention and do what you read in the newspapers and hear on radio and on television. How can you go wrong with such brilliant and infallible guides?

Frank Ritter, a columnist for *The Tennessean*, recently wrote an article with the heading, "Religious denominations often do more to divide than unite." The article appeared in the newspaper Tuesday, October 26, 2004. It bothers me to have to say it, but the title of the article betrays a serious misunderstanding of denominationalism. The word involves devotion to sectarian principles or interests. The term refers to organizations that emphasize the denominational differences to the point of narrow exclusivism. Some dictionaries list the word "sectarianism" as one of the synonyms of denominationalism.

But before I review some of the points Frank Ritter makes in his article, I shall read two statements from the book, **A Theology of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: William B.

Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), by Dr. George Eldon Ladd, a professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in California. Dr. Ladd wrote very perceptively: "...the idea of denominations would be abhorrent to Paul. The nearest things to denominations" were the sectarian groups "in Corinth that Paul heartily condemned" (p. 532). You do not have to be a biblical scholar to know that Dr. Ladd is correct. There were no denominations in apostolic times. The reason Paul heartily condemned the nearest thing to denominations—the sectarian groups in Corinth—was because denominations were contrary to our Lord's prayer in John 17. Do you remember the Lord's prayer for his disciples?

Neither pray I for these alone (that is, his immediate disciples), but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

Two comments on his passage are in order. The unity Jesus desires for those who claim to be his followers is not a kind of generic unity. It is the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. It is not possible modern denominationalism can harmonize with the intent of the Lord's prayer. Furthermore, one of the goals of unity is the influence such unity will have on unbelievers. Jesus prayed that we might be united "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The division that exists among the professed followers of Jesus Christ has to be confusing for men and women who may be seeking to know the truth. Tragically, most modern denominations promote plans of salvation that cannot be found anywhere in scripture. How absolutely discouraging to sincere seekers after truth!

Frank Ritter tells in his article about a wedding that took place in December of 1905. The announcement of the marriage simply stated: "Oak Grove Church." Ritter

said that the announcement did not mention whether the church was Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, not even Quaker, Muslim, or Buddhist—“just church.” Ritter expresses the hope that the day will come when the word “denomination” is erased from the dictionary and from all religious treatises. He asked why he would make such a statement. His answer: “Because it doesn’t do much more than cause dissension” (p. 11-A).

Frank Ritter says he is proud of his denomination. It is that attitude that has promoted sectarianism and denominationalism in the world. If every religious group would simply refer to themselves as “the church of the Lord,” “the church of the living God,” “the church of Christ,” “the body of Christ” — and oppose all denominational titles, that would be a step in the right direction, but it would not be adequate. All groups would have to give up their denominational distinctives, such as, the doctrines they preach, the way they worship God, and other features of modern denominations. Just sacrificing denominational names would make little or no difference unless all groups agreed to abide by the teaching of scripture. Paul instructed the sinfully divided church at Corinth:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you; but that you be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

How can we speak the same thing if we do not follow the Bible?

Frank Ritter provides some insight into his thinking about denominations by the following example. He mentions that some groups sprinkle for baptism while others totally dunk them under the water (p. 11-A). The expression, “totally dunk them under the water,” is not a very helpful term. The word, “dunking,” reminds one of dunking donuts in coffee or hot chocolate. Maybe Frank Ritter does not know — which

is inexcusable since he raised the topic – but sprinkling is not baptism. If a person is going to discuss a controversial topic, he ought to have done the necessary research to be able to discuss it intelligently. Frank Ritter has not done that or, if he has, his article gives no evidence of it.

What Frank Ritter probably did not know – although he should have made an effort to know – is that the Greeks used two very different words for “sprinkle” and “baptize.” The Greek word for “sprinkle” is *rhantizo*. The verb form appears four times in the New Testament and is almost always used of the sprinkling that occurred under the Mosaic law. For example,

For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:13-14)?

The noun form of the word, *rhantismos*, is also used of the sprinkling of blood (Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2). The New Testament never – I repeat – never uses the word of baptism. In fact, it was several centuries after the church was established before any group substituted sprinkling or pouring for baptism. Does that fact not tell you that changing the name of religious groups matters little or not at all unless they also change their teachings and practices?

The word “baptize” (*baptizo* in the Greek) means to immerse, to submerge, to overwhelm, to dip. W. E. Vine’s **Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1940) says the word “was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into it.” The Greek biographer, Plutarch, used the word of the drawing of wine by dipping a cup into the bowl (p. 97). Most denominational scholars readily agree that the word “baptism” means

immersion or submersion. But then they illogically argue that it really does not make any difference how a person is baptized so long as he is truly penitent.

Would Frank Ritter be willing to say: "I accept the Bible's teaching on baptism. I am willing to use my talent and time to promote what the word of God teaches and only what the word of God teaches?" If he and all others were willing to do that along with dropping his pride in his denomination, that would be a very significant step in the direction of unity. I have no idea if he would take that bold step, but until all who are involved in denominations have that kind of faith and courage, unity will not be possible. We know Jesus prayed for unity (John 17:20-21); we know Paul pled for unity (1 Cor. 1:10) and we also know Paul gave a plan for unity (Eph. 4:3-6). And how can we forget the words of the inspired Psalmist: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psa. 133:1)?

Frank Ritter raises the issue of communion or the Lord's supper. Should we take it once a year or every Sunday (p. 11-A)? There is almost universal agreement among reputable scholars that the early Christians took the Lord's supper every Lord's day. Please think of this analogy. God commanded the Jews under the Mosaic covenant to remember the sabbath day and to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8). Which sabbath during the year were the Jews required to remember and keep it holy? Would they have pleased God had they observed just one sabbath during the year? The early church met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7). It ought to be obvious that we are to take the Lord's supper during every week that has a first day – the day on which our Lord was raised from the dead and on which the Lord's church was established in Jerusalem. If every church would take the Lord's supper every Lord's day and teach the necessity doing so, one barrier to unity would be removed.

Frank Ritter mentions the use of instrumental music and dancing as acts of worship. Does he have any idea what the

scriptures teach about worship or is worship just what people feel like doing? Does it make any difference what worship activities God authorizes? For the benefit of Frank Ritter and those who think like he does, I must say as forcefully as I am able: There is not a man alive or a woman either who can find scriptural warrant for using mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the New Testament church. Does he have any idea what the scriptures teach about worship? Does it make any difference what worship activities God authorizes? Anyone who thinks he can find instrumental music in the New Testament is hereby challenged to do so.

It is tragic that many churches do not seek scriptural authority for what they do in their worship services. They may simply do what they have always done. After all, tradition is a powerful influence in religion. Or they may do what they like. One response to our speaking against instrumental music has been on occasions: "But I like instruments of music." So do I. Does that mean that you and I have the right to decide what the Lord should accept in our worship? I like sirloin steak, but who would be so blatant as to offer it on the Lord's table?

More than 115 years ago, Dr. John L. Girardeau, a professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary—a conservative Presbyterian theological seminary in Columbia, South Carolina—published a little book on instrumental music. His students asked him why he opposed instrumental music in public worship. The book, **Instrumental Music in the Public Worship** (Fayetteville, TN: International Gospel Hour, n.d.), was his response to their questions. Incidentally, the International Gospel Hour has recently republished Dr. Girardeau's book. The very first paragraph in Dr. Girardeau's book sets forth the argument he uses to show that instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament church is not authorized and therefore should not be practiced. Please listen to that paragraph.

Attention, at the outset, is invoked to the consideration which serves to establish the

following controlling principle: A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded in the scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements, is forbidden (p. 15).

One of the biblical stories Dr. Girardeau uses to illustrate the principle he has outlined is that of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16). God himself decided who would be his priests under the Jewish covenant. The high priests were to be the descendants of Aaron and the other priests from the tribe of Levi. Korah was a Levite, but Dathan and Abiram were the offspring of Reuben. Those three men objected to the authority God had given God had given to Moses and Aaron. The men rose up against Moses and Aaron, and said to them,

You take too much upon yourselves, seeing all the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore do you lift yourselves above the congregation of the Lord (Num. 16:1-3)?

In your reading of the Old Testament, have you ever found where God said to the Jewish people, "Only those who have specifically been chosen for the priesthood can serve in that capacity?" When God gave the command for the sons of Levi to serve as priests, did he have to say, "The sons of Judah, the sons of Reuben, the sons of Zebulon and others cannot serve as priests?" When he authorized the sons of Levi to be the priests in Israel, that eliminated men from all the other tribes. What was God's reaction to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram?

The earth opened up her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They and all that appertained to them, went down alive

into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from the congregation. And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense (Num. 16:32-25).

The two hundred and fifty men were co-conspirators with Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

Jude, our Lord's physical brother, warns false teachers. "Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah" (Jude 11). The word "gainsaying" means answering back. It can involve either words or actions. The English Standard Version renders the Greek "rebellion." What was the Holy Spirit's reason for recording the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram? Does he want us to seek authorization for all we do in the work and worship of the church? Dr. Girardeau also discusses Cain and his offering (Gen. 4), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-3), the disobedience of Moses in smiting the rock (Num. 20) and other Old Testament examples. These stories are recorded for our learning (1 Cor. 10:6, 10; Rom. 15:4). Everyone of these great stories teaches that we must have divine authority for the work and worship of the church.

Frank Ritter also mentions dancing, faith healing, tongues-speaking, women preachers and auricular confession. Not one – not even one – of these practices can be sustained by a correct interpretation of God's word. I do not have the time today to examine these practices. I have discussed some of these practices on this program and will try to examine the others at a later date.

Frank Ritter makes a plea for the professed followers of Christ to cease their bickering about God and how to do the worshipping (p. 11-A). Does not Frank Ritter understand that some people may consider his thoughts as "bickering" about religious differences? Is he arguing that we should not disagree or debate religious differences? He says he reads the



book of John — a beautiful book all of us should read regularly. Does he know what Jesus taught the woman whom he met at Jacob's well in Sychar, Samaria? The woman asked Jesus about the worship of the Samaritans and that of the Jews. She said to Jesus, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Why did not our Lord tell the woman: "It is time that we end this bickering about God and how to do the worshipping?" That, apparently, is what Frank Ritter would have told the woman. But in the Lord's view, there was a right way and many wrong ways to worship God. So he said to the woman, "You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:19-20, 22). When Frank Ritter reads the book of John, does he understand what Jesus taught the Samaritan woman?

Ritter's article betrays rampant relativism, at least, as it applies to the worship of the church. He may reject the term "postmodernist," but there is hardly any doubt he belongs in that category. Does he believe we cannot know what God expects of us? Does he believe it does not really matter what churches teach and practice? Tragically, what Frank Ritter has written in his article seems to be gaining ground among religious people. It is a sign that we have departed from God's pattern for his church. His views also destroy the foundation for biblical moral values. Such ideas deeply trouble me. I hope they also trouble you. If you are not troubled about them, I am troubled about you.



## Chapter 17

### Fast Track To Sainthood

The King James Version of the Bible addresses Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as “saints.” It does not use the word “saint” of Paul or Peter or Jude or James. The introduction to Romans begins simply by saying, “The Epistle of Paul to the Romans.” Were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John “saints,” but Paul, Peter, Jude and James were not? What was the motivation behind the use of the word “saint” in these instances? Frankly, I cannot explain it, but it makes absolutely no sense. All of these men were saints of the living God, as are all of his children. If you and I are Christians, we are saints.

The confusion surrounding sainthood is inexcusable. I am not sure of the origin of the confusion, but its perpetuation stems from serious misunderstanding and misapplication of the sacred text. The word “saint” comes from the Greek *hagios* and simply means one who is set apart for the Lord’s service. It has nothing to do with sinlessness or miracles or great accomplishments. In other words, there were no perfect saints in early Christianity and there are no perfect saints today. I can go a step further: There will be no perfect saints next year or the year after that. Perfection will belong only to those who are eventually ushered into the eternal kingdom. All of our sins will be forgotten and we shall stand pure and whole in the sight of our God.

You may have heard the so-called “talking heads” on television speak of “the fast track to sainthood.” That expression will serve as the basis of our lesson today. I know – and I am not boasting – the fast track to sainthood. It is so plainly and powerfully revealed in the Bible that no one should miss it. I shall use the ancient Corinthians as an example of “the fast track to sainthood.”

The apostle Paul paid an initial visit to Corinth around 50 A. D. What he found at Corinth would rival modern San Francisco or Las Vegas or New Orleans during Mardi Gras. The city was one enormous brothel. Drunkenness, all forms of sexual immorality, idolatry and extortion were rampant in the city. The late Dr. William Barclay's commentary on **The Letters to the Corinthians** (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) says that Corinth was a:

...byword for evil living. The very word 'corinthianize' (*korinthiazesthai*), to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery. Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was shown drunk (pp. 2-3).

The temple of Aphrodite, the so-called "goddess of love," was located on the famous hill of the Acropolis. One thousand prostitutes walked the streets of Corinth and sold their bodies to the sailors who made visits to the city. The money the prostitutes raised from their devilish trade was poured into the coffers of the pagan temple. In case you might be wondering if that could happen in our nation, let me assure you that it has happened. A group calling itself "the Children of God," founded by David Moses Berg, sent young women out on the streets to seduce men into sexual immorality. They called it "flirty fishing." How absolutely disgusting!

Paul asked the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor exhortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

In very simple terms, the people who commit the sins Paul listed and do not repent of them are not going to heaven.

I have a very serious question for you to consider. How could fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, drunkards and such people ever be on a fast track to sainthood? I ask you to listen carefully to what Paul said about the people he mentioned in this passage.

And such were some of you (that is, some of the Corinthians had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, drunkards and so on): but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

They were washed when they submitted to the Lord in baptism, just as Paul had done (Acts 22:16). They were justified, that is, declared to be right with God, when they obeyed the Lord.

Did you notice that Paul said the Corinthians were “sanctified?” I mentioned a moment ago that the Greek word for “saint” is *hagios*. That is also the word translated “holy” in reference to the Holy Spirit. The word “sanctified” is from the Greek *hagiazō*. You do not have to be a student of the Greek language to know that *hagios* and *hagiazō* are from the same root word. A saint is one who has been sanctified. Does that mean that those wicked Corinthians had actually become saints? Please listen to Paul’s greetings to the church at Corinth.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1 Cor. 1:1-2).

Paul used similar language in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:1).

I need to say a few words about the expression, "called to be saints." The infinitive "to be" does not appear in the original text. The Corinthians were not called to be saints; they were called saints, that is, they were saints according to their calling. The word "called" is a verbal adjective and describes the kind of saints the Corinthians were. They were called saints. The reason they were called saints is because they were sanctified. But in view of their previous sinful condition, how could they become saints? How could such people be on a fast track to sainthood?

The apostle Paul visited the cities of Thessalonica and Athens before he came to Corinth. At Corinth, he:

...found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla: (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and worked: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Since Paul was Jewish, he could go into Jewish synagogues.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:1-5).

The word "reasoned" is a translation of the Greek *dialogomai* from which we get our English word "dialogue." The Greek word can be rendered "discussion," "debating," "disputed" and "preached." A. T. Robertson's great set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930), sheds further light on the word translated "reasoned." In the active voice, the verb means "to select, distinguish, then to resolve in the mind, to converse, then to teach in the Socratic method of question and answer, but always with the

idea of intellectual stimulus" (volume 3, p. 267). Paul did his very best to convince the Jews and the Greeks that Jesus was the Christ.

The Jews were very angry with Paul. "They opposed themselves, and blasphemed." Paul knew he could not bring them to faith in Christ. So he shook his raiment, and said unto them, "Your blood be upon your own heads: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." Please listen to what occurred as a result of Paul's faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:6, 8).

When the Corinthians heard the word, believed it and obeyed the Lord in baptism, were they saved, sanctified and justified? What else did they have to do to become saints? We know they were saints because that is the way Paul described them (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). Did they have to demonstrate that a miracle had been performed in their names? Did the other Christians at Corinth, including Paul, Silas and Timothy, have to vote on them to make them saints?

Paul's two letters to the church at Corinth prove conclusively that the Corinthians were saints—living, breathing, working—saints. A few passages from these letters should demonstrate that truth. Paul asked the church:

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters (1 Cor. 6:1-2)?

The Corinthian Christians were already saints. And no more than three or four years had passed since they had obeyed the gospel. They did not have to wait to be saints. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be generous in their giving.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, even to you must do....I beseech you, brethren, (you know the house of Stepanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and they that addicted themselves to the saints) (1 Cor. 16:1, 15).

Can there be any doubt that Paul was discussing living saints – members of the body of Christ?

Two chapters in 2 Corinthians – 8 and 9 – are the two greatest New Testament passages on giving. Paul commended the generosity of the Christians in Macedonia.

For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (2 Cor. 8:3-4).

Were the Macedonians ministering to dead people or to living people? Paul adds:

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write unto you....For the administration of this service not only supplies the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God (2 Cor. 9:1, 12).

Paul assured the Corinthians: “All the saints salute you” (2 Cor. 13:13).

Let us return to the question I raised a few minutes ago. In view of the wickedness of the Corinthians, how could they become saints? Luke explains in words nobody should misunderstand. “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). The Corinthians heard the word Paul preached. We cannot be sure of all the points Paul made in his sermon, but we know he convinced them that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:5-6). I would like to challenge you to search the book of Acts to learn about the absolute necessity of hearing the word. The book of Acts does



not record a single conversion where there was no preaching. Luke records what occurred on Pentecost.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do (Acts 2:37)?

At the house of Cornelius,

Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he who fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him (Acts 10:34-35).

We can understand from the cases of conversions in Acts why Paul told the Romans: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). If you have a desire to be forgiven of your alien sins and become a saint of the most high God, you must hear the word since the word of God is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). That was the apostle Peter's reason for telling his readers:

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, that lives and abides forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: but the word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

There is no possibility of becoming a saint until one hears and obeys the word.

Honest hearts will believe the word when they examine the evidence. Tragically, Calvinistic teachers have confused the plan of salvation by preaching faith alone. But there is no possibility of pleasing God without faith (Heb. 11:6). It is

absolutely amazing to me how anyone can preach or accept the doctrine of faith alone when the Bible has so much to say about obedience. I have just read to you what the apostle Peter taught. "Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth" (1 Pet. 1:22). Can we purify our souls if we fail to obey the truth? And what was Peter's message at the house of Cornelius? "He who fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him" (Acts 10:35). Did the apostle Peter actually mean, "works righteousness?" If we have to work righteousness, we are not saved by faith alone. The apostle John stressed that same truth.

Little children, let no man deceive you: he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous....In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not do righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:7, 10).

One step in working righteousness or in obeying the truth is being baptized for the remission of sins. Please remember that the Corinthians heard, believed and were baptized. Is that when they washed away their sins, just as Saul had done (Acts 22:16)? Paul said the Corinthians had been washed, sanctified and justified. I shall take a short time to summarize what baptism does for alien sinners.

We know when the Ephesians obeyed the gospel. Paul had made one visit to Ephesus, but had to leave because of a previous appointment. When he returned, he found some disciples. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. They said they did not know there was a Holy Spirit. He then asked them unto what they were baptized. They told him they were baptized unto John's baptism.

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard

this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5).

When the Ephesians were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, were they on a fast track to sainthood? In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul commended the members of the church for their faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love unto all the saints (Eph. 1:15). He commanded the Ephesians:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints (Eph. 5:3).

Is there the slightest doubt in your mind that the Ephesian Christians were saints – not at some distant future – but right then?

Paul and Silas met with a group of Jewish women by the side of the river Gangites at Philippi. Among the women who were worshipping on that occasion was a woman named Lydia of the city of Thyatira. She heard the word of the Lord and was baptized. Other members of her household were also baptized into Christ. Later in the same city, Paul and Silas taught the Philippian jailer the truth of God's word. They baptized the Philippian jailer and members of his household. These two groups were charter members of that good church at Philippi.

But were they saints just because they had become Christians – members of the body of Christ? Did they have to wait for someone to vote on them to make them saints? Paul addressed his letter to the "saints in Christ Jesus who are Philippi" (Phil. 1:1). Paul urged the Philippians: "Salute every saint in Christ Jesus." He then assured the Philippians: "The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they who are of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:21-22). Would it not be rather difficult for "dead" saints to salute living saints?

Neither the book of Acts nor any other biblical source informs us of the facts surrounding the conversion of the

Colossians. We do not know who did the original preaching at Colosse, but some commentators speculate that it may have been Epaphras, one of Paul's companions. But we know how they became Christians. Paul says they were "buried with him in baptism," wherein also they were risen with him "through the faith of the operation of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). The truth is: The Colossians became Christians in exactly the same way that the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Thessalonians and all other first century Christians did. After all, God only has one plan of salvation.

Were the living Colossians saints or did they have to wait a few years after their death to become saints? When they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized into Christ, they were saints immediately. In his introduction to Colossians, Paul wrote:

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colosse.... We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love that you have to all the saints (Col. 1:2-4).

If you want to be on a fast track to sainthood, believe and obey the gospel today.

## Chapter 18

# Do We Focus On The Man Or The Plan?

**P**reachers sometimes baffle me. They often discuss topics that have little or no relevance to anyone or they make distinctions without a difference. Some preachers like Joel Osteen avoid all controversial topics and borrow most of their material from the so-called "positive thinkers," like Wayne Dyer, Abraham Maslow and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, although Dr. Peale preached more solid material than Joel Osteen or Robert Schuler. One preacher announced in his bulletin he planned to speak on the topic: "Do We Focus on the Man or on the Plan?" Our study today will be devoted to that topic.

I do not wish to be facetious, but I can answer the question, "Do we focus on the man or on the plan?", with one simple word: YES. If we wish to be faithful to our calling as preachers and teachers, we must focus on the man and on the plan. How can reasonable people claim to love the man – the Lord Jesus Christ – and not love the plan he ordained, the gospel of Christ? Did not Christ himself say: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)? The author of Hebrews asks:

How shall we escape if we neglect the great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them who heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will (Heb. 2:3-4)?

It ought to be obvious from this passage that Jesus Christ had a plan which the author of Hebrews calls "the great salvation." Jesus began to teach that plan; the apostles

confirmed it; and God bore witness to it with miraculous manifestations. How could anyone separate the man from the plan? Would it be legitimate to call that plan a "pattern?" In other words, did Jesus outline what the apostles and others were to teach men about salvation? If he did – and you know he did – why does not what he said constitute a pattern?

Luke tells of Christ's visit to Nazareth, his home town.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them who are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:16-19).

Is there the slightest doubt in your mind that Christ completely fulfilled the mission God had assigned to him? Did he not preach the gospel to the poor? Was not his appeal primarily to the poor? Paul told the Corinthians: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, nor many noble, are called" (1 Cor. 1:26). Jesus wants all men to be saved – rich and poor, wise and unwise, noble and ignoble – but many people trust in their own wisdom, power and nobility and imagine they do not have need for a savior.

Our Lord spent much of his earthly existence healing the broken-hearted. The Apostle Peter told Cornelius and his household "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Our Lord fed the hungry, healed broken hearts and broken lives, comforted those who had lost loved

ones and provided inspiration to those who had lost hope. He served as the perfect example for his immediate followers and for all subsequent generations, including our own.

The Lord Jesus Christ constantly preached to men and women who were held captive in the bondage of sin. The Sermon on the Mount summarizes many of the great moral and spiritual principles God demands that his children honor. None is better known than these inspiring words: "Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do you also to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Christ also told men they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven by simply confessing his name. We must do the will of his Father who is in heaven (Matt. 7:21). He provided guidance for our giving, praying and fasting (Matt. 6:1-7). Christ's every waking thought was devoted to doing the will of God (John 8:29) by carrying out the mission God had given him. And when he died on the cross, he said: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus was saying, in effect, to God almighty: "I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). Should we not be able to say, the man carried out the plan?

When John the Baptist heard of the great work Jesus was doing, he sent two of his disciples to ask Christ:

Are you he who should come, or do we look for another? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matt. 11:2-5).

All four gospel writers provide examples of Christ's healing the blind. On one occasion, Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth (John 9). But Jesus not only healed men who were physically blind; he also opened the eyes of those who were spiritually blind (Luke 24:31).

Our Lord set at liberty those who were bruised. The

English Standard Version uses the word "oppressed" rather than the word "bruised." Charles Williams and Dr. Hugo McCord translate the Greek "the down trodden." Jesus also preached the acceptable year of the Lord. If you have an open heart, you cannot fail to see that our Lord fulfilled the plan God had for his earthly ministry. Jesus Christ did exactly what God wanted him to do in the way God wanted him to do it.

But did Jesus Christ furnish his apostles and others a plan they were to preach to the lost? At the conclusion of his earthly ministry, Jesus gave specific instructions about the message of salvation he wanted preached. We commonly refer to these instructions as the Great Commission. Matthew ends his gospel with these well known words from the very mouth of Jesus Christ:

All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you all the way, even unto the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Do you believe Matthew's readers had any difficulty understanding the words of our Lord?

The words of Mark's account of the Great Commission differ slightly from those of Matthew's account, but the import is the same. Jesus commanded his apostles:

Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Luke quotes Jesus as saying,

Thus it is written, and thus it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning



at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things  
(Luke 24:46-48).

Please remember the word “witnesses” as I read to you  
Christ’s plan for spreading the gospel.

You shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit  
has come upon you: and you shall be my witnesses  
unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and  
in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the  
earth (Acts 1:8).

Did the apostles and other God-ordained preachers follow the  
plan the Lord himself gave? If you have the slightest doubt,  
please listen to the remainder of our study.

Jesus told the apostles what they were to preach. They  
began their gospel preaching on the day of Pentecost. God  
performed some spectacular miracles to authenticate his  
preachers. There were the rushing of the mighty wind, the  
cloven tongues as of fire and speaking in tongues they had  
never learned (Acts 2:1-4). Some of the people observing  
the events on that day wanted to know the meaning of the  
tongues-phenomenon. Others mocked and said, “These men  
are full of new wine,” in other words, they are drunk (Acts 2:12-  
13). Men who are drunk have difficulty speaking their own  
language. How could drunk men speak in other languages —  
languages they have never studied and did not know?

The Apostle Peter’s sermon on Pentecost was very  
simple and very powerful. He told the Jews that the events  
on that great day were a fulfillment of the prophecies of Joel  
and of David. He emphasized the death of Christ and his  
resurrection. He concluded his sermon with these stirring  
and challenging words: “Therefore let all the house of Israel  
know assuredly, that God has made this same Jesus, whom  
you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). What  
a painful revelation this must have been to the Jews! They  
realized they had murdered their own Messiah. When they  
heard what Peter said, “they were pricked in their hearts,

and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Acts 2:37)?

What did the Jews want to know? Did they want to know how to escape the wrath of the Roman Empire? You know that is not the case. The Jews could not have crucified Jesus Christ without the involvement of the Roman government. Verse 21 spells out the reason the Jews asked: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" "And it shall come to pass," Joel had predicted, "that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." The Jews wanted to know what to do to be saved from their sins.

Peter's answer to their question could hardly be plainer, although what he said has been twisted almost beyond recognition. He commanded the believing Jews:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:38-39).

How did the Jews understand what the Holy Spirit guided Peter to preach? Did they know they were supposed to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins? Or did they think they had to repent and could be baptized if they wanted to? The Holy Spirit tells us what happened. "Then they who gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

God's plan called for the gospel to begin in Jerusalem. We know that occurred on Pentecost. The gospel was also to be preached in Samaria. Acts 8 tells us exactly what happened. Saul of Tarsus, a bitter enemy of the cross of Christ,

...made havoc of the church, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to

the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:3-5).

Philip's sermon on that occasion was different in some ways from the sermon Peter preached on Pentecost. The Samaritans had not involved in Christ's crucifixion as the Jews had been. But Philip's sermon emphasized three vital truths: the kingdom of God, the name of Christ, and baptism. How can we legitimately arrive at that conclusion?

But when they (the Samaritans) believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

When Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, did he emphasize only the man or also the plan? We know he preached Christ. Did that also necessarily include the plan? If it did not, how did the Samaritans know they were supposed to obey their Lord in baptism? Can you understand how preachers run into intellectual trouble when they do not take all the Bible says – not just what they like or what is popular in their circles?

The Apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon ever recorded to the Jews on the day of Pentecost; Philip the evangelist preached the first sermon to the Samaritans; the Apostle Peter then preached the first sermon to Gentiles. Acts 10 records the sermon Peter preached at the house of Cornelius. He told Cornelius and his household:

...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose

from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believes in him shall receive the remission of sins (Acts 10:38-43).

What did the Holy Spirit lead the Apostle Peter to tell the Jews about the remission of sins? "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Did Peter preach a different plan of salvation to Cornelius and to his household? We do not have a complete record of Peter's sermon at the house of Cornelius, but we know what occurred on that occasion as a result of Peter's preaching Christ. He asked:

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:47-48).

Some of the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem were troubled by the events at the house of Cornelius. Peter recounted what led him to Cornelius. The Holy Spirit told Peter to go. Peter explained to those who questioned him:

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus, who was I, that I should withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:15-18).

Did the Apostle Peter preach the man or the plan? He preached both.

Paul's travels carried him to the city of Philippi in the

province of Macedonia. He and Silas met with a group of women who were meeting for prayer. He sat down with the women and taught them the gospel.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying, If you have found me to be faithful, come into my house, and abide there (Acts 16:13-15).

Can you discern a pattern or a plan from the conversions I have mentioned? The Jews on Pentecost were baptized (Acts 2:41). The Samaritans heard the word, believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). Cornelius and his household were baptized (Acts 10:48). Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). Is this purely accidental or did the man ordain the plan?

There are other aspects of God's plan I must mention as our time draws to a close. God's plan demands that we worship God regularly and faithfully. In the very first century, there were Christians who were neglecting to worship God.

And let us consider one another to provoke to love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much more as you see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

All worshipping activities must be according to the divine plan. "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:16).

God's plan also includes the moral values Christians must honor. We must also grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). And we must be dedicated to reaching out to the lost. Since the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), Christians

must use every available means to preach the gospel to the whole world. The International Gospel Hour is dedicated to preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

I urge you to read your Bible regularly and prayerfully and to obey its precepts. God has a place prepared for those who are prepared to go there. Are you prepared to meet the Lord in the final judgment?

## Chapter 19

# God Speaks To Men Today

It is almost impossible to listen to Trinity Broadcasting Network for any length of time without hearing one of the television evangelists say: "God spoke to me today and told me to give you this message." I hesitate to accuse men and women of being dishonest, but those who claim God speaks directly to them today are either deliberately deceiving their audiences or they are deceived or they are mentally disturbed. God speaks to men today, but he speaks only through his word – the Holy Bible. Did not our Lord inspire the Apostle John to write:

For I testify unto every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19)?

I am fully aware that Christ was speaking specifically of the book of Revelation, but the principle applies to every book of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

A few months ago, I received an e-mail from a woman who objected to a message I had preached on the International Gospel Hour. I argued that God does not speak directly to man today. She asked: "Have you sought the Lord as to whether or not he speaks to men today?" I believe with all my heart God speaks to men today, but that is not really the question. Does he speak directly to men today? If he speaks directly to men today, does that not imply that his word is

incomplete? According to the Apostle Paul, God has given us all we need to know to serve him.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that that man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

If the scriptures thoroughly or completely furnish us unto every good work, what need do we have for further revelation? We have in the Bible all we need and we need all we have.

My correspondent said: "The scripture instructs us to lean not on our own understanding, but rather to acknowledge God in all our ways, and He will direct our paths." The book of Proverbs urges men: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your way acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). The crucial question is: How does the Lord direct our paths? Fortunately, we are not left to wonder. The divinely inspired Psalmist gives us the answer we need.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether (Psa. 19:7-9).

The Psalmist asked:

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?  
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.  
With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments! Thy word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against thee....Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psa. 119:9-11, 105).



Every human being on earth needs understanding and direction for his life. The Psalmist teaches that such understanding and direction can be found in the word of God.

Does the New Testament teach the same truth? When Satan tempted Christ, our Lord always responded: "It is written." The tense of the verb means "it stands written." Even though what Jesus quoted from Moses was written hundreds and hundreds of years before, he was telling Satan that it still applied. Has my correspondent taken careful note of what Paul told the Ephesian elders?

And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

What else does anyone need? Do you want to know the mind of God? Read his word (1 Cor. 2:7-13). James admonished his readers:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted (or implanted) word, which is able to save your souls (Jas. 1:21).

My correspondent observes: "The fact that each of us 'knows what he knows that he knows' is the reason we have different beliefs." Her views are somewhat different from Paul's teaching. The church at Corinth was foolishly divided. What was Paul's inspired advice to the Christians at Corinth?

Now I beseech you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

There cannot be unity until every one speaks the same thing. How is that possible? The Apostle Paul provides God's view of unity.

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:3-6).

Those who claim that God speaks to them directly are responsible to a great degree for the confusion that exists in the religious world. When a man says, "God spoke to me," how do we test what he says? Thousands of religious teachers claim direct revelation from God, but they teach different ideas and doctrines. There is one way and one way only to test what any man or woman teaches: Consulting the word of almighty God. John urged the early Christians not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits (1 John 4:1). The church at Ephesus tried those who claimed to be apostles and were not and found them to be liars (Rev. 2:2). A man can claim whatever he wants to, but proving his claims is another matter.

The woman who wrote the e-mail said she had not expected to have God to speak directly to her. She was not being taught to expect to hear directly from God. She affirms that:

...those who seek God's wisdom and will for their lives on a moment by moment basis will be led by God inside and in their moment of need, which is not sometimes while they have their Bibles opened before them.

Every person should seek God's wisdom and will, but there is no way we can find them except by having our Bibles open and receiving what they teach. How does a person know the voice he seems to be hearing is from God? Could the voice be coming from his or her own consciousness? The dear lady can find God's wisdom and will in the scriptures, and only in the scriptures.

She quotes these words from Christ's Parable of the Good

Shepherd: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). When Jesus was on earth, he spoke directly to the apostles and to others. He knew they were his sheep. They heard his voice and followed him. We know we are God's sheep when we hear his voice and obey it. But how do we hear his voice? If you want to know what you must do to be saved, you turn to the great book of Acts and imitate the examples in that book. For example, Philip the evangelist preached Christ to the Samaritans.

When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:5, 12).

When Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, were they hearing the voice of Christ? In other words, were they hearing the message Christ wanted them to hear?

Jesus often spoke in parables. The Parable of the Vine and the Branches urges his disciples to abide in him and to bring forth fruit. Please listen to what he told his disciples.

Now you are clean through the word I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, and you are the branches; he who abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John 15:3-6).

Do you hear the voice of Jesus in these challenging words?

The author of the letter quotes Jesus: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self" (John 7:17). What is God's will? How can we know it? Must God speak to us directly so we can know his will? The word "will" appears sixty-four times in the New Testament. There is not one of these appearances

that requires direct communication from God. Please listen to some of the verses that use the word "will."

Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

According to the book of Hebrews, the will of God is the gospel of Christ.

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He takes away the first that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:7-10).

Who is the one who said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God?" Could be anyone other than Jesus Christ? He is the one who came to give us a new covenant. Did you notice that Hebrews affirms: "He takes away the first that he may establish the second?" The first covenant was the Law of Moses, which Hebrews 10:8 makes plain. The second covenant is the gospel of Christ. It is by this will, that is, the gospel of Christ, that we are justified. Is my correspondent arguing that God has not given unto us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3)? The Apostle John told his readers: "The world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). Jesus makes that truth very plain. "Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

My correspondent claims that God spoke to her directly. These are her words:

When I asked God if I should continue to serve in Vacation Bible School in the same class I had the previous year in kindergarten, God said: 'Yes, to VBS. No, to kindergarten.' While most of what God says to me is a direct quote from scripture, reminding me of what has been written, this of course would not have been found there.

Later she asked God where he wanted her to serve. He told her to go see the "assistant pastor." She further says:

Those of us who have the experience of hearing directly from God will always endeavor to enlighten those who have not experienced it because only God's works are godly works.

If God speaks directly to the author of this e-mail, is he not a respecter of persons? He has never spoken directly to me. Why did he speak to my correspondent and not to millions and millions of others? I want to show my audience just how troubling this woman's reasoning is. Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, two Quaker preachers, published a book with the title, **If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person** (San Francisco: Harper, 2003). Gulley and Mulholland believe in the doctrine of universalism, that is, that God will save every person in the universe regardless of anyone's beliefs or practices. They claim they visited prisons and became acquainted with the most vicious criminals—murderers, rapists and child molesters. As they made room for these people in their lives, they "had to consider making room for them in heaven" (p. 34).

Gulley and Mulholland twist the scriptures to try to justify their belief in universalism. For example, they quote these words from Paul's letter to Titus: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men" (Tit. 2:11). They conveniently overlook verse 12:

Teaching us (that is, the grace of God teaches us) that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

But they make no pretense of having found their belief in universalism primarily by theological reasoning. If they did not find universalism in the Bible, how did they come to the conclusion that God will save every person? God whispered it in their ears (p. 18). Has God forgotten what he revealed through Jesus and the apostles? The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that those who do not love God and do not obey the gospel "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Maybe somebody else whispered in the ears of Gulley and Mulholland. You can know for sure it was not God.

My correspondent needs to know, if she does not already know, that thousands and thousands of people claim that God speaks directly to them. Many of them do not claim to be Christians. Some of them belong to various cultic groups or to eastern religions. Neale Donald Walsch has published a number of books of his conversations with God. I shall take time to mention only two of his books, **Tomorrow's God: Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge** (New York: Atria Books, 2004) and **The New Revelations: A Conversation with God** (New York: Atria Books, 2002). In the first book, **Tomorrow's God**, Walsch says he believes in pantheism, that is, "There is nothing that is not a part of God, for God is separate from nothing, but is the All in All" (p. 32). So when Walsch is having a conversation with God, guess who his God is. Himself! He affirms: "The God in me sees and honors the God in you" (p. 384).

In the second book, **The New Revelations**, Walsch rejects the Bible's ideas about God. For example, Walsch foolishly says: "You cannot die, and you will never be condemned to eternal damnation" (p. 326). Walsch quotes these words from James: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." He then observes: "This is the religion of low self-esteem" (p. 332). I have a question for my correspondent. How do we distinguish between the

beliefs of Gulley, Mulholland and Neale Donald Walsch and my correspondent's belief that God speaks directly to her and the claims of thousands of others who make the same claims? Is God delivering such contradictory messages? If he is, how could Paul say that "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33)?

I certainly am not denying that God has spoken directly to the prophets in Old Testament times and to the apostles and other chosen men in New Testament times. At this time, I am teaching the book of Ezekiel on Wednesday nights at the West Fayetteville Church of Christ. Ezekiel prophesied during the Babylonian exile. Over and over, God almighty gave direct instructions to Ezekiel. I shall give you a few examples.

And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, and the elders of Judah sat with me, that the hand of the Lord fell there upon me....And he said unto me, Go in and behold the wicked abominations that they do here....Then he said unto me, Son of man, have you seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chamber of his imagery?....He said also unto me, Turn yet again, and you shall see greater abominations that they do (Ezek. 8:1, 9, 12-13).

Is there any doubt in your mind that God spoke directly to the apostles and to other chosen vessels in the New Testament? The book of Revelation came to John from the very mind of Jesus Christ. In the final chapter of Revelation, Jesus said to John:

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last....I Jesus have sent my angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring

of David, and the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:12-13, 16).

All we need to know about God, about his Son Jesus Christ, about the plan of salvation, about Christian living and about the end of age has been given to us in God's inspired word. Our duty is to study the word, obey its precepts and teach others the way of salvation.



## Chapter 20

# The Gospel According To Oprah

The apostle Paul informed the Roman Christians:

I am debtor both to the Greeks and also to the Barbarians, both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much is in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein (that is, in the gospel of Christ) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:14-17).

You may or may not believe what Paul wrote – and that is your prerogative – but do you have any difficulty understanding his words? The central thrust of the passage is: “The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes.”

I know it may sound strange to faithful Bible students to ask, but which gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation? Is it the gospel of liberal theologians or of Universalists or of Calvinists? You do not have to be a theologian or a historian to know that these and many other groups do not agree on what the gospel is or how it saves. Tragically, some liberal theologians do not believe human beings are lost and need a savior. Universalists believe that all people will be saved, regardless of their behavior. Calvinists believe God has selected a certain number to be saved and certain number to be lost. Those numbers cannot be altered. It ought to be obvious that all of these views cannot be correct. They all may be false, but at least two of them have to be false. The law of non-contradiction eliminates at least two of these positions.

In our lesson today, I shall present a different approach to a “gospel” from any of those I have mentioned. I am calling our study: “The Gospel According to Oprah.” I do not have to tell you that Oprah Winfrey is one of the richest and most influential women in the world. She is reputed to be worth more than one and a half billion dollars. She is also one of the most articulate people I have ever heard. I almost never watch her program, but when I have watched it, I have never heard her struggle for a word. She knows exactly what she wants to say and how to say it. She has become an icon for millions of American women. Please understand that what I plan to say today is not a personal attack on Oprah. She has a right to believe whatever she chooses to believe. In fact, I admire her stamina, her ingenuity, her initiative and her tremendous success. Oprah Winfrey proves that poor and disadvantaged people can succeed in the United States of America, if they are willing to work as hard as Oprah Winfrey has.

Dr. James R. Edwards is professor of biblical languages and literature at Whitworth College, Spokane, Washington. He is a preacher for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and a contributing editor of the evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*. Dr. Edwards has recently published a book with the title, **Is Jesus the Only Savior?** (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005). Dr. Edwards has written:

Oprah Winfrey, the popular talk show host, once remarked, ‘One of the biggest mistakes we make is to believe there is only one way. There are many diverse paths leading to God’ (p. 203).

Later in the book, Dr. Edwards remarks:

All of this suggests how wide of the mark Oprah Winfrey and others are who imagine all religions are equal paths to God....The statement that all religions are basically the same is usually heard from people who are not adherents of any religion (p. 208).

My concern today is not to examine the different beliefs men and women have of the way or ways that lead to God. Our time will be spent today to determine what the New Testament teaches about the way to God. It is true that most religions teach that some acts are wrong and some are right. For example, I do not know of any religion—Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism or Sikhism—that encourages men and women to be sexually promiscuous, to abandon their children for a life of worldly pleasure and to ignore the needs of their fellowmen. There are probably individual members of all of these religions that could care less about reasonable moral values, but those religions do not generally endorse such lifestyles.

Does the New Testament teach there are many ways to God—that all ways to God are basically the same? I invite you to listen carefully as I read and examine some passages from the word of almighty God. If, as Oprah and other pluralists argue, there are many ways to God, New Testament Christianity is one of the cruelest approaches to life the human family has ever known. Both the Old Testament and the New make it plain that the Messiah had to die for the sins of the world. Approximately 750 years before Christ was born, Isaiah the great Messianic prophet, predicted:

Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he is cut off

from the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was stricken (Isa. 53:4-8).

Should any serious Bible student have difficulty identifying the person Isaiah had in mind? No one in the history of God's dealings with man, except Jesus Christ, can fit all the details of the prophecy from Isaiah. We know that is true by reading Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We also know it is true by reading the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch had been reading Isaiah 53:7-8. He asked Philip the evangelist to explain the meaning of the passage. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:32-35). The apostle Peter had Isaiah 53 in mind when he wrote: Jesus:

...did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him who judges righteously: who his own self bore out sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, might live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you are healed. For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Pet. 2:22-25).

I shall not take the time today to read the entire account of our Lord's suffering and death, but I do want to read a portion of it. Matthew says that the soldiers stripped Jesus of his scarlet robe.

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spat upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head....They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified

him, and parted his garments, casting lots (Matt. 27:28-31, 34-35).

Thinking seriously about death by crucifixion is almost impossible for us to comprehend. If men can be saved in any other way than through the suffering and death of our Lord, then Christ's death was not only in vain but also heartless.

The book of Romans outlines the place of Christ's blood in the scheme of human redemption.

But God commends his love toward us, in that, when we were sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8-10).

The apostle Paul was simply confirming what Jesus himself had taught. When Christ instituted the Lord's supper, he said: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). The inspired author of Hebrews adds: "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). I am aware that radical feminists and liberal theologians ridicule the idea of blood atonement, but neither Christ nor the apostles did.

If Christ and his apostles had preached the pluralism of Oprah Winfrey and of other liberals, do you honestly believe they would have been killed for their preaching? Would the Jews or the Romans have persecuted the early Christians if they had preached: "We believe we have the best savior, but not the only savior? Every one who is honest and lives by his convictions will be saved, regardless of his beliefs and behavior?" In other words, if those early Christians had preached what is commonly called "universalism," that is, that every person will be saved, would they have had to pay with their lives for their

religious views? But surely people who call themselves Christians would not endorse universalism, or would they?

Tragically, there are millions of people who call themselves "Universalists." As the term indicates, Universalists believe all men will be saved. They do not have to do anything to be saved. Neither can they do anything that will cause them to be lost. I am not questioning the sincerity of anyone who holds that doctrine, but surely no serious Bible student can be a Universalist. Two Quaker preachers, Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, have written two books promoting universalism. Their first book, **If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), argues: "Jeremiah made it clear that the salvation of every person was not merely God's desire, it was his promise" (p. 20). There is one thing absolutely sure: Jeremiah would have been totally surprised at such an interpretation of his great prophecy. If Jeremiah were a Universalist, why did he so strongly condemn idolatry (Jer. 2:11-13), adultery, lies and corruption among the leaders in Israel (Jer. 23:14)? Nobody – I repeat – nobody can read with understanding the prophecy of Jeremiah and hold to the doctrine of universalism. Oddly enough, Gulley and Mulholland quote these words from Peter's sermon at the house of Cornelius: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (p. 25). If men do not fear God and do what is right, will he accept them anyway? If he will, the words of Acts 10:34-35 are meaningless.

Gulley and Mulholland's second book, **If God Is Love: Rediscovering Grace in an Ungracious World** (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), is just as unreasonable and unscriptural as the first book. I have time to give you just one example. Gulley and Mulholland are critical of a movement that is known as "dominion theology" or "reconstructionism." They accuse dominion theologians of "promoting an American jihad" (p. 188). Are Gulley and

Mulholland arguing that dominion theologians are wrong? If everyone is going to be saved anyway, what difference does it make if a person believes and practices error? Gulley and Mulholland quote these words from Marcus Borg, one of the most radical members of the so-called "Jesus Seminar":

When we think about the claim that Christianity is the only way of salvation, it's a strange notion. Does it make sense that (God), whom we speak of as the Creator of the universe, has chosen to be known only in one tradition, which just fortunately happens to be our own (p. 128)?

Gulley, Mulholland and Marcus Borg are free to believe whatever they choose. Our concern must always be: What did Jesus and his apostles teach? Let us look first at what the Son of God taught about the way that God has ordained for our salvation. After Christ uttered those beautiful words in John 3:16, he said:

He who believes on him (that is, the Son of God) is not condemned: but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).

You are free to deny what Jesus taught, but you should have difficulty not understanding what he said.

Throughout the book of John, Jesus constantly used the definite article — "the" — in reference to himself and the work he came to do. For example, Jesus said to his disciples:

He who believes on me has everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven: if any man eat this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I shall give him is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world (John 6:47-51).

There is no passage in the New Testament, in my opinion, that more strongly and uncompromisingly teaches that Christ is our only Savior than John 14. Our Lord promised to go to the Father to prepare a place for his faithful followers. He said to Thomas: "Where I go you know, and the way you know." The apostle Thomas responded: "Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?" Our Lord's words in answer to Thomas have been the guiding light hope for millions of men and women through the ages. He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:1-6).

If Jesus meant what he said and if he had the authority to say it, he is not simply a way, not even the best way; he is the only way. In the view many modern pluralists, Christ's words are intolerant and arrogant. But there is no doubt Jesus and the apostles taught it. Oprah Winfrey, John Shelby Spong, and other pluralists may deny our Lord's words – and they have that prerogative – but we would need help not to understand what Jesus said. He also claims to be the truth and the life. No one, according to Jesus Christ, can come to the Father except through him. That means, in very simple language, there is just one way to the pearly gate.

Did the apostles also believe and teach the same view of salvation? You may not agree with what they said, but you know that is what they taught. The apostles John and Peter healed a man who had been lame since he was born. The miracle authenticated Peter and John as true spokesmen for God. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem did not deny that a mighty miracle had been done (Acts 4:14). The main concern of the Jewish leaders was what to do with the apostles. The Jewish leaders demanded to know by what power or by what name Peter and John had healed the lame man.

Then Peter, being filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, You rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and



to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God has raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone that was rejected by your builders, that has become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:7-12).

This is such simple and powerful language. There is salvation in Jesus Christ and in no other. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

What does the Lord himself teach that men must do to enjoy the salvation he has come to provide for the entire human race? I have already shown that Jesus made faith an indispensable factor in salvation. Jesus told some of his fellow Jews:

You are from beneath; I am from above: you are of this world, I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins (John 8:23-24).

The author of Hebrews added:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

Jesus also taught that we must confess him before men so he will confess us to the Father in the final judgment (Matt. 10:32-33). He told his fellow countrymen: "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). In the Great Commission according to Mark, our Lord commanded his apostles:

Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; he who believes and is baptized

shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

But we must continue to be faithful to receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Do you remember what our Lord told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount? "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

## Chapter 21

# Health And Wealth Gospel

There are a number of people in the New Testament who did not endorse the so-called "health and wealth" gospel or the prosperity gospel. That view contradicts the true gospel. Jesus had neither part nor lot in such utter foolishness. He was born into poverty and lived in poverty for his entire life. At least, that is what the gospel record teaches. On one occasion, a man said to Christ,

Lord, I will follow you whithersoever you go. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has not where to lay his head (Luke 9:57-58).

The author of an article in **The Atlanta Journal-Constitution** spoke with Dr. Eric Myers, professor of Archeology at Duke University. Dr. Myers is the editor of the **Oxford Encyclopedia in the Near East**. He points out that Jesus was so poor he could not afford his own burial tomb. "There is no way to speak of wealth in this context," Dr. Myers insists. "This is living at the margins of society, eking out an agricultural existence" (p. MS-5).

But wait just a minute. What about the gold, frankincense and myrrh the wise men of the east gave to Mary and Joseph? Matthew records what happened.

When they (that is, the wise men of the east) were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11).

Did those gifts make Christ rich? Creflo Dollar and other prosperity preachers argue that the gifts made him rich. **The**

**Atlanta Journal-Constitution** (Sunday, October 22, 2006) published an article with the title, "Was Jesus Rich?" The subtitle of the article was, "Swanky messiah not far-fetched in Prosperity Gospel." The article says that Christians have sung for many years about Jesus as the poor baby "asleep in a manger with a crib for his bed." According to the article, Creflo Dollar, a popular television evangelist, denies that Jesus was poor. He argues that Jesus became wealthy because of those gifts the wise men of east gave to Mary and Joseph. In fact, according to Dollar, Jesus had so much money he had to have an accountant to keep track of his money. He says that Jesus wore such expensive clothing that the Roman soldiers who participated in the crucifixion gambled for his robe. Dollar asserts: "He was rich, he was whole, and I use those words interchangeably" (p. MS-1). Tragically, that shows how little Creflo Dollar knows about words.

Creflo Dollar's opinions – no one has any basis for calling them "beliefs" – raise some very interesting questions. If Jesus Christ had so much money he had to have an accountant to keep track of it, why did he not have a place to lay his head? A person with a great amount of money may choose to spend his nights in the forests or in the fields. But that was not the case with our Lord. He did not have any place to lay his head. In his excellent commentary on **The Gospel of Luke** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) Norval Geldenhuys says concerning our Lord's poverty: "In answer to his loyalty to the Master, the Savior calls his attention to the naked reality of His life of extreme deprivation. For him there is no rest such as is to be found even for foxes and the birds of heaven" (p. 295).

I have another question for Creflo Dollar and for other health and wealth preachers. Is there even one reputable Bible scholar in the world – conservative, liberal, radical or otherwise – who believes that Jesus Christ was rich? Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts and Benny Hinn do not qualify as Bible scholars. They are popularizers of their prosperity message. You cannot read

the Bible with any comprehension and support the health and wealth gospel.

If the prosperity gospel preachers were right, could we not infer that Jesus did not plant enough faith seed to become rich or even moderately comfortable? We do not know how much money Jesus ever made. But we know he gave his all to serve the living God. Paul told the Ephesians that Christ “gave himself up” for the church (Eph. 5:25). No man in the history of the world ever gave so much. But his giving of himself did not make him rich in this world’s goods.

I have another question for Creflo Dollar and others who claim that the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh made Christ rich. How much gold, frankincense and myrrh would it have taken to make Jesus rich? Did the wise men from the east bring an ounce or a pound or a wagonload of gold? Frankincense and myrrh were very expensive items, but nobody – not Creflo Dollar or anyone else – knows how much of these items the wise men brought to Jesus. The only reason the prosperity preachers maintain that Jesus was rich is to try to justify their greed. All prosperity preachers pervert the gospel of Christ. I strongly suspect they could care less what I have to say on the subject.

Do you know of anyone, except the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave more to the cause of Christ than the Apostle Paul? I do not mean he sacrificed money. I do know how much money he ever had. But I know this: Paul endured hardships most of us can only imagine. He explained to the Corinthians:

For I think God has set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed unto death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are honorable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we

suffer it: being defamed, we entreat: we are made the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

Let us take a few minutes to examine some of the terms Paul used in this passage. There were times when Paul was hungry, thirsty, naked and buffeted. The word "naked" does not mean he had no clothing. It means he had inadequate clothing. The word "buffeted" literally means to beat with the fist. Paul not only was deprived of food, drink and clothing; he was beaten for his preaching. He had to work with his hands to support himself in his work for Christ. From the viewpoint of the prosperity preachers, Paul must not have planted enough seed faith to make himself rich. Paul further explained the great sufferings he had endured. There were times when he was "in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11:27). I wonder if those fastings were voluntary or if they occurred because of the hardships he had to endure.

The church in Philippi had been very generous in supporting the Apostle Paul (Phil. 4:18). But not all churches were so generous. He wrote to the Philippians:

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Phil. 4:12).

If he had been more generous in giving to the cause of Christ, would he have encountered so many difficulties? Can you not understand how insulting the so-called prosperity gospel is to our Lord, to the Apostle Paul and to untold numbers of faithful Christians?

Most of you remember what happened to Jim Bakker of the PTL club. To make themselves rich, Jim and his wife Tammy fleeced thousands and thousands of people. He believed and taught: "God does not want any poor kids or any sick kids." When my Molly and I lived in Memphis, Tennessee, the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* reported that Jim

and Tammy claimed to have given virtually every cent of their money to PTL. The reporter for the paper had discovered that the Bakkers owned a \$400,000 house in California and an expensive home in North Carolina. In addition, they owned a Mercedes Benz and a Rolls Royce. It ought to be obvious that Jim's preaching had been very lucrative.

Of course, Jim went to prison for five years because he had mishandled the money which was given to his ministry. After his release from a federal prison, he wrote a book dealing with his grievous mistakes. His book has the title, **I Was Wrong: The Untold Story of the Shocking Journey from PTL Power to Prison and Beyond** (Nashville: Nelson, 1996). Jim confesses that his previous view of prosperity was "fundamentally flawed." He denies that God has promised health and wealth to Christians (p. xiii of the Introduction). Jim affirms: "The mistakes I made are being perpetuated in ministries, churches, businesses, marriages and families" (p. xiv of the Introduction). Jim admits he was proud of being associated with what is known as the "prosperity gospel." He confesses that he had not studied the words of Jesus until he was in prison. He learned that the so-called "prosperity gospel" is the exact opposite of the gospel Jesus preached. He realized that he was helping to propagate a false gospel – not the true gospel of Jesus Christ (pp. 532-533). Incidentally, it takes a big man to make such an admission.

The message Jim preached convinced the King's kids that they deserved health and wealth. Tragically, there are many television evangelists – both men and women – who preach the same false message. *The Tennessean* (Sunday, November 29, 2009) published an article, "Prosperity Gospel faces challenge: frugal savers," by Bob Smietana from the newspaper's staff. The author points out that Charles Cowan of the nondenominational Faith Is the Victory Church in Nashville had bought into prosperity gospel. Like the other prosperity preachers, Cowan preaches that God wants Christians to prosper. Cowan's mentors in the health and

wealth gospel were the late Kenneth Erwin Hagin and Oral Roberts (p. 1-A).

Does the Bible teach that God wants his children to prosper? The Apostle John wrote to Gaius: "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in good health, even as your soul prospers" (3 John 1-2). The prosperity preachers constantly cite this passage as justify their prosperity gospel. Does it really do that? Is financial prosperity the only kind Christians should anticipate? Was this a promise of God or a wish of the Apostle' John's? Could John have had in mind what Peter told his readers: "But grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18)? John said: "I wish above all else that you may prosper and be in good health." If John were speaking of financial prosperity, does that mean that financial prosperity is of greater importance than spiritual prosperity? God wants all of us to prosper in adding the Christian graces: virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. If we lack these, we are "blind and cannot see afar off and have forgotten that" we were "purged from our old sins" (2 Pet. 1:5-9). If a Christian does not prosper financially, would he be blind and would he have forgotten that he was purged from his old sins? In other words, is financial prosperity on the same plane as spiritual prosperity?

Bob Smietana, author of the article in *The Tennessean*, says the prosperity preachers often quote these words from Luke 6:38: "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." Charles Cowan "believes that God will take care of his faithful givers – rewarding them with spiritual and physical health, along with enough money to meet their needs." Cowan told Smietana that "some churches have gone too far." They seem to stress money above "the total focus of their relationship with God" (p. 13-A).

Was Jesus speaking primarily of money when he said: "Give and it shall be given unto you?" If that it what he had



in mind, his promise has failed in hundreds and hundreds of thousands of cases in the past 2,000 years. Some of God's most faithful servants have been extremely poor, including the Lord himself and the Apostle Paul. My own father was a very generous man. With twelve children to support, he still gave generously to the work of the Lord. Did he prosper financially? He made a good living, but never accumulated great wealth. Did he believe he had been blessed, even though he was not a wealthy man?

What did Jesus have in mind when he said, "Give and it shall be given unto you?" There is no doubt God will bless those who are faithful to his will, but do those blessings necessarily mean money? Paul assured the Philippians that God would bless them for their generosity in helping Paul to preach the gospel.

Now you Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things that were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God. But my God will supply all your need according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:15-19).

Kenneth Copeland is one of the really wealthy health and wealth preachers. He recently purchased a \$20 million Cessna jet aircraft. Copeland published a little booklet with the title, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Ft. Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974). He asks: "Do you want a hundredfold return on your money? Give and let God multiply it back to you. No bank in the world can offer this kind of return! Praise the Lord" (p. 67)! Copeland also insists: "Every man

who invests in the Gospel has a right to expect the staggering return of one hundredfold" (p. 87).

D. R. McConnell has both an undergraduate and a graduate degree from Oral Roberts University. In 1988 McConnell published an excellent book with the title, **A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement** (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson). McConnell quotes Dr. Gordon Fee, a scholarly Pentecostal preacher:

American Christianity is rapidly being infected by an insidious disease, the so-called 'wealth and health' Gospel – although it has very little of the character of the Gospel in it. In its more brazen form...it simply says, 'Serve God and get rich'...in its more respectable, but pernicious – forms it builds fifteen million dollar crystal cathedrals to the glory of affluent suburban Christianity (p. 170).

McConnell also quotes Kenneth Hagin, the grandfather of the prosperity gospel: God "wants His children to eat the best, He wants them to wear the best clothing, he wants them to drive the best cars, and He wants them to have the best of everything" (p. 175). Did the Apostle Paul have the best to eat, the best clothing, the finest horses to pull his fancy chariot and the best of everything?

And what about the healthy part of the prosperity gospel? McConnell quotes E. W. Kenyon: "It is wrong for us to have sickness and disease in our bodies when God laid those diseases on Jesus" (pp. 150-151). One of the leading gurus in this movement, Kenneth Hagin, got sick and died. Paul Crouch has had serious heart problems. Oddly enough, many of the teachings of the health and wealth preachers originated with the new thought movement. They did not come from the word of God.

I ask you to think of some of the great servants of God. One of Paul's fellow soldiers was a man named Epaphroditus. Paul said concerning this man:

I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier, but your messenger, and he who ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because you had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick near unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when you see him again, you may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was near unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me (Phil. 2:24-30).

Did God fail in his promises to Epaphroditus? Or is it possible the health and wealth preachers have missed the mark?

Timothy, Paul's son in the gospel, had some stomach problems (1 Tim. 5:23). We do not know what sickness Trophimus was experiencing, but Paul left him in Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20). How do the health and wealth preachers explain Paul's sickness? He told the Galatians:

You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh you did not despise, nor reject; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness of which you spoke? For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me (Gal. 4:13-15).

Is it possible Paul was sick because he had not been generous enough in giving to the cause of Christ? Paul gave his whole life to the Lord.



## Chapter 22

### How The Word Of God Came To Man

**D**r. Harold Lindsell, one of the founding professors and vice-president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, angered many theologians when he wrote the book, **The Battle for the Bible** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House). In the Foreword to Dr. Lindsell's book, Dr. Harold J. Ockenga, President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, summarizes the basic message of Dr. Lindsell's book.

He is right in declaring that the attitude we have toward the trustworthiness of Scripture determines our later position, not only on faith, but also on practice. The evidence that those who surrender the doctrine of inerrancy inevitably move away from orthodoxy is indisputable (p. 12).

In very simple language, Dr. Lindsell argues: If you give up biblical inerrancy, you will almost certainly sacrifice other biblical ideas. Philosophers refer to Dr. Lindsell's view as the slippery slope argument.

Dr. Lindsell's book created a storm of controversy. A number of prominent evangelical theologians viciously attacked Dr. Lindsell's book. In response to those criticisms and to continue his strong belief in the inerrancy of scripture, Dr. Lindsell wrote a second book, **The Bible in the Balance** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979). Two statements from Dr. Lindsell's book outline his purpose in writing both books.

If the Bible contains both truth and error, it differs from no other book in the world. And if truth is mixed with error, who is to decide which parts are true and which parts are not true (p. 12)?

Dr. Lindsell tells why he wrote the first book.

I claimed that once anyone departs from a commitment to biblical inerrancy he opens the door to a disavowal either in principle or in practice of other important doctrines of the Christian faith (p. 14).

The term, "biblical inerrancy," means that the Bible is without error. If the Bible contains error – either moral, spiritual or scientific – it is not the word of God. It is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18). So how could his word lie? The argument about the nature of scripture boils down to a very vital question, "How did the word of God come to man?" If it came about by man's intuition, by his mediation on spiritual matters or by dedicated research, it is not the word of God. It might contain many valuable truths, but it is not and cannot be our infallible guide in serving and worshipping God.

So how did the word come to man? I invite your attention to these verses from 2 Peter 1.

Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you shall do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in our hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (vss. 15-21).

Did you notice Peter's statement: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables?" The great truths of New Testament Christianity were not mythological tales that were spread throughout the Middle East and elsewhere, as most theological liberals believe and preach. They were based on real events, such as the transfiguration of Christ. The Apostle Peter claims that he and his fellow apostles were actually present when Christ was transfigured. He affirms: We "were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Not only were Peter, James and John eyewitnesses; they were also ear-witnesses of the events on that momentous occasion. They actually heard God almighty say concerning Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Was the Apostle Peter lying about being present for the transfiguration, about actually seeing Christ transfigured and about hearing the voice of God? Incidentally, Matthew, Mark and Luke all report the events on the mount of transfiguration. If Peter lied, so did the three gospel writers.

What the apostles witnessed on that occasion made a lasting impression on them and on all who read their account of the events. Peter affirms: "We have a more sure word of prophecy." More sure than what – the events they saw and heard on the mount? I believe the expression ought to be translated: "We have the prophetic word made more sure" or "We have the message of the prophets more fully confirmed" (McCord). In their book, **The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), Cleon Rogers, Jr. and Cleon Rogers, III make the following comments: "Peter is saying that the Holy Scriptures are more certain than experience. He is saying, 'If you don't believe me, go the scriptures'" (p. 583).

New Testament writers lay great stress on the fulfillment of prophecy. For example, Matthew proves the virgin birth of Christ by quoting the prophecy of Isaiah. "Behold, 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" (Matt. 1:23). Matthew was quoting Isaiah 7:14. Matthew also quotes Micah regarding Christ's birth in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:6). Approximately 700 years before Christ was born, Micah had predicted:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you be little among the thousands, yet out of you shall he come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, and from everlasting (Mic. 5:2).

According to the Apostle Peter, those prophecies are made more sure by the events on the mount of transfiguration.

Peter affirms unequivocally: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). This verse tells us how scripture did not come to man. It did not come by "private interpretation." I do not know why the King James Version and other versions, such as, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version use the word "interpretation." The Greek word has nothing with interpretation. The Greek word for "interpretation" is *hermeneia* from which we derive our English word "hermeneutics" – the science of interpretation. The Greek word in our text is *epilusis*. The word means releasing, loosing, solving.

I often use Charles Williams' translation of the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950) because he almost always takes into consideration the tenses of verbs. But I believe he has missed the mark on the word "interpretation." He translates verse 20: "You recognize this truth, that no prophecy in scripture is to be interpreted by one's own mind." Again I emphasize that Peter is not speaking of the interpretation of scripture, but of its origin. Dr. Hugo McCord renders the Greek: "Know this first, that no prophecy is of anyone's own origination." Rogers and Rogers agree with Dr. McCord. "Peter is talking about the divine origin of Scripture, not about its proper interpretation" (p. 584). In



his commentary on **The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), Michael Green, a bishop of the Church of England, has written:

In the preceding paragraph, Peter is not talking about interpretation but authentication. His theme is the origin and reliability of the Christian teaching on grace, holiness and heaven.

Green quotes John Calvin as saying: "They did not blab their inventions of their own accord or according to their own judgments" (pp. 90-91).

Verse 20 tells us how scripture did not come—"of anyone's own origination." Verse 21 tells us how scripture did come. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Jeremiah did not sit down one day and decide what ought to be included in his prophecy. Had he done so, his prophecy would have been by the will of man. Instead, God spoke through him as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. The word "moved" (*phero*) is a powerful word and means to be carried along, to be borne along. It is the kind of language one would use in speaking of a ship's being carried along by the wind (Acts 27:15, 17). Rogers and Rogers say: "The metaphor here is of prophets raising their sails, the Holy Spirit filling them and carrying their craft along in the directed He wished" (p. 584). The conclusion to this powerful passage is very clear. When the prophets spoke, it was the Holy Spirit speaking through them. When men deny the inspiration and authority of the scriptures, they are denying the Holy Spirit.

Did you know that the Bible tells us how all of this took place? According to Paul, "The Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God." Men are incapable of knowing what is on the mind of the Spirit, unless the Spirit reveals his mind to us.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things we speak, not in the words that man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches; combining spiritual ideas with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:10-13).

Are lowly human beings like you and me capable of reading the words of the Spirit and understanding them? There are religious teachers who argue that we must have especially trained and endowed people to tell us the meaning of scripture. That is inexcusably false. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul shows the fallacy of the notion that ordinary mortals cannot understand the word of God. Please listen.

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which is given me to you: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote before in few words, whereby when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:1-4).

I shall summarize what we have learned from 1 Corinthians 2 and Ephesians 3. From eternity past, God almighty has had many great truths in his mind. Man could not know those truths on his own. The Holy Spirit searched the mind of God and revealed what he found to the prophets and to the apostles. Those men wrote what they received from the Holy Spirit. When we read what they wrote, we know what Paul and Peter and James and John knew. Neither the Corinthians nor the Ephesians had to have an official interpreter of God's word. They read the writings and knew what they needed to know.

But did not Paul refer to what he had learned as a "mystery?" As a matter of fact, he did. The Greek word *musterion* from which we derive our word "mystery" appears twenty-seven times in the New Testament, primarily in

Paul's epistles. The word never means that which cannot be understood. The word literally means a secret. Do you remember what mystery Paul had in mind in Ephesians 3? The mystery in;

Other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel (Eph. 3:5-6).

At one time that truth was a mystery, a secret, but now it has been revealed to all who are willing to read and to believe the divine record.

The Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul have firmly established the supernatural origin of scripture. What does that mean to men and women in every age until the Lord returns? It means we can trust what God has revealed to be all the truth we need to be saved and to stay saved. For example, you can know the way the universe, including man, came into existence. It is impossible that it could have evolved. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Did you know that Jesus endorsed the Genesis account of creation? The Pharisees approached Jesus with a question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus answered:

Have you not read, that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall become flesh (Matt. 19:3-4)?

We can know from the scriptures that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Salvation is available only through him. Yes, I am fully aware that such teaching is politically incorrect, but my concern is not political correctness – but biblical correctness. Does the Bible actually teach that men must believe in Christ and obey the gospel to be saved? Fifty years ago, that question would have received

a “yes” from virtually every denomination in the land. That is not true anymore. But what does the inspired word of God teach? Peter and John healed a lame man at the Beautiful gate of the Jewish temple. The Jewish leaders were upset, but could deny that a mighty miracle had occurred. They asked Peter and John:

By what power, or by what name, have you done this? Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, You rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone that was set a nought by you builders, which has become the head of the corner.

Please listen carefully.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:7-12).

Is there anything difficult in understanding the expressions, “neither is there salvation in any other” and “no other name...by which we must be saved?” You may not agree with the Apostle Peter’s words—and that is your prerogative—but it seems to me you need a great amount of help not to understand them. Do people refuse to accept those words because they believe Christianity is too narrow? The truth is: Christianity is the narrow gate Jesus had in mind (Matt. 7:13-14). Did not Jesus tell Thomas: “No man comes unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6)? Did he have the authority to make such a statement? Did he mean what he said?

Since we discussing how the word of God came to man, we must examine what that word says about the plan

of salvation. I shall refer to just one example of conversion from the book of Acts. There was a bitter persecution of the early church. All the disciples were driven from Jerusalem, except the apostles. But driving the early Christians from Jerusalem did not slow the growth of the church.

Therefore they who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

God endorsed Philip's preaching by the mighty miracles that accompanied his work. We do not know exactly what Philip preached to the Samaritans, but we know how they responded.

But when believed Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:4-6, 12).

When your preacher discusses Christ, does he stress any of the great truths that are listed in Acts 8? When he has finished his sermon, does anyone in audience respond like the Samaritans? What I am really asking is very simple: Does your preacher teach the same plan of salvation one reads over and over in the book of Acts? If he told men and women to repent and to be baptized, as the Apostle Peter told the believing Jews on the day of Pentecost, would he have a place to preach next Sunday? I am trying to get you to see that the word of God gives one and only one plan of salvation. How can churches believe they have God's approval if they fail to preach and to practice only what the Bible teaches?

But initial obedience to the gospel is just the beginning of our journey of faith. We must commit our lives to keeping the commandments of God. Is that not what the Apostle John had in mind when he wrote his first epistle?

Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: and every one who loves him that begat

loves him also who is begotten of God. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:1-3).

## Chapter 23

### Ideas Have Consequences

**S**ir Francis Bacon was an English philosopher, scientist, statesman and jurist. He was one of the greatest essayists who ever lived. His essay entitled, "Of Studies," makes some very wise observations on books.

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few are to be read wholly, and with diligence, and attention.... Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, **Uncle Tom's Cabin**, had an enormous impact on the thinking of many Americans. When Mrs. Stowe was introduced to President Lincoln, he is reputed to have said: "So you are the little lady that started this big war?" William Shakespeare's plays have survived 500 years and are still taught in every college and university in the United States. I do not claim to have any greater insight into the future than other people, but it is my considered judgment that books such as the Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins are merely a flash in the pan. They will not survive as literary masterpieces and will be shown to have made predictions that are utterly false and misleading. Hal Lindsey's book, **The Late Great Planet Earth** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), has sold multiplied millions of copies but will eventually be cast into the trash-bin of history.

In 1948 Dr. Richard Weaver, an English professor at the University of Chicago, wrote a book that has been quoted by dozens and dozens of later writers, including your speaker. Dr. Weaver's book has the title, **Ideas Have Consequences**

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press). My first acquaintance with Dr. Weaver's book was in reading Dr. Francis Shaeffer's books and articles. In his outstanding book, **The Great Evangelical Disaster** (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), Dr. Shaeffer does not mention Dr. Weaver or his book, but he does say: "Ideas have consequences in the way we live and act, both in our personal lives and in the culture as a whole." Dr. Shaeffer mentions several ideas that have changed our nation in negative and destructive ways. For example, "I must be free to desert my husband or wife, and abandon my children" (p. 30). Ethan Bronner's book, **Battle for Justice: How the Bork Nomination Shook America** (New York: Norton, 1989), points out that Judge Bork attended the University of Chicago while Robert Maynard Hutchins was chancellor and Dr. Weaver was a professor of English. According to Bronner, Robert Bork often referred to Weaver's book.

Weaver admonished that the failure of intellectuals to take the force of ideas was a symptom of the dissolution of the west. To him, modern liberal culture was corrosive (p. 59).

Robert Bork, one of America's great legal minds and a man of great integrity, apparently agreed with Weaver's thesis that "ideas have consequences" (p. 73).

Gloria Steinem, a radical feminist, stresses the importance of ideas. In her book, **Revolution from Within: a Book of Self-Esteem** (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992), Steinem quotes Mona Caird as saying, "We are governed not by armies and police but by ideas" (p. 107). She also quotes Stephen Jay Gould, the famous evolutionist from Harvard: "The paths of destruction are indirect, but ideas can be agents as sure as guns and bombs" (p. 141). Most of us probably agree with Baird and Gould, but we know the Bible teaches the same truth more effectively and with greater authority. Solomon urged his readers: "Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Christ told the Pharisees:



For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things (Matt. 12:34-35).

Paul admonished the Philippians: "Let this mind (or thinking or attitude) be in you which is also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). There is no way to become like Christ without thinking like him.

The publishers of Dr. Weaver's book call it "a classic work." They maintain that the book "unsparingly diagnoses the ills of our age and offers a realistic remedy." According to the publishers, the cure "lies in the right use of man's reason, in the renewed acceptance of an absolute reality, and in the recognition that ideas—like actions—have consequences." The publishers, however, are not the only ones who sing praises of Dr. Weaver's book. Reinhold Niebuhr calls it a "profound diagnosis of the sickness of our culture." These and other commendations appear on the back cover of Dr. Weaver's book.

Dr. Weaver does not pull any punches in describing the moral spiritual condition of our nation. He says "there is ground for declaring that modern man has become a moral idiot" (p. 1). Because men have measured themselves by themselves and compared themselves among themselves, "anarchy threatens even that minimum consensus of value necessary to the political state" (p. 2). Dr. Weaver quotes what Matthew says about the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21) and then adds: "We have for many years moved with brash confidence that man had achieved a position of independence which rendered the ancient restraints needless" (p. 2). Dr. Weaver was troubled about the denial of universal standards and values. "With the denial of objective truth there is no escape from the relativism of 'man as the measure of all things'" (p. 4).

Every intelligent on earth knows that what a person believes makes all the difference in his behavior. Dr. Weaver affirms:

Every man participating in a culture has three levels of conscious reflection: his specific ideas about things, his general beliefs or convictions, and his metaphysical dream of the world (p. 18).

David Barton's book, *The Myth of Separation* (Aledo, TX: Wallbuilder, 1992), quotes George Washington as saying:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man clam the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness.... And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion (pp. 115-116).

Was the father of our country arguing that "ideas have consequences?"

Dr. Weaver discusses the popular misconception that it does not matter what one believes so long as one is honest. He says this "statement really means that it does not matter what one believes so long as one does not take his beliefs seriously." The sad fact is: Men's contentions that beliefs do not matter has led us to "look with derision upon the prohibitions of the 1890s" and "suppose that violation of them has been without penalty." One example of losing the sense of discrimination is "the failure of the modern mind to recognize obscenity" (pp. 26-28). Dr. Weaver has great insights into the new media, into art, into child psychology and into private property, but I shall have to save those ideas for a later date.

Do I have to remind the older people in my audience about the destructiveness of Nazism? Hitler believed that the Aryan race was superior to all other races and should rule the world. He thought Jews and blacks and others were sub-human. He believed they should be eradicated from the face of the earth. His stupid ideas led to the deaths of 6,000,000 Jews and more than 14,000,000 others. How could the people of Germany—many of whom were highly educated and

culturally sophisticated – allow Hitler’s ideas to cause so much harm to the human family? How can people in modern times with a grain of sense call themselves Neo-Nazis or Skinheads or members of the Aryan Nation?

Do you have any idea how many human beings Communism has destroyed? If you have not investigated the enormous number of people Communism has eliminated, you must buy and read **The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression** (Cambridge: Harvard, 1999). Oddly enough, the book was published by Harvard University Press. Harvard has Communists on its faculty. The six scholars who wrote the book are all specialists in the international Communist movement. The book has over 850 pages and is filled with the most disturbing information you can imagine. If you are concerned about the Communists in Hollywood, in some of our colleges and universities and in Washington, you would do yourself a favor by reading the book. I know you will not remember the enormous numbers the Communists destroyed, but I believe giving the information should be helpful.

The Soviet Union was responsible for the deaths of 20 million people; China 65 million; Vietnam 1 million; North Korea 2 million, Cambodia 2 million; Eastern Europe 1 million; Latin America 150,000; Africa 1.7 million; and Afghanistan 1.5 million (p. 4).

Altogether the Communists have killed 100,000,000 people. That figure does not take into consideration the millions of people who were denied their God-given rights to live peacefully, to own their own businesses, to worship as they believed God demanded and to choose their own leaders. Communism is an unmitigated evil. Anyone who embraces any phase of Communism has some serious moral and spiritual problems. God willing, I plan to do a series of lessons on Communism.

Hedonism is an idea that has influenced millions of

people worldwide. The word "hedonism" means devoted to pleasure. The New Testament uses the Greek *hedone* five times. The word is translated "pleasure" and "lusts." Paul describes the condition of unbelievers.

For we ourselves also were sometimes disobedient, deceived, serving different lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another (Tit. 2:2).

James asks:

From whence come wars and fightings among you? Do they not come hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?...You ask, and have not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts (Jas. 4:1, 3).

Even activities that are not wrong within themselves may become wrong if they prevent our taking care of our families, helping those who are in need and worshipping God regularly. For example, fishing is a great pastime. Millions of people spend billions of dollars buying fishing equipment and going fishing. But fishing can become sinful if we allow it to interfere with our duties to our families and to our God.

Even legitimate pleasures are temporal. Robert Burns' poem, "Tam O'Shanter," tells us how temporary earthly pleasures are.

But pleasures are like poppies spread; you seize  
the flower the bloom is shed. Or like the snow falls  
in the river, a moment white then melts forever.  
Or like the rainbow's lovely form vanishing amid  
the storm. Or like the Borealis Race that flit ere you  
can point their place.

The Bible does not condemn legitimate pleasure, but it does condemn making pleasure our God. Secular humanism is one of the most influential ideas of our generation. It denies the existence of God, the inspiration of the scriptures, the deity of Christ, the existence of life after death and a solid

basis for moral values. Many of the people in the media, in government, and in our universities are secular humanists. Even though they may not have officially subscribed to **Humanist Manifestos I & II** (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1973), they have swallowed hook, line and sinker the ethical views of the humanists. For example, humanists deny that there are any absolutes. So was it alright for Hitler to murder 6,000,000 Jews, for the Communists to kill 100,000,000 people, for pedophiles to abuse sexually little boys and girls and for political leaders to commit adultery and then lie about it? If there are no absolute standards, there is no way we can condemn any activity except to say, "I do not like that."

If you think that militias and survival groups are not dangerous, you are not keeping up with their behavior or you have the moral values of vicious and dangerous animals. These evil groups are committed to taking the government into their own hands and revolutionizing it along Nazi lines. In fact, many within the militias are committed Nazis or Klansmen or skinheads. Their plans for America are antichristian, anti-American and irrational. They actually hate our country, although many of them pretend to love America.

The greatest idea in the history of the world is New Testament Christianity. It is the only philosophy or religion that provides for a Savior who can forgive our sins and give us life eternal. Jesus Christ came into the world to show us the Father (John 1:18), to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28) and to be an example for every human being on earth (John 13:15). Jesus explains his mission. "The thief comes not, but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I have come that you might you have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

But is not Christianity too restrictive, too exclusive? Any philosophy or religion that does not involve some restrictions cannot contribute to man's welfare. For example, Jesus quoted with approval: "You shall not commit adultery" (Matt. 19:18). Did Jesus endorse this Old Testament commandment to

take the joy out of living? He knew how utterly foolish and destructive adultery is. Adultery destroys relationships, in many cases leads to divorce, puts children at a terrible disadvantage, weakens the very foundation of society and endangers the souls of the participants. God gave the commandments to make us stronger and to keep us from destroying ourselves.

Every serious student of the scriptures knows that Christianity is exclusive. No, it does not discriminate on the basis of race or color or national origin. But it does require every one who would be saved to love God and to obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8-9). The Apostle Peter told some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem:

This (meaning Christ) is the stone which was set at nought by your builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12).

The Apostle Peter asked Christ: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69).

What does God demand of us that we may enjoy the wonderful benefits of this great idea—New Testament Christianity? The book of Acts records a number of conversions that give us insight into what alien sinners must do to have the forgiveness of sins and to be added to the Lord's church. God commissioned Philip the evangelist to preach to the Samaritans.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them....And when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:5, 12).

God's plan for saving man could hardly be plainer. Every person who wants to become a Christian must believe and obey the Lord in baptism (Matt. 16:15-16).

But those who would be saved must go beyond their initial obedience to the gospel. Please listen to these verses which are addressed to Christians.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast (that is, the Law of Moses), how shall we escape if we neglect the great salvation (Heb. 2:1-3)?

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12).

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without no man can see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them who are in bonds, as bound with them; and them who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body (Heb. 13:1-3).

Jesus said to all men—saint and sinner alike: "But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things (food, drink and clothing) shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

The world is full of philosophies, world religions, cultic groups and worldviews. But there is only one way to serve the living God and have the promise of life eternal—New Testament Christianity. If you are not a Christian, will you this very day surrender your will to the will of God by obeying the gospel? If you are a Christian, I urge you walk in the light as Christ is in the light that you may continue to have the forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:7).





## Chapter 24

### Is Exclusivism Arrogant?

**T**he *Tennessean*, middle Tennessee's most influential newspaper – like most newspapers – always includes a number of “Letters to the Editor.” Each day the editorial staff gives three stars to a letter the editors apparently think is the best letter of the day. Sometimes the letters are quite good, but at other times, they are so poorly reasoned one wonders how they ever made it into publication. Do the editors of the paper delight in publishing letters that are way out in left field? Do they give three stars to those letters that most closely agree with the agenda of the newspaper's editors? Frankly, I have agonized over the liberal and illogical messages of many of the letters to the editor.

On April 22, 2003, *The Tennessean* published an Alabamian's letter with the title, “Other countries see the U. S. as arrogant.” Tragically and inexcusably, many Americans who travel abroad give the impression that America has the greatest history and culture in the world. That is the reason some people in foreign countries call us “ugly Americans.” Do some Americans appear to people of other countries to be arrogant? Is it possible that people of other nations and cultures are simply jealous of America's scientific and technological accomplishments? The truth is: There is no reason for anyone – Americans included – to be arrogant.

The letter to the editor says it is time for Americans to be honest about the religious image we present to the rest of the world. He affirms that Americans see themselves as a caring people who want to help the rest of the world to enjoy freedom of life and religion. He argues that many of us presume that we are a “Christian” nation and we assume that Jesus Christ is our model for personal behavior (p. 8-A). I know America has made some tragic mistakes and continues

to do so. But no nation on earth has ever done more to help other nations to be free than the United States. How many countries in history have defeated their enemies and then spent billions of dollars to help those countries rebuild? What would be the condition of nations like Germany, Italy and Japan were it not for the compassion and generosity of our great country? And would weak-kneed France even exist were it not for the United States?

I do want to say in passing that the United States of America is not a Christian nation; it never has been and by definition cannot be. The Bible has no pattern for making any nation Christian. There are millions of devoutly religious people in our country, but that does not make the United States a Christian nation. The vast majority of the so-called "founding fathers" claimed to be Christians, but never were the majority of Americans Christians, almost regardless of how one defines the term "Christian."

The letter writer says Americans have a problem we almost never consider with openness and honesty. And what is that problem he so wisely understands that the rest of us ignore? "The posture of our religious bearing to the world at large is one of basic arrogance." Please listen carefully to this writer's conclusion.

Our traditional presentations of our faith propagate the belief that only those of us who are Christian really know God. Our commitment to culturally influenced visions of Christianity as superior to other faiths paints a picture of a faithful people with haughty, theological manners (p. 8-A).

It would take a full-length book to deal with the observations this man makes about Christianity, but I shall respond as time permits to some of his views.

Are Christians the only ones who can really know God? You may not agree with what I am about to tell you, but those who have committed their lives to Christ must accept his word on every topic, including the truth about God. If

we are truly followers of Jesus Christ, how can we entertain views on any topic that differ from his? What he thought about God or about the plan of salvation or about moral values, we must think. Is that not what having the mind of Christ means? Paul charged the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

Jesus had much to say about his Father. How could it be otherwise since he was the very Son of almighty God? No founder of any other religion could make that claim and prove it to be true. I am aware that the founders of some cultic groups have claimed to be manifestations of God, but no knowledgeable Bible student has taken them seriously. Those religious leaders did not and could not prove by supernatural means that they were God manifest in the flesh. Yet Jesus was marked out to "the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Luke says that Jesus "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). Who but God manifest in the flesh has the power to lay down his life and the power to take it up again (John 10:18)?

Will you please listen to what John writes about Jesus Christ?

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 by him; and without was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men....He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not (John 1:1-4, 10).

The affirmations contained in these verses could not be said about the founder of any other religion or about any other religious teacher. Please think about John's statements. Jesus Christ – the Word – existed from eternity past. He was with God in the beginning and he is God. He – not the founder of any other religion and not Shirley MacLaine – was the Creator

of the world. It is in him and in him alone that men can have eternal life. The apostle John adds: "And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

From what I have read to you in the book of John, would you not expect that Jesus Christ alone had complete access to the mind of God? He alone is the Word made flesh; he alone has existed with God from eternity past; he alone made the world and provides for life eternal. The apostle John affirms: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him" (John 1:18). The word "declared" in the Greek means to reveal, to explain, to make known. Only Jesus had existed from the beginning with God and only he could fully explain the Father.

On one occasion, Jesus informed the apostles that he would soon be leaving them. They wanted to know where he was going, although he had told them before that he was returning to the Father. He said to them, "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas asked, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; and how can we know the way?" Jesus told him:

I am the way, the truth and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you should have known my Father also: and from henceforth you know him, and have seen him.

The Lord's statements must have surprised and even shocked the apostle Philip. He pleaded with Jesus: "Show us the Father, and it suffices us." Our Lord's reply to Philip is one of the most remarkable teachings from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus said to Philip: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:3-9).

Do we have adequate reasons to believe what Jesus said to Philip? Thomas Carlyle was speaking with a friend about Jesus. He quoted our Lord's words to Philip: "He who has

seen me has seen the Father." The friend said to Carlyle: "I could say the same thing." Carlyle responded: "But Jesus got people to believe it." We know beyond any doubt that Jesus is indeed equal with the Father (John 5:17) — that he and God are one (John 17:21-22). Since he is God the Son and has existed with God the Father from eternity past, would he not be in a perfect position to know God and to reveal his will to fallen men? The apostle Peter wrote of Christ's precious blood, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Pet. 1:19-21). To put it as precisely and concisely as I am able: We have in Christ the complete and perfect revelation of God the Father.

Since Christ is God and has been with God the Father from the beginning, should he not know the moral and spiritual condition of man? Is it even remotely possible that anyone could speak on matters of salvation with the same authority Christ possesses? Just before Christ ascended to the Father to await his second coming, he explained the authority God had given him and then gave this beautiful and powerful commission to them.

All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you all the way, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

What purpose does baptism serve in the scheme of human redemption? Mark's account of the Great Commission gives us some insight. "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). If you have any doubt about the meaning of baptism, please listen to the climax to Peter's sermon on Pentecost. When the Jews asked Peter and the other apostles,

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”, Peter by divine guidance answered:

Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:38-39).

Incidentally, when the three thousand Jews on Pentecost responded to the Lord’s command by repenting and being baptized, were they born again? If they were not, what further steps did they have to take to be born again?

No sane person believes that anyone who has committed himself to Christ always lives above sin. We all have sinned and continue to come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). But the teachings of Christ and of his apostles provide the foundation for the moral values God demands that we honor in our daily lives. The first step for the newly converted person is to remember these words: “Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Paul outlines what it means to continually seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness.

If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sits on the right of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory.

Paul commands Christians to mortify our members that are upon the earth—sexual immorality, uncleanness, evil passions, covetousness, which is idolatry. We must put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new man “which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him” (Col. 3:1-10).

We must freely admit that some of the world religions

and cultic groups teach many of these ideas and concepts. In many cases – although not in all – they teach these truths because of their indebtedness to either the Old Testament or to the New. But no other religion or cult or sect teaches the whole truth about God, about salvation and about righteous moral values. Many of the adherents of the other religions are good moral people. They do not lie, steal or abuse their wives and children. They pay their taxes and are responsible citizens of the countries where they live. But they do not believe in Christ and will die in their sins (John 8:24). But am I not being intolerant? If these were my words, the answer would be yes. They are not my words; they are the words of God's Holy Spirit. They come from the very mind of God almighty (1 Cor. 2:6-13).

The letter writer says: "Our commitment to culturally influenced visions of Christianity as superior to other faiths paints a picture of a faithful people with haughty, theological manners" (p. 8-A). Am I preaching "culturally influenced visions of Christ" when I tell people: Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life?" If Christianity is not superior to all other faiths, then I may be haughty in my theological manners. The author of Hebrews argues that the gospel is greater than the law of Moses (Heb. 1:5-7). Until the gospel came, the Mosaic covenant was the best law any people had ever known. But the gospel is better in every way than the Old Testament law. From a biblical viewpoint, there is no question of the gospel's superiority to every other religious worldview. If that is arrogant, it is because Christ and his apostles were arrogant. That is precisely what they taught. Are you happy to accuse Christ of being arrogant?

The following excerpt from the letter to *The Tennessean* defies logic.

Thoughtfully and theologically, I cannot imagine the Jesus of the scriptures being proud of such pride-filled piety among his personal followers (p. 8-A).

What the letter writer imagines has absolutely nothing to do with the facts in the case. What did Jesus teach about his knowledge of God and about his place in the plan of salvation? Did not Jesus affirm: "Except you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24)? Can you imagine a more exclusive claim than that? You may or may not believe what Jesus taught – and that is your prerogative – but how can there be any debate about his meaning? And how could words be more exclusive than these words: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6)? Christ's Parable of the Good Shepherd can hardly be misunderstood. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep....I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:7, 11).

The apostles Peter and John healed a man who was born lame. The Jewish leaders could not deny that a notable miracle had been done, but they were angry with the apostles. They were afraid that their followers would grasp the significance of the miracle and desert Judaism for Christianity. The apostle Peter quoted the prophet Isaiah's prediction about the Jews' rejection of their Messiah (Isa. 28:16). "This is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the head of the corner" (Acts 3:11). Peter then said to the Jews: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Millions of people who claim to be Christians, including prominent evangelicals like Clark Pinnock, reject the apostle Peter's words, but that in no way changes their significance. According to the apostle Peter, salvation is in Christ alone and in no other. To unbelievers and to liberal theologians, these words appear intolerant and bigoted, but all the Bible writers taught the same truth on this topic. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Those who reject Christ reject God. They have no hope of eternal salvation. Is that the message Jesus Christ and



his apostles intended for Christians in every age to teach? Is that the only message that will save men and women from eternal damnation? Paul told the Romans:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein (that is, in the gospel of Christ) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

Please meditate on the following questions relating to our topic, "Is Exclusivism Arrogant?" Have there been professed Christians who have shown a spirit of arrogance in preaching Jesus as our only Savior? If you know human nature, you know there have been. Does that mean that everyone who preaches Christian exclusivism is arrogant? If we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that the apostles were inspired of God, what choice do we have about preaching Jesus Christ as our only Savior? If we can be saved without believing in Christ and obeying his gospel, was not God cruel in sending Jesus into the world to suffer and to die for our salvation?

If you are not a Christian, I urge you to confess your faith in Christ, to repent of your alien sins and to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Then walk in the light as Christ is in the light that you may continue to have the remission of sins (1 John 1:7).



## Chapter 25

### Is The Bible Enough?

The place of the Bible in the scheme of human redemption has been for many years and still is very controversial. Do we not need creeds, confessions of faith, human rule books, traditions, the official interpretations of religious leaders and other aids to know what we must do to become Christians, how to worship God, what moral values God demands of his children and how the church is to govern itself? I remember receiving a letter from a man who wrote: "You must accept the idea of *sola scriptura*." I do not remember what I said that gave him that impression, but he was exactly right. The Latin phrase, *sola scriptura*, literally means scripture alone. It was one of the major emphases of the Reformation movement. Churches of Christ do not embrace the doctrine of "scripture alone" because Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin believed and preached it, but because the Bible explicitly teaches it. Our lesson today asks the question, "Is the Bible Enough?"

If the Bible is not enough, would that not be God's fault? Did not the all-wise God know enough to provide for all our moral and spiritual needs? Did he not care enough to remove all doubts about salvation from our minds? If the Bible does not furnish us all we must have to please God, where do we go to get the rest? If you have the slightest doubt about the doctrine of scripture alone, please listen to these familiar words. The apostle Paul urged a young preacher:

Continue in the things that you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them, and that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by the 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 Tim. 3:14-17).

You may not agree with Paul's words about scripture, but you would have a hard time not understanding them. I shall briefly summarize the great truths of these verses. If the holy scriptures make us wise unto salvation, what else do we need? I shall not take time to review the many examples of conversion in the book of Acts, but I shall give one example. Luke tell us that Philip the evangelist went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them. "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:5, 12). While there are preachers in all religious groups, including some left-leaning preachers among churches of Christ, who vigorously oppose what they call "pattern theology," is it not obvious that the conversion of the Samaritans is a pattern for the conversion of men and women in every generation until the Lord returns?

Paul affirmed: "All scripture... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Is there anything else we need in order to "grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18)? The words Paul used — doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness — cover all the bases in our growth as Christians. Whatever teaching is required for us to become Christians and to remain faithful Christians has been graciously given in the word of God. Incidentally, the Greek word *paideia* (translated "instruction") would be more correctly translated "discipline." Does this not mean that the scriptures furnish all the information we must have to serve God acceptably? The scriptures also discipline us so that we may become like our Savior. The book of Hebrews emphasizes that truth. "Whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and scourges every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:6). I am not arguing

that the word of God is God's only means of discipline, but that is certainly one way he disciplines his children.

Paul further emphasizes: The God-breathed word enables the man of God to be "perfect." I am fully aware that some theologians have misinterpreted and misapplied the word "perfect." Some holiness groups teach the doctrine of perfectionism, that is, that once a Christian has received the direct operation of the Holy Spirit he can no longer sin. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are no sinless people. The apostle John was writing of and to Christians when he said: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Did not the apostle Paul teach: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)? The verb, "have sinned," is past tense and the verb, "come short," is present tense and means continually come short.

The word "perfect" means full grown or mature. It never means sinless or flawless. The author of Hebrews severely criticizes his readers for their immaturity.

For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone who uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them who are full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The expression, "of full age," is from the same Greek word translated "perfect." The author of Hebrews uses the same word when he charged his fellow Christians: "Therefore let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1). He was pleading with the Hebrew Christians to grow up, to mature, to quit acting like babies.

Paul argues: "The scriptures...thoroughly furnish us unto all good works." Most modern versions use the word

“completely” rather than the word “thoroughly.” If the scriptures completely furnish us unto all good words, what has God left out of the scriptures that we need to know? Has he not told us how to be saved and how to stay saved? Do you honestly believe the God who loved us enough to send his Son to die for us would have left out of his word information and instructions we must have to be his faithful servants? In case you have any doubt, please remember the Apostle Peter’s words.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

Has God “given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness?” If he has not, Peter was not telling the truth. If he has, what need is there for further revelation? And yet, if one watches Trinity Broadcasting Network, the Inspiration Channel and similar operations, he cannot avoid noticing how many of the speakers on those programs claim to have a direct revelation from God. They use words somewhat as follows: “The Lord spoke to me” or “The Lord appeared to me in a dream.” I wish I could say that only Charismatics or Pentecostals were guilty of deceiving their listeners by pretending to have a direct word from God, but that would not be the case. Rich Atchley, the preacher of the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas, made this completely unscriptural claim:

Right there at that spot about 1994 **the Holy Spirit said to me in the middle of a sermon**, ‘that’s what you and all preachers like you are doing, who

haven't for years believed that the worship of God with instruments was wrong. But you continue by your silence to let people think it's wrong. But you allow the people to be disrupted, and you do so under the plea, 'Well, we're just maintaining peace.' But that's not peace; that's cowardice. I knew then the day would come I'd have to teach this lesson.

Tragically and inexplicably, Rick Atchley is guilty of imitating some of the false prophets in Old Testament times. He was speaking where God has not spoken. He is like the Balaam, the Gentile prophet: He was waiting for what more the Lord has to say. He was attempting to convince churches of Christ to fall in with the fleeting fashions of the world (Rom. 12:2). I pray to God almighty that we shall not be deceived by Rick Atchley's imagination.

In view of the false teachers who claim to have direct communication from God, I must ask a series of questions. Is there something we need to know about God the Bible does not reveal? The word of God tells us that God spoke the world into existence (Gen. 1:1). It informs us that God in his infinite love initiated the plan of salvation so that all who love God and keep his commandments will be saved from their sins and given the promise of eternal life. Paul explained these great truths to the Ephesians.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him (Eph. 3:8-12).

I do not have time in this short study to discuss many features of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but I must read several passages from the Old Testament that shed considerable light on the nature of God. Moses taught: Our "God is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are just: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). No book of the Old Testament has so much to teach us about the nature of God as Isaiah. The Lord God himself asks:

To whom then shall you liken me, or shall I be equal, says the Holy One? Lift up you eyes on high, and behold who has created these things, that brings out their host by number; he calls them all by names by the greatness of his might, for he is strong in power; not one fails (or is missing). Why do you say, O Jacob, and why do you speak, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my Lord? Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, neither is he weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to them who have no might he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; and they shall mount up with wings of eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isa. 40:25-31).

There is much more from Isaiah I would like to read, but I shall have to reserve it for a future lesson.

My second question relates to Christ. Has the word of God revealed all we must know and believe about him? Every book in the New Testament provides wonderful insight into who Jesus is, but I shall confine my reading to the book of Hebrews. In the very first chapter of this powerful book, we learn that God speaks to this dispensation through Jesus.



And why does God speak through Christ and not through some other person? The inspired author explains in very plain language.

But unto the Son, he (God) says, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest: they shall wax old as does a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail (Heb. 1:8-12).

The author of Hebrews calls Jesus "the apostle and high priest of our profession" (Heb. 3:1). He affirms that Christ "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus Christ is the "author and finisher of our faith" who sacrificed himself for us and is now seated at the right hand of God (Heb. 12:2). Has the Holy Spirit revealed anything new to Pentecostals or to anyone else about Christ since the close of the canon?

I have already mentioned the gospel plan of salvation, but let us return to it for a moment. What do modern men and women need to know about salvation that is not found in the scriptures? I wonder if the Pentecostals, Calvinists and others think they have been given the so-called "sinner's prayer" as the means of saving alien sinners? Did God speak to them outside the scriptures and tell them that alien sinners are to pray for forgiveness? I know this and so to you: There is not a person on earth who can find the sinner's prayer in the word of God. When the believing Jews on the day of Pentecost asked Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?", did the apostle Peter tell them to pray? Did Philip instruct the Samaritans to pray for the

forgiveness of their sins? When Ananias, the heaven-sent preacher, approached Saul of Tarsus, why did he not urge him: "Please say to Christ: I know I am a sinner. I know you died for my sins. I want you to come into my heart and save me. I thank you for saving me?" Should it not be a source of embarrassment for men in leadership positions in various denominations to add to God's plan of salvation? Why not tell modern sinners what inspired men told sinners in the first century? Or are we to ignore the divine pattern revealed in the word of almighty God?

There are two other scriptural passages I must read before our time expires. Paul met with the Ephesian elders at the seacoast town of Miletus. He warned them of false teachers that would threaten the peace and unity of the church.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.

What were the elders to do to counteract the influence of the false teachers? Please listen.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of this grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified (Acts 20:29-32).

Is the word of God alone sufficient for that purpose? Do we not need creeds, disciplines and catechisms? We need the word and only the word.

James, the Lord's brother, urged his readers:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls (Jas. 1:21).

If the word of God is able to save our souls, what need is there for human creeds and confessions of faith? In Acts 20:32 and in James 1:21, the inspired authors used the verb, "is able." That verb comes from the same Greek word that is translated "power" in this well known passage.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

James adds:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas. 1:22-25).

You can discern from these verses in James 1 that hearing the word of God – as valuable as that is – is not adequate. We must obey the word to be saved and to stay saved. Is that really what the Bible teaches? There are numerous passages that stress that truth. Jesus asked his disciples: "Why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say" (Luke 6:46)? The author of Hebrews affirms:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of salvation unto all them who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9)?

Is he the author of eternal salvation to those who do not obey him? If he is, the message of Hebrews 5 is meaningless.

I shall conclude our study today with two verses from 1 John.

Little children, let no man deceive you: he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous....In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:7, 10).

The meaning of doing righteousness can be gleaned from the scriptures and only from the scriptures. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7). What the Spirit says to the churches, he says only in his word.

## Chapter 26

### Joel Osteen's Preaching

Katie Couric is one of the most biased people I have ever heard. She gives liberals clear sailing on most issues. She chews up and spits out conservatives – whether political or religious. And yet many people in the media ask, “How can you argue that there is bias in the media?” If you have any doubt about whether the media are liberal on virtually every issue, you must read Bernard Goldberg’s two books, **Arrogance: Rescuing America from the Media Elite** (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 2003) and **Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News** (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2002). In his book, *Arrogance*, Bernard Goldberg is particularly critical of Katie Couric (pp. 6, 164, 173, 198).

On Tuesday, May 9, 2006, Katie Couric interviewed Joel Osteen, the “senior pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas,” to use the language he employs of himself. She asked him why he did not get involved in political issues, such as, abortion and same-sex marriage. He said that God had called him to encourage people, to preach a positive message, not to be involved in controversial issues. Have you ever wondered why no prophet in Old Testament times and no preacher in New Testament times ever had such a call? Has God called Joel Osteen to ignore the critical issues that are tearing this nation apart and destroying the lives of millions of Americans? Does Joel Osteen not know that failing to preach the whole counsel of God contributes to the moral deterioration of our culture? Does he not know that silence can be sinful?

Please understand that I have no personal ill will toward Joel Osteen. He is a very articulate young man who preaches to approximately 30,000 people in the meetinghouse at Houston and to millions on television each week. His

book, **Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential** (New York: Warner Books, 2004), has become a national bestseller – not because it has any depth of meaning and certainly not because of any literary merit – but because of his popularity on television. I bought the book several months ago, read about fifty pages and decided it was not worth my time. Besides, there are serious flaws in the book. For example, Osteen insists: David, the man after God’s own heart, “didn’t focus on his faults or on the things he had done wrong” (p. 48). As a matter of fact, king David did focus on the wrongs he had done. I wonder what Joel Osteen thinks David had in mind when he wrote:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of my transgressions. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

David further prayed:

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities. Create in me a new heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me (Psa. 51:1-2, 7-10).

Had Joel Osteen ever read that Psalm and others where David confesses his grievous sins against God and against others? There are numerous examples of mysticism in the first fifty pages of the book, but I shall have to wait for another time to discuss them.

Have you ever examined God’s calling of the great prophets of the Old Testament? Not one of them – not Isaiah nor Jeremiah nor Amos nor Malachi – was called to preach what many modern preachers call “positive messages.” Isaiah, the great Messianic prophet, appeared on the scene about 750 years before Christ came into the world. In Isaiah 6 the prophet records his call into the prophetic ministry. It is one

of the most spectacular scenes in the word of God. Isaiah complained that he was not worthy for the great task God had assigned to him. He said,

Woe is unto me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

The Lord sent an angel to touch the lips of Isaiah and purged the sin from his life. He heard the Lord ask, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah responded: "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:5-8). Please listen carefully to the mission the Lord assigned to Isaiah.

Go, and tell this people, Hear indeed, but understand not; and see indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then I said, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate. And the Lord have moved men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land (Isa. 6:9-12).

The sad truth is that many modern people are like to ancient Israelites to whom Isaiah preached. Isaiah vigorously condemned the Israelites for their hypocrisy (Isa. 1:1-15). He castigated them for attempting to make alliances with Egypt instead of trusting in God for their deliverance (Isa. 30:1-7). He called them "rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord." He accused them of saying to the prophets,

Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth (or pleasant) things, prophesy deceits: get out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us (Isa. 30:9-11).

What was the Lord's response to the hardheartedness of the Israelite people?

Wherefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, because you despise my word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit (Isa. 30:12-14).

Isaiah's message is very positive indeed, but is it the kind of message Joel Osteen, Robert Schuler and other so-called "positive thinkers" would preach?

God called Jeremiah into the prophetic ministry approximately 150 years after he called Isaiah to preach to the nation of Israel. At the time of Jeremiah's call, the nation was on the brink of the Babylonian exile. It was a critical time in the history of the Israelite nation. When the Lord called Jeremiah, then prophet said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." The Lord rebuked Jeremiah for calling himself a child. God commanded Jeremiah to go where he was sent and to speak what he was told to say. He promised to put his words in Jeremiah's mouth. Please listen to the mission God gave to the prophet Jeremiah.

See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:5-10).

Did you take note of the negative commands God gave to Jeremiah—"to root out, the pull down, to destroy and to throw down?" God used six terms to describe Jeremiah's ministry. Four of them would be considered negative and two—only two—positive. Is that the balance one hears in



the preaching of Joel Osteen and of Robert Schuler? Do we not find the same balance in Paul's charge to Timothy?

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts will they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away from the truth, and shall be turned into fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Am I arguing that two-thirds of our preaching should be negative and one-third positive? Absolutely not! But I am arguing that we must condemn error and immorality when they rear their ugly heads in our culture. What do you think would have happened to Isaiah and to Jeremiah had they failed to deliver the very words of God to the people of God? Can modern preachers do less and expect to have God's approval? Are we not obligated to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)? Is Joel Osteen preaching the whole counsel of God when he fails to condemn serious moral behavior and doctrinal errors?

Very few preachers in the history of the world were more outspoken against sin than the eighth century prophet Amos. The prophet condemned Damascus, the cities of the Philistines – Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron – and other places, such as Tyre, Edom, Moab, Judah and Israel (Amos 1:3-2:8). A Jewish priest by the name of Amaziah was upset with the preaching of Amos. He urged him to go back home to earn his living. He demanded that Amos prophesy not again at Bethel:

For it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court. Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was not prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a shepherd, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear the word of the Lord: You say, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not

your word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus says the Lord, Your wife shall be a harlot in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided by line; and you shall die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land (Amos 7:10-17).

Is that positive preaching? It is positively negative.

We have no record of Malachi's calling, but we know he was a faithful prophet of God. I shall take time to read one brief excerpt from his book. Malachi told the priests in Israel:

If you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it....For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed out of the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore I have made you contemptible and base before all people, according as you have not kept my ways, and have been partial in the law (Mal. 2:2-3, 7-9).

Is there any possibility you will ever hear that kind of preaching from the mouth of Joel Osteen or of Robert Schuler or of the other so-called "positive thinkers?" How can any man claim to be a gospel preacher when he neglects the great themes of God's word – when he fails to oppose what the apostles opposed and fails to uphold the great truths they taught?

All serious Bible students are acquainted with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and of his call to serve God as

an apostle and as gospel preacher. When Paul was on trial before king Agrippa, he revealed what Christ called him to do. Christ commanded Saul:

Rise, and stand upon your feet: for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister (or servant) and a witness both of these things that you have seen, and of those in the which I will appear unto you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:16-18).

Is there any doubt in your mind that Saul (who later became Paul) obeyed the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ? Let us take a brief look at some of Paul's letters – both to churches and to individuals.

The church at Corinth had many serious problems. They were apparently divided over preachers. They were saying, "I belong to Paul, and I belong to Apollos; and I belong to Cephas (or Peter); and I belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 1:11). Was that sectarian spirit contrary to the will of God? If you have any doubt about it, please listen to Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. For whereas there is among you envying, strife and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men (1 Cor. 3:1-3)?

Do you honestly believe Joel Osteen would call anyone in his vast audiences "carnal?" If he preached that some of them were acting like babies, how many of them would be back

for his next sermon? But calling people carnal and babies is too negative, is it not? It is if they are not carnal and acting like babies. Did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to preach what the Corinthians needed? A careful reading of 2 Corinthians 7:7-10 will show that Paul's preaching produced genuine repentance on the part of the Corinthians. Is that not what gospel preaching is supposed to accomplish? Preachers who fail to encourage change of minds and change of behavior are wasting people's time and betraying the Lord.

If you claim to be a Christian, do you not believe in the sacredness of the Lord's supper? How should people behave when they gather to commemorate the death of our Lord? There was confusion in the church at Corinth. Paul wrote:

Now in this I declare unto you I praise you not, that you come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

Paul asked them:

Do you not have houses to eat and to drink in? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame the ones who have not? What shall I say unto you? Shall I praise you in this (1 Cor. 11:17-18, 22)?

How would the so-called "positive preachers" respond to Paul questions? Would they praise where praise was not appropriate? Surely they would not accuse anyone of sin. Paul stated very emphatically: "I praise you not" (1 Cor. 11:22).

Paul urged the Corinthians to examine themselves as they prepared to eat the Lord's supper. "For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Now please listen carefully. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:29-30). Is such preaching negative? On the contrary, nothing Paul could have done would have been more positive in promoting spirituality than what he told the Corinthians. Their situation was desperate. They were in

danger of being lost if they did not repent. Paul's powerful and uncompromising preaching led to repentance, as I have already indicated. Can I or any other preacher do less if we have the welfare of our listeners in our hearts and if we are concerned about our own salvation?

No book in the New Testament more strongly condemns immorality and religious error than Paul's letter to the Galatians. How many of you who have heard Joel Osteen or Robert Schuler believe either of them would preach like this:

I marvel that you are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you that that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9)?

Does Joel Osteen believe that all the teaching on television is the pure gospel of Christ? Does he understand the conflict between those who preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone and those who deny that doctrine? Do the many false doctrines that are promoted on television bother him? Does he not believe he ought to respond to error whenever and wherever it raises its ugly head? Does he know how Christ and his apostles responded to false doctrine?

How many positive thinkers would tell their audiences:

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you (Gal. 3:1)?

The Greek word translated "foolish" literally means "stupid." Are you aware that Jesus used the same word of some of his

disciples? "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory" (Luke 24:25-26)? In his **Word Pictures of the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930) Dr. A. T. Robertson says the word translated "foolish" means "without sense" (volume 2, p. 293). If Joel Osteen were to use that kind of language—even if some members of his audience deserved it—his audience the next time he preached would be great reduced. And how could he pay for that multi-million dollar church building?

But maybe Paul did not love the Corinthians or the Galatians so much as Joel Osteen loves the people to whom he preaches? Nobody — not Joel Osteen nor Robert Schuler nor any sane person — would ever be so foolish as to maintain that position. They know Paul loved all people — both Jews and Gentiles — enough to sacrifice his life for them. That was his reason for preaching the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth on every occasion. That also permitted him to write:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give unto me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them who love his appearance (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Can modern preachers do less and expect to receive the crown of righteousness?

## Chapter 27

# The Law Of Non-Contradiction

Approximately four hundred years before our Lord came into the world, Aristotle, the brilliant Greek philosopher, formulated many of the laws of logic. Please remember that I did not say he invented the laws of logic; he simply formulated them. One of those laws is usually designated "the law of non-contradiction." In his outstanding book, **Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics** (Grand Rapids: Baker books, 1999), Dr. Norman Geisler defines the law as follows:

Being cannot be nonbeing, for they are direct opposites. And opposites cannot be the same. For one to affirm that 'opposites are both true' does not hold that the opposite of this statement is true (p. 250-251).

This law has always been true. Rational people almost instinctively know it is true. We sometimes say to individuals: "You are contradicting yourself." If it is unreasonable for me to contradict myself, is it reasonable for churches of Christ to fellowship other groups when their teachings and practices are direct opposites from what we teach and practice?

Churches that cooperate on the celebration of so-called "Holy Week Services" are guilty of violating the law of non-contradiction or they simply do not care what others teach and practice. What would you think of the following observation: "We can come together regardless of doctrine and be united on the belief of the empty tomb?" As absolutely vital as our Lord's resurrection is to the scheme of human redemption, is there not more to Christianity than that? And besides, do all of those who meet in fellowship during "Holy Week Services" really believe in the bodily resurrection of our Lord? Do you honestly believe our Lord approves of our meeting

with people who have doubts about the great miracles of the Bible, including the Lord's bodily resurrection?

Just because many in a community claim to recognize the meaning of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord does not mean we can have fellowship with those who deny many of the fundamentals of the faith. How many of the ones who meet for "Holy Week Services" accept the Bible's teaching on baptism? I am willing to defend anytime, anywhere the Bible's teaching on baptism, but that is not my purpose at this time. I want to apply the law of non-contradiction to the subject of baptism. Faithful gospel preachers teach – because they believe the Bible does – that we must be baptized to have our alien sins remitted. Our Calvinist friends teach that God forgives men without their being baptized. Those theological positions are direct opposites. They cannot both be true. But does it make any difference which one is true? Those who join in community worship services or are a part of a ministerial association are saying it does not matter what one believes so long as he is honest. The law of non-contradiction does not allow for both positions to be true. Can we consistently embrace the Bible's teaching on baptism and the Calvinist position at the same time? If we fellowship those who teach that baptism is not essential to salvation, we are violating the law of non-contradiction.

Those preachers who seek to remove the barriers between the New Testament church and denominationalism often make statements such as this: "We are all sons of God through faith; for we have all been baptized into Christ." Any knowledgeable student of modern theology could never be guilty of such foolishness. The vast majority of the people in the religious world lampoon the idea that we are baptized into Christ. They argue that we believe into Christ and then are baptized as a sign of our salvation. A scholar of the reputation of Dr. A. T. Robertson makes the mistake of denying we are baptized into Christ, in spite of the fact that the text actually uses that language. In his set of books, **Word**



**Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), Dr. Robertson comments as follows on the expression: "Were baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3).

The translation 'into' makes Paul say that the union with Christ was brought to pass by means of baptism, which is not his idea, for Paul was not a sacramentarian....Baptism is the public proclamation of one's inward spiritual relation to Christ attained before baptism (volume 4, p. 361).

I have used Dr. Robertson's set of books for more than forty-five years. I use them virtually everyday. But Dr. Robertson did not reach that conclusion about baptism from the Greek text. That was his theological position as a Calvinist. There is no way under heaven it can be defended either grammatically or theologically. The law of non-contradiction will not allow Dr. Robertson's view. Either baptism saves and puts us into Christ or it does not. The apostle Peter says it saves (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21) and Paul argues that it puts into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). It cannot both save and not save at the same time in the same way.

What would you think of a preacher who opposes instrumental music in worship and then joins in singing with an instrument at "Holy Week Services?" While I am on the subject of music in worship, we must examine the matter of authority for whatever we do in worship. Are you aware that a leading Presbyterian scholar, Dr. John L. Girardeau of Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, strongly opposed the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church? In 1888 Dr. Girardeau published a book with the title, **Instrumental Music in the Public Worship** (Fayetteville, TN: International Gospel House, n. d. A reprint). Incidentally, the International Gospel Hour for which I am the speaker has republished Dr. Girardeau's outstanding book. His book absolutely devastates the arguments various people use to try to justify mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the New Testament church.

I shall read just the opening paragraph from Dr. Girardeau's book.

Attention, at the outset, is invoked to the consideration which serves to establish the following controlling principle: A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded in the Scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements, is forbidden (p. 15).

A brief examination of this short paragraph should be helpful.

Dr. Girardeau affirms that we must have divine authority for all we do in the work and worship of the church. That means we cannot practice any act of worship or engage in any work the Lord has not authorized. That principle has applied since the beginning of time. Nadab and Abihu were not condemned for committing adultery, for stealing, for murder or for violating other specific commandments. The King James Version says they offered fire that the Lord had not commanded (Lev. 10:1-2). The English Standard Version renders the Hebrew: "unauthorized fire." We are guilty of the sin of presumptuousness when we follow our own preferences in matters of faith and practice.

But can we be sure we violate the scriptures when we engage in activities that are not specifically forbidden? In other words, must we respect the silence of the scriptures? Did you know that Jesus Christ—the Creator and Sustainer of this universe, God manifest in the flesh—could not serve as a priest under the Jewish covenant? Is there a verse in the Old Testament that said, "Men from the tribe of Judah cannot be priests under the Mosaic covenant?" No such passage exists; nor does it have to exist for the people of the Jewish covenant to know who could and could not serve as priests. The author of Hebrews explains that truth so simply that no one should have any difficulty understanding.

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also in the law. For he (that is, Christ) of whom these things are spoken pertains to another tribe, of whom no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood (Heb. 7:12-14).

If Moses said nothing concerning a priest's coming from the tribe of Judah, what could possibly be wrong with a man from Judah serving in the priesthood? Men had to be authorized to serve in the office of a priest. Nobody from any tribe other than Levi was so authorized.

Let us apply the law of non-contradiction to the priesthood under the Mosaic covenant. A man was either authorized to serve as priest or he was not so authorized. He could not have it both ways. If he were authorized to serve, he could do so without sinning against God. Only men from the tribe of Levi had God's approval to be priests. God did not have to say: "Men from Judah, from Simeon, from Benjamin and from the other tribes cannot serve as priests." When he authorized men from Levi to be priests, that excluded men from all other tribes. Korah, Dathan and Abiram had to learn that lesson the hard way. They took authority that they did not have. The earth opened up and swallowed them (Numbers 16).

These three rebels could have said: "The law does not specifically forbid men from the tribe of Reuben from being priests. After all, we also are holy and the Lord is among us." That is very close to what they did argue (Num. 16:1-3). But the law did not have to mention men from Reuben. When God authorized the priests to come from Levi, did that not exclude men from all other tribes? Again the law of non-contradiction applies in this situation, as in all others. The men from Reuben were either authorized to serve as priests or they were not authorized. They could not be both authorized and not authorized at the same time and in the

same way. Can you now understand how an application of the law of non-contradiction would have eliminated many teachings and practices in the religious world?

Some left-leaning churches of Christ have joined with the denominations in celebrating the man-made day called "Easter." They even participate in "Holy Week Services." Gospel preachers have been known to make statements as follows: "We celebrate this (that is, being baptized into Christ) on Easter Sunday." They have been known to encourage members of the church to be involved in sunrise services on Easter. People who are concerned about doing Bible things in Bible ways and calling Bible things by Bible names cannot – I repeat – cannot participate in such activities.

The Bible authorizes Christians to celebrate the Lord's resurrection every Lord's day. It does not authorize anyone to set aside a special day called "Easter" to honor our Lord. Anyone who thinks it does is hereby challenged to give book, chapter and verse. I am fully aware that no one – not Roman Catholics or Protestants or anyone else – will even try to furnish scriptural authorization for celebrating Easter. How do I know that? Those who participate in those services have been challenged hundreds of times to furnish scripture for the practice. No one has done so; nor can they do so; nor will they try. Does it matter whether God authorizes what we do in religion?

The charismatic movement for several years has gained momentum worldwide. It has shown enormous growth in parts of Africa and in Latin America. It also has considerable strength here in the United States. But from a scriptural viewpoint there are many problems with the movement. Its worship services – at least, those I have watched on television – are more like a rock concert than a biblical worship service. Anyone who thinks he can find scriptural authority for such confusion must be using a different Bible from the one the rest of us use. I do not go to rock concerts, but the ones I have seen on television appear to be tame compared to some

of the charismatic worship services. Shaking, rocking, rolling, dancing, hand clapping, and similar activities characterize many of the charismatic worship services. It does not take an especially wise person to know that their services are an outpouring of emotions. Many of them seem to exist for entertainment purposes. We surely know their services have little or no resemblance to the services the Bible outlines. But they would be entertaining were it not for their disregard for the teaching of scripture.

Pentecostal preachers like Benny Hinn, Paul Crouch, and a host of others claim to be able to heal diseases miraculously and to perform other miracles. None of them has ever miraculously healed one person. I did not say no Pentecostal has ever healed someone. Psychologists know that some healings occur because of suggestions by faith healers or by voodoo practitioners or by Indian medicine men. It has absolutely nothing to do with supernatural powers. The truth is: All so-called "faith healers" are frauds. If they would like to refute that observation, they can have many opportunities to prove me wrong. I have a quadriplegic friend who would love to be healed. Would it not be as easy for Christ or for one of his apostles to heal a quadriplegic as it would to heal a backache?

You probably have seen Benny Hinn and other television evangelists hit people on the forehead and watched the person fall to the floor. They call it being "slain in the Spirit." Incidentally, the Spirit has absolutely nothing to do with such a crude practice. While Benny Hinn was in a healing campaign in Tulsa, Oklahoma, he hit a woman on the head. She fell to the floor. There was no one there to catch her. She was injured. Do you think he prayed for her or laid in his hands on her? He called for an ambulance to take her to the local hospital. Is that not an open admission that he has no more miraculous healing power than my little Dachshund?

I have mentioned the charismatic movement because ministerial associations and community worship services

always include charismatics. The members of the association, almost without exception, doubt or actually deny that miracles occur in the healing services of Pentecostal churches. How can anyone – especially those who are members of the churches of Christ – fellowship those who are known to engage in fraudulent activities? But maybe good can come from some of the healing campaigns. The Bible teaches explicitly that we cannot do evil that good may come (Rom. 3:8). But what if the Pentecostals are sincere? We cannot fellowship error just because those who espouse it are sincere.

Let us now apply the law of non-contradiction. Either the Pentecostals can perform miracles or they cannot. They cannot both perform them and not perform them. We know they cannot perform miracles. If they could, they would arrange meetings where miraculous healings could be confirmed. Was there any doubt that Peter and John healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the Jewish temple? Even the enemies of Christianity had to admit that a notable miracle had been done (Acts 4:16). Was there any doubt that dead Eutychus was restored to life (Acts 20:9)? I am not asking the Pentecostals to heal a lame man or to restore life to a dead man. Just miraculously heal a scratch on someone's finger.

I am concerned about the deception that characterizes the charismatic movement. But that is not my major concern today. How can churches of Christ fellowship those who claim to perform miracles? "But," some of the left-leaning churches might reply, "we are not fellowshiping them." When gospel preachers meet with the ministerial association or participate in "Holy Week Services," of course, they are fellowshiping Pentecostals and many different kinds of religious organizations. To deny that fact is to show one's ignorance of or lack of concern for the meaning of fellowship.

Most of the denominations in our area are basically Calvinistic. They believe and preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone. They have a legal right, but not a scriptural

right, to do whatever they choose along those lines. I know they cannot find that teaching in the Bible. Any passage that requires any act of obedience destroys Calvinism. If salvation is by grace alone, it cannot be by grace plus something. I have mentioned this fact in other lessons, but it bears repeating. One Calvinist preacher says, "Maintaining holiness is not a condition of salvation" (Rhodes, p. 274). As strange as that teaching sounds, that is precisely what consistent Calvinists have to teach. If we must maintain holiness, we are not saved by grace alone. In fact, if we must do anything, we are not saved by grace alone. There is no possibility of harmonizing words like "must," "obey," "do" and "abide" with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. If you would like to challenge that conclusion, you are invited to do so.

Should not preachers of all religious groups – including preachers among churches of Christ – understand that fellowshiping those who preach Calvinism is the same as actually preaching Calvinism? How can a man preach the following words and still fellowship Calvinists: "Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say unto you" (Luke 6:46)? The apostle John strongly emphasized the necessity of doing righteousness.

Little children, let no man deceive you; he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous....In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not do righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:7, 10).

In these verses John lays down two conditions for having God's approval. We must do righteousness. Doing righteousness is not optional for God's children. It is an absolute requirement of the gospel. John had earlier said: "If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does righteousness is born of him" (1 John 2:29). Loving our brothers is the second requirement for having God's approval. John asked:

But whoso has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his heart of compassion upon him, how dwells the love of God in him (1 John 3:17)?

If you agree that doing righteousness and loving our brothers are conditions for having God's approval—and how could you not agree since that is what John teaches?—you cannot sustain the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Did you know that sometimes preachers and churches reason somewhat as follows: "If we extend fellowship to our denominational friends, they may learn the truth and become members of the New Testament church." I have a letter from an elder who said as much. He said the members of the ministerial association heard their preacher speak on the gospel plan of salvation. But if a church of Christ fellowships the denominational groups, those groups are going to conclude that they must be in harmony with the church of Christ or the members of the church of Christ would not have given them the right hand of fellowship. We are not going to win anyone to Christ when we compromise the gospel of Christ. It never has been done and will not be done in the future.

Every faithful church of Christ will preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. After all, neither the Bible nor the church belongs to us. We are not the ones to decide what the truth is and how the church must conduct its affairs. God alone decides what his people must believe and what they must do. We cannot compromise; we cannot negotiate. Our duty is to preach and practice only what the scriptures authorize. They do not authorize Easter, Christmas, Holy Week Services, the Passover and interdenominational services. If we have any respect for the word of God, we shall do only what it teaches. We cannot add to nor take from nor substitute for what God has revealed. If we do so, we shall be under the curse of God. Incidentally, that is not my judgment, but God's (Gal. 1:8-9). Churches of Christ have almost always honored those truths, but some



are ignoring them or compromising with the religious world around us.

Tragically, some churches of Christ are making the same blunder the ancient Israelites made over and over. The people of God under the Mosaic covenant often forgot whom they were supposed to serve. They made agreements with their pagan neighbors. In some cases, they even served the gods of the nations surrounding Israel. When Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel, he warned of the dangers of becoming like the nations around them. Most of us are probably familiar with these words from the mouth of Joshua.

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:14-16).

Would to God that every member of the body of Christ would exhibit the same courage of the Israelite people! They said to Joshua:

God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers from the house of bondage, and who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: and the Lord drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites who dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the Lord; for he is God (Josh. 24:16-18).

The thrust of this meeting between Joshua and the Israelites

can hardly be missed: We cannot fellowship those religious people who preach and practice error.

I have some appeals I would like to make as our time expires. I sincerely urge all preachers to discuss all the topics the churches must have to be New Testament churches. That means giving attention to the first principles of the gospel of Christ. If the people of our day do not know what the Bible requires of all who would become Christians, how are they going to obey the gospel? Preachers must examine the great examples of conversion in the book of Acts. How many sermons have you recently heard about the conversions on Pentecost, in the city of Samaria, in Corinth, at Philippi and at Ephesus?

But preaching on the great conversions in Acts is not adequate. We must also explain in simple but forceful terms what God wants us to do in worship to his holy name. In teaching the truth on New Testament worship, we must explain that playing on mechanical instruments of music is not authorized in the Bible. We must also point out that faithful Christians meet every Lord's day and partake of the Lord's supper. And how absolutely inexcusable it is to refer to the Lord's supper as "the Eucharist." Burning incense, counting beads and lighting candles have no part in our worship in the Christian era.

In addition to preaching on first principles and on worship, we must also address the moral issues that are wreaking havoc in our great country. Are preachers where you attend services exposing the evils of gambling, beverage alcohol, abortion, euthanasia, pornography, homosexuality, adultery, premarital sex and similar evils? If and when they do preach on these topics, do you give them your support for their efforts? Or do you say they should not be so negative?

Most of us know what divorce is doing to the families of America. Should we teach what the Bible says about marriage, divorce and remarriage? If we fail to do so, marriages in America will continue to deteriorate. Millions of children

will grow into maturity without a father. Besides, the Lord will hold all of us accountable for our failure. I want to be able to say at the end of my days on earth.

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).



## Chapter 28

### Less Than Perfect Interpretations

There is no more serious obligation for people who claim to be Christians than the correct interpretation of God's inspired word. If every word of the Bible came from the very mind of God, should we not use extreme care in learning exactly what God wants us to know? Jesus Christ prayed that all who believe in him through the preaching of the apostles would be united (John 17:20-21). Paul urged the Corinthians to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul also admonished the Ephesians to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). How can our Lord's prayer for unity, the Holy Spirit's plea and plan for unity be achieved if we do not all understand the Bible alike?

Rubel Shelly and John York have endorsed some of the features of postmodernism, that is, that we cannot be absolutely sure about anything. In their book, **The Jesus Proposal: A Theological Framework for Maintaining the Unity of the Body of Christ** (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood, 2003), John York criticizes the doctrine of "Scripture Only." He says it "can easily be turned into bibliolatry – worship of the book itself or a particular translation" (p. 29). In my sixty-six years of preaching, I have never met one person who worships the Bible or a particular version of the Bible. I know thousands of people who have great love for the Bible, but I do not know even one person who worships it.

York also affirms:

The more certainty with which we have believed we could objectively know the truth, the more divided the church that Christ died for has become (p. 29).

Does that mean we should make no effort to “objectively know the truth?” Does York know how much the Bible emphasizes our ability and our need to know the truth? One of the keys to understanding 1 John is the word “know.” For example, John says: “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). John also affirmed:

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him....We know that whosoever is born of God does not sin; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one does not touch him. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in sin. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:14-15, 18-20).

Five times in these five verses the Apostle John used the word *oidamen*, one of the Greek words translated “know.” The tense of the verb in all five cases means: “We have come to know and we still know; we have sure knowledge.” John York and the Apostle John are on different planes when it comes to man’s ability to “objectively know the truth.” Besides, John says: “This is the confidence we have in him” (1 John 5:14). He also affirms: The Son of God “has given us understanding” (1 John 5:20). Please listen to these inspiring and comforting words:

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of

the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil (Heb. 6:17-19).

Did the inspired author of Hebrews really mean that our hope is "sure and steadfast?" The Greek word translated "sure" (*asphale*) appears five times in the New Testament. It is also translated "certainty," "certain" and "safe." The Greek word rendered "steadfast" (*bebaios*) appears nine times in the New Testament. It is also translated "firm," "of force" and "more sure." The Apostle Peter used the word when he admonished the early Christians. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall" (1 Pet. 1:10). Is Peter telling us we can have objective knowledge of the truth?

Both the Old Testament and the New use the word "certain." Moses told the Israelites:

Then shall you inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you (Deut. 13:14).

Paul informed a young preacher: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). Is it possible that neither Moses nor Paul accepted the foolishness of postmodernism? Please listen to Paul's words to the Corinthians:

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens....Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (for we walk by faith, not by sight.) We are confident, I say, and rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord....Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto

God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:1, 6-7, 11).

What a depressing world this world be if we could not know the truth!

The Emerging Church movement is one of the most influential worldviews in the religious world. It basically is postmodernism. Brian McClaren is the leading guru in the movement. In his book, **A Generous Orthodoxy** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), McClaren argues:

I believe that we must be always reforming, not because we've got it wrong and we're closer and closer to finally 'getting it right,' but because our mission is ongoing and our context dynamic. From this viewpoint, 'getting it right' is beside the point; the point is 'being and doing good' as followers of Jesus Christ in our unique time and place, fitting in with the ongoing story of God's saving love for planet earth (pp. 191-192).

I have two comments on McClaren's postmodern reasoning. Jesus Christ and the apostles were completely devoted to 'getting it right.' Did not our Lord insist: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? I have already read to you what John, Paul and Peter wrote about being sure. Does that not mean they were deeply concerned about "getting it right?" In addition, if "getting it right" is beside the point, how can we know what "being and doing good" means?

Rubel Shelly says members of the body of Christ:

...were taught to seek fixed and objective understandings of the text. Postmoderns (postmodern people) have no difficulty with less-than-perfect interpretations, for they value persons above formulas (p. 83).

Of all the foolish statements I have read from a man who claims to be a faithful gospel preacher, that is probably the



most outlandish and anti-biblical. The remainder of our time today will be devoted to the theme, "Less-Than-Perfect Interpretations."

When Jesus met with his apostles at Caesarea Philippi, he asked them:

Who do you say that I am?...And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah: for flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell (or Hades) will not prevail against it. And I will give unto you the keys to the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:15-19).

Let us examine this passage using Rubel Shelly's suggestion about less-than-perfect interpretations.

When Jesus said to the apostles, "Upon this rock, I will build my church," what did he have in mind? Was the rock the confession Peter had just made: "Thou art Christ the Son of the living God" or was the rock the Apostle Peter or was it the Christ? We know the rock was not the Apostle Peter. Paul explained to the Corinthians:

For we are laborers together with God: you are God's husbandry, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

The Apostle Peter told his readers:

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, you

also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he who believes on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore who believe he is precious: but unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them who stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed (1 Pet. 2:4-8).

The rock is not the Apostle Peter. If that were the case, the church would have a very weak foundation. The rock is not the confession Peter made. The rock is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

When our Lord told his apostles, "I will build my church," is it permissible to be satisfied with a "less-than-perfect interpretation?" Would it be alright for us to interpret the Lord's words as plural—my churches—instead of the singular—my church? Such a perverted interpretation of this passage would furnish justification for denominationalism. But there is not a person on earth who can find denominationalism in this or in any other passage. Dr. George Eldon Ladd's book, **A Theology of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), makes the following observations on denominationalism: "The idea of denominations would be abhorrent to Paul. The nearest thing to denominations was the sects (sectarian groups) in Corinth that Paul heartily condemned" (p. 532).

In the meeting at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus said to his apostles: "Whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Is Jesus saying: The God of heaven will be watching you? He will then bind and loose what you bind and loose? A less-than-perfect interpretation might reach that conclusion.

But that is not what the passage is teaching. Unfortunately, the King James Version does not take note of the tenses of the verbs – bind and loose. The Greek reads: “Whatsoever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven and whatsoever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

In their very scholarly book, **The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers, III explain the tenses of the verbs:

This construction is the future perfect passive periphrastic transitive: ‘will have been bound,’ ‘will have been loosed.’ It is the church on earth carrying out heaven’s decisions, not heaven ratifying the church’s decision (p. 37).

Charles Williams renders the passage:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.

The truth is very simple: The apostles had no right to bind or to loose what God had not already bound or loosed. In modern times, we have a right to bind only what God has bound and to loose only what God has loosed. A less-than-perfect interpretation will not fit in with the words of Jesus in this passage.

Jesus Christ and the Sadducees had a powerful debate about the resurrection. The Sadducees asked our Lord:

Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up children unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother; likewise the second also, and the third unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died. Therefore in the resurrection

whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her (Matt. 22:24-28)?

If Jesus had been a postmodernist, he would have replied: "We cannot be objectively sure of the truth. We will have to do with a less-than-perfect interpretation."

Do you remember how our Lord answered the Sadducees?

You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:29-32).

Was Jesus teaching the objective truth? Did you notice that Jesus based his argument on the tense of a verb? God did not say, "I was the God of the living." He said, "I am the God of the living." Does that mean Christ would not have accepted a less-than-perfect interpretation of God's holy word?

There are preachers who think it is out of order to speak of the number of a noun or of the tense of a verb. I have already shown how absolutely essential it is to know the tenses of verbs. If we do not know the tenses of verbs, we can run into some serious problems with the sacred text. The beautiful little book of 1 John cannot be understood without taking into consideration the tenses of verbs. For example, the King James Version reads:

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

When we take into consideration the tenses of the verbs in that verse, it reads:

If we continually walk in the light, as he is in the light, we always have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ continues to cleanse us from all sins.

Calvinist preachers and others often try to prove the doctrine of once in grace, always in grace by an appeal to these words:

Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God (1 John 3:9).

If we take the King James Version at face value, we might conclude that once a person is saved, he cannot be lost. Many of the translators of the King James Version were Calvinists. That probably explains why they ignored the tenses of the verbs. Please listen to Charles Williams' translation of that passage.

No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning, because the God-given life-principle continues to live in him, and he cannot practice sinning because he is born of God.

Acts 3 records a sermon the Apostle Peter preached on Solomon's porch of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. After convincing the Jews of their complicity in the death of Christ, he said to them:

Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:14-15, 19).

The expression, "be converted," is passive voice. In other words, it emphasizes what God does for us. The problem is that the verb is in the active voice. It should read: "Repent therefore and turn." God does not do the turning for us. We repent and turn. The English Standard Version translates the verse: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out."

There is confusion in the religious world over the prepositional phrase, "for the remission of sins," in Acts 2:38. Peter commanded the Jews on Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Does the expression, "for the remission of sins," mean in order to or unto the remission of sins or does it mean because our sins are already remitted? I urge you to consider this verse: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). What does "for the remission of sins" mean in this verse? Does it mean that Christ shed his blood so that our sins could be forgiven or because our sins were already forgiven? Incidentally, the words in the Greek and in the English are exactly the same.

In 1964 Dr. James D. Bales of Harding University wrote a splendid little book, **The Case of Cornelius** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light). Dr. Bales has an extensive discussion of the Greek word *eis* (translated "for" in Acts 2:38). Dr. Bales quotes J. W. Willmarth, a Baptist preacher's comments on the Greek word translated "for":

Its general equivalent is, into. But unto, in order to, for, until, and other English prepositions, translate it better in certain cases, owing to difference of idiom.

Willmarth mentions Matthew 26:28 as an example. If people argue that the word means because of, they need to listen to Willmarth's wise words:

This interpretation was doubtless suggested, and is now defended, on purely dogmatic grounds. It is feared if we give to *eis* (for) its natural and obvious meaning, undue importance will be ascribed to Baptism, the Atonement will be undervalued, and the work of the Holy Spirit disparaged. Especially it is asserted that here is the vital issue between Baptists and Campbellites....We are gravely told that if we render *eis* in Acts 2:38 in order to, we

give up the battle, and must forthwith become Campbellites; whereas if we translate it on account of, or in token of, it would yet be possible to remain Baptists.

Such methods of interpretation are unworthy of Christian scholars. It is our business, simply and honestly, to ascertain the exact meaning of the inspired originals, as the sacred penmen intended to convey it to the mind of the contemporary readers. Away the question—'What ought Peter (to) have said in the interest of orthodoxy?' The real question is, 'What did Peter say, and what did he mean, when he spoke on the Day of Pentecost, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?'....The truth will suffer nothing by giving *eis* its true signification. When the Campbellites translate in order to in Acts 2:38, they translate correctly. Is a translation false because Campbellites endorse it (pp. 89-90).

Incidentally, Willmarth said he meant no offense by calling members of the churches of Christ "Campbellites" (p. 89).

Dr. Julius R. Mantey was one of the Baptist Church's great Greek scholars. In fact, one of the Greek grammars I have in my study was written H. E. Dana from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at Ft. Worth and Dr. Julius R. Mantey of the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary at Chicago. In Dr. James D. Bales' book, **The Case of Cornelius**, he quotes Dr. Mantey's comments on Acts 2:38:

Notice that he said 'every one.' It is a sad commentary on our twentieth century remissness that some of our ministers, as far as practice is concerned, seem to claim a fuller knowledge of Jesus' mind than Peter, who was an intimate companion of Jesus, had. The 41st verse indicates that every one who gave heed to Peter' advice was baptized. So he not only urged baptism but also demanded it as a *sine qua non* (an absolute condition) to discipleship. Observe, too, that he used the

imperative mood. The aorist imperative occurs here in the Greek and it is the most urgent form of command that can be uttered in that language, according to the late Dr. A. T. Robertson, the great Greek grammarian (p. 91).

I have no idea if Willmarth and Mantey still held to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But their words show conclusively that alien sinners must be baptized to have their sins remitted. Please notice again the words of J. W. Wilmarth:

Away with the question, 'What ought Peter (to) have said in the interest of orthodoxy?' The real question is, 'What did Peter say, and what did he mean, when he spoke on the Day of Pentecost, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit' (p. 89)?

Is that not the attitude every person must have as he approaches the pages of God's holy word?

How can you harmonize that approach with the "less-than-perfect interpretations Rubel Shelly recommends? Do you remember Paul's prayer for the Ephesians? He prayed that the eyes of the understanding of the Ephesians might be enlightened (Eph. 1:18). The goal of every Christian should be to read God's word with an open mind to learn exactly what God wants us to know. We have no authority to add our opinions or our preferences to the Bible.

If you are not a Christian, I sincerely urge you to study the great conversions in the book of Acts and imitate them. I have time to review just one of those conversions. The Apostle Paul was permitted to preach in the Jewish synagogue at Corinth. Luke says Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." We have no way of knowing the full content of his sermon, but we know the theme. He "testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." The Jews were upset with Paul's sermon.

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he (Paul) shook his raiment, and said,



Your blood be upon you own head; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Please take careful note at what occurred as a result of Paul's preaching.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:4, 6, 8).

When the Corinthians obeyed the gospel by believing and by being baptized, were they saved? If they were not saved, what else did they have to do to be saved? If they were saved, and you know they were, is their conversion an example for people in our day? In other words, if modern people want to be saved from their sins, do they have to believe in Christ and obey the Lord in baptism? In the Great Commission according to Mark, our Lord commanded the Apostles:

Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

When the Corinthians submitted to Christ by being baptized, did that mean they were born again or from above? Did not our Lord tell Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5)? Did their obedience to the Lord in baptism make the Corinthians citizens in the kingdom or the church? Fortunately, we do not have to wonder.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

If you are not a Christian, I plead with you to obey the gospel today. If you are an erring child of God, please come

back to the Lord this very day. If you are a Christian, please use your time and talent to further the borders of the Lord's kingdom. I close with these familiar words.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things (that is, add the Christian graces), you shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:10).

## Chapter 29

### Bumper Sticker Religion: "Meat Is Murder"

Many modern people apparently feel they must display their philosophy or religion on their bumper stickers. Some of their statements of belief are vulgar; some are just plain silly; very few have any lasting significance. R. Daniel Watkins' book, **An Encyclopedia of Compelling Quotations** (Peabody, MA, 2001), has more than 10,000 quotations from over 3,200 different sources. In his section on "Vegetarianism," he includes the following anonymous bumper sticker: "Meat is murder." In the same section, he quotes Albert Einstein as saying, "I have always eaten animal flesh with a somewhat guilty conscience" (p. 744). In our study today, I shall dwell on the expression, "Meat is murder."

My first responsibility is to establish a standard by which we can decide whether meat is murder. If we do not have an absolute standard for making such decisions, it makes no sense even to discuss the topic. Without a standard, it is your opinion against mine and mine against yours. And one opinion would be just as good as any other. But there is one standard and only one standard that has stood the test of time and must always guide our discussion and behavior – the inspired word of almighty God. If the Bible teaches that killing animals and consuming their flesh is wrong, it is wrong. If it does not teach that, nobody has a right to bind that idea on others. You have every right to refrain from eating meat. What you do in that respect has no bearing on what I do. You have no right to tell me what I must or must to do.

Originally, God forbade human beings to eat the flesh of animals. Why he did so he has not revealed to us. I have no right and no intention of speculating about such matters.

Moses explained how man ought to react to what God has decided to keep within his own counsel:

The secret things belong to the Lord our God: but those things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of the law (Deut. 29:29).

While I cannot enter into the mind of God to determine why he forbad man to eat flesh, I know he later granted man that right. After the flood,

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, and upon all that moves upon the earth, and upon all the fish of sea: into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things (Gen. 9:1-3).

Scholars have offered various explanations for the Lord's granting permission to eat every moving thing. I have no idea why God made such an arrangement. It really does not matter. It is none of our business. But when God decides it is permissible – though not mandatory – for men to eat meat, that is the end of the matter for Bible believers. We sinful mortals have no right to question the wisdom of God almighty. How can vegetarians, or anyone else for that matter, be so arrogant as to make laws where God has not made any? If the vegetarians think it is wrong to eat meat, it is for them, but not for the rest of us, unless they can find biblical passages that condemn it. In his discussion of eating meat as contrasted with eating vegetables, Paul asked:

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is the man who does not condemn himself in that thing which he allows. And he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:22-23).

Paul's use of the word "faith" in these verses from Romans 14 has absolutely nothing to do with faith in God or in Christ or in the Bible. He is speaking of our faith in "that thing that we allow." In the case under consideration, he specifically has in mind eating meat. Dr. Hugo McCord's translation makes that truth very clear.

Hold to yourself the conviction you have before God. Blessed is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. The one who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he lacks conviction, and everything which is not of conviction is sin.

What Paul says amounts to this: "I know I should not eat meat since I have strong convictions against it. But everyone else is doing; so I will do it too." Eating meat under those circumstances is wrong because I am being a hypocrite. If I believe what I am doing is wrong, it is wrong for me, but not necessarily for others. On the other hand, if I believe an act is right when it is clearly wrong, that does not make it right for me or for anyone else. My believing it is right does not make it right, but my believing it is wrong makes it wrong for me.

Before and during the Jewish covenant, God commanded his people to offer animals sacrifices. The first example was that of Cain and Abel. We are not told exactly what God said to these brothers about the offering. But in the course of time,

Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of the flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and his offering he had no respect. And Cain was very angry and his countenance fell (Gen. 4:3-5).

We know God told Cain and Abel what to offer or he would not have objected to whatever they offered. The book of Hebrews makes all of this very plain.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaks (Heb. 11:4).

Since “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), we know why God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s. If killing animals is murder, as some of the radical animal rights activists insist, God himself is responsible for murder. He is the one who ordained animal sacrifice.

Under the Jewish covenant, the people flocked to the tabernacle during the early years of the covenant and later to the temple in Jerusalem to participate in animal sacrifices. I shall not take time to read a great number of Old Testament passages pertaining to animal sacrifice, but I must read a few.

And the Lord called unto Moses, and spoke unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood around about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it in pieces (Lev. 1:1-6).

If animal rights activists have convictions against the killing of animals, they will have to take it up with the Lord in the final judgment. God is the one who commanded Cain and Abel to offer animals as sacrifices unto him. He is the one

who ordained the burnt offerings for the sins of the Jewish people. The author of Hebrews adds:

For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament that God has enjoined on you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood is no remission (Heb. 9:19-22).

If you challenge the Lord's authority for requiring the offering of his own creatures as sacrifices, you demonstrate how little respect you have for God's law as revealed in the Old Testament and how arrogant you are to set your will above his. Most animal rights activists seem not to care at all about God's arrangements for those lived under the Mosaic covenant or for any other part of God's law. They have become a law unto themselves.

There were some animals God forbade his people to eat. God did not allow the Jews to eat pork. Since pork must be thoroughly cooked to kill a small worm that causes trichinosis – a very serious disease – that could be the reason God called pork unclean. In their nomadic life, the Jews may not have been properly equipped to cook their pork to kill the worm that causes trichinosis. Tularemia (better known as rabbit fever) is passed from the rabbit to the person handling the rabbit. I have known people who were infected with rabbit fever. It was almost fatal to some of our very dear friends. Incidentally, the law also forbade the eating of catfish. That would be very hard on some of my friends who like that Mississippi pond-grown catfish. Why did God forbid the eating of catfish? Could it be because they are scavengers? We do not know – because the Bible does not tell us – why some animals were clean and others were unclean. There is

nothing to be gained by speculating about the matter. But this we do know for sure: God did not consider it murder to kill animals for sacrifices and for human consumption. How inexcusably ridiculous to call meat murder!

Greek philosophers had convinced some first century Christians that eating meat was wrong. Why those Christians listened to the philosophers rather than consulting the word of God is hard to explain. Paul predicted two signs of a coming apostasy: forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meat. The word translated "meat" does not mean flesh, but solid food. But nobody – no church, no parachurch group, no cult – has the authority to restrict our eating any kind of food. Please listen to the full text of the passage I have just mentioned.

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron: forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

I believe it is appropriate to repeat that last verse. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." Does "every creature" include hogs, rabbits and catfish?

God does not prohibit Christians from eating whatever foods are available, including the flesh of animals. God created animals to serve his glory and to supply man's needs. That includes providing food for man. We are not obligated to refuse any food. Nobody – and I do mean nobody – has a right to make us feel guilty about killing cattle, hogs, chickens and other animals and eating their flesh. In fact, some people in our world suffer from various nutritional deficiencies because



they do not eat meat. One example comes to mind. I had classes at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, with a young Seventh-Day Adventist woman. She appeared to be almost ready to deliver a baby. She said her doctor told her she ought to eat meat. She wanted to know what I thought. I encouraged her to follow her doctor's orders. No church has the authority to make laws where God has not made them.

One of the crucial elements in our discussion of eating meat is the behavior of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As you know from your study of the life of Christ, he was born and reared under the Jewish covenant. His parents were very devout in keeping the Mosaic covenant and in making sure he was reared according to that covenant. Luke writes concerning the Lord:

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb (Luke 2:21).

Christ's parents took him to the temple in Jerusalem. "And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned unto Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth" (Luke 2:22, 39). Although we are not specifically told that Jesus actually ate of the sacrifices that the Jews offered in the temple, we may safely conclude that he did. That was what all faithful Jews did under the old covenant. We know Jesus kept perfectly every phase of the law of God as revealed in the Old Testament. Had meat been murder, our Lord would not have participated in those sacrifices and he would have strongly opposed them.

All four gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record the Lord's multiplying five barley loaves and two small fish to feed five thousand men, plus the women and children (John 6:5-14). The last time I checked fish were animals. If meat were murder, is there any possibility our sinless Savior would have condoned murder by taking the boy's small fish and multiplying them to feed the crowd? If

meat were murder, why did not Jesus explain to the people: "I will multiply the loaves, but I have strong convictions against murder. And meat is murder?" You know why he did not make such a foolish statement. Meat is not murder, unless you are talking about cannibalism.

Our Lord met two of his disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus. At first they did not recognize him, but eventually they did. Please listen to Luke's inspired account.

And as they thus spoke, Jesus himself stood in their midst, and says unto them, Peace unto you. And they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are you troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have you here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish (Luke 24:36-42).

The word translated "meat" can mean only solid food – not necessarily the flesh of animals. But this passage leaves no doubt about the food the two disciples offered Jesus and which he ate. He ate the flesh of a fish. If the Son of God could participate in the burnt offerings of the Jewish covenant, how can animal activists or anyone else have the audacity to condemn modern people who eat animal flesh? If the radical vegetarians were right, why would the only one who completely knew the will of God, eat the flesh of fish after his resurrection from the dead? Do you now understand how utterly arrogant are the people who try to restrict our eating meat? No one – I repeat – no one has the authority to prohibit us from eating any kind of animal flesh. If you do not want to eat meat, that is your prerogative. But I intend to eat it, until my doctor says it is not good for me or until it is

offensive to a weaker Christian brother. "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Cor. 8:13).

The apostle Peter's convictions about eating meat had been shaped by the restrictions of the Jewish covenant. He knew it was wrong for him to eat pork or rabbit or catfish. So when a vision from the Lord instructed him to rise, to kill and to eat all kinds of "fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things and fowls of the air," he refused. Peter said,

Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that was common or unclean. And the voice spoke unto him again the second time, What God has cleansed, do not call common (Acts 10:12-15).

All Bible students know the purpose of the vision God sent to Peter. It was to inform Peter that he was to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles. But can we not also learn that the consumption of meat from all kinds of animals is permissible under the new covenant? Would the Lord have used the vision I have just described if eating animal flesh were not within God's will? Peter had been forbidden to eat the flesh of unclean animals, but he apparently had eaten the flesh of clean animals. After all, before Peter became one of Christ's apostles, he had made his living catching and selling fish. Would it have been honorable for him to catch fish to sell to others if he had moral convictions against eating animal flesh?

While I live in the second largest cattle county in the state of Tennessee, I assure you that that has nothing to do with my speaking out against the foolishness of the radical animal rights activists. I have been opposing those radical groups – long before I moved to Lincoln County, Tennessee. I have an obligation to defend the actions of Old Testament and New Testament saints and of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



## Chapter 30

### Pattern Theology

When God gave men responsibilities in ancient times, he gave a pattern they were to follow in complying with his wishes. Otherwise, how would they know what to do to please him? What if God had simply said to Noah:

Because of the wickedness on the earth, I am planning to send a flood to destroy all who are not obedient to my will. I want you to build an ark to save those who are faithful to my command?

Noah probably would not have known any more about building an ark that would survive the flood waters than I would. That means that he and his family would not have survived. God knew he would have to provide the pattern for the building of the ark and that is exactly what he did.

I am sure you are familiar with the pattern God gave to Noah. He said:

Make an ark of gopher wood; rooms shall you make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which you shall make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, and the breadth of it shall be fifty cubits, and the height of it shall be thirty cubits. A window shall you make to the ark, and in a cubit shall you finish it above; and the door of the ark shall you set in the side thereof; with the lower, second and third stories shall you make it (Gen. 6:15-16).

Incidentally, most Bible scholars believe a cubit in ancient times was approximately eighteen inches. That means the ark was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high.

If Noah had been like some modern theologians and

preachers, he would have found ways to improve the ark, at least, in his judgment. Do you remember what the divine record says about Noah? "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen. 6:22). In the great chapter on the heroes of faith, the author of Hebrews said concerning Noah:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7).

What does God want us to learn from Noah's example? If we want to please God, we must have the attitude Jesus expressed in a discussion with some of his fellow Jews: "He who sent me is with me; the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). And how do we know what pleases God? We know because he tells us.

The book of Leviticus provides God's instructions concerning the offering of animal sacrifices.

And the Lord called unto Moses, and spoke unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, you shall bring an offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord (Lev. 1:1-3).

Do you get the impression that God gave a pattern the Israelites had to honor?

What could possibly be wrong with offering cattle that were diseased or cripple? After all, would it not be better to offer the lame and the sick rather than let them go to waste? The prophet Malachi gives us God's answer. God accused

the Israelites of polluting his altar. The people blatantly asked: "Wherein have we polluted thine altar?" God explained:

In that you say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is that not evil? And if you offer the lame and the sick, is that not evil? Offer it now unto your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your person, says the Lord of hosts?....And you have brought that which was torn, and the lame and the sick (Mal. 1:7-8, 13).

Since the Israelites ignored the divine pattern, God could not accept their offerings.

Time will not allow me to outline the extensive instructions the Lord gave Moses for the construction of the tabernacle. God told Moses to speak to the children of Israel and ask them to bring gold, silver, brass, blue and purple and fine linen and goats' hair and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins and many other items (Ex. 25:1-8). Please listen to verse 9. "According to all that I show you, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall you make them." He even gave them a pattern for making candlesticks for the tabernacle.

And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work: according unto the pattern which the Lord showed Moses, so he made the candlestick (Num. 8:4).

God commanded Moses: "And look that you make them after their pattern, which was shown you in the mount" (Ex. 25:40). The author of Hebrews had these patterns in mind when he wrote:

For if he (Christ) were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was

admonished of God, when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, see, says he, that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount (Heb. 8:4-5).

There is much more in the Old Testament that should help us to understand that when God gives a pattern he expects his children to follow it. For example, why did God execute Nadab and Ahihu? They offered fire that was unauthorized (Lev. 10:1-2). In very simple language, they ignored God's pattern for offering sacrifices. Why did God punish Korah, Dathan, Abiram and people who were sympathetic to them? They challenged God's pattern for the priesthood. They said, in effect, the men from the tribe of Reuben are just as holy as the men from the tribe of Levi (Num. 16:1-4). Is there a lesson for us in these stories from the Old Testament? Were they written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world have come (1 Cor. 10:11)?

You cannot overlook the foolish and fatal mistakes some of the Israelites made. Would it surprise you that some modern preachers and theologians are making the same mistakes? They even go so far as to deny that the New Testament has any patterns. Several months ago, a preacher in Middle Tennessee delivered a sermon on the topic, "Baptism and Christian Unity." Among the many foolish statements he made in his sermon, none is more unscriptural and irrational than this: "Beware of pattern theology" (p. 6). Incidentally, pattern theology was not invented by churches of Christ or any other church. God himself has given patterns for the New Testament church.

Before I take time to examine some of the patterns in the New Testament, I must do a simple word study. The Greek word translated "pattern" comes into English in our word "type." The Greek word appears sixteen times in the New Testament. It is translated "print" (John 20:25), "figure" (Rom. 5:14), "manner" (Acts 23:25), "example" (1 Tim. 4:12) and "pattern." Paul urged young men:



In all things showing yourself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shown integrity, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he who is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Tit. 2:7-8).

I have already read Hebrews 8:5, but I shall read it again. The priests of the Mosaic covenant “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, says he, that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount.” Is the author of Hebrews teaching that God has given patterns for the church of our Lord? If he has not, what is the point the divinely inspired author of Hebrews wants to understand?

Every reasonable person knows that some items in the work and worship of the church are left to our discretion. For example, where in the New Testament do you find a passage that tells Christians they must meet in a building? The Bible specifically authorizes Christians to meet to worship God, but it does not specify whether we are to meet in a building, out in the forests, down by the riverside or somewhere else. The Bible does not tell us what kind of songbook to use or even if we are to use one. Christians must meet on the Lord’s Day for worship. But the Bible does provide the time of day we are to meet. The church where I worship owns a van and a bus. I have not found an example in the New Testament of any church that did that in apostolic times. I am not familiar with any first century churches that owned a buggy or a chariot or a wagon. These and many other items are simple ways of carrying out the Bible’s instructions for the work and worship of the church.

So are there patterns the church must honor if we want to have God’s approval? Matthew, Mark and Luke describe what happened when our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper. I shall read Matthew’s account. As Jesus and his apostles were participating in the Passover meal,

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, All of you drink of it: for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Mt. 26:26-29).

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, was he giving a pattern he expected his disciples to follow through the ages? We are almost two thousand years this side of the occasion Matthew, Mark and Luke describe. We live in an entirely different environment. Would it be permissible in the twenty-first century for churches to serve a steak sandwich and a glass of soft drink instead of the bread and the fruit of the vine? If Jesus did not mean eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine constituted a pattern, how could anyone oppose serving whatever pleases us on the Lord's Table? Would it violate the teaching of scripture if we were to add a third element to the Lord's Supper? There is at least one religious group in the United States that adds a third element. Is there any possible way adding a third element can be justified scripturally?

Did the Apostle Paul understand that Christ had given a pattern when he established the Lord's Supper? Paul told the Corinthians:

For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup,

you do show the Lord's death till he come (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

We know Paul was not present when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. But what Paul taught the Corinthians about the sacred feast he had learned from the Lord himself (1 Cor. 11:23). Did Paul understand that Christ had given a pattern for observing the Lord's Supper? Or was it purely incidental that Paul relayed to the Corinthians exactly what Matthew, Mark and Luke teach about the Lord's Supper? Was Paul not concerned that Christians should beware of pattern theology? Even if you think modern Christians should beware of pattern theology, there is no way you can deny that Paul followed the pattern Jesus established in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Tragically, there are people in our postmodern culture who are not sure about anything to Bible teaches. In many cases, they like to make their own rules and regulations. But if we want to have the Lord's approval, we must have scriptural authority for what we preach and practice in religion. Is that what Paul meant when he wrote: "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17)? In case you think that only churches of Christ believe we must have scriptural authority for the work and worship of the church, let me assure you that is not true. For many years Dr. John L. Girardeau, a Calvinist, taught at Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, SC. His students asked him why he opposed instrumental music in public worship. In response to the students' questions, Dr. Girardeau wrote an outstanding book, **Instrumental Music in the Public Worship** (Fayetteville, TN: International Gospel Hour, n. d., a reprint). The opening paragraph in Dr. Girardeau's book sets the tone for the arguments he makes against using mechanical instruments in worship.

Attention, at the outset, is invoked to the consideration which serves to establish the

following controlling principle: A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded in the Scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements, is forbidden (p. 15).

According to Dr. Girardeau, the principle that should control every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church must be what he called "a divine warrant," that is, we must have biblical authority for whatever we believe and practice. Dr. Girardeau wrote the book on instrumental music more than 120 years ago. Have the scriptures changed in the years between the time he wrote the book and today? Absolutely not! But there have been changes in attitudes within various religious groups. I have time to give you just one example. A few months ago, Dr. John MacArthur wrote an excellent book with the title, **The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception** (Nashville: Nelson, 2007). A portion of Dr. MacArthur's book is devoted to an exposition of the so-called "Emerging Church movement." According to Dr. MacArthur, many of the Emerging Church leaders accept uncertainty as the new truth (p. 16). Within the Emerging Church movement, "Certainty is overrated. Assurance is arrogant. Better keep changing you mind and keep you theology in a state of flux" (p. 22).

I ask you to contrast the attitudes of many postmodernists with the words of the Apostle John. In his first epistle, the Apostle John uses some form of the word "know" over and over. Please listen to these verses.

And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him....We know that whosoever is born of God does not sin; but he who is begotten of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in sin. And we know

that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him who is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:15, 18-20).

The Apostle John used the expression, "we know," six times in these four verses. Five of those times the verb means "we have come to know and we still know; we have full knowledge."

If the Apostle John could know the great truths he outlined, can we not also know them? For example, John affirms: "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us and understanding" (1 John 5:20). John uses a different word for "know" in the following verses, but he assures us we can know.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

I have devoted considerable time in establishing the fact that human beings can know. We cannot know all there is to know; only God can do that. But we can know the plan of salvation, the Lord's instructions about worshipping him and the moral values God has revealed in his word. That means, very simply, that we can know that God has given a pattern for the work and worship of the church. We can also know that God expects us to honor the patterns he has given. We must have the mind of Christ to do always those things that please God (John 8:29).

I have a question for you to consider. If modern believing non-Christians want to have their sins forgiven and to be added to the Lord's church, must they follow the Holy Spirit's pattern the Apostle Peter enunciated on the day of Pentecost? Peter commanded the believing Jews:

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

Did the Jews obey the Holy Spirit's pattern for having their sins remitted? "Then they who gladly received his word were baptized, and there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Must alien sinners follow the same pattern today if they want their sins forgiven?

## Chapter 31

# Replacement Theology

**H**ave you ever encountered the term, “replacement theology,” in your reading or in listening to sermons? Frankly, I do not remember ever reading or hearing the expression until recently. John Hagee’s latest book, **Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World** (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2006), uses the term several times and severely criticizes those of us who believe in and preach “replacement theology.” He defines what he means by “replacement theology.”

Adherents of replacement theology believe that the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people, and God does not have specific future plans for the nation of Israel (p. 72).

Hagee recognizes that most religious groups in America preach replacement theology. He says: “Replacement theology means that Israel failed, and God has replaced Israel with the church” (p. 165). Hagee believes that Paul’s argument in Romans “demolishes replacement theology, specifically Romans 11:1 and 11” (p. 185).

David Brog, a devout Jew and one of John Hagee’s staunch supporters, employs the term dozens and dozens of times in his book, **Standing with Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State** (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2006). Incidentally, John Hagee wrote the Foreword to Brog’s book. Hagee writes:

Standing with Israel is a comprehensive expose of the roots of Christian anti-Semitism, the birth and development of Christian Zionism, and the death of replacement theology written by a Jewish author (p. xi of the Foreword).

Before reading to you a few brief excerpts from David Brog's book, I must comment on the title, "standing with Israel." It may come as a surprise both to Brog and to Hagee, but Christians have no obligation to stand with Israel any more than they would stand with any nation that is striving to provide for the safety and security of its people. The Israel of today is not and never has been God's chosen people. The Israel that was God's chosen nation disappeared many centuries ago. They failed to live by God's commandments and they ceased being his people. Today Jews and Gentiles stand on the same footing with God. Is that not what Paul meant when he told the Roman Christians: "For there is no difference" (Rom. 3:22)?

David Brog concedes that the majority of those who identify themselves as Christians "embraced the teaching of contempt and a 'replacement theology' which held that the church had superseded the Jews as God's chosen people" (p. 3). Brog quotes Hagee as teaching that the Bible mandates an obligation of God's people to bless the Jews. He also quotes Hagee as affirming that "every word of the Bible was written by Jewish hands" (p. 4). Did John Hagee not know that the largest block of material in the New Testament – Luke and Acts – was written by a Greek physician – not by a Jew? Brog thinks that John Hagee's view of the Jews is the dominant strain of Christian thinking. He says: "Replacement theology is on the decline" (p. 5). I am not sure where he learned that idea, but I strongly suspect that most reputable scholars – whatever their denominational affiliation – would strongly disagree with Brog and Hagee. Brog asserts: "Replacement theology led inexorably to anti-Semitic opinion, legislation and action. Rejected by man, the Jews found little mercy from God" (p. 14).

The assertion that replacement theology led to anti-Semitic opinion, legislation and action is pure fiction. Were there people who embraced replacement theology who were anti-Semitic and persecuted the Jews? Of course there were and are. But their belief in replacement theology was



not the cause. I have preached what Hagee and Brog call “replacement theology” for more than sixty years. I am not anti-Semitic. I do not know one gospel preacher who is anti-Semitic. It is irresponsible for anyone to accuse believers in replacement theology of being anti-Semitic or of encouraging anti-Semitism. Do I know people who are anti-Semitic? Absolutely! Most of the anti-Semites I know are not religious at all and could not define replacement theology if their lives depended on it.

David Brog foolishly affirms: “None of the earliest Christians believed they were starting a new religion” (p. 18). I have no idea about David Brog’s understanding of the New Testament, but all the New Testament writers who spoke on the topic believed they were starting a new religion. They do not use the modern term, “replacement theology” or the expression, “starting a new religion,” but there is not the slightest doubt they believed the new covenant was replacing the old – that the church was replacing Israel as God’s chosen people.

Since John Hagee argues that the book of Romans destroys the idea that the new covenant has replaced the old, let us turn to the book of Romans. You will recall that Hagee teaches: “Paul’s description demolishes replacement theology, specifically Romans 11:1 and 11” (p. 185). The following are probably the best-known words in the book of Romans:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein (that is, in the gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

If the gospel of Christ is God’s way of making men righteousness – the meaning of the expression, “the righteousness of God” – both Jews and Gentiles must obey the gospel. Did you take note of the definite article? “The gospel is the power of God unto salvation.” The definite article means there is one way and only one for men to be saved – “the gospel of Christ.”

There are many passages in Romans that refute the idea that God's covenant with Israel is still in effect. I ask you to listen carefully to these words from Romans.

Do you not know, brethren, (for I speak to them who know the law,) how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law of her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if, while her husband lives she is married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband is dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she is married to another man (Rom. 7:1-3).

Do you have any difficulty understanding the principle Paul explains in these verses? Please listen to his conclusion.

Wherefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:4).

I shall briefly summarize the teaching of this powerful passage. If a husband is still living, the woman who marries another man shall be called an adulteress. Why should she be called an adulteress? Because she is an adulteress. If her husband is dead, she is free to marry another man without being an adulteress. Paul uses this illustration to show that we are not under the law of Moses but under the gospel of Christ. The Roman Christians had become dead to the law of Moses that they might be married to Christ. If they had tried to live for Christ and yet felt themselves bound to any part of the law of Moses, they were spiritual adulterers. Demanding that anyone during the gospel era must keep any of the Mosaic covenant makes one guilty spiritual adultery. If that is not what Paul is teaching in Romans 7, what is he teaching?

The book of Galatians emphasizes the same truth. Paul

argues that the physical children of Abraham are not God's children. If they or Gentiles want to be children of God, they must obey the gospel of Christ. Christ does not have two plans of salvation—one for Jews and one for Gentiles. Paul emphasizes that God made a covenant with Abraham—a covenant incidentally that could not be broken or replaced. "Now to Abraham and to his seed were the promises made. He says not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one. And to thy seed, which is Christ." Does that mean the law of Moses had no meaning? "Wherefore," Paul asks, "then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator." Who was the seed concerning whom God had made the promise? The seed is Christ. Paul explains further:

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith that should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster (or tutor) to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are not longer under the schoolmaster (Gal. 3:16-17, 19, 23-25).

No true Bible believer can deny the divine origin of the Jewish covenant. God himself ordained the law and gave it through angels to Moses (Gal. 3:19). But it was given for a specific time and ended when the new covenant began on the day of Pentecost. After the day of Pentecost, everyone—both Jew and Gentile—must obey the gospel of Christ or be lost. The law served the purpose for which God gave it, but it ended when the gospel of Christ was given. The Mosaic covenant prepared men and women to receive the gospel. But after faith came, we are not longer under the schoolmaster (that is, the law of Moses). Did you notice that the definite article is used in verse 25 when Paul speaks of the gospel? Dr. Hugo McCord renders the Greek: "Now, that the faith has come, we are no longer under the guide."

The term, “the faith,” does not refer to your faith or mine, but to the system of faith – the gospel – as revealed in the New Testament. Do you remember how Paul concludes the paragraph I have been reading to you?

For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Who are Abraham's seed or heirs according to these verses? Who can deny that faithful Christians and only faithful Christians are the heirs God had promised to Abraham?

Some of the harshest language Paul uses of any group appears in his letter to the Galatians. He asked them:

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh (Gal. 3:1-3).

Is Paul contrasting the “Spirit” (the gospel) with the “flesh” (the law of Moses)? The word “foolish” (*anoetoi*) in verses 1 and 3 means stupid or senseless. Was Paul speaking of their intellectual ability? He was accusing them of being stupid by seeking salvation under the law of Moses that had already been canceled and not applicable to anyone – Jew or Gentile.

The New Testament uses the word “Israel” many times. Most of the time inspired writers are referring the nation of Israel. But sometimes the word is used of the new Israel – the church of the living God. What did Paul have in mind when he told the Roman Christians:

Not as though the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel, who are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall your seed be called; that is, They who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for seed (Rom. 9:6-8)?

Paul also told the Galatians:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).

Who are the people who constitute the "Israel of God?" Are they the physical descendants of Abraham? I have just read to you these plain words. "They who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for seed" (Rom. 9:8). In his very scholarly commentary on **The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), Dr. Herman N. Ridderbos, Professor of New Testament at Kampen Theological Seminary in the Netherlands, says concerning the Israel Paul mentions in Galatians 6:16:

In view of what has gone before, we can hardly doubt that this Israel of God does not refer to the empirical, notional Israel as an equally authorized partner alongside of the believers in Christ. As elsewhere (for example, Romans 9:7), so here, Israel designates the new Israel (p. 227).

Bishop J. B. Lightfoot of the Church of England wrote one of the most scholarly commentaries ever written on **The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957, a reprint). The original commentary was published in 1865 and republished in 1957. Bishop Lightfoot makes the following appropriate comments on the term, "the Israel of God."

The 'Israel of God' is in implied contrast to the 'Israel of the flesh.' It stands here not for the faithful converts from the circumcision alone, but for the spiritual Israel generally, the whole body of believers whether Jew or Gentile (p. 225).

I do not know of one reputable scholar — not even one — who would disagree with the conclusion of Herman Ridderbos or of J. B. Lightfoot. The church of our Lord is the true Israel.

Did the apostle Peter have in mind the ancient nation of Israel or the church of the living God when he wrote:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: who in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10)?

He cannot be speaking of the Jews because at one time they were the people of God. The apostle Peter was speaking of the members of the body of Christ. They are the elect nation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession. At one time, Gentiles were not a part of the elect nation — that is, of ancient Israel — but now they and those Jews who have obeyed the gospel are true Israel.

David Brog denied that any of the earliest Christians believed they were starting a new religion (p. 18). Unfortunately and inexcusably, he was misinformed or deliberately perverted the teaching of scripture. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah specifically predicted the coming of a new covenant. He even described the nature of that new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Brog gives no indication that he is familiar with the prophecy of Jeremiah. He almost certainly would not accept the truth that the gospel of Christ is that new covenant Jeremiah had in mind. But that is precisely what the book of Hebrews teaches. The author of Hebrews quoted Jeremiah's prophecy about the coming of the better

covenant that would be established on better promises. He then added, "If that first covenant, that is, the law of Moses, had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second, that is, the gospel of Christ." He concludes his discussion of Jeremiah's prophecy of the two covenants by affirming: "In that he says a new covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:7, 13). The English Standard Version renders verse 13: "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

There is much more in the book of Hebrews I would like to discuss with you, but time will not permit it today. However, I would like to conclude our study today with a few more passages from Hebrews. The inspired author begins his discussion of the differences between the two covenants with these familiar words:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

The same author explains why Jesus Christ could not have been a priest under the Mosaic covenant: He came from the wrong tribe. Please listen.

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also in the law (Heb. 7:11-12).

Are these passages difficult to understand? The Levitical priesthood disappeared. God has given a new priesthood. That necessitates a new law – the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews informed his readers that the sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant could not take away sins.

So God determined to send his Son in the world to die for our sins. The book of Hebrews quotes Christ himself as saying: "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Please listen carefully to this plain and simple conclusion:

He takes away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:4, 9-10).

The blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sins, but the blood of Christ can. The Mosaic covenant provided for animal sacrifices. The new covenant provides the blood of the Son of God to take away sins. The animal sacrifices had to be offered on a regular basis. The blood of Jesus was offered once for all.

John Hagee, David Brog and others may strongly object to what they call "replacement theology," but Romans, Galatians and Hebrews plainly teach that the new covenant has replaced the old, that the church has replaced Israel. I close today with the apostle Paul's words to the people of Antioch of Pisidia:

Be in known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the remission of sins: and by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39).



## Chapter 32

### Are Churches Of Christ Too Picky?

Sometimes critics of churches of Christ accuse us of being too picky. They seem to believe we should interpret the scriptures in a very broad and liberal way. We should not pay too much attention to the details of scripture. For example, one left-leaning preacher among churches of Christ does not believe we ought to stress the tenses of verbs. I shall give you one example of how tremendously important it is to take notice of the tenses of verbs. If we do not emphasize the tenses of verbs, what the Apostle John wrote to his readers makes no sense. The King James Version reads: "Whosoever is born of God does commit sin; for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). Charles Williams' translation of the New Testament renders this verse:

No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning, because the God-given life principle continues to live in him, and so he cannot practice sin, because he is born of God.

If we do not take into consideration the tenses of verbs, we put ourselves in an impossible situation. If John means that those who are born of God cannot sin at all, the apostle contradicts himself. Earlier in this same epistle, John affirmed: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Even our Calvinist friends believe Christians can sin. But they do not believe a Christian can so sin that he can be lost eternally. In his set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1933), Dr. A. T. Robertson, one of the world's greatest Greek scholars, says concerning 1 John 3:9:

The child of God does not make a habit of sinning....  
A great deal of false theology has grown out of a

misunderstanding of the tense of the verb *hamartein*, that is, go on sinning (volume 6, p. 223).

The duty of every Christian and not just preachers is to examine every word in scriptures to ascertain its meaning. Honesty demands that we must examine every word in its context. If we are not careful to examine a word in its context, we can make the Bible mean whatever we want it to mean. That is being dishonest with the text. We would not treat any other document the way some theologians treat the scriptures. Tragically, there are preachers and theologians who make up their minds what they believe or what their denominations teach and then reinterpret the scriptures to harmonize with their preconceived ideas.

Let us take notice of how God dealt with his people under the Mosaic covenant. After God had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and they were wandering in the wilderness, they could not find enough water for that vast army of people.

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was not water for the people to drink....And the Lord said to Moses, Go on before the people, and take with you the elders of Israel; and your rod, wherewith you smote the river, take in your hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Ex. 17:1, 5-6).

On a later occasion, when the Israelites came to Kadesh, they could find no water. The Lord commanded Moses:

Take your rod, and gather the assembly together, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his

water, and you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock; so you shall give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, you rebels; must we bring you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod smote the rock two times: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also (Num. 20:1, 7-11).

Did you notice in these passages how picky God was in his dealing with the Moses? God explicitly told Moses to smite the rock in Horeb (Ex. 17:6). Moses did exactly what God told him to do. At Kadesh, God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would come forth for the Israelites (Num. 20:8). I know and so do you that there is a difference between striking the rock and speaking to the rock. But should it really make any difference? After all, the water came forth on both occasions. The results were exactly the same. So what was the big deal? If you have any doubt that God always means what he says, please listen to what God told Moses after he had disobeyed him.

And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron, Because you have believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given you (Num. 20:12).

To the modern mind, this just does not seem reasonable or relevant. What possible difference could it make whether Moses struck the rock or spoke to it? The difference was that Moses obeyed the Lord in the first instance and disobeyed him in the second. Did you take careful notice of what the Lord told Moses? "You have not believed me" (Num. 20:12). When it comes to serving the Lord God of heaven, we are to do exactly what he says in the way he says do it. The New Testament makes that truth very plain.

And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the father by him (Col. 3:17).

How can we do anything in the name of the Lord Jesus if we do not follow his instructions?

One preacher was quoted as saying he wished the story of Nadab and Abihu were not in the Bible. If a man does not plan to follow the explicit teaching of scripture, I can understand why he would have problems with that story. Nadab and Abihu were priests, the sons of Aaron. They had the responsibility of leading the worship services of the Israelite people. Each of them:

...took a censer and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them (Lev. 10:1).

Frankly, I do not know the difference between strange fire and any other kind of fire. But Nadab and Abihu knew. We know the principle involved. The strange fire was fire which the Lord had not commanded. The English Standard Versions calls it "unauthorized fire."

Is God really that picky? If you think God does not mean what he says, please listen to what happened to Nadab and Abihu.

And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses spoke unto Aaron (Nadab and Abihu's father), This is that the Lord spoke, saying, I will be sanctified in them who come near to me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace (Lev. 10:2-3).

Does the Lord mean he cannot be sanctified and glorified unless his children do only that which he authorized? It is no wonder that some religious leaders do not like the story of Nadab and Abihu.

Tragically, there were false teachers among the churches

of Galatia who had the attitude of Nadab and Abihu. They were trying to reinvent New Testament Christianity, somewhat like former Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong attempts to do. Those false teachers in Galatia apparently thought a synthesis of Judaism and Christianity would be better than either religion alone. Some of those teachers were trying to compel Titus, a Greek Christian, to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3). They were like some of the men who came down from Judea to Antioch in Syria and taught the brethren, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Besides, Paul approved of Timothy's circumcision. Luke tells us what happened.

Then came he (Paul) to Derbe: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain woman, who was a Jewess, and believed, but his father was a Greek: who was well reported of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those quarters: for they all knew that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3).

If Paul approved of Timothy's circumcision, why did he balk at having Titus circumcised? Please listen to Paul.

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them who were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:1-5).

Does it seem to you that Paul was being too picky when he objected to the brethren's seeking to compel Titus to be circumcised? There was a principle involved in Paul's objection to compelling Titus to be circumcised. Titus was a Greek while Timothy was half Jewish. Timothy being half Jewish would not have had the influence among Jews if they knew he had not been circumcised. If Paul had given in to the pressure to have a Gentile circumcised, it would have set a terrible precedent. It might have left the impression that Gentiles have to become Jews to be Christians. By the direction of God's Holy Spirit, Paul stopped that movement before it destroyed many souls.

I need to say in passing: circumcision is neutral in the Christian era, unless teachers or religious institutions try to force it on someone as a condition salvation. Later in the letter to the Galatians, Paul says concerning circumcision: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith that works by love" (Gal. 5:6). "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). Paul told the Corinthians: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19).

Does not all of this amount to a great deal about nothing? If we are going to make up our rules, the examples I have used are meaningless. But if we want to have God's approval, we must do what he tells us to do, even if his commandments seem too picky. Is not God the one who does the picking? He gave Moses instructions about speaking to the rock so water would supply the needs of the Israelites. Moses did not honor the authority of God. He had ordained the kind of fire the priests were to offer. Nadab and Abihu must have thought they knew better or it really did not matter what God had commanded. They paid with their lives for disobeying the will of God. Paul knew he could not allow the Judaizers among the churches in Galatia to alter even one biblical principle.

Do some modern churches think churches of Christ are being too picky when they oppose the observance of the Passover and other Jewish feasts? The Passover belongs to the Mosaic covenant – not to genuine Christianity. If we observe the Passover or any other Old Testament ordinance, including circumcision, we are making the cross of Christ of no effect (Gal. 5:1-4). In addition, we are dishonoring Christ since he is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). I cannot stress too strongly that the Law of Moses has been removed. The book of Hebrews quotes our Lord as saying,

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He takes away the first that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:7-10).

Observing the Passover in the Christian era is an insult to our true Passover—the Lord Jesus Christ. But is that not being too picky?

Many people in the religious world believe Easter is the most holy day of the year. Most denominational churches engage in elaborate celebrations during the Easter season. Faithful churches of Christ do not participate in such celebrations. We know and so does everyone else who has studied the matter with an open mind and an open Bible there is no scriptural authority for celebrating Easter. But is biblical authority all that important for what we teach and practice in religion? Are we not just being too picky about such matters? Why do you think the Bible includes the stories of Nadab and Abihu and of Moses? They were not written just to fill up space.

You probably know that some people criticize churches

of Christ for not using mechanical instruments of music in the worship services. I can assure you it is not because we do not like pianos or organs or other kinds of musical instruments. I grew up in a musical background. My late wife was a music teacher. She played the piano and the organ. But worship services are not designed to please me or my fellow church members or you. Our worship must be directed to God almighty. Jesus told the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria: "God is spirit: and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

It may surprise you to know that the founders of some of the leading denominations condemned instrumental music in worship. That was true of John Wesley, John Calvin and Martin Luther. A number of the leading scholars in those denominations strongly opposed the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of England's most respected Baptist preachers, would not allow instrumental music in the church where he preached.

John L. Girardeau, a Presbyterian scholar, was for many years professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. In the late 1800s his students asked him why he opposed instrumental music in worship. He provided an answer in a very scholarly book with the title, **Instrumental Music in the Public Worship** (Fayetteville, TN: International Gospel Hour, n.d., a reprint). The book was originally published in 1888 by Whittet & Shepherson of Richmond, Virginia. I thought the book was so valuable that I had the book republished by the International Gospel Hour.

Several times in the book, Dr. Girardeau stresses this theological position. Please listen to his initial paragraph.

Attention, at the outset, is invoked to the considerations which serve to establish the following controlling principle: A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded



in the Scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements, is forbidden (p. 6).

In very simple language, Dr. Girardeau is teaching the absolute necessity of having authority for all we teach and practice in religion. He could not find scriptural authority for using instrumental music in the worship of the church; so he opposed the practice. The truth is: Many of the older Presbyterian preachers, such as Throneberry and Chalmers, believed using mechanical instruments of music in worship of the church was without divine warrant, to use Dr. Girardeau's expression.

Dr. Girardeau appealed to the stories of Cain and Abel, Nadab and Abihu, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, Moses' smiting the rock, Uzza and the ark, and others to sustain his thesis that we must have authority for all we preach and practice (pp. 18-26). There is much more in Dr. Girardeau's excellent book, but this will have to suffice for this study.

There are unquestionably people among our religious neighbors who think churches of Christ are being too picky on such matters as observing Christmas, keeping the Passover and using instrumental music in the worship of the church. Our goal is not to be different just for the sake of being different. We are striving with God's help to do everything in the name of our Lord, that is, by his authority (Col. 3:17). I am fully aware that this approach is not popular in the denominational world and not even among some left-leaning churches of Christ. In fact, one elder of a church in Texas argued that we can do whatever is within our "comfort zone." What if interpretative dancing or burning incense or keeping the Jewish Sabbath is within our comfort zone, should we engage in these? Only the Lord has a right to make such decisions. Our duty is do what he authorizes and only what he authorizes.



## Chapter 33

### Conversion Of A Good Man

Most Bible students are familiar with the word "conversion," although, oddly enough, the word appears only one time in the King James Version of the Bible. The word literally means a turning upon. Luke records the following incident.

And certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except you are circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. And therefore when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren (Acts 15:1-3).

James uses the verb "convert" two times in his epistle. He applies it to unfaithful members of the body of Christ.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jas. 5:19-20).

The New Testament writers employ the verb "be converted" six times. I shall give you just one example. In his powerful sermon on Solomon's porch of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem, the apostle Peter commanded his listeners: "Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19)." Unfortunately, some of the King James translators

allowed their Calvinism to influence their translation. The verb is not in the passive voice. The verb should be rendered "turn" or "turn again" – not "be converted." All other versions with which I am acquainted translate the verb in the active voice. The verse should be translated: "Repent, and turn that your sins may be blotted out."

Many of us preachers often refer to the great book of Acts as "the book of conversions." That certainly is a valid description of this magnificent book. It records the conversion of the Jews on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, the Thessalonians, the Corinthians, the Ephesians and others. Each of these conversions is a thrilling story of men's turning away from evil and embracing the gospel of Christ. Tragically and inexplicably, many of the denominational preachers, especially Calvinist preachers, ignore many of these beautiful stories of conversion. These great conversions provide wonderful insight into what we must do to become members of the body of Christ.

We do not know much about the moral and spiritual conditions of all those who were converted. But we do know that in some cases, they were really very evil people. For example, Paul writes concerning the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Paul does not say that all of the Corinthians had been guilty of all of these sins. Do you believe the Corinthians had to change before they could inherit the kingdom of God? There really is not the slightest doubt about it.

But if people were not really all that wicked, did they have to change also? For example, there is no evidence that Lydia and her household were guilty of the sins that were

rampant among the people in Corinth. Lydia apparently was a devout Jew, but she had to obey the gospel. Please listen to what occurred.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us (Acts 16:14-15).

Lydia worshipped the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but she still needed to turn and obey our Lord in baptism. Lydia apparently was a good woman, but she had to obey the gospel to be saved. What about the Gentile named Cornelius? Our lesson today will be devoted to the topic: "The Conversion of a Good Man."

There is much in the story of the conversion of Cornelius that time will not allow me to discuss today. Please listen to Luke's description of Cornelius.

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always (Acts 10:1-2).

From what you know about this man, do you not think he was a good man? Many scholars refer to him as a "God-fearer," that is, a Gentile who honored the moral values of the Old Testament. In fact, would you not agree that he was a better man than many church members? So why did he need converting?

It is obvious from Luke's account that Cornelius was a military man. He was a centurion in a military unit called the "Italian band." The English Standard Version calls the group "the Italian Cohort." A centurion was an officer who

commanded about 100 men. The New Testament mentions six centurions. We know nothing of his military record, but we have reason to believe he was a good soldier. It is unlikely he would have been given the honor of leading 100 men had he not demonstrated the ability to handle that responsibility.

Luke lists some great qualities of this good man. He calls Cornelius "a devout man." That is probably the reason some New Testament scholars call him a "God-fearer." The word "devout" is a translation of the Greek *eusebes*. That Greek word appears four times in the New Testament – two of those times in reference to Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 7). The word is used of Ananias, the preacher God sent to tell Saul what he had to do to be saved. "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews dwelt there" (Acts 22:12). The word is rendered "godly" in the following verse. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:9).

Luke describes the Jews who met on the day of Pentecost as being "devout," but he uses a different Greek word. He used the same Greek word of the men who carried Stephen to his burial (Acts 8:2). What do these Greek words signify? The word "devout" tells us that Cornelius was a man of great devotion and piety. Later in chapter 10, Luke tells us what the men who came to get the apostle Peter to go to the house of Cornelius said about the man.

And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man and one who fears God, and a good report of all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by a holy angel to send for you into his house, and to hear words from you (Acts 10:22).

The word "just" means righteous. Righteousness involves doing right according to the law of God.

Luke says Cornelius was a man who "feared God with all his house." We know the meaning of fearing God. Fearing God involves obeying the Lord's commandments.

No man can truly fear God if he does not keep the Lord's commandments. As the Israelites were preparing to leave the wilderness of wandering and to enter the land of Canaan, God's spokesman, Moses, instructed his people:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, and to walk in his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, which I command you this day for your good (Deut. 10:12-13)?

Fearing God does not mean being afraid of him, although if we are not walking in the way of truth, we have a good reason for being afraid of God. Is that not what the author of Hebrews meant when he wrote:

He who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, do you suppose, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him who has said, Vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:28-31).

Cornelius not only feared God, but so did the members of his household. We are not told who composed his household, but it may have included servants, as well as members of his family. This is a very significant statement. It is so very vital that we do our best to have good families. Do you remember what Paul wrote about elders of the Lord's church? An elder must be a man who:

Rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man does not

know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:4-5)?

I am aware that Cornelius was not an elder or a preacher before he obeyed the gospel, but he was a man who was deeply concerned about his own family.

Luke records that Cornelius gave much alms to the people. The New American Standard Bible translates that expression: "He gave many alms to the Jewish people." I have no doubt the expression, "the people," refers to the Jewish people, but the translators of this version go too far when they add the word "Jewish." Charles Williams renders the Greek: He "was always liberal in his many deeds of charity to the people." Obviously, Jews living under the Mosaic covenant were to be generous in taking care of their unfortunate brothers and sisters. Moses instructed the Israelites:

If there be among you a poor man of one of your brethren within any of the gates in your land which the Lord gives you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother. But you shall open your hand wide unto him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wants. Beware that there be not a thought in your wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and your eye be evil against your brother, and you give him nothing; and he cry unto the Lord against you, and it be sin unto you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give unto him: because that for this thing the Lord your God shall bless you in all your works, and in all that you put your hand unto (Deut. 15:7-10).

The Jews were to help the poor within the nation, but they were also to help strangers. Moses demanded of his fellow Jews:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, who regards not persons, nor takes reward (or bribe): he



executes judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love therefore the stranger: for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deut. 10:17-19).

We are not surprised when Jews loved Jews and provided for their physical welfare. Nor are we surprised when Gentiles loved other Gentiles and provided for their needs. But Cornelius was a Gentile who loved the Jews and regularly helped them. Cornelius had learned the lesson many of the Jews had not learned, and that was: God's people were not to show partiality. Since God is not partial (Deut. 10:17), his people were not supposed to be partial. Cornelius apparently loved the Jews. That was the basis of this statement about him: He had a "good report among all the nation of the Jews" (Acts 10:22).

Cornelius also was a man of prayer. Luke says: He "prayed to God always." The English Standard Version affirms that he "prayed continually to God." The sacred text gives us no insight into the content of his prayer. Was he praying he might find the truth about the gospel? Was he praying for his family and for others? We do not know. I have no intention of speculating about it. But it is significant that he prayed regularly to God almighty.

Please take note again of the character of Cornelius. He was devout, feared God with all his house, gave generously to Jewish people and prayed continuously to God. I must return to a question I raised a short time ago. So why did he need converting? If we engage in good works, is that not enough for us to inherit the eternal kingdom? Do not many modern teachers imply or actually state that we are saved by repeating the so-called "sinner's prayer?" If we are saved by praying, Cornelius did not need to be baptized for the remission of sins.

Let us now examine what occurred to bring this man to Christ. God gave him a vision of an angel coming to him and saying, "Cornelius." He was afraid, but asked the angel:

“What is it, Lord?” The angel responded: “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.” Does that mean he was saved by his good works and prayers? The angel instructed Cornelius:

Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. He lodges with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: he will tell you what you ought to do (Acts 10:4-6).

Did you take note of that little word “ought” (*dei* in the Greek)? Have you thought about the meaning of that word? It means it is necessary, it is essential. Since Cornelius was such a good man, why was it necessary for him to do anything? Will you also think seriously about that little word “do”? Did the angel of the Lord really mean Cornelius had to do something to be saved? I cannot overemphasize the importance of the word “do.” A careful examination of the New Testament’s use of the word “do” should convince any honest person that we are not saved by grace alone through faith alone. Jesus asked his disciples: “Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say unto you” (Luke 6:46)?

After the angel of the Lord left, Cornelius “called two of his household servants and a devout soldier among those who waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things, he sent them to Joppa.” The apostle Peter went up on the housetop to pray. While he was praying,

He became very hungry and would have eaten; but he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, let down to the earth.

In that sheet were all kinds of four footed beasts and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air. He heard a voice commanding him to rise and to eat. Peter responded: “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that was common or unclean.” He heard the voice again: “What God

has cleansed, that do not call common. This was done three times" (Acts 10:8-16).

While the apostle Peter was thinking about the meaning of the vision, the men whom Cornelius had sent arrived at Simon's house and stood before the gate. They called and asked if a man named Simon Peter was lodged there. The Holy Spirit told Peter:

Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, and get down, and go with them: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men that were sent unto him from Cornelius: and said, Behold, I am he whom you seek: what is the cause wherefore you have come?

They told Peter of the warning Cornelius had received from God. The next day the men and Peter left Joppa and traveled to Caesarea. "When Peter was coming in Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him." The apostle Peter said to Cornelius: "Stand up, I am also a man." Peter explained:

You know that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God has shown that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I have come unto you without objection. I ask therefore for what intent you have sent for me.

Cornelius told Peter about the vision he had received. He then said to Peter:

Immediately therefore I sent to you; and you have done well that you have come. Now therefore we are all here present to hear all things that are commanded you of God (Acts 10:17-33).

Luke's account of Peter's sermon is just a brief summary of the message God wanted Cornelius and his household to hear. Please listen.

Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness, is accepted of him. The word that God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all) that word, I say, you know, that was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are all witnesses of all things that he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:34-43).

While the apostle Peter was speaking these words:

...the Holy Spirit fell on all them who heard the word. And they of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. And they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

Now please take careful note of what followed.

Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to remain certain days (Acts 10:44-48).

As time permits, I shall examine some of the great truths that are taught in this account of the conversion of Cornelius. Do you remember Joel's prophecy that the apostle Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost? Joel predicted: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17). But on the day of Pentecost, God poured out his Spirit on Jews only, since the audience in Jerusalem was composed of Jews and proselytes only. There were no Gentiles. The prophecy was only partially fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The prediction was completed at the house of Cornelius. Please listen again to what I read to you a moment ago.

While Peter was speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them who heard the word. And they of the circumcision (that is, the Jews) who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-45).

This incident unequivocally teaches that all human beings — Jews and Gentiles — are covered by the new covenant.

Later some of the Jews challenged Peter for going among the uncircumcised and eating with them (Acts 11:1-3). Peter explained:

The Spirit bade me go with them (that is, the messengers from Cornelius), nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered in to the man's house: and he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, that stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter; who shall tell you words, whereby you and all your house shall be saved. And as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; who was I, that

I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:12-18).

There is no doubt the apostle Peter and other Jews had difficulty accepting the entrance of Gentiles into the church of the living God. That helps us to understand why God showed Peter three times the vision of the animals (Acts 10:16). When the voice in the vision commanded Peter to rise and kill and eat the various animals that were revealed in the vision, he responded: "No so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." The voice then said to Peter: "What God has cleansed, that call not common" (Acts 10:13-15).

What did the Lord want Peter and other Jews to learn from this incident? Fortunately, we do not have to guess.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness, is accepted of him (Acts 10:34-35).

The expression, "respecter of persons," literally means to receive the face. In his splendid set of books, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930), Dr. A. T. Robertson comments on the expression, "respecter of persons":

The idea is to pay regard to one's looks or circumstances rather than to his intrinsic character. The Jews had come to feel that they were the favorites of God and actually sons of the kingdom of heaven because they were descendants of Abraham (volume 3, p. 143).

Please listen to verses 34-35 from the English Standard Version.

So Peter opened his mouth and said, 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable unto him.'

Did you notice the basis on which God accepts both Jews and Gentiles? "But in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). What if people do not work righteousness, are they still acceptable with him? Righteousness, as you can discern from this passage, is not what God does for us. We must work righteousness. Is that not also what the apostle John teaches?

Little children, let no man deceive you: he who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous....In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not do righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:7, 10).

The tense of the verb "do" in both verses is significant. The Greek literally reads "keep on doing righteousness" or "practices righteousness." Doing righteousness eliminates the Calvinist doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Did you notice what the apostle Peter said to the house of Cornelius?

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:47-48).

Were they baptized, like the Jews on Pentecost, in "the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38)? Does that mean that good men who are not Christians have to obey the gospel just like the gross sinners at Corinth and the Jews who crucified our Lord?





## Chapter 34

### Death Of Death In The Death Of Christ

When death takes from you the person you loved most in this world, you should be able to understand why Paul called death an “enemy” (1 Cor. 15:25-26). Death is a hateful enemy. I despise death because it took from me my beautiful wife of more than fifty-three years. I strongly suspect that every one of you in my audience today has experienced the loss of significant people in your life: Parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members and friends. I know that death is inevitable for all human beings (Heb. 9:27), but I have no doubt I shall grieve over the death of my Molly until my dying day.

During the early years of the twenty-first century, Dave Hunt, an internationally known author and lecturer, and James White, director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, conducted a written debate on Calvinism. Their debate was published under the heading, **Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views** (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004). In one of his chapters, Dave Hunt refers to a book that was written in the mid-seventeenth century. The book has the unusual title, **The Death of Death in the Death of Christ** (p. 373). The title of that book will serve as the basis of our lesson today.

The apostle Paul explains how death came into God’s perfect creation and how God has been so gracious in providing the way of salvation to all who believe and obey the gospel.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed (or counted)

when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them who had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him who is to come. But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift of grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, has abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ). Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:12-21).

We know that death was not in the world until Adam and Eve sinned and brought death on the entire human family. We also know that God is so loving, gracious and merciful that he wants all men to be saved. Both the apostles Paul and Peter make that truth too plain for anyone to doubt.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

What did that mid-seventeenth century author mean by the expression, "the death of death in the death of Christ?" We know he could not mean that Christ's death on the cross eliminated physical death for anyone, including Christ's most devoted followers. I have already given you two verses about the universality of death. The following verse from Hebrews probably is the best-known verse on that topic. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). And how can anyone miss the import of these words from the book of Romans? "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

The death that the death of Christ removed for those who believe the gospel and obey it is the "second death." Do you remember the promise Christ made to his faithful church in ancient Smyrna? "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches; he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2:11). The word "overcome" is from the Greek *nikao* and means to win the victory. The Lord also promised:

Blessed and holy is he who has a part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign a thousand years (Rev. 20:6).

But what will happen to those who reject the gospel and live for the devil?

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Frankly, I do not look forward to the first death, do you? But I know both by reading the scriptures and by observation that no one escapes this world alive, except those who will be alive when Christ returns. Surely no reasonable person

wants to experience the second death, although many of our fellowmen may not even believe in it or have probably not given much thought to it. Since we cannot avoid the first death, how can we escape the second death, that is, the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Will you please give your undivided attention to what the Bible teaches on the topic?

I must begin by emphasizing what God has done to give us the opportunity to enjoy eternal life. We know we cannot earn salvation. So God took the initiative to provide the means by which we can be forgiven and have the promise of eternal life.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

An analysis of this text should help us to understand what the grace of God has done and continues to do for fallen men. Paul insists that the grace of God has appeared unto all men. We know that men did not and do not deserve salvation. But,

God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

Do the facts that the grace of God has appeared unto all men and that God sent his only begotten Son to save us mean that all people will be saved? The truth is: There are conditions we must meet to access the grace of God. For some Calvinistic theologians to argue that salvation is unconditional flies in

the face of hundreds and hundreds of scriptural passages.

Paul teaches that the grace of God brings salvation. That the grace of God brings salvation cannot be doubted, that is, if we believe what the Bible so plainly says. But how does the grace of God bring salvation? God has given us his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus himself taught his disciples: "Even as the Son of man did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The word "ransom" is a noun form of the word translated "redeemed." Christ's death on the cross redeemed us from our alien sins. If we continually walk in the light, as Christ is in the light, his death continues to cleanse us from our sins (1 John 1:7). The apostle Paul added:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

Have you ever thought of the Bible as being a gift of God's grace? You do not believe we deserve to have God speak to rebellious and sinful men through the prophets, through his Son Jesus Christ and through his apostles, do you? In his farewell address to the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus, Paul warned: "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone of you night and day with tears." Please listen carefully.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified (Acts 20:31-32).

Were it not for the grace of God we would not know who God is, how to become Christians and how to so live as to have God's approval.

Fortunately for those who accept the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant word, we know how to avoid the second death. Our Lord does not mention the second death in the following passages, but we know what he had in mind.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:14-17).

What did Jesus have in mind by using the words “perish” and “condemn?” He certainly was not speaking of our physical deaths. Faith in Christ and obedience to his word means we shall not perish in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

Our Lord accused some of the Jewish leaders of being of this world, of not thinking as God wanted them to think. He then told them: “I said therefore unto you that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am he you shall die in your sins” (John 8:23-24). The Jews were going to die physically even if they believed in Christ and obeyed his gospel. There was nothing they could do to avoid that death. But if they wanted to avoid eternal punishment – the second death – they had to believe in Christ and to obey his gospel. Did not our Lord affirm: “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15)? How can we claim to love the Lord if we do not keep his commandments? Can men go to heaven if they do not love the Lord?

Tragically, there are preachers and teachers who insist that men are saved by faith alone. If that were true, the Bible writers deceive us by insisting that we must do the will of God. What did Christ mean when he asked his disciples: “Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say” (Luke 6:46)? If we must do what the Lord says, we are not saved by faith alone. James teaches very plainly that we must do the will of God.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only,  
deceiving your own selves....But whoso looks into

the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed his deed (Jas. 1:22, 25).

And why did Paul criticize some in Rome for not obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:16)? If we are saved by faith alone, we do not have to obey the gospel.

On one occasion, there were some people who told Christ of some Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus asked them: "Do you suppose these Galileans were sinners above all Galileans because they suffered such things?" The Lord answered his own question. "I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." Christ mentioned eighteen people upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them. He asked: "Do you think that they were sinners above all men who dwelt in Jerusalem?" Again he answered: "I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5). Is our Lord teaching in these verses that alien sinners must repent if they want to avoid the second death, that is, eternal punishment?

Both the Galileans whom Pilate killed and the Jews on whom the tower of Siloam fell died. But will they also experience the second death? It all depends on whether they were walking in the Lord's way. If they were faithful to God's commandments, they had to die only one time, just as all of us have to die one time. But there is a great lesson Jesus taught in these verses, and that is, we must repent or perish. Paul taught the Athenians the same lesson.

The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: because he has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

When God judges the world in righteousness, does that mean that some will be cast into outer darkness? If you are

a committed Bible student, you know the answer to that question.

What do you want to hear the Lord say to you in the final judgment? Can you imagine anything more beautiful than to hear him say, "Enter into the joys of thy Lord?" Do you believe he will say that to every human being, as the Universalists so blatantly teach? If he will, most of the Bible has precious little meaning to us. Our Lord demanded that we confess him on earth so he will confess us to the Father in heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

Do you believe that those who deny our Lord on earth will escape the second death?

The apostle Peter indicted the Jews on Pentecost for having crucified and slain their own Messiah. He climaxed his great sermon by arguing: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ. The Jews were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Were they asking what they had to do to stay out of prison or to escape physical death? There was no threat of imprisonment. After all, the Jews had the permission, if not the blessing, of the Roman government when they crucified Christ. They knew physical death would be their lot whatever their belief about Jesus. They wanted to know how to be forgiven of their sin so they could inherit eternal life.

Peter's answer could hardly have been plainer.

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and



to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward (or crooked) generation (Acts 2:38-41).

Why were the Jews on Pentecost to repent and to be baptized? So they could enjoy the remission of sins. Since sin cannot enter the heavenly city, the Jews had to be baptized to have the promise of life eternal. By obeying the gospel, they would not experience the second death.

When believers repent and are baptized, is there any possibility they still might be lost eternally? I am fully aware of the Calvinistic doctrine of eternal security or once in grace always in grace. But there are some really serious problems with the doctrine. What did the author of Hebrews mean when he wrote: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12)? The Greek word translated "departing" is *apostenai* from which we derive our word "apostasy." Of course, a child of God can apostatize or fall from grace. That fact should not even be debatable.

I conclude our study today on the topic, "The Death of Christ in the Death of Christ," by pointing out what all serious Bible students already know, and that is, the death of Christ would be of no particular value were our Lord not raised from the dead. A few words from Paul's great chapter on the resurrection should be a great comfort to all faithful children of God.

If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is vain also. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

Paul concludes that great chapter by affirming:

Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my

beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:14-15, 57-58).

May our heavenly Father help us to be faithful so we may receive the crown of life!

## Chapter 35

### Fire In My Bones

**D**o you think there has ever been a preacher who has not said at one time in his ministry: "What is the point in continuing to preach? Nobody seems to be listening." Noah preached for over a century and had very little to show for it. The great prophet Elijah just knew he was the only faithful prophet left on the face of the earth. He decided to enter a cave. A voice from heaven asked Elijah: "What are you doing here?" Elijah responded:

I have been jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away (1 Kings 19:13-14).

The Lord said to the discouraged prophet: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). The Apostle Paul used that incident to show that a remnant of grace still existed in his day (Rom. 11:1-4).

Jeremiah, the seventh century B. C. prophet, encountered some very troubling situations. The Lord said to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah:

Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn unto me. But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorcement; yet treacherous Judah

feared not, but went and played the harlot also (Jer. 3:6-8).

The false prophets were assuring the Israelites they had nothing to fear. The false prophets had healed the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, saying, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace." Were the people:

...ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them who fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, says the Lord. Thus says the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest unto your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not pay attention (Jer. 6:13-17).

The tragedy was even worse because the leaders were corrupt. The Lord said to Jeremiah:

The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their hearts (Jer. 14:14).

Pashur, the chief governor of the house of the Lord, did not like what Jeremiah was prophesying. He "smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord" (Jer. 20:1-2).

Against this background, can you understand why Jeremiah said:

I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name? But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay (Jer. 20:9).

As you can understand from this verse, Jeremiah was discouraged and said he would not mention God any more or speak in his name. But God's word was in his heart like a burning fire shut up in his bones. He became weary with not speaking God's word and could no longer endure. Paul expressed similar views to the Corinthians: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16)! Our study today will be devoted to the theme: "Fire in My Bones."

There are many moral and spiritual conditions that weigh heavily on my heart. For example, I grieve over the enormous damage beverage alcohol does to Americans and to other people in our world. Jerry Lee Lewis is not my favorite country singer by any means; nor is he my favorite person. He recorded a song with the title, "*What Made Milwaukee Famous Has Made a Loser out of Me.*" Although I strongly suspect Jerry Lee Lewis has no knowledge of what the scriptures say about beverage alcohol, and probably could care less if he did know, his song is a good commentary on these passages from Proverbs. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has babbling? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? They who tarry long at the wine; they who go to seek mixed wine. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it gives his color in the cup, when it moves itself aright. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes shall behold strange women, and your heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, you shall be as he who lies down in the midst of the sea, or as he who lies upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, you shall say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Prov. 23:29-35).

One of my greatest concerns and I suspect one of yours also is the corruption in our culture we hear about almost every day. If you would like to know more about that corruption, I recommend that you buy and read Michelle Malkin's very disturbing book, **Culture of Corruption: Obama and His Team of Tax Cheats, Crooks, and Cronies** (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2009). Malkin quotes these words from George Washington: "Associate with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for it is better to be alone than in bad company." By divine inspiration, the Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians: "Be not deceived: evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

What the prophet Jeremiah said about the corrupt leadership in Israel reminds me of what has occurred in our nation in the past several years. In his outstanding book, **A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy** (Rocklin, CA: Prima, 1992), Dr. Thomas C. Reeves, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, tells of the many affairs John F. Kennedy had while he was the president. He had an affair with "a beautiful young California woman, Judith Campbell Exner. She had been admitted to the White House on many occasions for more than a year to carry on a romance with the president." Incidentally, the same woman had close ties with two mafia figures—Sam Giancana and John Roselli....Exner admitted the facts of an affair with the president (p. 7). Both *Time* and *Newsweek* published well-researched articles "linking the president romantically with several well-known actresses and scores of young women, including two youthful staff members code-named 'Fiddle' and 'Faddle' by the secret service." Dr. Reeves quotes one man as saying, "It was a revolving door over there. A woman had to fight to get in line" (p. 7). Dr. Reeves' book is full of disturbing information about the immoral behavior of John F. Kennedy. Bobby Kennedy and Ted Kennedy were chips of the same old block. Their father, Joseph P. Kennedy, was a notorious whoremonger. If you have any doubt about that,

read Ronald Kessler's book, **Sins of the Father: Joseph P. Kennedy and the Dynasty He Founded** (New York: Warner, 1996). Kessler says the senior Kennedy was involved in bootlegging and in organized crime. He was anti-Semitic and made efforts to appease Adolf Hitler. He also tried to manipulate the stock market (p. 2). Kessler quotes the *Boston Herald*: "Joseph P. Kennedy rose from modest beginnings to the pinnacles of financial power and political eminence by adhering to old-fashioned America virtues that have been somewhat discounted in today's society: devotion to family, loyalty to friends, strength of character, and the will to win" (p. 5). The author of the article in the *Boston Herald* was either ignorant or stupid.

In recent months, we have learned of the adultery of John Edwards, former senator from North Carolina. He lied about it for months, which I guess is normal for people who commit adultery. Like Jesse Jackson, John Edwards has a so-called "love child." Why do the media use the word "love" in such immoral situations? The word "lust" is the more appropriate word. Besides, John Edwards' wife is suffering from cancer. Did he not have enough sense to know what revelations of his extramarital affair would have on his sick wife? And how absolutely disgusting was the conduct of William Jefferson Clinton!

But Democratic presidents and senators have no monopoly on stupid behavior. Mark Sanford, governor of South Carolina, was a bright and shining star among conservative Republicans. There was even some speculation that he might run for the highest office in the land. And then it was learned that he had been traveling to Argentina to see a woman he called his "soul mate." "Soul mate" indeed! The Bible calls such people "whoremongers." For example,

For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5).

What is the difference between these men and barnyard animals?

Jeremiah accused the leaders in Israel of walking in lies. Do any of the leaders in our nation “walk in lies?” Or maybe I should ask that question another way. Are there any leaders in our nation who do not walk in lies? Is a leader lying when he promises to rule in one way and then rules in the opposite way? I have a number of books in my library with the word “lie” in their titles. For example, Christopher Horner, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, recently published a book with the title, **Red Hot Lies: How Global Warming Alarmists Use Threats, Fraud, and Deception to Keep You Misinformed** (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2008). Horner quotes Al Gore, the alleged inventor of the Internet: “I believe it is appropriate to have an over-representation of factual presentations on how dangerous it (global warming) is” (p. 1). Do you know what “over-representation” means? It means very simply lying. Horner also quotes Dr. Richard Lindzen, professor of meteorology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology: “There is a clear attempt to establish truth not by scientific methods but by perpetual repetition” (p. 4).

Another book with the word “lie” in its title is Michael’s Medved’s book, **The Ten Lies about America: Combating Destructive Distortions about Our Nation** (New York: Crown, 2008). My first acquaintance with Michael Medved was reading his book, **Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values** (New York: Harper, 1992)—the number one best book on the evils being perpetrated by Hollywood. In his book, **The Ten Lies about America**, Medved corrects many of the lies the liberal establishment in this country is promoting. One of the lies Medved refutes is: “The Founders Intended a Secular, not a Christian, Nation.” Incidentally, Michael Medved is an orthodox Jew. Medved points out: “Of the thirteen original colonies, ten mentioned religious purposes in their founding documents” (p. 78). He also points out what Dr. Benjamin



Rush (one of the founders) wrote of Samuel Adams (another of the founders):

He considered happiness and the public patronage of religion as inseparably connected; and so great was his regard for public worship, as the means of supporting religion, that he constantly attended divine service in the German church in Yorktown while the congress sat there...although he was ignorant of the German language (p. 79).

There is no doubt that many in the liberal community spew lies like Old Faithful spews hot water.

I need to mention one other book with word "lie" in its title. David Moore has published a book entitled, **Five Lies of the Century** (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1995). I shall read the titles to the chapters in the book. "America Never Was a Christian Nation," "The Traditional Family Is Irrelevant," "Evolution Is an Established Fact," "The Sexual Revolution Has Set Humanity Free," and "Entertainment Is Harmless." I agree with all of these except the one about America's being a Christian nation. At one time, America was almost certainly more religious than it is today, but it has never been a Christian nation. There is no such thing as a Christian nation.

I need to return briefly to Michele Malkin's book, *Culture of Corruption*. President Obama chose Joe Biden to be his running mate. Did Obama not know that Joe Biden had been guilty of plagiarism? Plagiarism means to pass off other people's ideas as one's own. To be very blunt: Plagiarism means stealing. Biden also tells lies. The *Wilmington News Journal of Wilmington, Delaware*, says concerning vice president Biden:

He tells tales with such wonderful conviction and sincerity—he just makes things up and seems to really believe what he makes up. That seems borderline delusional to me....It's not just that he lies, it's that he lies SO well that you think he really believes the stuff he makes up (p. 75).

But not only is fire in my bones over the corruption in our government; my bones are on fire over the corruption that exists in religion. I know that may sound strange to those who are unfamiliar with what happens in some religious organizations. Did you know that one cultic group has a practice it calls "flirty fishing?" The cult sends out beautiful young women to lure men into the organization. Some cultic groups seek to control every phase of their members' lives. They tell them what their college majors should be, how much time they can spend studying, how much time they can sleep, if and when they can visit their parents, whom they can date and marry. Such practices are as corrupt as any we can find in government, in the media or in business. God has not given any religious leader that kind of control over other people's lives.

I remember hearing one of the preachers on television tell about a visit he made to Africa with the infamous faith healer, A. A. Allen. He said a child who could neither hear nor see was brought to Allen. The child did not have any feet. Allen laid his hand on the child who then began to hear and to see. The child also grew feet. The preacher who told that story on television was either deceived by A. A. Allen or he was lying. Incidentally, many of the so-called "faith healers" are professionals at deceiving people.

Michael Moriarity works with the Immanuel Bible Church in Springfield, Virginia. His excellent book, **The New Charismatics: A Concerned Voice Responds to Dangerous New Trends** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), has a brief discussion of A. A. Allen.

Allen's constant reports of how he was raising people from the dead and theatrical announcements of coming miracles stirred the people....Allen's ministry was also severely jeopardized by his erratic behavior. In the fall of 1955, he was forced to withdraw from public ministry after being arrested for drunken driving while conducting a revival in

Knoxville, Tennessee....In 1970 Allen died from sclerosis of the liver (pp. 35-36).

A. A. Allen claimed he had a few one dollar bills in his pocket. In the midst of prayer, those one dollar bills miraculously turned into twenties (p. 38). Politicians are not the only ones who lie.

For a number of years, Jerry Sholes worked as a professional publicist and fund raiser for Iowa State University and for the University of Florida. At one time he worked as TV writer and producer for the Oral Roberts' ministries. In 1979 he wrote a book exposing the corruption in the Oral Roberts Evangelistic organization. In his book, **Give Me That Prime Time Religion** (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1979), Sholes reports that Oral Roberts claimed to read every letter he received. At the time he made the boast, he was receiving 20,000 letters each day. If he worked fourteen hours every day—as he claimed to do—he would have had to read 24 letters per minute (pp. 1-2). After publication of the book I have mentioned, some thugs savagely beat Sholes in a Tulsa parking lot. His injuries were so grave he had to have plastic surgery to repair his face. Incidentally, Patti Roberts, the ex-wife of Oral Roberts' son, Richard Roberts, has also exposed the corruption in the Oral Roberts' organization. Her book, **Ashes to Gold** (Waco: Word, 1983), is a very disturbing examination of Oral Roberts and his ministry.

I conclude today's brief study with a few observations. Every nation on earth desperately needs preachers like Jeremiah. We must have men who cannot be bought or intimidated. I am aware that men who preach the truth of the gospel without compromise may have difficulty finding a place to preach. But until churches are willing to support strong, sound preaching, the moral and spiritual situation in our nation will get worse. I plead with every preacher in our nation to pay attention to Paul's admonition to Timothy: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).



## Chapter 36

### Poverty Is A Curse

I do not make a habit of listening to Trinity Broadcasting Network. But yesterday (June 29, 2009) I listened to Kenneth Copeland, Gloria Copeland and several other Pentecostal preachers discussing – what else? – the so-called “Prosperity Gospel.” As usual, Kenneth Copeland dominated the discussion. He made a statement which will serve as the basis of our lesson today. He strongly affirmed: “Poverty is a curse.”

Is it possible I misunderstood Kenneth Copeland? Maybe Copeland did not mean that poverty is a curse. I have two books on poverty – **The Laws of Prosperity** (Ft. Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974) by Kenneth Copeland and **God’s Will Is Prosperity** (Ft. Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1978) by Gloria Copeland. Kenneth Copeland asserts: “When you are walking in the Word of God, you will prosper and be in health” (p. 17). What a tragedy that our Lord did not know this law of prosperity! Was not our Lord walking in the will of God? Kenneth Copeland insists: “You won’t find a Jew who believes in poverty, because poverty is not in the Old Covenant” (p. 32). If poverty were not in the old covenant, why do the books in the Old Testament speak so often of helping the poor? As every student of the books of Moses knows, God made special arrangements for the poor – not only for strangers but also for his own people. Solomon reminded the Israelites: “He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord; and that which he has given will he pay him again” (Prov. 19:17). There is more in Copeland’s thoroughly unscriptural and unreasonable book, but I shall turn briefly to Gloria Copeland’s book.

Gloria Copeland quotes God as saying that he wanted her to write a book. She foolishly affirms: “The Word of God

simply reveals that lack and poverty are not in line with God's will for the obedient." Is she saying that Jesus, Paul and thousands and thousands of Christians through the ages were not in line with God's will for the obedient? She claims to believe that "Jesus bore the curse of poverty at the same time He bore the curse of sickness" (p. 35). The truth is: He did not bear the curse of either poverty or sickness. He bore our sins on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). When Gloria Copeland needs money, she calls for a specific amount. She commands it to come to her (p. 43). It is tragic that millions of devout people have not known Gloria Copeland's formula for getting wealth.

She quotes these words from Christ.

And Jesus answering said, Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands with persecutions: and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Gloria Copeland says Mark 10:30 is a good deal (p. 48). She says if you give the Lord — by which she means the Kenneth Copeland ministries — \$1,000, you will receive \$100,000. Let us see how that works with the other items mentioned in these verses. Will we also receive a hundred houses, hundreds of brothers and sisters, a hundred wives, a hundred children and a hundred mothers?

William Lane's outstanding **Commentary on the Gospel of Mark** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) says concerning Mark 10:30: "God takes nothing away from a man without restoring it to him in a new and glorious form" (p. 372). Every Christian knows how he has been blessed with hundreds and even thousands of new brothers and sisters. Christ was not promising large bank accounts, but the many gracious blessings he has bestowed upon us.

D. R. McConnell did graduate work in theological and historical studies at Oral Roberts University. He is thoroughly acquainted with the so-called "health and wealth gospel." His book, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), completely oliterates the prosperity gospel. He quotes Fred Price, a recently chosen apostle by some of the leaders in the Pentecostal movement, as saying:

God has certain benefits attached to walking by faith. Most employers at least have enough common decency about them they don't ask somebody to work for them for free....If man has enough nicety about him to do that, can't you at least believe that the Father God is not asking you to serve him for free either (p. 169)?

In response to Fred Price's question, I have one comment: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Gordon Fee is a reputable Pentecostal scholar. McConnell quotes Dr. Fee as affirming:

American Christianity is rapidly being infected by an insidious disease, the so-called 'wealth and health' Gospel – although it has very little of the character of the Gospel in it. In its more brazen form, it simply says, 'Serve God and get rich'.... In its more respectable – but pernicious – forms it builds fifteen million dollar crystal cathedrals to the glory of affluent suburban Christianity (p. 169).

McConnell quotes Fred Price as asking, 'If the Mafia can ride around in Lincoln Continental town cars, why can't king's kids?...King's kids ought to ride in Rolls Royces'" (p. 174). Before he went to prison and learned better, Jim Bakker loved to say: "God does not want any poor kids or any sick kids."

There are some really serious problems with Copeland's foolish observation that "poverty is a curse." Does that not mean that Jesus Christ was cursed? Does it not border on blasphemy to say our Lord was cursed because he was poor?

When Jesus Christ and some of his disciples were traveling toward Jerusalem, a man approached Christ and said:

Lord, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus said, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has no place to lay his head (Luke 9:57-58).

Was the Lord Jesus Christ cursed because he had no place to lay his head?

The two greatest chapters in the Bible on giving are 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. As an incentive for Christians to be generous in their giving to the cause of Christ, Paul reminded the Corinthians:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

The Greek word translated "poverty" means to be reduced to abject poverty. When Christ became poor by leaving the riches of glory and coming to this old earth for our salvation, did that make his poverty a curse?

Did you know that some of the so-called "prosperity preachers" argue that Jesus Christ was rich? Creflo Dollar says the gold, frankincense and myrrh the wise men of the east brought to Jesus at his birth made him rich. In fact, he was so rich he had to have an accountant to keep up with his money. He wore such expensive clothing the Roman soldiers gambled for his robe. Have you ever heard the expression, "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel?" That is precisely what the "health and wealth" preachers do when they insist that Jesus was rich. How much gold, frankincense and myrrh did the wise men bring to Jesus and his family? Did they bring a ton of gold and wagonloads of frankincense and myrrh? Have you ever wondered if those men and women are reading the same Bible the rest of us read?

Do you believe the Apostle Paul was a faithful servant of the Lord? There is no doubt in my mind that he was a



great preacher and probably the greatest missionary who ever lived. He made sacrifices for the cause of Christ that would astound most of us. His life was constantly in danger because of his faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. If the prosperity preachers were correct, should not Paul have been extremely wealthy because of his total commitment to Christ and his kingdom? What did Paul mean when he wrote to the Philippians:

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer want (Phil. 4:12)?

If Paul had been as rich as Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, would he have had to go hungry and suffer want?

In his two letters to the church at Corinth, Paul provides some insight into the suffering he had to endure in his service to God. He explained:

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are honorable, but we are despised. Even unto his present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands (1 Cor. 4:10-12).

Can you imagine Creflo Dollar's being hungry and thirsty and having no certain dwelling place? Can you imagine that any of those prosperity preachers having to work with their own hands to supply their physical needs? In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul sheds further light on his poverty. There were times when he was "in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11:27). What a tragedy that Paul knew nothing about the prosperity teachings of the Copelands, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer and Paul Crouch!

Joyce Meyer believes God has prospered her because

of her preaching and her generosity. She travels in her own \$10 million jet aircraft. She and her husband own a \$107,000 Mercedes Benz. They also own a \$2 million home. I certainly do not mean to be unkind, but God has absolutely nothing to do with Joyce Meyer's wealth. It comes from people who attend her services and buy her books. Kenneth Copeland owns a \$20 million Cessna jet aircraft and lives in a house that rivals the mansions of the Arab oil sheiks. How many of their listeners or viewers have prospered like Joyce Meyer and the Copelands?

The churches of Macedonia were truly great churches in the first century. Paul explains their generosity in helping the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Moreover, brethren, we want you to know of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this we did, not as we had hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

Did you take note of the expression, "deep poverty," in verse 2? That is the same Greek word used of Jesus in verse 9. How tragic that these very generous churches in Macedonia were under a curse because the members were poverty stricken! It is inconceivable that any student of the Bible would be so blind to the teaching in these verses from 2 Corinthians 8. The same language is used of the church in Smyrna. The Lord himself said of the Smyrneans:

I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9).

The word "poverty" is the same Greek word we examined in 2 Corinthians 8:9 in reference to Christ and in verse 2 of the Macedonians. The Christians at Smyrna were poverty stricken in worldly goods, but they were rich in heavenly goods. In contrast, the Laodiceans boasted: "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." The Lord said the Laodiceans were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Where do the prosperity preachers fit in these categories?

What about Job and Abraham? Were they not rich men? They definitely were rich. The Bible says concerning Job:

His substance was also seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred female donkeys, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men in the east (Job 1:3).

I read from one book that estimated Job's wealth at a billion dollars. To be completely honest with you, that is a silly estimate. But we cannot deny his wealth. The story of Job raises some important questions. Do we know whether Job accumulated his great riches before or after he became a faithful servant of the Lord? Could he have had his wealth when he decided to give his life to God? The "health and wealth" preachers are going beyond the biblical evidence to justify their greed.

The Bible also describes Abraham as a wealthy man. We know God promised to bless Abraham. In him would all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3). After God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and travel at God's direction, did he have more wealth than he had in his home town? Did God's blessings on Abraham necessarily constitute health and wealth? Do God's blessings on Abraham translate into wealth for every faithful child of God? Is it not true that some of God's greatest servants were and are poverty stricken?

Am I arguing that wealth is always evil? Absolutely not! The truth is: Wealth is a relative concept. If you have a new automobile, its value is probably greater than the total wealth of the vast majority of the human race. Many Americans make more in a month than most people in the world make in a year. When I was in Malaysia in 1981, I learned that the average Malay makes about \$30 a month in American money. So are the Malaysian people cursed because they are not wealthy by our standards?

The Apostle Paul tells men and women how to be really rich. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). The most fortunate person on earth is the person who is godly and content with what he has. Paul further says:

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us therewith be content (1 Tim. 6:7-8).

The vast majority of Americans have much more than food and raiment. But if we had only food and raiment, would we be content? Could we be content? At the time when Paul did not have enough to eat and had no certain dwelling place, was he content? He tells us plainly: "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content....I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:11-13).

If a person has wealth—and many devout Christians do—how can he use his money without its becoming a curse? The Holy Spirit does not leave us to guess. He led Paul to tell Timothy:

Charge them who are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Many people in American society believe the government should take from the rich and give to the poor. They refer to such a practice as "distributive justice." It is not justice at all – distributive or otherwise. It is stealing. Besides, Russia, England and other countries have tried socialism and found that it is an abject failure. It makes everyone poor. It discourages men from building factories and creating wealth. And in addition, it does not make the poor any richer. It simply makes them more dependent on other people working.

Paul cautions the rich about being high-minded, that is, about the sinfulness of being haughty. He also warns them about trusting in "uncertain riches." When there are crooks on Wall Street, in the government and in other places in our world, we should know not to trust in uncertain riches. The sad truth is: There are governmental leaders who want to make every one poor except themselves. How many congressmen, senators and other political leaders willingly give up their increases in their salaries?

Paul urged the rich: Do good, be rich in good works, ready to distribute and willing to communicate. I shall give you one example of how a man's great wealth can bless our world. When I entered college in 1943, I had enough money to pay the tuition for one semester. There was a rich brother in Longview, Texas who wanted to help young men attend college so they can learn to preach. There were dozens or perhaps hundreds of us at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee who were able to go to college because of that rich brother. He was laying up in store for himself a good foundation against the time to come. The good he did with his wealth can be known only in the world to come. May God bless all of us – rich and poor – with the attitude of the Macedonians: "First they gave themselves to the Lord."