

# The Gospel Preceptor

*Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Psa 119:104*

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## The Holy Spirit and Conversion

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There is but little difference among religious people that there is a Holy Spirit Who begins, continues and consummates the conversion of men. However, there is a wide and irreconcilable difference among some religious people as to how the Holy Spirit does this work of converting. When the subject is considered, we are led to the conclusion that there are only two alternatives to choose from. Either the Holy Spirit converts men directly, or He converts men indirectly. (i.e. through a medium). Most (if not all) denominational groups hold the idea that in His work of converting men, the Holy Spirit operates directly on the hearts and minds of men today. Consider this statement from *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*:

We believe the Scriptures teach that in order to be saved, men must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel... (page 63).

According to Baptists, men cannot be saved unless the Holy Spirit does something “in connection with”—**not through or by**—the Word. To their minds, not only does He work alongside the Word in order to save men but He does it in an incomprehensible manner “so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel.” This really is a fruit of the Calvinistic doctrine of Hereditary Total Depravity, which is the teaching that men inherit from Adam, a nature that is “utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.” As the teaching goes, since man is of such a nature, then without the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on his heart or mind, he cannot be saved. We posit that this idea contradicts the Bible in every regard as we shall prove in this article.

### Voluntary Obedience?

Contrary to Baptist teaching, the Scriptures teach that when the Holy Spirit operates directly on men, there is no opportunity for “voluntary obedience.” As a matter of fact, no one who was influenced directly by the Holy Spirit, could resist Him. When Balaam wanted to curse the Israelites for Balak due to the money offered him, the Bible says, “...the Spirit of God came upon him.” (Num. 24:2). When that happened, Balaam under the Spirit’s direct influence blessed Israel four times. Balaam in that very moment could not resist blessing God’s people, even if he wanted to.

We also see that when Saul, due to envy, sent three groups of men to murder David, they, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, did something contrary to their commission. (1 Sam. 19:20-21). When Saul attempted to go finish the job himself, he was met with the same fate as his messengers. (1 Sam. 19:22-24). They had gone to Naioth in Ramah to commit murder. Yet, the Holy Spirit directly influenced them to do something contrary, and these men could not resist Him. The Holy Spirit did not respect the choices of these men, when He operated directly on them.

Therefore, if it is true what the Baptist Manual teaches, then there would not be a single sinner or lost soul in hell because the Holy Spirit desires the salvation of all men.

(1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). However, we are told that the majority of men will spend eternity in hell. (Matt. 7:13-23). Thus, if it be the case that the Holy Spirit converts men directly, then with the majority of men on the highway to hell, we must necessarily conclude that the Holy Spirit has either chosen some men to be saved and condemned the rest to hell, which would contradict His impartial nature (Gal. 2:6), or He is really incompetent in the business of saving men, which would contradict His Omnipotence. Baptists can't eat their cake and have it.

### **How Does the Holy Spirit Convert Men?**

It needs be noted that when the Holy Spirit directly influenced the men above, He did not convert them from their wickedness. Evidently, if He had, they would have been unable to resist Him. It is an axiom that men are created free-moral agents and God Almighty, even though He can, does not violate this freedom, either spiritually or morally. We see therefore that Balaam still went ahead to counsel the Israelites to sin against God, leading to the demise of about 24,000 of them. (Num. 25:1-9; 31:16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14). Saul, also continued his persecution of David unabated. The direct operation of the Holy Spirit on these men, neither converted them, nor changed their character or their spiritual states.

That being the case, we are left with the only other alternative, which is that the Holy Spirit converts men indirectly (i.e. through a medium). We know this is especially true because even though the Holy Spirit desired the salvation of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29) and Cornelius (Acts 11:12), He did not operate directly on their hearts but sent preachers to them. Why? Because the Spirit's medium of conversion, has always been **through** or **by** (not in connection with) His Word. Every page of Scripture teaches this absolute truth. Let us note a few:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul... (Psa. 19:7).

...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved... (Mark 16:15-16).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth... (Rom. 1:16).

Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth... (Jam. 1:18).

From the foregoing, we must conclude that the Holy Spirit has put His converting power in words and when these words are preached to the hearts or understanding of men and men, by their own freewill, respond favorably to the words of the Spirit in obedience to it, they will be saved or converted. However, if like Baptists teach, there is some sort of operation, separate and apart from the Word of God, or "in connection with" the Word, then we are interested in knowing at which point the Holy Spirit stops His operation for the Word to take over and vice versa. We also are interested in knowing who is responsible for a lack of obedience. The Holy Spirit or the sinner?

### **Conclusion**

Let us study diligently the entirety of God's word on this issue and quit the theorizing that only leads to doctrines that are fatal to gospel obedience. The Scriptures carefully studied lead to but one conclusion; that we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. (1 Pet. 1:23).

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## **"Providence"**

**Brad Green**

The miraculous age has ceased:

Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

However, that does not mean that God is not alive and working in the lives of men to-day. The Bible teaches, "to the intent that the living may know that the most High

ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:17). We also read of the general provisions necessary for life that God makes available: “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45).

The mistake many make is concluding that if God works in the lives of men today, then He must be working miraculously (i.e., Pentecostalism), or that if miracles have ceased, then God cannot work in the lives of men today at all (i.e., Deism). Both extremes are incorrect according to the Bible. Much of the confusion about providence begins with the question: “How does God do it?” The answer to this may be simpler than it seems: “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). God does not reveal unto us the **how**, regarding providence, but He does reveal unto us the **fact of its existence**. God does not reveal to us the **how** regarding answers to prayer, but He does reveal that “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas. 5:16). God, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet.1:3). Since God has given us “all things that pertain unto life and godliness,” then the answer to how, regarding providence, is not necessary since He did not reveal it to us in His Holy Word. How presumptuous it is of man to think that he could even understand the how, in regard to providence, seeing that God chose not to provide that information.

To understand miracles and providence Scripturally, both must be properly defined and distinguished. Miracles were instantaneous: “So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and **immediately** their eyes received sight” (Matt. 20:34). Providence, on the other hand, may take a great deal of time before the result is evidenced. Consider the example of Joseph. Many years passed between the time his life was spared and he was sold into slavery until the time he was given a place of prominence in Egypt (Gen. 37-45). Another big distinction between miracles, which have ceased, and providence is the demonstration of each. Miracles were witnessed and easily certified. Even the enemies of Christ who,

...beholding the man which was healed standing with them [Peter and John], they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it (Acts 4:14-16).

In direct contrast, when Esther contemplated a right course of action, Mordecai gave her advice and then pondered, “who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Est. 4:14).

Our God, He is alive, and He works in the lives of men today—not miraculously, but providentially. All men are blessed by the general provisions that God has made for us to live and thrive here on Earth, but it should be our desire to seek those Spiritual blessings which are reserved only for those who are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Through faith (Heb. 11:6) and obedience to God’s Word, repenting of past sins (Luke 13:3) and confessing the Deity of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), one can be immersed in water to have his past sins forgiven and washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16). God will then add you to His church (Acts 2:47) where you can enjoy the Spiritual blessings of being in the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Salvation can be found in no other (Acts 4:12). Let us seek to obey God and be faithful to Him even “unto death” so that we may be given “a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

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## The Evidences of Inspiration

**B.C. Goodpasture**

The evidences of the inspiration of the Bible fall into two classes—namely, external and internal. Josephus and Philo, learned Jewish authors, testify that the Jews always re-

garded the Old Testament as a product of holy men writing under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. From the very nature of the case however, the chief arguments in favor of the divine origin of the Bible are largely internal. This fact does not militate against the arguments in favor of inspiration. If the contents of a given bottle were in question, the best way to find out the truth would be to make a careful analysis of what was in the bottle. The internal evidence would be more conclusive than any kind of external evidence that could be produced. If the nature of a nugget of metal, which many thought to be gold, was in question, the best way to arrive at the fact would be to examine the nugget itself. In like manner we have a book, the Bible, which we claim is inspired. Does it bear the marks of inspiration? Will it stand the acid test of internal investigation? We have a right to examine this book to see whether or not it bears the marks of divine origin. It has nothing to fear from the most rigid investigation.

### **The Bible's Anticipation of Religious Errors**

As an evidence of its divine origin, we mention the fact that the Bible has anticipated and answered every major departure from the faith which has been made during the past nineteen hundred years. Only an example or two can be cited. The Roman Catholic Church has denied the cup to the "laity," the rank and file of its members. Jesus, as if in specific anticipation of this error, said at the institution of the Lord's Supper: "Drink ye all of it" (Matt. 26:27). He did not mean, as some modern cranks have foolishly contended, that they must drink the entire contents of the cup, the fruit of the vine; but that each one must drink of it. The disciples so understood him. It is said that "They all drank of it" (Mark 14:23). Again, Paul said: "The Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received" (1 Tim. 4:1-3). It is a matter of common knowledge that the Romish Church has forbidden marriage to its leaders and commanded its members to abstain from meats at certain seasons. In doing this, it has followed the "doctrines of demons." Some so-called "Protestant" churches ape the "Mother of Harlots" in abstaining from meats. All such practices have been anticipated and condemned. By no human wisdom or ingenuity could these errors have been foreseen and answered. The only adequate explanation is inspiration.

### **The Bible's Scientific Foreknowledge**

The Bible is abreast with the most up-to-date scientific knowledge. Yet the Bible was not written as a treatise on science. It was written in the language of the people addressed at the time it was produced, yet it contains no statement of fact which is at war with scientific truth. The order of events in creation as enumerated by Moses, is in agreement with the latest scientific pronouncements. Jeremiah said that "the host of heaven cannot be numbered" (Jer. 33:22). The ancients thought, however, that the stars could be numbered. They thought that they had counted them. Now no astronomer ever hopes to know the number of the host of heaven. How did Jeremiah know this? Job said many centuries ago: "He stretcheth out the north over the empty space and hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7). How did the Uzzean sage know that there is a vast stretch in the northern heavens which is without stars? How did he know about the law of gravitation and the forces by which the earth is held in its proper place? He spoke far in advance of scientific discovery. He had no modern telescopic equipment, and he was not a world traveler. Whence came this accurate knowledge concerning the heavens and the earth? Isaiah used language which contemplated the rotundity of the earth. He said: "It is he that sitteth above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers" (Isa. 40:22). Isaiah had never, like Magellan, sailed around the earth. He had access to no modern maps or geographies. How did he come into possession of such knowledge? Jesus used language which took into consideration the fact that people live on a round earth, a sphere. He said that when he comes the second time two men would be in the field; one would be taken and one left. Two women would be grinding at the mill; one would be taken and one left (Matt. 24:40). And in that night two men would be in one bed; one would be taken and one would be left (Luke 17:34). Normally, at the time Jesus spoke, persons were in the field by day, in bed by night, and ground at the mill by twilight. Jesus meant, then, that

when he comes it would be daylight at some places, twilight at others, and at still other places it would be night. This could happen only on a round earth. How did Jesus know this? He lived and died in Palestine—he was seldom outside that country. He lived in sight of the Mediterranean Sea, yet never mentioned it. There is no evidence that he was ever on its waters, yet he speaks of conditions which will prevail when he comes again in such manner as to show that he knew that the world is round. How did he know it? How did he and the others quoted in this connection know about matters of science so far in advance of their times? The only answer is that they knew by inspiration of the Almighty.

### **The Bible's Impartiality**

Another evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible is its utter impartiality in the delineation of human character. When uninspired men are writing about those whom they eulogize and adore, they are prone to leave unmentioned things which are complimentary and sinful. But not so with the writers of the Bible. Moses, the great lawgiver, deliverer, and prophet, is one of the most colossal figures in all history. He is the most highly honored character of the Old Testament. His name alone of the Old Testament worthies is associated with that of the Lamb in the song of the blest (Rev. 15:3). Yet the Bible relates the sad story of Moses' sin at the rock and his consequent inability to enter the land of promise. David sinned, and the Bible records his sins. Peter sinned, and the tragic story of his thrice-repeated denial of his Lord is faithfully given. If men, apart from the moving of the Holy Spirit, had been writing about these men, they would either have left their sins unmentioned or would have "written them down." We cannot account for such fairness and frankness in the portrayal of heroic characters except upon the ground of divine authorship.

### **The Bible's Aloofness From Human Curiosity**

As an additional proof of its inspiration, we suggest the fact that the Bible does not cater to human curiosity. It never stoops to satisfy the curious meddlesomeness of man. This is not true of books written by uninspired men. The Bible often leaves unrecorded that which men would like to know. It is said that upon one occasion Jesus wrote twice upon the ground (John 8:1-8). This is the only instance of his writing. What he wrote would be news of the first quality, yet we do not know what he inscribed on the sacred soil of Palestine. It is significant that the Bible does not contain one book—not even one sentence—from the pen of Jesus. His childhood and youth are passed in almost complete silence. From the age of twelve to his baptism at the age of thirty we have no word from his lips. How different if men had been writing about him apart from the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Bible mentions several persons who were raised from the dead. Yet none of these brought back any word concerning what they saw and experienced beyond the veil. Their tongues were tied and their lips were locked concerning the great beyond. How different it would have been had men been writing according to the dictates of their own nature and learning. They could not, or would not, have foregone the pleasure of speaking some word to gratify the longing and anxious curiosity of men. Impostors have ever sought to solve the mysterious and tell of the world to come. Even the silence of the Bible is instructive. It, as well as its speech, is an argument in favor of its divine origin.

### **The Bible's Remarkable Unity**

Again, the unity of the Bible is a mark of its superhuman origin. It is composed of 66 books, written by about 40 different persons, under a variety of conditions and in widely separated countries, during a period of 16 centuries. Yet it is one book not only in form, but also in purpose, subject matter, and development. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." It was written to make men wise unto salvation. Each writer has made a distinct and fitting contribution to the whole. This can be accounted for only on the ground that a superior Intelligence directed these men to write what they did. "If," as Everest remarks,

...forty sculptors, living in different countries, scattered through sixteen centuries, and belonging to several schools of art, should fashion, without knowledge of each other or concert of action, as many different parts of a marble statue, and if at the end of these centuries it should be found that



these portions exactly fitted one another and resulted in a work of art the most perfect and the most sublime, then all would recognize the miracle, and that there was a presiding Intelligence more enduring and more exalted than man. Such are the circumstances under which wrought the forty sacred writers, and such was the result of their Labors—the Bible. Its inspiration alone accounts for its unity.

### **The Bible's Prophecies and Their Fulfillment**

Finally, we cite its prophecies as a conclusive evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible. Impostors have generally steered clear of prophecy. They have been afraid to jeopardize their reputations by making predictions. When they have yielded to the temptation to prophesy, they have invariably been embarrassed by what followed. On the other hand, the writers of the Bible have made frequent predictions, not one of which has failed of fulfillment, in due season. There are three kinds of prophecies in the Bible—namely, those which have been fulfilled, those which are in the process of being fulfilled, and those yet to be fulfilled. Obviously the first two classes are all that can now be used as evidence of inspiration. From these two classes we select a few examples.

In Josh. 6:26 we read that after Jericho had been destroyed, it was predicted that the man who rebuilt the city would lay the foundation with the death of his firstborn son and set up the gates with the death of his youngest son. Time moved on. Five hundred fifty years passed. This was too long a time for the man who did the predicting to have anything to do with the fulfilling. H'iel presumed to rebuild Jericho. When he laid the foundation, his first-born son, Abiram, died; and when he set up the gates, his youngest son, Segub, died—exactly as it had been predicted centuries before (1 Kin. 16:34) The length of time and the number of details involved render it impossible to explain this prophecy apart from inspiration. Again, we read that a man of God came from Judah to Jeroboam as he stood by the altar to burn incense, and predicted that a descendant of David, Josiah by name, would burn on that altar priests and the bones of men in his efforts to destroy idolatry and restore the worship of the true God. (1 Kin. 13.) This was a highly detailed and circumstantial prophecy, yet three hundred fifty years later it was fulfilled to the letter. (2 Kin. 23:15-20.) The author of this prediction could have had nothing to do with its fulfillment. He died soon after the prediction was made. Besides, the fulfillment came centuries later. How did the man of God know so far in advance that a certain man, Josiah by name, of the royal family, would do these specific things on Jeroboam's altar? Again, we answer, inspiration is the only adequate explanation.

When Frederick the Great, of Prussia, asked his court chaplain to give him in one word the evidence for the inspiration of the Bible, he answered: "The Jews." This was not a bad answer. The Jews do furnish strong evidence of the supernatural origin of the Bible. In Deuteronomy 28 Moses gave a very detailed prediction concerning the future of the Jews. He told them that as long as they were faithful to the Lord they would be prosperous in the land, and that no enemy could stand before them. But if they proved to be unfaithful, he warned, they would be removed from the land and severely punished. The punishment and the captivities which they would bring upon themselves were vividly described. Moses even went so far as to describe the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent misfortunes of the Jews. He predicted that the Lord would bring against the Jews a nation from afar, as swift as the eagle flieth, whose speech the Jews would not understand; that this nation would besiege Judea and Jerusalem in all their gates until the walls were destroyed; that in the siege the inhabitants would suffer unparalleled misfortune; that the delicate women of Jerusalem would devour their own children by reason of the famine; that great numbers of the Jews would be killed in the siege, that multitudes, till no man would buy them, would be carried to Egypt and sold into slavery; that they would be removed from Palestine and scattered among all the peoples of the earth; that they would be oppressed and despoiled; that they would find no rest day or night, but be anxious and troubled everywhere; that they would be a byword and proverb among the nations. Josephus' description of the siege and overthrow of Jerusalem is the best commentary on that part

of the prediction which has to do with the destruction of the holy city. The later history of the Jews is in exact fulfillment of every feature of the Mosaic prophecy. Jeremiah said: "I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee." (Jer. 30-11 ) The ancient Assyrians are gone, the Babylonians are gone, the Old Roman Empire has perished; yet the Jews are still here. They are a living monument to the genuineness and inspiration of the Old Testament prophecies. How could Moses have foretold the destruction of Jerusalem fifteen hundred years before it came to pass or related the misfortunes of the Jews down through thirty five centuries to our day except by divine inspiration? How did Jeremiah know that the Jews would survive even in the fires of persecution, and all their ancient foes? We can account for the Bible only on the grounds that its writers spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Bible has been in the fiery furnace of human investigation for these many centuries, yet it emerges without the smell of fire upon its garments. It has stood the acid test of practical experience. It has never failed when fairly tried. We have seen it in the forum of public discussion, we have seen it at the bedside of the dying, we have seen it at the graves of the dead; yet we have never seen it weighed and found wanting. It is God's Book.

*A glory guilds the sacred page  
Majestic like the sun;  
It lends its light to every age;  
It lends to all, but borrows none.*

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## Two "Rationales" For Sin

Jerry C. Brewer

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day were experts at finding what they perceived as "loopholes" in God's Law to rationalize their own sins and entrap the Lord. They attempted this by questioning Him about plucking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8), the washing of hands as a religious rite (Matt. 15:1-9), marriage (Matt. 19:3-9), His authority (Matt. 21:23-46), civil government (Matt. 22:16-21), the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33), the "greatest commandment" of the Law of Moses (Matt. 22:34-40), et al. "There is no new thing under the sun." Modern proteges of those ancient Pharisees **still** rationalize their own sins by appealing to what they **think** are loopholes in the New Testament, like Jesus' words here:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye: and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5)

Other than John 3:16, this passage may be the only one in the entire Bible that many people know, and it is a favorite to hurl in the face of those who preach the Truth and condemn sin in men's lives. The retort is usually, "Don't judge me! The Bible says, 'Judge not.'" Let's take a close look at this rationale for men's sins in our day.

If Jesus had stopped at the end of verse one and never said anything else, the rationale would be valid. But He didn't. A consideration of the context indicates that He does **not** condemn all judgment, only **hypocritical judgment**. In so doing, He used a hyperbole to illustrate the hypocrisy of the kind of judging He meant.

He asked, "...why beholdest the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest the beam that is in thine own eye?" A *mote* is, "a dry twig, or straw," and a *beam* is from a Greek word with a primary meaning of "holding up; a stick of timber: - beam" (James Strong, *Greek Dictionary of The New Testament*). There is a vast distinction between the two. The mote is a tiny particle. The beam is as we describe a huge piece of timber today, holding up a wall or ceiling. Thus, Jesus uses hyperbole (exaggeration) to teach

a lesson. A person with his eyesight weakened by a six by six beam of wood protruding from his eye approaches his brother and says, “Let me get that splinter out of your eye.” That, Jesus said, is hypocritical.

But, He continues, “first cast the beam out of thine own eye: and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” He does not condemn the man with the beam in his eye for seeing the mote in his brother’s eye. He only condemns the hypocrisy of trying to correct another when a like—or larger—problem afflicts the one doing the correcting. It is **not** wrong, or hypocritical, to correct another. Jesus was not condemning all judgment on man’s part, but **hypocritical** judgment. In fact, he **commanded** “righteous judgment” in another passage: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). These passages in Matthew and John **require** judgment. They do not condemn it.

What constitutes hypocritical judgment? Does one have to live a sinless life in order to preach the judgment of God on sinners? When hypocrisy is understood, the answer is a resounding **no**. The word “hypocrite” means, “an actor under an assumed character (stage player)” (Strong). Actors are literally hypocrites, and hypocrites are literally actors. They are real persons who “pretend” to be someone else in their performances. James Stewart was **not really** George Bailey in *It’s A Wonderful Life*. He was James Stewart, but portrayed someone else. The person with a beam in his eye portrays a person with clear eyesight, but he is not. That makes him a hypocrite. But Jesus did not prohibit him from removing the mote from his brother’s eye. He commanded that he first remove the beam from his own eye and **then** he would no longer be a hypocrite, **pretending** he was righteous. A person may commit adultery and try to correct that sin in others’ lives. He is hypocritical (an actor) **only** if he is **still** an adulterer. If he has repented and been forgiven of that sin, he is not a hypocrite, and has every right to preach against adultery in others’ lives. Matthew 7:1-5 does **not prohibit** one from passing **any** judgment; only that which is hypocritical.

#### “We’re All Sinners”

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her (John 8:3-7).

The rationale for sin that, “We’re all sinners” is based on this passage. The idea set forth is that no one can condemn sin in the life of another because, “we’re all sinners.” When one condemns sin, the reply, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” is usually hurled. That smug retort assumes that Jesus condones sin in men’s lives because all have sinned. This passage does **not** so teach.

Verse 6 gives the reason for their question to Jesus: “This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.” Their intent was not to mete out justice and follow the Law of Moses, but to discredit Jesus. They thought they had Him in a dilemma.

The dilemma they wished to get Him in was somewhat like that of the tribute money. To affirm the binding validity and force of the law of Moses would be to advise a course of action contrary to the Roman law. On the other hand, if He set aside this law it would make Him liable to the charge of breaking this law which would be an aid in killing His influence with the Jews. In one case they would accuse Him to the Romans and place Him under civil authority; in the other they could denounce Him as setting aside the law of Moses (David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on The Gospel by John*, Edited With Additional Notes by C. E. W. Doris, 1964, Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, pp. 121, 122).

Adultery was punishable by death under the Law of Moses. “And the man that commit-



teth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10). "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel" (Deut. 22:22). Punishment was to be inflicted on **both** parties to adultery—not just the woman. The validity of the charge had to be established by at least two witnesses, and the law required those witnesses to cast the first stone (Deut. 17:7).

Jesus neither set aside the Law of Moses, nor condoned the woman's sin. The scribes and Pharisees failed to bring the man to Jesus, who was also guilty of adultery. If she was caught, "in the very act" of adultery, as they charged, then they should have brought the man also. When Jesus said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" He invoked the Law of Moses' requirement that the "hand of the **witnesses** shall be first upon him to put him to death." "He that is without sin among you" did not mean the first stone could not be cast if any of them had sinned in any fashion, but referred to those who had witnessed the adultery. In this instance, the witnesses had to be "without sin" which meant they were not parties to the adultery.

When they tried to entrap Him, Jesus presented **them** a dilemma. **They** claimed the woman committed adultery. **They** said she was caught in the act which they, obviously, had to witness. Therefore, Jesus merely followed Moses' law, saying the **witnesses** must cast the first stone at her.

The latter part of this incident is generally used to imply that Jesus condoned the woman's sin.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:10-11).

Jesus was meticulous in His observance of the Law of Moses. He had not been a witness to her adultery and, therefore, could not condemn her to death under the law. His reply that, "Neither do I condemn thee" was in the legal sense. He did not condone her sin, but told her to, "sin no more," saying that she had, indeed, **sinned**.

John 8:3-11 does not mean that sin must be condoned because, "We're all sinners." It teaches just the opposite. Sin **can**—and **must**—be condemned in the lives of all, as Jesus condemned it in the scribes and Pharisees and in the woman taken in adultery.

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## Saved Outside the Church?

**Clarence C. Gobbel**

Here are some questions often asked by men: "Can one be saved outside the church?" and "does the church save anyone?" These questions are not the same, though they are considered to be so by those who ask them.

We agree that the church does not save anybody, but the question, "Can one be saved outside the church as well as in it?" is asked to bolster the denominational teaching that one may be saved before and without ever becoming a member of any church. Now, when spoken in regard to a denomination, it is true that one does not need to belong to any of them to be saved. The very ones composing them will admit that one can be, and is, saved before and without ever belonging to a denomination. Thus, according to their own admission, salvation is not found in any of them.

They try to explain this by saying that to become converted is to become a member of the "invisible church," then afterward one may join the "visible church." The Bible knows nothing of those expressions. I have not been able to find anything concerning

the “invisible church” in the teachings of Christ or His apostles.

But in our present discussion, we refer to the New Testament church, the one of which the Lord spoke when He said, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). This one came into existence on the first Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection, and it was immediately said, “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). It is the one over which Christ is the head. “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23; cf, Col. 1:18).

Salvation is in Christ and not one of the denominations denies this. Notice the following: “That they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). Again, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature...” (2 Cor. 5:17). These, with other passages, show how important it is to be in Christ. The apostle tells how one gets into Him: “For ye 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” (Gal. 3:26-27). Also, “For by one Spirit [authority of] are we all baptized into one body...” (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus to be in Christ is to be in His body, for the same thing that translates us into one puts us into the other. And we are told that the body is the church: “...the church, which is his body” (Eph. 1:22-23). Thus to be in Christ is to be in His church. There is only one body of Christ, for we have that plain statement in Ephesians 4:4: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”

Although the church saves no one, Christ promised salvation to those in Him, thus in His church. And to settle this beyond any quibble, we quote, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Again, “The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). Salvation is for those who are in the church, or body, of Christ.

To illustrate this, when God created fishes, he also made the place in which they would have life. That place, or element, is water. They cannot live or find life outside that element. So it is, friends, the Lord placed salvation in His body, His church. To live spiritually, one must be in this spiritual institution.

If one can be saved outside the body of Christ, His church, then the following is true:

1. **Saved out of Christ.** “Even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). To be in Christ is to be in His body. Therefore, if one is saved outside of His body, one is saved outside of Christ. Not only that, but since He is the saviour of the body, or church, to be saved outside of it is to claim another as our Saviour.
2. **Saved without His blood.** “Take heed...to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Again, “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). We are also assured that we “have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...” (Eph. 1:7). The above quotation from Acts says He purchased, or gave His own blood for, the church. Thus to be saved before, or without, coming into this body is to be saved outside the pale of His cleansing blood. But that is an impossibility.
3. **No spiritual blessings.** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Thus, there are no spiritual blessings for those out of Christ, and to be out of Christ is to be out of His body, the church

There is no salvation outside the church for which Jesus died. Those who claim the church is not necessary to our salvation are saying Christ died for something unnecessary, for He shed His blood for the church and gave Himself for it.

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# The Entrenched Position Of Religious Error

Cled E. Wallace

Devout believers of the Bible and defenders and advocates of the New Testament order of things are often appalled at the extent to which religious errors become entrenched in the minds of the people. Ideas that have no scriptural support whatever become impregnably fortified in the minds of multitudes and make gospel evangelism a very difficult task indeed. This phenomenon challenges the attention of every gospel worker and can be met only by employing a high degree of thought and intelligence.

Just as I sat down to begin this article, I was interrupted by a telephone call and the conversation that followed may affect the entire course of this discussion. A sweet-voiced lady informed me that she had only recently arrived in this city and wanted to make arrangements to have her baby "christened." I supposed she was looking for a Methodist, Episcopalian or Presbyterian minister, or possibly a Catholic priest, but she informed me that she was a member of the church of Christ and her baby was "fifteen months old" and had never been "christened." She seemed distressed about the matter. Further inquiry revealed that she came from a city in Texas and the church and the preacher she mentioned are quite well known. Now, it probably would not improve the situation for me to publicize that church and excoriate that preacher for their lack of attention to doctrinal matters. I do not have enough facts in hand for all the deductions I can at the moment think of. It would be embarrassing to me if some lady who had heard me preach very many times should go off to another city and call some preacher and ask him to "christen" her baby. I know something about the preacher in this case but I would have to know more about the lady to blame him too much. It is a humbling thought to consider how little we preach really sticks in the minds of those who listen to us. People generally, even members of the church, do not read the Bible enough to get the best results from even the best preaching, and it is surprising with what facility even plain speech is misunderstood and misapplied by some who from all outward signs should know better. There is not a hint in the whole Bible about "christening" babies, no example of it, no command for it, and no inference looking that way. Nevertheless doting mothers numbering into the thousands feel that their darlings are not properly named and miss other blessings if it is not attended to. Why is this?

A casual look into the situation reveals some interesting and disconcerting facts. This and other ideas and practices belong to that large body of tradition which has grown up and found lodgment in the human mind since the New Testament was written. It is backed up by vast organizations, widespread and subtle propaganda, and is supported by concentrations of money and social appeal. It is not only respectable, it has become by force of custom in many circles, the thing to do. Many do not feel any need to go beyond this for authority. The fact that it belongs to the doctrines and commandments of men and condemned by the Lord is unknown and unthought of. To get that fact over to them is a most difficult task.

To break away from the bondage of entrenched error is difficult for the individual. It often means defiance of strong organization and a break with custom. It requires both intelligence and independence to do this, and that to a degree a large number of people do not possess. The step is obviously painful. It was so with Paul and others who became Christians in his day. A brilliant physician was asked by one of his patients: "Doctor, what church do you belong to?" The answer was: "I am a Presbyterian." He was asked if he knew why he was a Presbyterian, if reading the Bible made him such and a few like questions. The physician replied that he had never given that angle any particular thought. His parents were Presbyterians, his associations and rearing determined his course and he had never had time or inclination to go into the theological merits of the situation. He was a Presbyterian as a matter of course. The patient requested him to read the book of Acts, to note the establishment of the church, how people became Christians and see if he could find anything there that looked like the Presbyterian denomination. The doctor promised to do so, and if he did, it must have initiated a conflict within him, the age-old conflict between truth and error. The huge religious errors that have found root in one way or another in the popular mind are not

in the New Testament. The only way to uproot them is to establish in the minds of the people the authority of the New Testament in religious matters and make them acquainted with its contents.

Everybody knows how hard it is to reach a Catholic with the simple teaching of the New Testament. He is in the bondage of a system. It is as hard for him to break loose from it as it is for a Jew to become a Christian. The obstacles to be overcome, to even have him exposed to gospel teaching are near the insuperable. There is nothing extant in the way of religion that is much farther from the New Testament order than the Catholic hierarchy with its network of traditions. Take a New Testament and make an attempt to evangelize the domain of Romanism, and you will catch what I mean by the entrenched positions of religious error. It is no solution to the problem to assert that Catholics are dishonest, know they are wrong and do not want the truth. My observation is that many of them are passionately, even fanatically sincere. Error has some very effective methods of enslavement. There is a widespread "zeal for God" within the fortifications of religious error but much of it is "not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:1-2).

Protestantism as it is commonly known, in its up-to-date development, is sustained more by the authority of its organizations and customs than by an appeal to, "It is written." The arguments commonly used in its defense are of a blanket character capable of offering covering to Romanist, Jew, and even deist. *Toleration* is the watchword of modern religion. Any effort to approach any citadel of error with an open New Testament is challenged by the sentries of toleration. In modern religion any man who says a man is not right in his religion when he is wrong, is "intolerant." Intolerance is getting to be close akin to treachery. Thus another link is forged in the chain of error that binds the minds of mankind. True tolerance is a good thing and intolerance can become demoniacal, but the proper bounds of these words need to be clearly noted. When tolerance holds out the olive branch to false doctrine, it is clearly abusing its proper functions. Incidentally, some of the apostles of modern tolerance can become flamingly intolerant, when opposition begins to pinch them. Broadmindedness can sometimes express a rather sneering contempt for what it calls "narrowness." And "narrowness" has often turned out to be the truth in the realm of religion. The seeker after truth in religion should keep a New Testament handy. It more often condemns what the world approves and approves what the world condemns than otherwise. It is a good book to know and in addition to its other virtues, it is excellent for mental hygiene.

A striking example of the entrenched position of certain errors has recently come to my attention. Some years ago a moving picture of Biblical scenes was shown on the screens of theatres throughout the country. The baptism of Jesus showed John and Jesus standing in the water about ankle deep and John was pouring a little water on the head of Jesus. A week or so ago, I glanced over a series of pictures in a daily paper illustrating the current Sunday School lesson. The text of the lesson was: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Then the picture shows John and one of the multitude standing in the stream about ankle deep and John pouring water on the head of the other. It is pure sectarian propaganda. The uncritical and the uninformed, not to mention the confirmed pedobaptist, **assume** that baptism was so performed by John and others in the New Testament. That one picture widely circulated makes a wider impression in favor of sprinkling and pouring for baptism than any number of books and sermons on the subject. A lot more people see the picture than would read the books or hear the sermons. Besides, it is easier to draw a plausible picture on that particular subject than it is to make a convincing argument, in view of the scarcity of material on that side of the question in the New Testament.

The picture is interesting for a number of reasons. It raises some questions. Why should John lead anybody into the water, even ankle deep to sprinkle or pour water on his head? Affusionists do not do that way today. Did John think a man had to be immersed on one end and sprinkled on the other to be truly baptized? John led them into

the water all right, but more than ankle deep. He immersed them and made a complete job of it. The whole New Testament is quite clear on this particular point. Error here has made use of many devices to maintain its position.

It would be surprising, if not alarming, to some who take their practice for granted, should they carefully examine the New Testament for proof that affusion was practiced for baptism. The chief reliance is upon the text: "I baptize you with water." Of course if the word baptize meant to sprinkle, which it does not, it could be done with water, but affusionists **assume** that immersion could not be done with water. The weakness of the sprinkling argument, if it can be called an argument, is the assumption that "with water means it had to be sprinkling or it could not be "with." It is quite impressive when presented to the uninformed and thoughtless. Scholars among them are bound to know better. The American Standard version puts "in water" instead of "with water." The word that is translated "with" in the King James version is used nine times in this same chapter. Six times it is translated "in." "In the wilderness," "baptized in Jordan" "whose fan is in his hand" etc. The argument based on "with" cannot mean too much to those who know this.

"With water" does not imply sprinkling or pouring as baptism, nor is it proof of immersion taken alone. There are facts and circumstances connected with baptism in the New Testament which are decisive. Baptism is a command of God, it came from heaven, and all who recognize the authority of heaven should be sure to know what it is and do it right. It is both with and in water.

John baptized "in the river Jordan." "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water." "And straightway coming up out of the water." "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were baptized" (Matt. 3:6, 16; Mark 1:10; John 1:23).

John performed the same act that the apostles' and other Christians did as recorded in Acts. The evangelist Philip baptized the eunuch with water, and in water. What happened is rather clear. "And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more for he went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:36-39). Do these circumstances favor sprinkling or immersion?

Circumstances connected with the baptism of the jailor are interesting and informative. "And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." (Acts 16:32-34). This baptizing took place somewhere outside the jailor's house sometime after midnight. Since they came "up into his house" after the baptizing, they must have gone **down** somewhere to do it. We know there was a river in the city and jails were usually built close to them and above the flood stage. Where are we to suppose Paul baptized the jailor, since he did it outside the house after midnight? Do the circumstances favor sprinkling or immersion? If they went to water, went **down** into it and came up out of it, they must have gone to where there was enough water to do all this. Affusion would not require it. Immersion **would**.

The allusions to baptism in Paul's letter are unmistakable. They cannot be made to fit affusion at all. "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus was baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3-4). "In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, where ye were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." (Col. 2:11-12). These Christians had all been baptized. Paul alludes to the fact.



They were baptized with water. Does sprinkling fit in with Paul's references? Affusionists have been much troubled to handle these references. Some of them have gone to the length of taking all the water out and leaving not a drop, even for sprinkling. The reason therefore is too obvious. They can do more for their practice by drawing pictures than citing texts of scripture. Consulting any Greek dictionary reveals that the word "baptize," or rather that from which it came, means to immerse. The circumstances attending the baptism of persons in the New Testament all favor immersion. They do not favor sprinkling at all.

People who are anxious to obey the Lord, should look further for information than a misleading picture in a newspaper. If a man is not intelligent and independent enough to use his New Testament, there is not much telling where pictures and other things may lead him off to in religion in these modern days.

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## **The Mercy and Grace of God**

**Text: 1 Peter 1:1-12**

**Kent Bailey**

The divine scheme of Redemption centers upon our need for mercy and grace. By the term *mercy* we refer to *compassion or forbearance shown to the offender*. By the term *grace* we refer to *unmerited or undeserved favor*.

When Peter, the apostle of Christ, penned the words of our text, it is without a doubt that he both realized and was reminded of his need for the mercy and the grace of God in his personal life. When we consider the record of Peter's denial of Christ and our Lord's reaction to such, we are reminded of the mercy and grace of God (John 13:36-38; 18:25-27; Luke 22:61-62).

One of the aspects of the realization and reality of one's sin is the effects that sinful behavior has upon one's thought process. The realization of one's personal sin brings upon one the aspect of personal guilt and worthlessness. In consideration of Peter's denial of Christ we rightly conclude that he genuinely repented of such sin. We conclude such because of the results produced within his life. In consideration of the fact that godly sorrow precedes repentance (2 Cor. 7:10), such produces a deep contrition of thought and a sense of worthlessness in the estimate of one's life. When one is impressed with the fact that he has sinned against God and stands justly condemned in a lost condition there is a sense of complete hopelessness that overwhelms him. We note in the life Peter that he gave up. As a matter of fact, he decided to return to his former work of fishing. No doubt Peter sincerely thought that his sin against the Lord had disqualified him for further service in the cause of Christ.

One of the greatest displays of the mercy and grace of God is demonstrated in the way that Christ responded to Peter's repentance (John 21:1-25). Another crucial passage in the study of the mercy and grace of God is recorded in Luke 22:31-34. The time element under consideration is prior to the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In this text we read of the fact that Christ not only demonstrated His Deity by His omniscience concerning Peter's denial of Him, He demonstrated his mercy, grace, and willingness to forgive by indicating that Peter would return to a condition of faithfulness and service unto Him. Christ further indicated Peter's worth to the cause by stating "...when thou are converted strengthen thy brethren."

On the imprint of every page of the word of God we note the eternal message of God's divine mercy and grace (Ezek. 18:23,32; Hosea 11:8-9; John 1:17; 3:16-17; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Tim. 1:12-15). It is not God's desire that any should be lost in eternity, but rather that all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The entire aspect of God's scheme of Redemption finds its foundation upon the reality of God's divine mercy and grace.

### **God is Sovereign in Delegating His Mercy and Grace**

By this phrase we mean that such is a recognition on our part that whatever He wills is right. God alone determines the appropriate course of action. This does not mean that

He is arbitrary. This means because, of His perfect attributes and nature, He alone is qualified to determine the essence and limits of His mercy and grace (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:18; Jas. 2:14-26). We do not earn God's Salvation. It is by His divine mercy and grace when our faith acts in obedience to His divine scheme of Redemption (Heb. 5:8-9).

### **God's Mercy and Grace do not Remove the Consequences of Sin**

One of the most touching stories found within the Scriptures deals with the life of David, King of Israel. David was approximately 50 years of age at this time. He had made vows before God (Psa. 101). He had insisted upon righteousness in his nation. Israel, as a nation, had been taught to love, honor, respect, and obey God. David, their King, was their example. He was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).

In spite of his love for God, he fell into temptation and yielded to sin. David was guilty of both adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11-12). The prophet Nathan was sent by God to inform David of his sin and demonstrate that he was worthy of death (2 Sam. 12:5). Even though David did sincerely repent of his sin, confess it to God, and plead for mercy and forgiveness, and even though he was forgiven because he turned to God (Psalm 51), he still faced terrible consequences from his sin. David paid with 20 years of heart break, strife, and the loss of a child that meant everything to him.

### **God's Mercy and Grace are Costly**

In the scriptures we note the vicarious suffering of Christ. As the second member of the Godhead He took on the essence of humanity while maintaining His Deity and became our substitute on the cross in suffering for our sins, paying our sin debt and tasting death for all of us (Isa. 53:1-6, 12; Heb. 2:1-9; 2 Cor. 5:21). Salvation is not inexpensive. It cost Christ His blood to purchase our Salvation and to build the church, which composes the totality of those who are saved (Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 2:38; 20:28; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23).

### **God's Mercy and Grace are Conditional**

Because Christ purchased Salvation for us, He has the right to state its conditions (Heb. 5:8-9). We must believe the gospel (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Acts 17:30), confess the Deity of Christ (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:1-7; 1 Cor. 12:13). The Christian must remain faithful to Christ (1 John 1:6-7; Rev. 2:10). The unfaithful fallen away covenant child of God must return to Christ (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:6-10).

Only through acceptance and obedience to God's scheme of Redemption will one be a beneficiary of the mercy and grace of God.

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## **God's Foolishness vs. Man's Wisdom**

### **N.B. Hardeman**

Paul says: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). The Corinthians rather prided themselves on their wisdom, their knowledge, and their philosophy. They thought that the things that could not be understood by them and reasoned out from the premises toward a conclusion that would be logically true were, of course, unworthy of respect; hence, Paul said unto them:

After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.

Then he said:

The foolishness of God, that which you so consider, is wiser than all the wisdom of men; and the very weakness of God is stronger than the towering strength of man. For God has chosen the foolish things of the earth to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the strong and mighty, the purpose being that no flesh should glory in his presence, and that we might fulfill the scripture that is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

The gospel plan of salvation, the scheme of redemption, is not based upon premises laid down by man from which a logical conclusion may be reached. It is none too early I to say that very frequently in God's dealings with humanity there is absolutely no logical connection between the thing done and that for which it is done. No power of man's wisdom has ever been able to understand a connection or to see a just reason between the hundreds of things the Lord has bidden man to do and the things to be accomplished thereby.

I am positively certain that the Israelites never did see a connection between the sprinkling of the blood of the lamb on their doors and their escape from the vengeance of the death angel. Why, there is no connection in that—absolutely none. I am sure that Abraham never did understand, never did see the point, logically speaking, based on human judgment, as to why God demanded of him the peculiar things of which we have a record.

Now, perhaps, that is further emphasized by Isaiah 55:8-9, where God says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." And unless we can get it in our minds at the very outset that Christianity and the scheme of salvation is a matter of faith, rather than a matter of sight and of logical and argumentative conclusions, I think we will be handicapped and hindered and blinded and deluded in our effort to work out by human wisdom and human skill anything by which we will be able to save our souls at last.

Now, I have in mind just a few illustrations of the text to-night that I think will illustrate the very principles I have just pounced; and I call your attention, first of all, therefore, unto the story of Naaman, the record of which is found in 2 Kings 5:1-27; and as I recite very briefly just a few things connected with him, I want you to understand and appreciate, if possible, the philosophy and lesson God intended us to learn therefrom. Let it be understood that the record of such wonderful events was written for our learning and our admonition. There is always a principle or line of thought connected therewith that is applicable unto us in the gospel age. Now, beginning the story: "Naaman . . . was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: . . . but he was a leper." Now I think I can appreciate Captain Naaman, as he stood honored by his official position and a great man in the country wherein he chanced to live an honorable man and by whom honorable deeds had been wrought; but the record says "he was a leper." That is to say, there was a disease that had fastened itself upon him, that knew no earthly cure, that had baffled the skill of all the scientific, learned, and medical men of the age in which he lived. It was but a question of time until this disease should have worn himself away, until rottenness and decay would have been the result.

Throughout the entire Bible that disease is held up as typical of our sins, on the ground that there is no earthly remedy, no power known to man himself, that can rid us of our sins and wash us and make us whiter than the snow.

Now, Naaman's company had gone out and had captured a little Hebrew maiden and made her a servant unto Naaman's wife. After being in his home, she had learned something of the family and that Naaman was afflicted with this disease; so she chanced to make this statement: "Would God my lord [that is, Captain Naaman] were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Then it was that some went in and told Naaman. Like drowning men grabbing at a straw, they said: "Possibly there may be some hope of recovery." And so the king of Syria wrote a letter and directed it to the King of Israel. Of course he misunderstood of whom the little maid spoke. He sent a great reward of silver and gold and raiment. When the king of Israel received the letter, he went into a rage and rent his clothes and said: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man should send unto me? . . . He seeketh a quarrel against me." Therefore he turned and was filled with wrath. Then it was that Elisha, quite cool, and calm, and deliberate, a prophet of God, hearing that, said: "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariot unto the door of the house of Elisha; and Elisha sent a messenger (he did not go himself, but sent a messenger), who told Naaman to go

down to the river Jordan and dip himself seven times therein and that he should be made clean. When Naaman heard that admonition, it was quite contrary to his fancy or to a theory or conception, and possibly belittling to his dignity. A man of his position, of his rank and of his standing, might naturally have expected something else; but the prophet simply sent the message: "Go down, Naaman, unto the river Jordan and dip yourself seven times, and thy flesh will come again, and you shall be cleansed."

But this was quite contrary to Naaman's conception, and he turned away and said: "Behold"—now note—"Behold, I thought"—not proposing to be governed at first by what that man had said, but anxious that things would be announced according to his preconceived thought; so he said: "I thought that the man would surely come out And speak to me, and call upon the name of his God, and strike his hand upon me, and the leprosy would be healed." Now, Naaman had that thing all "cut and dried" and figured out. He had the story in his mind, and before he ever heard the glad tidings by which he was to be saved he had largely become prejudiced and biased on the ground that "I have a theory, and this is the way I am looking for the matter to be brought about" and so he is ready to turn away and forsake the demand.

But after a little reflection further, he reasoned after this fashion: "Why, up here around Damascus there are the rivers of Abana and Pharpar. Why can't I dip in them and be cleansed?" Now, will you watch the situation? If I had been there and Naaman had said, "Hardeman, why can't I dip in the cool, clear streams around Damascus rather than go down to the river Jordan?" I am frank to say to you that I would have said: "Naaman, I cannot answer." It looks to me like that would do just as well, and I have never been able to understand the difference. In the first place, I do not see what good it will do; but if there is dipping to be done, instead of going way off to the river Jordan, why not dip in the waters of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, to be cleansed?"

Human judgment is lost. Human reason says: "I do not understand." I cannot analyze and draw a logical conclusion either for or against.

So Naaman was about to give the matter up, and then it was that the servant said: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" Human nature, ladies and gentlemen, has been just about the same all down the line. If, in the matter of becoming cleansed of leprosy, Naaman could have had a big "to do" respecting it or attracted considerable attention and some mysterious removing been characteristic thereof, his servants understood, he would be delighted to be a participant therein, and they said: "How much rather, then, go and dip and be clean?"

Now, may I stop to ask even of the physicians of Nashville: What do you think about prescribing that kind of a remedy? Suppose some man marches up to your office with some skin disease and says: "Doctor, there is something or other the matter with me. I have something like leprosy. Naturally, I am a little worried about it. I do not understand it and want you to tell me what to do." I do not believe there is a physician in Nashville that would say: "My dear air, you just go down here to the foot of Broadway and dip in the Cumberland River seven times, and all will be well." Why, as a matter of fact, I doubt not but that if one of your doctors were to give advice of that kind, we would ring up our Central Hospital for the Insane and ask if there was room for another. A doctor would be silly to give advice like that. In the eyes of man that is foolish. Paul said, though, be it remembered, that the very foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. Man has never been able to cure leprosy, and God's remedy seemed exceedingly foolish, and yet I want you to watch the sequel.

When by and by Naaman looked upon his person and saw there was no hope, I can see him as he walks down to the Jordan and looks upon the rolling waters thereof and wonders what on earth that has to do with it. "I do not believe there is any virtue in the water, and yet I am a dying man, and all hope has been abandoned. I will try." And he marches down therein and dips himself once, and possibly pulls up his sleeve to see if any of it has gone away. Not a particle—absolutely none; but he says: "I will try twice, and thrice, and four times, and five times, and six times, and now surely some of it has

faded." But not a particle had been removed. I just want to ask this audience: Suppose Naaman had stopped there with the sixth dip, what think you about the results? I am persuaded to answer for you. With one heart and one accord we say: "No cleansing from leprosy." Why? Because God had not promised it. There was absolutely no assurance that thus would he be cleansed. But the record says that he went down and dipped himself seven times, according to the saying of the man of God; and as he came up out of the water, behold, his flesh was like the flesh of a little child, and he was cleansed.

Now, what did it? The most simple thing imaginable that which, from any kind of human reasoning, would be considered foolish; and yet Paul said: "It is wiser than all of men's remedies."

Well, I think that is demonstrated. Now, do I need to stop and take your time by asking: Did the waters of the river Jordan wash away the leprosy? Do you think that the virtue inhered in the water? I presume nobody believes in a thing like that. The virtue was in God Almighty, but it was not granted until the man did what the Lord told him in the absolute; and when he obeyed by dipping the seventh time, he received the blessing and went about rejoicing, as well might he, on account of the fact that his flesh was as in the days of his youth.

Now, I think that illustrates the very text of to-night. God's foolishness has proven wiser and better, more efficacious, than all the skill and all the learning and all the wisdom of the whole world combined.

Well, I call your attention to another simple story. After the death of Moses, when Joshua led the hosts of Israel across the river Jordan and pitched their tents at Gilgal as headquarters and started to drive out the enemy in three separate and distinct campaigns that he launched, the first city he coveted and desired was the city of Jericho, a city that was surrounded. None went in and none passed out but by permission. Now, watch carefully as I tell the story, based upon Joshua 6.

The record says that God spoke unto Joshua, saying: "Joshua, behold, I have given unto thee the city of Jericho." Now, watch the expression, "I have given it unto you." "Now, Joshua, arrange your men after this fashion: Put your armed men in front; right after them put seven priests with rams' horns, then the ark, then the rearward. That is the order in which you are to arrange them, and you march around this city once a day for six days and back into camp. On the seventh day march around it seven times. After that, let the priests give a long blast with the rams' horns; then let all the people shout, and down will fall the walls of the city."

Well, in the first place, I want to picture Joshua as first having said this: "Lord, did you not say you were going to give me this city? Now, if I have to work for it, that knocks out its being a gift, and that will put it on the ground of being of works; but it is not of works, lest any man boast. Therefore, I can do nothing except let you give it to me. I will sit down here and wait till you turn the keys over."

My friends, as a matter of fact, because it is a gift, that certainly does not prohibit a man's doing what the Lord bids him to do with respect to the same.

But I want to ask any of your military men—you soldiers, captains, colonels, or officers of whatsoever kind: What do you think about that kind of remedy or that kind of a way of securing a city in the hands of the enemy? Was that ever tried by any military men of earth? No, sir. Did General Foch ever think about a suggestion of that kind to capture a German city—just have the American boys march around it, blow rams' horns, and shout? That is absolutely foolish. I do not think there is any sense in such tactics.

I stood to-day and gazed upon our Capitol Building. I believe if every man, woman, and child in the city of Nashville were to march around the Capitol for a thousand days, and then blow all the rams' horns in this country, and everybody break loose and give a tremendous shout, I do not think it would in the least affect the gigantic walls thereof. There is no sense in that. It is trifling, weak, foolish. But remember the text: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." I want to see if this thing will work and where the power is. Now, if Joshua had



had some few sticks of dynamite and planted them well under the walls and had got off and touched the fuse and blown the whole thing up, of course we could understand that. I would say: "Now, Joshua, that has sense in it." I can see that. But what is the logical connection between blowing a ram's horn and tearing down a brick wall? I plead my absolute inability to understand one single point of connection. What is the connection between marching around and tearing down a stone wall? What is the connection between giving a shout and the walls coming down? If Joshua had been like a great many of us, he would have said: "Well, look here. I cannot see any sense in that. It does not appeal to me to nor intelligence. That may do for some folks! but I know there is nothing to it." Well, that is what Paul said. You count it foolish, and that is what the Greeks did back there. They said preaching the cross of Christ was foolish; but how does it work?

Joshua went straight forward—not by human wisdom, not by human reason; but he set out after the aforesaid order and marched around the city once a day and back into camp at night. I guess some of that crowd looked about and said: "We ought to see some mortar breaking out by now." Thus he did for six days, and still that wall stood there in its power and strength, bidding defiance unto all marching. Not a stone moved. On the seventh day the Bible says Joshua had his crowd out early, about the dawn of the day; and thus they marched around it once, twice, and three times, four, five, and six times, and not a single crack in the wall as yet. Not a brick has moved.

Suppose he had stopped? What think you about the results? Absolutely nothing would have come therefrom. Upon what does it all now depend? Upon one time more around, blowing the trumpets, and the shout of the people. Finally, in anxiety, Joshua marched around the seventh time; and then he said unto the priests: "Give a long blast." And thus they did, but not a stone as yet turned loose. Let me ask you now: Suppose they had just quit and had refused to shout? I think I can speak the truth in saying that God would not have given unto Joshua the city of Jericho. But when finally he bade all the people to shout and thus they did, the Bible says down came the walls of Jericho, and they walked in.

Was it foolishness with men? Absolutely. Did it look silly? Was it a weak thing? Indeed so. And yet what about it? It beat all the battering rams and the mighty guns that the world has ever seen, It worked, and down the walls came. What is the philosophy? God's hand was in it all. The power and the virtue were not in the footsteps around the city, nor yet in the trumpet that was sounded, nor yet in the shout of the people, but were inherent in God Almighty, who, according to an eternal principle, never bestows a blessing until man does what he tells him.

Well, let's try another. The Bible is just full of them.

After the people of Israel had left Mount Sinai, and also Kadesh-barnea, from whence the spies had been sent out, they started out from old Mount Hor, and the people began to complain and to murmur against God and Moses. "Why," they asked, "have you brought us out here into the wilderness? There is no bread, there is no water, and we loathe this light bread upon which we have been living. Let us go back into the land of Egypt." And then it was that the Lord caused fiery serpents to come out and to bite the hosts of Israel until numbers of them died. Well, of course, they began to be wonderfully penitent; and they took the matter unto the Lord and to Moses in prayer, and said: "Moses, intercede for us, lest we die." Well, there they are, every man back in his tent, filled with poison, his body swollen, and with death staring him in the face.

Now, what is the remedy? Oh, if I had been there or if some of us had been present and they had called upon us for a remedy, I would have said: "Well, sir, I don't know whether it can be had or not; but if you just had a full quart, bottled in bond, and could just fill up on it, I believe that would remove the poison." Some of my brethren would say: "Hardeman, you are talking sense now. That has some sense to it. I have tried it." Why, my friends, if that had been true, we would have been wholly convinced that national prohibition should never be adopted.

Suppose some good mother present had said: "Gentlemen, I think I know what is good for this. If you can spare somebody that is able to get out upon the hillside yonder,

along the old fence row, and if you can find some mullein leaves, we will make a good, strong ooze, and then apply it unto the parts affected, just as hot as it can be borne, and that will reduce the swelling." Now, that has some sense to it. That is our remedy. We have tried poultices and things of that kind, and such is according to human judgment. But if they had done that and success had followed their efforts, they would have attributed the whole matter to their own good sense and judgment.

"Now, Lord, what do you have to suggest?" Why, the Lord said: "Moses, I will tell you what to do. You take a piece of brass, and beat it into the likeness of a serpent, and put it on a pole out in the midst of the camp, and it shall come to pass that every soul that looks upon that shall live."

Now, physicians and doctors, I challenge your intelligence again. What think you of the remedy? What does any man of learning think about that kind of remedy for snake bite? I am frank to say to you that I don't believe there is enough brass in Tennessee or anywhere else to take away the poison or effect a cure. With all the power of logic, with all the power of human wisdom and of human reasoning, there is absolutely no connection between a piece of brass and the removing of their affliction. No man can get the connection. How is the remedy? It is weak; it is silly, foolish. Paul, what did you say? "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."

Moses, make your serpent. Well, he did so, and put it on a pole, and set it up in the midst of the camp. And what is the suggestion now? Every soul that looks upon it shall live. Oh, but here is a man away back over in the corner of the camp suffering so badly, so filled with pain, that he says: "I cannot bear to be moved. I believe, Moses, that it will work, and just let me be cured by my faith without doing anything. Faith, and faith only, is my hope. I do not care to look." Oh, no! There was no cure; for in addition to the man's faith, there had to be the act of looking.

Let me announce to you that no man was ever blessed on account of his faith until that faith was rendered expressive in some act of obedience. I care not if it be but the putting forth of the hand and touching the border of His garment, if it be but the turning of the eyes unto the serpent of brass upon the pole, it is the expression of the faith in the act of obeying God's command; and when they looked, they lived; for it was faith plus action, it was faith plus obedience, and the blessing came always as the result. No man can find an exception to that principle. Go where you will in all the Bible, from first to last, and there is this general, broad, sweeping principle that runs through the book of God.

Where was the virtue? Not in the piece of brass. They did not so understand it. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord;" for God has ordained just such things that are trifling, small, trivial, silly, and insignificant, "that no flesh should glory in his presence." God proposes to have the honor and the authority and the power, but He bestows the blessing when men do what He bids them.

Now, just one or two things in the New Testament, and I think the lesson is before you for the evening.

In John 9:1-41 we have an account of a young man born blind, who never had been privileged to look out upon the beauties and the light of God's day. He had lived in the world and had walked in darkness all of his years, until finally the great Physician, the Healer of all ailments, met up with him, and this is the remedy he used for restoring the sight to the blind. Now, what is it? He just simply spat upon the ground, made an ointment of the clay, and anointed this young man's eyes, and said: "Now, sir, go down to the pool of Siloam and wash, and all will be well." Mr. Physician, what do you think about the remedy?

We have a school for the blind in Nashville. How would it do to go out there tomorrow and try that? Some doctor says: "You would not get me into a thing of that kind. I am not going to be made a laughing-stock." Why, of course it won't work. You know there is no virtue in it. Nobody would undertake it. It looks silly; it looks foolish. That is what Paul said in the text: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

After this young man, with his eyes anointed, not walking by sight, but walking by faith, went down to the designated place and washed, he came back seeing and rejoicing on account of the sight that was granted unto him.

What did it? Not the clay, not the ointment, not the water of the pool of Siloam. There was no virtue in them, and blindness did not flow out upon the bosom of that pool.

God bestowed the blessing, and the point of practical import is: When did God do it? Answer: After the young man obeyed him. Had he stopped to walk by sight and to understand the philosophy and the "why?" and "wherefores," he would have died blind to the beauties of God's world.

My friends, in the gospel plan of salvation the principle likewise prevails. When all the sons and daughters of Adam, a lost and ruined and wretched race, were groping their way in darkness, God Almighty provided a scheme of redemption. What was it? The suffering, the dying, the sacrifice of his only begotten Son. Numbers of people in the world think that is silly. They talk about how ridiculous it is. I have had a letter since I have been in your city saying that I had gone crazy over the Christ idea, that no such person as the Son of God ever lived; and the man said he was sorry to see a young man of what he termed my intelligence lose his head, believing in the Christ as the Son of God. And many people likewise so consider it.

The scheme of redemption offered through the service and sacrifice of the immaculate Child of Mary is considered a silly thing, belittling to the intelligence and to the wisdom of men. No power, no virtue, no beauty attaches thereto, they think; and to others like those to whom Paul wrote here even the preaching of the gospel is considered foolishness. That is the way some of them think about it. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

Well, what else? I come now to the very climax of the thought—that about which so many people are worried. In the gospel plan of salvation there is a command to be baptized. Who is it that does not know that? I am sure that there is nobody in the city of Nashville accountable unto God and unto Christ that fails to understand that the New Testament authorizes baptism, authorizes people to be baptized. But how does the world look upon it? "Why," they say, "it is foolish to think about such. It is absolutely silly. There is nothing to it. You know there is no virtue, no power, and no cleansing effect in the waters of baptism." You say: "I don't see any sense in it." Well, I just want to join you. You see as much in it as I do. I never have seen any logical connection nor any reason why it is that being baptized has anything under heaven to do with the washing away of sin. I don't believe there is a logician in any of your universities who can take the statement, "be baptized," and from it reach the conclusion that remission of sins follows. I do not think that any logical connection is there. What virtue is there in the water in a baptistery or pool? I think not any. What good does it do? I cannot see a particle to save my life. What change is there in it? Well, I can see this, just from a human point, if you will let me say it. I can see that folks go in dry and come out wet. I can understand that much about it. But what is the logical connection between the act and the result, between baptism and the remission of sins?

I want to say, if you are going to walk by sight and by reason, I can understand why the world rebels; and unto that kind of a man baptism is not the thing he needs. That sort of a character needs faith in God's word, confidence in Jehovah's statements, trust in the Father's promise. He does not need to be baptized. He is not prepared. But when he believes what God says, when he looks not to the water nor yet to the act for the blessing, but looks beyond that and centers his faith not in the act or ordinance or thing done, but in the Christ that is back of it, there is the man that is ready to obey God; and that kind of a heart never halts, never stumbles, never rebels, but is prepared to take God at his word, to believe what he says, to do what he requires, to trust him for the promise. If it be foolish, my friends, it is wiser than the schemes of men.

It looked silly to Naaman, but it was wiser than all of his philosophies, and it wrought the desired effect.

Forgiveness of sins lies with God himself and with Christ Jesus our Lord. When does God bestow that blessing? When does God forgive sin, **after** I bow like Naaman, like

Joshua, like the Israelites, like the blind man—after I do what the Lord tells me. And when I have a change of heart sufficient to lead me to do God's commandments, then pardon, which always takes place in heaven and not on earth, is mine to share, and the promises are mine in which to rejoice.

And so I would have you learn from this lesson tonight not to walk by sight nor by human reason nor wisdom, but to walk by faith and trust and confidence in God Almighty and his truth.

If there are those of you therefore, that are willing to look to him for pardon and for blessing—that have a disposition of heart and mind to obey, to bow in subjection to his will, and to do his bidding, and then to trust him for the promise made you are the ones that are always invited; you are prepared to serve God and to become a disciple, a Christian, a child of the heavenly King. (*Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons*, delivered in the Ryman Auditorium, Nashville, Tenn., March 28-April 16, 1922, 161-175).

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## The Conversion of God Slayers

**Ron Cosby**

A vengeful Father angrily told of his son being shot and killed. The boy's 12 year old cousin took a 12-gauge shotgun and pulled the trigger. Some say it was an accident. The father thinks otherwise. Listen to the father's emotion: "I am so angry over all this that I can't even think straight. All I want is revenge. This kid will not be able to walk the streets without wondering what I might do to him. I want no love ... I want total hatred [and] not an ounce of forgiveness. Ever!" [his words may be read on the Internet]. Listen to the dad's poem [edited]. Grasp his anger and hatred of the murderer.

### **A Father's Revenge**

I have a living hatred for you,  
it's an anger that burns deep inside.  
Do you know that I've cried me that river?  
And then again, I've cried and cried.  
"I don't care what the judge and jury said,  
your judgment day will surely come,  
maybe you need to sleep with one eye open,  
and keep looking over your shoulder, old chum.  
"I'm so angry and so mad,  
I just can't think straight anymore,  
and I'll never again rest easy,  
until I've evened up the score.  
"Don't ask me for my forgiveness,  
because you've turned my heart to stone,  
I've never felt so desperate,  
I've never felt so utterly alone.

Now, think of the murderers of God's only begotten Son on the day of Pentecost. Place yourself in their shoes as you recall what you just read of the earthly father's hatred. Peter charges the Jews on Pentecost with murder,

Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay (Acts 2:22-23 ASV).

Will the Father of all the earth feel and respond as the earthly father? If He does, we are all doomed. If you were in the audience as Peter levels the ugly charge of cruelly killing the only begotten Son of God, would you tremble? You would unless you were deaf, hard-hearted, or a moron.

Before we proceed, we must understand that God cannot be killed. God is not dead! Whoa! Wait! Sounds like a contradiction. No. When the Jews murdered Jesus, God

allowed them to stress His flesh to the point of the spirit leaving the body (Jas. 2:26; Luke 23:46). This is death, as all on this earth shall experience it. However, He ever lives in the spirit, never to die (1 Pet. 3:18). Though the body was destructible, the Lord's spirit is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16). God prepared a body for Him that He might be the sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:5-6).

Devout Jews gathered on the day of Pentecost two thousand years ago in the city of Jerusalem and heard Peter charge them with the crime of murder (Acts 2). Though these people were highly religious, they were lost, not only for their crime of slaying God's dear Son but also for a host of transgressions of passion and neglect.

But Peter preached a message of hope. Prophecy, the empty tomb (Acts 2:29), the eyewitnesses (Acts 2:32), and the coming of the Spirit (Acts 2:33) proved that Jesus is the risen Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36; Heb. 5:8-9). Instead of pronouncing immediate justice upon the killers, God held out His hand of mercy.

Since the gospel which Peter preached by the Holy Spirit is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16), and since the Holy Spirit convicts sinners of their guilt only through the Word (Acts 2:4, 37; John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23), they had nowhere else to turn. The convicted asked, “What shall we do?” They received Heaven's answer. Forgiveness is possible, but only through the blood of the Righteous One. Irony isn't it? The death that contributed to the loss of their soul is the very blood that paid the ransom for the sin of their soul (1 Pet. 1:18-19; John 1:29).

Though forgiveness is possible only through the blood of the Lord, it is not through the blood only. Obedience is enjoined upon all (Acts 2:21, 38; Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16). Peter was specific with his words in commanding them.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-38 ASV).

Just as the command to repent is from God, so is “be baptized.”

We opened our thoughts with the poem of a father's revenge. Let us close with a psalm of heaven's promised forgiveness.

If thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, That thou mayest be feared. I wait for Jehovah, my soul doth wait, And in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord More than watchmen wait for the morning; Yea, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in Jehovah; For with Jehovah there is lovingkindness, And with him is plenteous redemption (Psa. 130:3-7 ASV).

What a contrast! On the one side we have a vengeance-filled father, looking for ways to take the life of the youngster who killed his dear son. While on the other hand, “...God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16 ASV). In this manner, God forgave the murderers. In the same manner, He forgives us, and will forgive all men.

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## Just a Little Talk with Who?

Jess Whitlock

Paul wrote, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15c). It is possible to sing error, as well as to teach error. Jesus taught us how to pray saying, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our **Father** which art in heaven...” (Matt. 6:9). When the disciples of Christ asked Him to teach them how to pray, our Lord said, “...when ye pray, say, Our **Father** which art in heaven...” (Luke 11:2). Paul instructs us in clarion tones, “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the **Father**...” (Eph. 5:20).

I am unable to find one single reference to New Testament Christians ever addressing



a prayer to Jesus Christ. We address our prayers to God the Father, and do so by the name of, i.e., by the authority of, Jesus Christ, His Son. “Whatsoever ye shall ask of the **Father** in My name...” (John 15:16d cf. 14:13; 16:23). The inspired Paul wrote, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all...I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Rom. 1:8; 7:25).

Contrast the Bible’s teaching with the admonition of the songs, *I Must Tell Jesus* and *Just A Little Talk With Jesus*. The former says, “I must tell Jesus! Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.” Jesus alone? What happened to the Father? The latter song teaches clearly, “I go to Him (Jesus jlw) in prayer, He knows my every care, and just a little talk with Jesus makes it right.” How can it be right to address Jesus in prayer, when it was Jesus Himself that taught us to pray “our Father”? Just because a song appears in a songbook does not assure scriptural teaching.

Years ago I became involved in a discussion on whether or not it is right to sing the song, *Just A Little Talk With Jesus*. The brother told me that he liked the melody! I responded that lots of our brethren like mechanical instruments of music. I asked if we could bring in the piano and organ and use them next Sunday. He said, “No.” Then, he argued that Stephen “prayed to Jesus.” I asked where Stephen ever prayed to Jesus? He read Acts 7:59-60. It is an assumption to say that Stephen’s words (“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”) was a prayer to Jesus. Stephen was not engaged in prayer. He was preaching. He was being stoned for telling the truth. In Acts 7:55 we learn that Stephen “...being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”

Jesus Christ was a witness to the brutal death of Stephen. Christ initiated this heavenly vision. The words that Stephen spoke to Jesus Christ should not be misconstrued as a prayer. The text nowhere states it is a prayer. If so, where? If you are going to “pray” in the same manner that he “prayed” you **must see Jesus** in a heavenly vision. If not, why not?

Some will contend that to “call on the name of the Lord or Jesus” is a prayer to Jesus (Acts 2:21; 9:14, 21; Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2). Sometimes this phrase simply identifies the followers of Jesus. His “name” is often used to show that we have the Lord’s authority or approval. If these passages are referring to a prayer prayed to Jesus (or even God the Father); then we have found authority for the so-called “sinner’s prayer.” That denominational terminology has affected many among the people of the Lord today.

In John 14:13-14 Jesus made it plain for all to see, “And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, that will I do.” As already seen, Jesus taught us to pray **to** the Father **through** His name. In John 14:15 Christ says that if we love Him we will keep His commands! Let your fingers do the walkin’ and let the Bible do the talkin’. “And I will pray the **Father...**” (John 14:16). There are myriad passages of Jesus praying to His Father. However, I have been **unable** to find even **one passage** of scripture wherein Jesus Christ prayed to Himself! Not the first one. It’s not there.

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## Did Jesus Die in Vain?

Dub McClish

The entire Christian system centers around the death of Jesus on the cross. He “died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6, 8). He “laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). In spite of numerous like statements of Scripture, certain things, if true, would mean that Christ died in vain.

- **If one can be saved by Law of Moses:** Paul argued: “If righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought” (Gal. 2: 21b). The Galatians had fallen victim to Jewish Christians who sought to bind at least parts of the law (i.e., circumcision, 5:2-4) upon the church. If Moses’ law could have saved, the Word need never have become flesh (John 1:14), for men had had that law for 1,500 years by the time of Jesus’ birth. The law was only a “tutor” that pointed to the

Christ (Gal. 3:24. Its sacrifices were merely typical of the “Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus slew the authority of Moses’ law on Calvary (Col. 2:14). All who justify their religious practices by it (e.g., sabbath keeping, a priesthood, instrumental music in worship, et al.) render the death of Jesus worthless.

- **If Jesus approves of religious division:** Though such diversity is applauded by the masses, the Bible condemns it. Jesus built only one church (Mat. 16:18), and He prayed that His followers be one, as He and the Father are one (which includes doctrinal unity) (John 17:20–23). He died to establish this one body (Eph. 2:16; 5:25). If Jesus is as pleased with the monstrosity of denominationalism as with the one church He established, then He died for nought in that regard.
- **If the church is non-essential:** Jesus “bought” His church with His blood (Acts 20:28). *Jesus yes, the church no* is a common, albeit grossly mistaken, concept. If one is speaking of man-made counterfeits of Jesus’ church, it is true; He died for none of them. However, to include His church in this concept implies that Christ paid the price for it in vain. His church consists of those who have been saved through His death upon their obedience to Him (Rom. 5:10; cf. Acts 2:37–38, 41, 47).
- **If I am lost:** Jesus’ death will have been wasted, as far as I am concerned, if I am lost. This will not be the case for others, of course. He “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6), so all have the opportunity to be saved, but if I am lost, He may as well have spared Himself the misery of the cross. His death will have been wasted on me.

It behooves each of us to obey His plan of salvation (Acts 2: 37–38), whereupon He will add us to His church (v. 47). We thereby accept the salvation He offers. Only obeying Him and faithfully serving Him may we personally attribute fitting value to His death.

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### **A New Book Coming in January!**

#### ***“The Thing That Hath Been...”***

“There is no new thing under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9-10). Author Jerry C. Brewer parallels apostasy of the church in the 19th century with current apostasy, identifying its roots and modern manifestations in “mainstream churches of Christ.” In the vein of Ira Y. Rice’s *Axe on the Root*, it will surprise most readers and infuriate others.

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## **Brotherhood**

### **Lee Moses**

The word “brotherhood” carries different connotations for different people. Some associate brotherhood with the entirety of mankind; others apply it only to an immediate family. That many attach great importance to brotherhood is evidenced by the numerous organizations, fraternities, and societies purporting to be brotherhoods. The late John Lennon, once a member of the Beatles, recorded a very popular song which put forth his views of what brotherhood entails. The brotherhood he “imagined” required (1) No heaven or hell—So all people would live for today instead of preparing for eternity, (2) No countries or religion—So there would be nothing for which to kill or die, and (3) No possessions—So there would be no greed or hunger. If these conditions should be met, he insisted, there would exist “a brotherhood of man...sharing all the world.”

The problem is, this concept is based on imagination and not reality. Both heaven and hell **do** exist; pretending they do not will not make their reality diminish. If mankind were to completely blot their existence from memory, the “brotherhood of man” would all be lost (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Political government has been instituted by God as essential to maintaining a degree of order (Rom. 13:1-4). Man is generally very selfish, and will generally act upon his selfish desires if he perceives that there are no negative

consequences to face, whether from God or government. Regarding the desire for “no religion,” it would certainly be to the advantage of all if **false** religions were to disappear from the face of the earth (Matt. 7:15). However, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27). Christianity is not a cause of killing or physical warfare; although a spiritual warfare is indeed waged against the aforementioned foes of God and humanity. As to “no possessions”; again, this cannot be possible when selfish men are allowed to pursue their selfish desires with no restraints.

There is no hope in a mere “brotherhood of man” in which each man or woman is his own highest authority. Cain apparently disregarded the facts that heaven and hell exist, that there was true religion, and that he and his brother were to coexist peacefully—and it led to murder, even of his own brother (Gen. 4). The violence in the Middle East between Muslims and Jews is between brothers, sons of Abraham. That all mankind has a common ancestor is not basis enough for a true brotherhood. But there is hope, a basis for true brotherhood. There existed no deeper loathing than that of the Jews toward the Gentiles; and yet,

He [Jesus Christ, LM] is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Eph. 2:14-15).

The hope of mankind is a brotherhood of man in Christ. John Lennon’s song closes expressing his desire that “the world will live as one.” All who are **in Christ** are described as being **one new man**. To see what true brotherhood is, read about the early church of Christ:

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers...And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2:42, 43-46).

When people “live for today”; when people want to live without God; there is selfishness run rampant—chaos and murder. But in Christ there is true brotherhood, and a brotherhood which will continue **forever**.

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## Observations About “Works”

**Doug Post**

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:5-11).

The above passage supplies a wealth of information concerning the salvation shared and enjoyed by Jews and Gentiles. Or, as Jude wrote, “our common salvation” (cf. Jude 3; Rom.1:16-17; Acts 15:9).

- God will judge all of mankind. Wrath and punishment will be for the unrighteous and eternal life for the righteous. There will be one judgment for both good and bad.

- God will judge according to the works performed.
- God will give eternal life to those who continue doing good, working what is good (“good works”), and who seek glory and honor—not from men but from God.
- God will exact His wrath upon the self-centered, self-willed, and self-seeking, followers of evil, who do not obey truth because they do not love truth, choosing to live according to standards of the world.
- God’s judgment is impartial.

The Holy Spirit, through both Jesus and John, reveals a pending day of judgment for both the just and unjust:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:28-30).

Moreover, judgment will be based upon works. These works could be described as either the works of Satan (evil works—unrighteousness—consistent with Satan and his desire) or the works of Christ (good works—righteousness—consistent with Christ and His Will). Souls will be judged based upon the works they perform.

A self-seeking attitude is what produces “evil works.” Elsewhere Paul describes such folks as not having received the “love of the truth” (1 Thess.2:10), being consumed with “pleasure in unrighteousness” (1 Thess. 2:12). Pleasing self was more important than pleasing Christ. On the other hand, those having loved the truth (the gospel/God’s Word/ the New Covenant), love being slaves for Christ (1 Cor. 7:22). Many translations refuse to use the word slave, even though the Greek word used is *doulos*. There are at least six Greek words for *servant* and not one of them is *doulos* or *slave*. There is only one word for slave, which cannot be mistaken for any other. The fact is, we have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20), implying the idea of slave, not servant or hired hand.

Just as translations have opted to use the word *servant* instead of *slave*, they also use *Lord* rather than *Master*. Jesus asked, “Why call Me Lord, Lord and do not the things I say?” (Luke 6:46). That should be, “Why call Me Master, Master,” not Lord, Lord. Here, the relationship to which Jesus refers is Master/Slave, **not** Lord/servant. Just as the concepts of slave and Master have been watered down, so has the word works—works which *slaves must* perform for their *Master*, and by which all *slaves* shall be judged, since God “will render to every man according to his deeds.” Here we see the subtle denominational bias as they substitute the word “deeds” for “works,” mitigating against the significance of the context, because “works” are seen as sinful.

The concept of **works** is found in the Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian dispensations. In each dispensation, “works” are requisite because obedience to God and His Word is necessary in order for a covenant relationship to exist. Some works are universal, while others are specific to particular dispensation. For instance, faith is necessary for salvation in each dispensation, yet faith, itself, is referred to as a “work” (John 6:29; Rev.2:19). These “works of God” or “good works” (Eph. 2:10), are basically assignments for us to obey and carry out—“perform” (Acts 10:34-35; Heb. 5:9; 1 John 3:7), being absolutely necessary, especially since we will be judged by them (Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Col. 3:25; Rev. 20:12; cf. John 12:48). Of course, James plainly tells us **faith without works is dead** (Jas. 2:19-26).

As long as I can remember I have heard my own brethren speak of *meritorious works* or *works of merit*, even though no such phrases are found in Scripture. The Bible simply speaks of “works” and we must determine from the context what “works” are under consideration. Quite simply, the New Testament addresses two kinds of works: one related to falling from grace and the other related to justification (right standing with God) and salvation.

## Works of the Law

There are various passages throughout the epistles, which speak of *works of the law*. Overwhelmingly, the contexts with the phrase, *works of the law*, refer to the Old Covenant—the law of Moses, not to works of merit or meritorious works.

The works God gives Christians to do under the New Covenant do, indeed, have merit since we will all be judged by how we obeyed Christ in carrying out these works (2 Cor. 5:10). Refusing to properly obey, or by refusing to carry out these assignments, results in “unbelief” (Heb. 3: 12-19; cf. John 3:36). Now, let’s address two passages commonly used to object:

- Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

First, the context concerns the church of Christ, and how both Jew and Gentile have become one new man in Christ (2:14-22). Paul speaks of the Jews being converted first (1:3-12). Then he speaks of the prophetically anticipated conversion of the Gentiles (1:13-14). Paul then explains this mystery (3:5-6) whereby the Gentiles are to be part of the same body – the church.

Second, what was it that separated Jews and Gentiles? The law of Moses, of course (2:14-18). But, what of the law was the culprit? Circumcision, of course (2:11-13). Circumcision was a big issue of the day between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (Acts 15:1-5; Rom.2:25-29; 1 Cor.7:19; Gal.5:1-5; Phil.3:3; Col.2:11; Titus 1:10). This was dividing the church because the Judaizers were pressing circumcision upon the Gentiles as a means of justification.

Third, some brethren teach Ephesians 2:9 simply refers to any works of which one might boast. This is false for various reasons. The word “boast” means to “glory,” which means “*to have an opinion, a view, an estimate, honor resulting from good opinion.*” Not only do I love the word of God (2 Thess.2:10), but in the example of God, Himself, I magnify it (Psa.138:2). I honor all the teaching Christ put forth, including baptism being necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16). To honor what the Lord taught is to honor the Lord. To boast in what the Lord taught, is to boast in Christ.

The idea of boasting here, however, means much more than just having a high opinion, but a high opinion of something that is obsolete. The law was obsolete (Heb. 8:13; 2 Cor. 3; Rom. 7:1-6, Eph. 2:14-18; Col. 2:11-14) and the Jews had a high opinion of it. So much so, they bound it upon the Gentiles.

The Jews “boasted” in the law and in circumcision. This is the very point Paul makes elsewhere: “Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?” (Rom. 2:23) and “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Rom. 3:27-28).

The Jews boasted in circumcision as a means of justification and were guilty of perverting the gospel over it (Gal. 1:6-9, 5:1-4). They were continuing to divide the church, and this is the point Paul is making in Ephesians 2:8-18, the very thing keeping Jew and Gentile separated, hence, salvation is “not of works, lest man should boast.”

Moreover, Paul goes on to declare we are “created in Christ Jesus (*epi*) unto good works.” The word *epi* here means *upon* or *on the basis of*. In Christ Jesus are the necessary works provided for transformation and are part of all spiritual blessings in Christ.

- Titus 3:4-7: “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”



Paul is writing to Titus concerning the church at Crete which also had its share of Judaizers (Titus 1:10-16), and by specifying “those of the circumcision,” Paul is identifying not only the party, but what they were teaching—“circumcision.” As is true in most of Paul’s epistles, the Judaizers and their binding of circumcision upon the Gentile Christians is also part of the background of Paul’s letter to Titus.

Many twist this passage to their own destruction. Paul, specifically says that something appeared “toward man before, not by works of righteousness which we have done.” This is the same point he makes in 2:11: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” The kindness and love of the Savior came to mankind, based upon an eternal plan (Eph. 3:10-11; Acts 2:23).

Mankind had nothing to do with this decision and why He appeared to mankind. Works of righteousness had nothing to do with it, so they did not compel or obligate Christ to come. His coming was purely a Divine transaction among the Godhead.

Sadly, many brethren read this passage believing it says that He (Christ) saved us without any need of works of righteousness. They will then force themselves into saying that “Well, baptism is not a work,” or that it’s only a work of God (Col. 2:12). Not only is this false, but it contradicts Acts 10:34-35, which, itself, has everything to do with Acts 15:9 and Acts 2:38. Moreover, it is not what the text says! Baptism is indeed something God has given us to do—it is a work of God or a good work. While God’s work is to forgive sin in baptism (Col. 2:12), it’s **our** work—a work of righteousness God has specifically given in order to be saved.

Paul then says that according to His mercy He saved us. But, how? Without any works of righteousness (Acts 10:34-35; 1 John 3:7)? No, but through **regeneration’s washing** and the **Holy Spirit’s renewing** (both clauses are possessive genitives). This is exactly what Jesus alluded to in John 3:3-8 (See also John 6:63; Eph. 5:26; Jas. 1:18,21; 1 Pet. 3:21-25).

### Works for Salvation

Under the Christian dispensation, the gospel, or New Covenant law, Christ provided Christians assignments or works to carry out. We are to love God and others, but love is a work (Rev. 2:19). We must have faith (Heb. 11:6) but faith is a work (John 6:29). We must repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38) but repentance is a work (Jonah 3:10; Matt. 12:41). All things we must do, like confessing Christ, are required for salvation.

When Jesus says we must “**abide**” in His Word to be His true disciples (John 8:31), He is saying we must do what He says (John 12:48; cf. Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-6, 5:3). When Paul says we must continue in the faith, His Word (Col. 1:23), then we must continue doing what the Bible teaches. And, when the Hebrews writer says we must obey Christ (Heb. 5:9), he means we must “**continue obeying**.”

Obedience means to carry out that which Christ desires and faithfully carrying out the **works** designed for us to perform, are as necessary for salvation as is faith, which, itself is a work. The work of faith must work in working the works of God, otherwise, we will find ourselves in “unbelief.”

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## A Happy New Year!

David Ray

It’s that time of year again—time to start a new one. Every year on the evening of December 31, we get together with friends and family to eat, watch football, eat some more, and eventually to celebrate the coming of the new year. Traditionally, we’ll probably be watching the dropping of the ball in Times Square, then at midnight we’ll all cheer “Happy New Year!” Depending on our time zone, we may have already watched others in earlier time zones do the same thing, possibly even cheering along with them.

But why such excitement? Is there really anything different about January 1 compared to December 31? Is 2020 a better number than 2019? Is there a magical change that takes place in us, or in the world, when the year increases by one?

All of us have things about ourselves, our lives, our families, etc., that we recognize

need to be changed. We all recognize our potential to be better spouses, parents, children, employees, employers, neighbors, or to work harder at losing weight, eating right, doing home improvements, and watching where and how we spend our money.

But habits are hard to break, and we often look for catalysts to help us start the changes. The new year is one of the best and most utilized of these opportunities. And we certainly want to tip our hats to those who make and actually follow through on new year's resolutions. We want to encourage those who want to lose weight to stick to their programs of diet and exercise. We want to encourage those who are too frivolous with their money to be more careful about their spending habits. But most importantly, we want to encourage everyone to make and keep **spiritual** new year's resolutions.

No changes you've made this year, or can succeed in making this coming year, will make any difference whatsoever if Christ returns and your soul is lost! These things we've mentioned are certainly good and important changes, but we must keep them in proper perspective. For example, Paul taught us that bodily exercise does profit a little, "but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). This is proper perspective! Don't just focus on short-term improvements; think about the long-term—the **extreme** long-term! Eternity, by definition, is never ending. Where will you spend it?

If you are not a Christian, think about your decision to live each day separated from God. Or worse, think about the consequences of this decision in living for the rest of eternity separated from God! Jesus described this as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 24:51; 25:30). This day (not just sometime this year), resolve to look at and accept the evidences of Christianity and the Bible, believing that Jesus indeed **is** the Son of God (John 3:16; 8:24). Repent of your sins, changing your life to conform to that of Christ's (Luke 13:3). Make a public confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized (immersed) in water for the purpose of washing away your sins (Acts 22:16), being raised to walk a new life (Rom. 6:3-6). Resolve to make home improvements to your eternal home!

If you are a Christian, think about your opportunity to grow as a child of God. Read and study the Scriptures daily "to show thyself approved" (2 Tim. 2:15). Study and apply the fruit of the Spirit to your life (Gal. 5:22-23). "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Look for opportunities to shine your light "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation" (Phil. 2:15). And look for ways to encourage your brethren in Christ to do the same! Be an example (1 Tim. 4:12)!

Is there really any difference between January 1 and every other day of the year? Only if we'll allow it to be an encouragement to us to make the necessary improvements in our spiritual lives. And, if we can do it on January 1, why not on February 17? Why not May 12 or September 10? Why not every day of the year?

Jesus will come again, bringing judgment upon the world (2 Thess. 1:7-10), and He will come at an hour that we do not expect (Matt. 24:42, 50). But He will also come to take His kingdom (His church) home with Him to Heaven (1 Cor. 15:24). Whether today is the first day of the year, or any of the other 364 days, make your resolution **today** to put spiritual issues first. Resolve to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). This, more than any of the other resolutions, will result in a happy new year!

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## Reverence For God's Word

**J. Paul Slayden**

Ready to depart and receive the crown of righteousness, the apostle Paul charged Timothy, "in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus who shall judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:1-3). His warning against perverting the word is ironclad. He said, "But though we or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we

preached unto you, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1:6-9). This was emphasized by repetition. He then said that the gospel, which was preached by him, was not after man, that he **did not receive it from man**, that he was **not taught it**, but that it came through revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:8-12) Apostles and angels measure up fairly well with uninspired preachers, and if preachers preach any gospel different from that which came from Jesus Christ those who hear should reject it outright.

The Son of God made remarks about God’s word which impose a reverence for it that no one can fully appreciate, making him fear and tremble as he undertakes to teach the way of salvation—the best work that any mortal can attempt to do. In the temple He said to the Jews,

My teaching is not mine but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself. He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true and no unrighteousness is in him (John 7:16-18).

Concluding His instruction to His apostles about the Holy Spirit, He said,

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall not speak from himself; but shall guide you into all the truth: for what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine and shall declare it unto you (John 16:13-15).

One may strain his imagination till it fritters and quakes, but he will obtain no incentive to reverence for the word of God that will remotely compare with the obligation imposed by the Lord in this message.

Preaching only God’s word now will make—of those who accept it—what it made of sinners when it was proclaimed by the apostles. Every one of the disciples who sat at the Master’s feet to learn of Him, had his lips sealed as to the gospel by the Lord, just before He ascended to heaven and no preaching was done by them till the day of Pentecost. when they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

If all had reverence for the Word there would be one body, one faith and one baptism, which is plainly mentioned in connection with one God, one Lord, and one Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6).

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## Which Church?

**Harrell Davidson**

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

Many say that it makes no difference—in theory that is! However, in practice it shows that it at least matters to them. Why? Perhaps it is because the first position is a matter of self-justification meaning that they have compromised their convictions if they had them to begin with. People join a church for various reasons. We have heard of some who did so because of personal friendships. To some, the preacher appealed to them through the style of dress or diction. Some join a church because of social prestige or to obtain business. To many—but not enough—it is a matter of conviction.

Does it make any difference to the Lord? He went to great pains to foreshadow, picture, or pattern His church (Heb. 8:1-2; 9:8-9; 10:1). He chose to build it Himself. “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). The church is His because He paid for it, built it and because He loved it enough to die for it (Eph. 5:25). He paid the purchase price (1 Cor. 3:9). He chose **one church** to be His bride (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:23-24; 2 Cor. 11:2-3). Christ honored one church by giving it His name. As individuals, we are called Christians (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16). Universally,

including all Christians, we are an assembly (Rom. 16:16; Heb. 12:23). It was into one church that He put His table (Acts. 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:17; Luke 22:29-30). He adds the saved to one church (Acts 2:41, 47). Of course it makes a difference to our Lord!

It is possible for that church to be discovered, restored and perpetuated, minus all that denominationalism stands for. The church is perfectly outlined in the New Testament as to its founder, the foundation, the head (Col. 1:18), the creed (Mat. 16:16), its discipline (2 Tim. 3:15), the ordinances (1 Cor. 11:2), the organization (1 Tim. 3) and its message (Gal. 1:8).

The terms of entrance are identical with the Gospel requirements for salvation (Rom. 1:16; Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Then there is maintenance to be done. Membership is maintained by following the teaching of the New Testament by life, by service (Col. 3:17) and by worship (Acts 2:42).

It is by the authority of Jesus Christ that a local congregation of Christians offers to all the privileges of becoming a Christian just as men did under the direction of inspired men (Acts 2:38). This causes one to be simply a Christian plus nothing or minus nothing—being a member of the church you read of in the New Testament without being a party to denominationalism (1 Cor. 1:10). There is freedom **in** Christ **not from** Christ, in His Word, or law. We have liberty, not a license; we have law, without legalism; authority without autocracy (human).

When God speaks it does make a difference what men do. About Adam and Eve, Voltaire said, “What a difference could an apple make?” God did not say it was an “apple,” but it made all the difference in the world. You see, the authority and character of God is involved, as well as human destiny. It made a difference what river Naaman dipped in (2 Kings 5) and it makes a tremendous difference whether we are a part of the bride—the church of Christ.

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## **Editor's Travels and Writings**

We preached Sunday morning, Dec. 8, at Willow, Okla. and at Yukon, Okla. that evening. We returned to Yukon to preach again on Dec. 22 and preached at Chillicothe, Texas Dec. 29. After 14 months, our new book, “*The Thing That Hath Been...*” is now at the printer and will be available in a few weeks. It parallels the cycle of apostasy in the 19th century with apostasy today. Its contents will surprise most people, be rejected as “radical” or “mean” by many, infuriate a lot of others, and perhaps open the eyes of some brethren, but its facts and conclusions cannot be refuted. It will be mailed **FREE OF CHARGE** to churches who request it and are willing to pay the postage.

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## **“What Saith The Scriptures?”**

**Harrell Davidson**

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**“Is one who is baptized in a denomination for the remission of sins, a brother in Christ?”**

The short answer to this question is obviously no, but we will demonstrate in a moment in more detail what we mean. The first question that came to our mind years ago was “How can one be taught wrong and baptized right?”

While almost all mainline denominations require baptism of some kind or type before one can be identified with that particular religious movement, there are about as many diversities of thoughts as there are baptisms they administer.



The question is not not altogether tied to a liberal movement, but it involves liberalism nonetheless. Let us ask some questions, make some statements and, thus, reason together (Isa. 1:18).

In the phrase in Acts 2:38, “For the remission of sins,” the word *for* is translated from the Greek word *eis*. Some pronounce this “ace” while others refer to it as “ice.” According to *Thayer, Vine, Liddell & Scott* and other Greek authorities, the word means: “In order to, or in order to obtain.” It points **forward always**—never backward.

For instance, our Baptist friends baptize individuals as an outward sign of an inward grace, or, to say the same in another way, they baptize someone who has already been forgiven. Thus, that baptism is not for the remission of sins and puts one in the Baptist Church, not the body of Christ.

Try calling your local Baptist preacher and ask him this question: “Will you baptize me for the remission of my sins?” He will answer in the negative. Not only will he do so, but he will do it in a negative way. This denomination does not baptize for the remission of sins, even though they use immersion. Therefore it would be impossible for one to be baptized with a baptism that points backwards as the Baptists teach and be a member of the body of Christ.

At one time in their history, the Catholic Church immersed individuals—even infants—before they started sprinkling. We realize that this sounds contrary, but history shows it to be true. However, according to Professor Stuart's work on *Baptism*, he noted that, “The English Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Church adopted modes of baptism quite different from that of immersion” (169-172).

There is no such thing as “modes” of baptism as it is the action involved. For instance, our Presbyterian friends pour for baptism and call it a “mode” but incorrectly so.

Our Methodist friends have adopted choices. On page 470, under Section II, under the heading of “Baptism” *The Discipline of the Methodist Church* states: “Let every adult person and the parents of every child to be baptized, have their choice of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.” On page 471, the parents of an infant are required to take an oath that “...it is your duty to see that he [the infant HDD] be taught, as soon as he shall be able to learn, the meaning and the purpose of this Holy Sacrament.”

The above represents a sampling of the teachings of our religious neighbors. How, under the sun which lights up our universe, did anyone come up with the idea that one could be baptized in any denomination and be in the body of Christ is beyond me to know.

Are we ready to throw away the plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures? Have we forgotten that every convert in the book of Acts was already religious? Not one of them was saved outside the body of Christ and not one of them argued that his baptism was “safe” as some do today.

It is obvious, even to the casual reader, that we have let denominationalism creep in among us today. In short, the answer is still “no,” but now you know why. Thanks for the question.

**Brother Davidson answers readers' questions in this column each month. If you have Bible questions, you may email them to him at [harrelld@charter.net](mailto:harrelld@charter.net)**

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Individuals residing in the U.S. may receive a **FREE COPY** of “*The Thing That Hath Been...*” *The Cycle of Apostasy* by sending \$3.00 for postage and handling to:

Jerry C. Brewer  
308 South Oklahoma Ave.  
Elk City, OK 73644.

The book is at the printer and will be available by Jan. 31.

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# The Folly of Directing One's Own Steps

Charles Pogue

Some people no doubt believe that life would be a lot easier if they could make up their own rules as they go along. It is the case that a lot of people do that very thing. It does not make any difference to them that Bible has ruled upon a thing to be false doctrine or morally evil, if they would rather believe a lie and rebel against the holiness described in the Bible that is exactly what they do

Unfortunately for them, the Bible teaches that man cannot conduct his life that way and be pleasing to God. Jeremiah wrote, “Oh, Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). The wise man Solomon, makes a similar statement when he writes that there is a way that seems right to a man, but it ends in death (Prov. 14:12).

The propensity of man to try to direct his own steps is not a new thing. In the days of the judges, every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judg. 17:6). Since that was the case, it is no surprise that Israel found itself being overwhelmed during that period by this nation and that nation. What was right in their own eyes was against the law of God and they paid the consequences.

One should learn from the example of the Judges that trying to direct one's own steps, and thereby ending up living a life that is displeasing to God, has its own disastrous consequences. As The wise man wrote in the Proverbs again, “Good understanding giveth favour, but the way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:5). Just ask the person who has destroyed his physical body through use of alcohol. But, barring future obedience to God, his worst affliction is yet to come when God destroys both his body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28).

In these days (and there are those in the church who are just as guilty as those outside of it) many try to decide for themselves what is right and wrong when the Bible has clearly already ruled on the matter. Yet, if one tries to impress such individuals with the truth, all he meets with is resistance and the assertion, “you are not my judge!” What drives such an individual? Where does his attitude come from? In many cases, it most surely comes from a genuine lack of concern for spiritual things in his life. Secular things; those are what matters to them, and they will have their way regardless of what God says about it.

A man may proceed to direct his own steps. One may do what is right in his own eyes. A person may believe the way he is going is right. There are many who have their minds set on doing their own thing, and God is not allowed to get a word in edgewise. Whether such persons suffer physical consequences for their sin in this life or not, they will suffer an eternal punishment in the fires of hell. If one were to ask them now, is doing what you want to do bringing you happiness? The answer no doubt would be, yes. But in the flames of hell, they will open their eyes through a flood tears, and despair for just a finger dipped in water and touched to their tongues. Then, the answer would, and will be, an entirely different one.

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## What Peter Didn't Say

Nathan Brewer

The first Gospel sermon contains important information, but what remains **un**spoken is just as important.

**First**, in Acts 2 Peter doesn't tell the sinners in Jerusalem to “just believe” in order to be saved.

After explaining to the Jewish audience that they had killed their Savior, but that God had raised Him from the dead and set Jesus at His own right hand in heaven, some in the crowd ask what they need to do (Acts 2:37). In verse 38, Peter tells them to repent and be baptized so their sins can be forgiven.

He doesn't tell them to believe because they already believe. Peter has already

preached Christ to them, and they respond by asking what they need to do. They've accepted Peter's information as true.

According to the popular Protestant doctrine of “faith only,” handed down by 16th century reformer Martin Luther, these people in Acts 2 should have already been saved. They believed in Jesus. By the time Peter opens his lips in verse 38, they have accepted the basic facts of the Gospel. But they aren't saved yet, because Peter goes on in verse 38 to tell them what to do to be saved. A sinner is **not saved** at the moment he believes.

**Second**, Peter doesn't tell this group of believing sinners to pray, even though a lot of people today are told to pray for Jesus to save them.

People usually cite Romans 10:13 when telling others to pray for salvation: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But they could just as easily cite Acts 2:21, since Peter says the same thing.

At this point in the first recorded Gospel sermon, Peter is explaining that the miraculous sights and sounds the Jews in Jerusalem see and hear are the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. Part of the prophecy is that “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). In other words, it's time for salvation to be preached and for sinners to be saved.

Yet when believing sinners ask what to do in verse 37, Peter does **not** tell them to pray. In verse 38 he tells them to repent and be baptized to be forgiven. The salvation that was to come by calling on the name of the Lord in verse 21 is explained in verse 38 as repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

No one is saved by simply believing or by praying. To contact the blood of Christ and have your sins forgiven, you must believe, then be willing to repent and be baptized, as Jesus commands.

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## “Instruments in The New Testament”

**W. Curtis Porter**

A sermon was delivered near where I live by a Christian Church preacher who contended that instrumental music is authorized by the silence of the New Testament. But after saying that the New Testament said nothing about instruments in the early church and that instrumental music was, therefore, unscriptural, but not anti-scriptural, he went on to use several passages of scripture to “prove” that instruments were used in the early church.

To say in one part of a sermon that the New Testament is silent about instrumental music in the worship, and then in another part of the same sermon to try to prove by the New Testament that the early church had instrumental music, is just one of the inconsistencies of false teachers. Here are some of the scriptures he used in an attempt to “prove” instrumental music in the New Testament:

### **First Corinthians 14:7**

The preacher alleged that this statement by Paul the apostle to the church at Corinth proves the church there had instrumental music in its worship. In this text, Paul says, “And even without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?” The conclusion was drawn, therefore, that the Corinthian church used pipes and harps in its services. But the man who would use this text to prove instrumental music in the church is hard pressed for a proof text.

The very next verse says, “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” If verse 7 proves they had pipes and harps in the church, verse 8 proves they had trumpets and carnal warfare! Are advocates of instrumental music ready for this? Were the Corinthian Christians blowing their trumpets to get people lined up for carnal battle? The idea is preposterous. Neither verse 7 nor verse 8 proves instrumental music in the church. Just as one would not know what is piped or harped if no distinction in sounds were given, and just as an army would not prepare

for battle if the trumpet should give an uncertain sound, “so likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air” (1 Cor. 14:9). The thing in the church to which Paul referred was “words spoken by the tongue,” and he compared them to the sounds of pipes, harps, and trumpets elsewhere to show the importance of speaking words that could be understood. No distinction in sounds would ruin music anywhere, and an uncertain sound of the trumpet would leave the army in doubt. Just so, a language that could not be understood by the audience would make the speakers and the audience barbarians to one another. Even a Christian Church preacher, if he will lay aside his ardent desire to find instruments in the New Testament, can understand this passage.

### **First Corinthians 12:28**

This was another passage in which the preacher alleged that instrumental music is in the New Testament. In this passage we find this language: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” Can you find the mention of instrumental music in this passage? If not, you must not be a very close observer, for it is there, according to this Christian Church preacher. But where does he find it? In the word “helps.”

Instrumental music, he says, is a “help” in the praise service, and since there were “helps” placed in the Corinthian church, they must have had instrumental music. With this understanding—or, rather, **misunderstanding**—of this passage, we might find authority for many things. I have often called for the text of scripture that authorizes the mourners' bench system of “getting religion.” From the interpretation given by this Christian preacher to First Corinthians 12:28, I suppose I have at last found it. The mourners' bench “helps” to get people to profess religion, and since God set “helps” in the church, that must include the mourners' bench. That argument could be made by the Baptists with as much reason as the digressives use in applying it to instrumental music.

### **Colossians 3:16**

In this text, Paul speaks of “psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,” telling the church to admonish and teach one another with such. The speaker claimed that Greek authorities say that “psalms” means “with or without an instrument,” and that “spiritual songs” were songs sung with an instrument. I have known for a long time the argument that has been made with respect to the word “psalms,” but this is something new concerning “spiritual songs.”

If “spiritual songs” were songs sung with an instrument, and Paul said to use “spiritual songs,” how could there be any choice left to us? And how could we say the New Testament says nothing about them? Paul said to use “spiritual songs,” and if that means songs with an instrument, then Paul said to sing with an instrument. Could we then leave off the instrument and obey this divine injunction? But the fact is that “spiritual songs” means no such thing. Certainly the instrument could not be found in the word “spiritual.” The word does not mean instrumental music, for we read of spiritual gifts, spiritual men and such like. If instruments are involved in this, it must be found in the word translated “songs.” But that is not true. The word “songs” is from the original word *hodaïs*, which is the plural number, dative case, of the word *hode*. This word simply means, “a song, lay, ode, or strain.” It suggests nothing about instrumental music, and such is not found in this portion of the New Testament.

### **Revelation 14:2**

“And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” This is often used in attempts to prove New Testament sanction of instrumental music, for John heard “the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” Of course, those who attempt to use this passage to prove New Testament approval of instrumental music overlook the symbolism of Revelation and want to make it all literal. The American Standard Version of this passage reads this way: “And the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” The *as* in this verse is in the original Greek.

So John heard a voice from heaven. It was not the voice of many waters, but it was **as** the voice of many waters for rhythm. Neither was it the voice of a great thunder. It was **as** the voice of thunder for volume, and it was not the voice of harpers, but it was **as** the voice of harpers harping with their harps for melody. But verse 8 tells what the voice was—the voice of singers as they sang a song before the throne, and that voice of singing contained rhythm as the voice of many waters, volume as the voice of thunder and melody as the voice of harpers harping with their harps. There is not a single vestige of New Testament proof for instrumental music in worship.

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## **Back to The Bible**

**Harvey A. Childress**

We need authority to know what is true or false, right or wrong. Authority tells us what to believe and what to do. What we believe and do depend upon our concept of authority. We can quote the Bible all day to a person who doesn't accept it as a standard of authority, and he merely shrugs his shoulders and says, "So what?" The authority of the Bible must be established before people will accept its statements.

Reason is not the basis of the edicts of authority. The basis of its edicts is desire. If authority orders, the subject must obey, for authority has been defined as a rule of action laid down by a superior for an inferior to obey.

Since God is self-existent, He is the ultimate authority. All truth inheres in Him and issues from Him.

### **The Christians Concept Of Authority**

This study is primarily for those who accept God as the final authority in all matters for the soul. In order to understand His will, we need to understand the Christian's concept of authority.

Hebrews 1:1-2 summarizes God's authority and its functions for us. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

God first issued His will in times past through the prophets. The prophets spoke for God as He moved them by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). What God spoke through the prophets has as much authority as if God had spoken directly to the people.

Now God speaks through His Son. Christ brought God's word to us (John 12:49), and what Christ says in the New Testament has as much authority for you and me as it would if God spoke directly to us. From this, we understand the authority Christ exercised while He was on earth. He taught with authority (Matt. 7:29), He had authority to work miracles (Mark 1:27), and to forgive sins (Mark 2:10).

God gave all authority unto the Son. "These things spake Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee: even as thou gavest him authority over all flesh" (John 17:1-2). A few days after this prayer, the resurrected Jesus meets with his disciples in Galilee where He gives them this charge: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations... Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature..." (Matt: 28:19; Mark 16:15). On what authority can He give such a commission? Upon His own authority, because God has committed all authority into His hands (Matt. 28:18). Since God, by right of His own existence, gives all authority unto Christ, then Christ determines what is true or false, right or wrong in the realm of religion.

There was little authority given by Jesus Christ to any individual. He gave authority to the apostles, and Paul said that authority was from Christ (2 Cor. 13:10), for the purpose of building up the church.

While Jesus addressed Peter and the other apostles, he said they were to bind and loose on earth (Matt. 16:19). Again, He told them they were to forgive and retain sins (John 20:22-23). But such binding and loosing, forgiving and retaining could only be done by them as they were moved by the Holy Spirit to reveal all truth (John 16:13). The expressions used in both passages of the Greek language say, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

By this, we know that the binding and loosing took place in heaven and was revealed under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The apostles merely revealed to man what those terms of Christ were which the Holy Spirit gave them (1 Cor. 2:13). The apostles had no arbitrary authority of their own to make decisions, rules, or edicts of their own that would be binding on the church. Neither could they forgive or retain sins of their own, but only as Christ revealed His will to them through the Holy Spirit. The apostles never passed on any succession of authority to other men when they died. Their work was finished before their deaths and they have no successors on earth today.

Some mention the authority of evangelists. In Titus 2:15, the evangelist is told to speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. But such speaking, exhorting, and reproofing can be done only according to the word of God (1 Pet. 4:11). If the evangelist doesn't give a "thus saith the Lord" for his speech, he is speaking without authority.

The elders of the local congregation have authority to tend the flock, exercising the oversight thereof (1 Pet. 5:2), and to rule that congregation (Heb. 13:17). But, like the evangelist, they can only enforce the word of God. They can neither add their own teachings to it, nor take any teachings from it. Christ has absolute legislative, executive, and judicial authority. Man's authority derives only from the word of God as Christ has expressed it.

The apostles were strictly forbidden to exercise authority over one another as civil authorities were doing (Mark 10:42-43). But this is the very kind of authority many churches exercise over their members in this present day.

Christians in the New Testament realized they left the rule or authority of Satan to come under the reign of Christ (Col. 1:13). They recognized Christ as Lord of all, and that what He authorized was delivered by inspiration to the church by Holy Spirit-inspired apostles and prophets.

### **Post-Apostolic Departure From That Concept**

In the two centuries following the deaths of the apostles, there was a noticeable departure from this concept of authority. Councils of bishops began to meet and define the faith and practice of Christians. In this manner, these councils of bishops gradually became the organ of authority.

The scriptures were venerated in word, but they were subordinated to the decisions of the bishops. Their decisions became an outline of a common creed that was accepted, and their power continued to increase.

From the fourth century to the middle ages, the authority of those councils grew to the extent that anyone not obeying them was excommunicated. While the councils claimed only to define the teaching of Christ, they invested themselves and their decisions with authority over man and usurped Christ's authority.

In the middle ages, Christ and His word were totally eclipsed by the absolute authority of what was by that time an apostate church. The Church of Rome concentrated in its episcopacy all the authority of tradition, bishops, councils, and whatever else held sway over the minds of men in religion. Scripture was ignored and the Bishop of Rome took upon himself the plenary authority of God over men's minds and lives.

In the Reformation Movement, internal authority sprang up. Men thought that what they felt about religion had as much authority as what God said. Many times they stamped their feet on the Bible, declaring, I had rather have what I feel in my heart than ten thousand Bibles. Such leads only to the worst confusion. Nothing can bring a uniformity out of all the confusion that exists in religion but the one inward fitness of one supreme revelation to the common needs of humanity.



### **Return To The Original Position**

There is one supreme revelation that fits that need — the Bible. The Bible and the Bible alone can bring us out of confusion into peace and progress in the faith. Lets go back to the original position of New Testament Christians regarding authority.

We have to choose between human and Divine authority. Human authority resides in church councils, pontiffs, creeds, conferences, conventions, and church covenants. Divine authority rests in Christ and His law expressed in the New Testament (Heb. 1:1-2).

Why do men want human authority today? The answer is simple. They desire to practice things in religion Christ never authorized. They want to glorify themselves more than Bible authority allows. They want to change the Bible with their creeds and ideas because it condemns so many things they practice.

But Jesus said, "...my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Christ's word is permanent—eternal (Heb. 13:20). The same word you read in your Bible will meet you in the day of judgment (John 12:48). Remember, you can change yourself, but you cannot change God's word.

Truth never varies. It is always consistent with itself. It always tells the same story. The apostles were guided into all truth that saves our souls (John 16:13). We have that truth in the New Testament. We don't need any more.

If you have trouble making up your mind which authority you will accept—God's or man's—then ask yourself these questions: Will church authorities judge me in the last day? Will the decrees of councils, creeds, conferences, conventions, or synods be the criteria by which I am judged? The answer to both questions is obviously **no**. None of those things will judge you. The word of Christ will be the standard by which your life will be measured and by which you will be judged (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). Your record will be weighed in the light of God's word, not the decrees of men.

Then, we breathe this prayer: "Lord, hasten the day when people will go back to the Bible to justify their faith and practice." Christ alone is King, and His word our only law (Matt. 17:5; 28:18).

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### **Book Review**

## **Recommended Reading: *The Ivory Domino***

**Gary W. Summers**

Anyone who begins reading this book will likely want to continue with it to see what will happen next. For a few pages, one might wonder, "Why should I care about this teenage youth who is so enamored with the Catholic religion that he would never even consider anything else?" The answer is that he is challenged to do so in a way he never thought possible (10). And it occurs in the midst of normal high school situations, such as playing on a successful football team. The previous season had been rather inglorious, but this season looked promising—maybe even a championship. Would the expectations be thrillingly fulfilled or result in agonizing disappointment?

The Catholic connection proved to be very strong; the author's mother, "grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins" were all members of that institution (6). In assessing his religious stance at that time, the author states:

It was the original Church begun by Jesus and His apostles, it has the pope, and we were 660 million strong. It was the right church, and if I had not been in it, I would have joined it. I wanted to be in the right! (7).

Does this young man seem to be a likely candidate for conversion? One might imagine that he had a close friend who somehow was able to reason with him, but that was not the case. Some of them were Catholic also. Perhaps some young lady caught his fancy, and in the process of dating her, he was persuaded to abandon his Catholic faith? Wrong again! Maybe he experienced a near-death calamity, or someone close to him died. No, that didn't happen, either. Nevertheless, over a period of time, he began to question the Catholic heritage he was born into, of which he was so proud.

An experiment in probability by a young woman started the ball rolling (14-15). The result of her illustration showed that the Bible cannot be the product of men. A wager between her and the author involved the outcome of the next football game. She won the bet because of a fluke that occurred. She graciously offered to release him from his obligation, but he just as graciously insisted on keeping it. The author's punishment for losing was to visit the place she worshiped.

His initial reaction was negative. Among other things, he noted to himself that the building was plain—"Just walls. No statues of saints. No images of angels. No stained-glass windows. No candles. No cross. Just walls. Plain walls" (20-21). After two pages of complaints about everything that was wrong with the worship, the author consoled himself by saying that he had fulfilled his debt and would never have to endure such craziness again.

And that should have been the end of it. When the young woman asked him about his visit to worship, he gave a negative response, but he made a fatal mistake (fatal to maintaining his status quo); he asked her one question. Unable to answer it, she talked with her Bible class teacher, who agreed to take the next whole Sunday class to answer the question. He told her that such an arrangement was not something that he was willing to do, but she outfoxed him for a second time; so he went (27).

The author was stunned by the reception he received and with the answer that was given him. He anticipated a flimsy reply based on tradition or mere preference; what he received was an answer found in the Scriptures. The answer was in the Bible, but it was not what Catholics practiced. Now he wondered why his religion did not do what the Bible taught; he decided to ask his priest.

The priest reminded the teenager that their Catechism taught that "God gave the church another source of authority, not just the Bible alone" (33). "Oral tradition was as valid as the Scriptures themselves" (34). This explanation totally satisfied the author, but once again he decided not to leave well enough alone; he determined to take this information back to the Bible teacher, Mr. Babbitt.

Finding him in the parking lot before class, the author told him firmly that since he (Mr. Babbitt) went only by the Bible and left out Tradition, "what **you** would say would be wrong. So there's no sense in my listening to **you**" (37). How would most of us respond to such a statement? Would we become a little angry? Would we say, "Is that so? Well, let me tell you something"? Or would we just sigh and walk away from what appeared to be a hopeless situation?

The teacher asked if Catholics believe the Bible is God's Word and received an affirmative answer. He wrote a passage on a piece of paper and handed it to the football player and told him he might want to consider what those verses taught. He snatched the piece of paper and departed, thinking, "That will be the last I see of him!" (37). But with more than 300 pages to go, it was not to be.

The author's desire to prove the Catholic Church correct led to examining various issues further. He studies from his own Catholic version, the church's own *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* (recommended by the *Catholic Encyclopedia*), and a *Catholic Dictionary*. What he learns and what he does with the knowledge comprises the remainder of the book, and it is all worth reading. Every bit of information is documented—and vital, with many applications. The author effectively combines doctrine with story-telling. The reader will be blessed.

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## Giving God a Helping Hand

W.E. Brightwell

When Paul was invited to speak in the open court of the Areopagus at Athens, he could take no text from the Bible, for his hearers knew nothing of the Bible or the God of the Bible. They had their own gods galore, and common patriotism precluded their giving heed to gods of other nations. Paul was forced to find a text in their own idolatrous

practice, and from that point to build his gospel bridgework. This he most cleverly did. How could the most enlightened nation on earth go on from generation to generation believing in and worshipping gods that had no existence except in the imagination of the worshipper? Did not their gods often disappoint them? How did they explain these disappointments? It is very simple: They were always asking for good things, but they received a mixture of good and bad. If they received good things, they promptly gave credit to their gods. If they received evil things, they could always find something in their own conduct to account for the failure of their gods to bless them. They might even decide that, after all, the things they had desired were not best for them. **They helped their gods out!**

Do Christians ever “give God a lift”? Some certainly do. It is very foolish, however, for their God needs no “helping out” that men can give. The heathen were forced to speculate, if they satisfied their curiosity. There was nothing else they could do.

Paul preached a revealed religion. A revealed religion removes the necessity of speculation. But when Christians go beyond what is revealed, they enter the field of speculation—the same field that has been occupied by the heathen throughout the ages—and they must give their God a lift. They must help Him out.

We know from the written record that God exercises His power on behalf of His people. That is clearly revealed. He answers their prayers (Jas. 5:16). If we cooperate intelligently and faithfully with the laws of God, we are assured that God will bless us, and our prayers shall be answered. But if we try to make everything that happens providentially into a special, personal, and miraculous way, we hurdle the fence of revelation and run loose in the field of speculation.

Many things that occur seem to be providential, and I suppose that when one cultivates his viewpoint along this line, his vision becomes expert and he can see the hand of Providence in every act and event of his life. But since these conclusions cannot be verified by the written record, he has nothing but his own guess as evidence. This is not satisfactory to others. Such evidence falls in a class with the claims of many sectarians to special experiences. Many claim, in all sincerity, to have seen angels or lights and to have received special messages. Their experiences are very precious to them—more precious than even the word of God—which is true of all speculations. They tell them over and over, and rely upon their correctness throughout a normal lifetime. But will others accept them at face value?

Anything that we cannot prove, and others cannot deny, is a speculation, pure and simple. The comfort that one can obtain from such a speculation may be real, but it certainly rests upon a foundation that is unreal—unrevealed. There is no more propitious place in the world for us to keep quiet than where God has not spoken!

It is difficult to determine which is the most ridiculous—helping out a god that is no god, or having a living God, who has plainly revealed His will, and deliberately wading out beyond the bounds of revelation and riding the waves of speculation. Certainly, there is less excuse for the latter.

If the revelation cannot be depended upon, we are without God and without hope. If it can be depended upon, our God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). How, then, can we conclude that we are His special pets? If God takes away the drunkard's wife and his children, so that he may be led to repentance—if God uses so many individuals as mere footballs to bring about the conversion of one man—just who are His pets? There is a tendency for each individual to think that the world revolves around himself. But if many are to be sacrificed in the process of saving one, it is disastrous to the worlds of those sacrificed.

It is a mighty comfortable feeling to believe that God is ordering events and disposing of circumstances **to achieve my good!** But it does not leave much comfort for others if they happen to get entangled in the wheels of my special providence. It smacks too much of the smug complacency of the man who thinks that the whole pageant of humanity is being staged for the single purpose of featuring him—that all the rest of mankind are merely props and stage setting!

Certainly good men—those who cooperate with the laws of God—receive more of God's grace. But that is lawful. It could not be otherwise, and it leaves not the least room for boasting, or even for morbid curiosity. When a good man talks of special providence, it sounds more plausible. It is certainly more pardonable. But if we admit *his* claim, how shall we deny the claims of others? The trouble is that some of those who talk the most of special providence and direct, miraculous answer to prayer have in one way or another proven themselves consummate failures in life—and everybody knows it but themselves. If we deny **their** claims, how shall we know whose claims to accept? And we may be branded as men of little faith. But if we accept their claims, we cannot help wondering why God did not make a better job of it.

Did you ever hear a tramp claim that God is taking a special interest in directing his life—that he is one of the Lord's pets? The claim would backfire. And yet there are some who have failed just as miserably in a spiritual way to make the claim. I hope that one may be pardoned for wondering why God would limit His extraordinary and miraculous benefits to financial considerations. Is it fair to wonder why He has not led some of them to a simple knowledge of the truth? Would that be an end worthy of special favor? If God is so prompt in giving them special direction in material things, why would He not give them spiritual light, and why would they not think to ask for it?

It is God's business if He wants to help those in special ways who are not entirely friendly with the truth. But since it is a matter that cannot be demonstrated by the scriptures or otherwise, it just does not click with the average Christian that God would demand strict loyalty to the truth and then bestow His choice favors upon those who are lacking in that loyalty. Since it is God's business and not ours, and He has not revealed it to us, is it not a mighty good subject upon which to keep quiet? The most opportune moment in life is to keep quiet when God has not spoken!

I have no more quarrel with the man who holds these views than I have with the man who wades out into the ocean beyond his depth. They are in the same predicament. But when he starts belittling the faith of those who do not follow him into the shark-infested waters of speculation and begins campaigning for his views as a point of cardinal virtue, it is perhaps well to warn him of his personal danger, and, in a Christian spirit, to suggest that he read again Luke 13:1-5. Christ clearly implies that the falling of the tower of Siloam upon 18 men did not prove them greater sinners than multiplied thousands upon whom no tower fell.

We should repent of our sins, keep His commandments and let Him bless us through whatever channels He chooses. We have not one moment to waste upon **guessing**—we must be **giving** ourselves wholly to the things Paul commanded Timothy to do, and “take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine,” that we may save ourselves and those who hear us (1 Tim. 4:15-16).

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## Jesus Christ: The Son of God

**Benjamin Franklin (1812-1878)**

“To whom he showed himself alive, after his sufferings, by many infallible proofs” (Act 1:4)

The evangelist Luke, author of the book styled Acts of Apostles, made the statement just read, and now selected as a text for a discourse on the Divine Authority of the Bible. It is a fundamental statement, when properly considered. It is not simply that Jesus was shown to his apostles after his sufferings, nor that he was shown to them alive, but he showed himself to them alive. Nor is it all, that he showed himself to them alive, nor that he did this by proof, nor that he did it by proofs, nor that he did it by any proofs, but he showed himself alive by many **infallible** proofs. The apostles not only saw the Lord, and saw him alive, but he showed himself to them alive; and gave them proof, and not only proof, but proofs; not only proofs, but more, many proofs; and even more than that, many infallible proofs, that he was the Lord himself. This grand statement is fundamental; involving the great issue between the believers in the Bible and unbelievers; the friends of the Bible and the enemies. It involves the foundation of the entire revelation from God to man. If this statement is true, the Bible is true and



from God, and all the consequences follow, whether we understand them or not. With this statement the Bible stands or falls; and with it stands or falls our faith and our hope of all beyond this life.

If Jesus showed himself alive after his sufferings by many infallible proofs, he rose from the dead. On his resurrection from the dead, the entire question turns. An impostor could not have raised himself from the dead. God would not have raised an impostor, and thus aided him in palming off an imposition on the world. If Jesus rose, God raised him. If God raised him, he is Divine. If he is Divine, all he ever said is true. This is the foundation of the entire matter of revelation. He said he was with the Father before time began; that the Father loved him before the foundation of the world; before the founding of kosmos, or the material world.

“Before Abraham was, I am,” said he. He said he came down from heaven. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last; the Bright and Morning Star, the Root and Offspring of David. I am He who was dead, and am alive; and behold, I live forever and ever. I am He who was, and who is, and who is to come, the Omnipotent.

He was before all things, and by him all things consist. It was by him and for him the universe was made. He is the express image of the invisible God and the brightness of the Father's glory. In him dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily. The apostles say, He knew all things. He came before the world as no other teacher ever did, declaring, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me.” “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me.”

There is no account of his having been educated, or having any opportunities, in continuous association with the wise, the learned, and the great. On the contrary, he was evidently brought up in comparative obscurity. Yet, on coming forth from this obscurity, to the position of a public instructor, the very first time he opened his lips, and on every subsequent occasion, he showed that he knew all about man, what was in him, even to his very thoughts; that he knew the Scriptures thoroughly; the patriarchs, the prophets, and the entire history of man, from the creation down to his time. He was never deceived nor disappointed by any man, nor set of men, but saw through them and all their designs; knew and frequently foretold the results that would follow. From the day he entered his public ministry till he ascended to heaven, it is clear that he saw all things in advance, comprehended all that was coming, and that even his enemies were blindly following the programme he had marked out for them, without seeming to know that they were confirming his claims as a prophet, and proving that he could see the future as clearly as the past (*The Gospel Preacher*, Vol. 1, 1869, Cincinnati, Ohio, Franklin & Rice Publishers, p. 8).

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## **Bible Study Resources**

**The Scripture Cache**

**Precept Upon Precept You Tube**

**Spiritual Perspectives – Gary Summers**

**Biblical Articles & More – Gary Grizzell**

**False Doctrines of Man**

**Yukon, Okla. church of Christ**

**Berea church of Christ**

**South Seminole church of Christ**

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# **New Book Coming This Month!**

***“The Thing That Hath Been...”***

***The Cycle of Apostasy***

**By Jerry C. Brewer**

**With Foreword By Daniel Denham**

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us (Eccl. 1:9-10).

History is cyclical. It not only recounts the past but mirrors the present. The philosopher said “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” That men have forgotten the past is obvious. The church in our century is in the midst of the same apostasy that occurred a century and a half ago.

He is a poor observer of men and things who does not see slowly growing up among us a class of men who can no longer be satisfied with the ancient gospel and the ancient order of things. These men must have changes; and silently they are preparing the mind of the brotherhood to receive changes (Moses E. Lard, 1865).

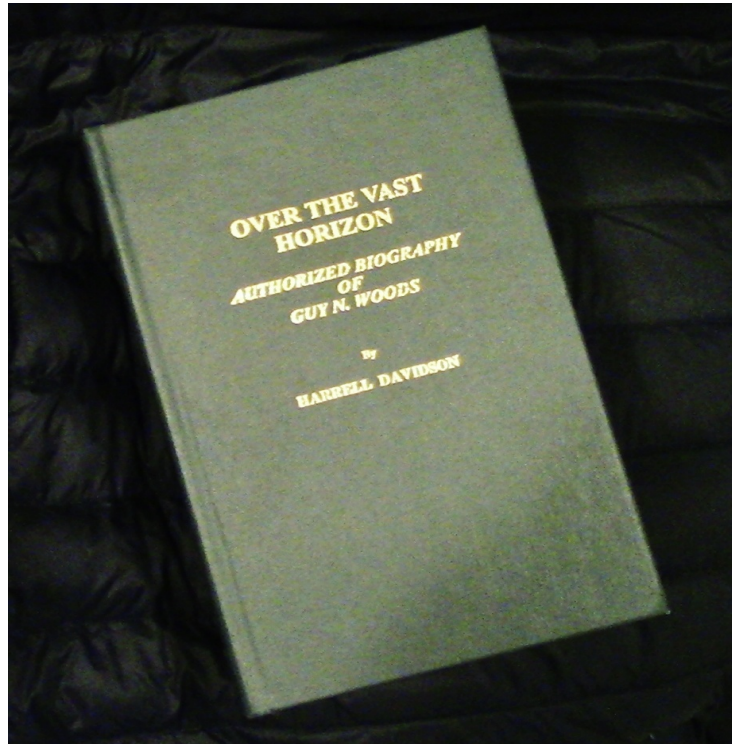
Mainstream churches of Christ project a public image which the world perceives as the principal tendency representing the prevalent attitudes and practices of churches of Christ. The world's perception is that these churches are dominant, normal, standard, and regular examples of churches of Christ. That is false. Mainstream churches have forsaken the pattern for the church revealed in the New Testament. They are denominations among denominations, liberal in their views and handling of Scripture, and have more affinity with Rome, Calvin, Luther, and Knox than they do the Lord Jesus Christ.

Their flirtation with liberalism has led them into apostasy. They are in full fellowship with each other and have become a “progressive” faction that will eventually result in a new denomination. That is already a fact in the case of former churches of Christ like Richland Hills in Fort Worth, Quail Springs in Oklahoma City, and Oak Hills in San Antonio.

**This book will surprise most readers and infuriate far more, but its facts and truth cannot be successfully denied. For details, send an email to [txjch@att.net](mailto:txjch@att.net).**

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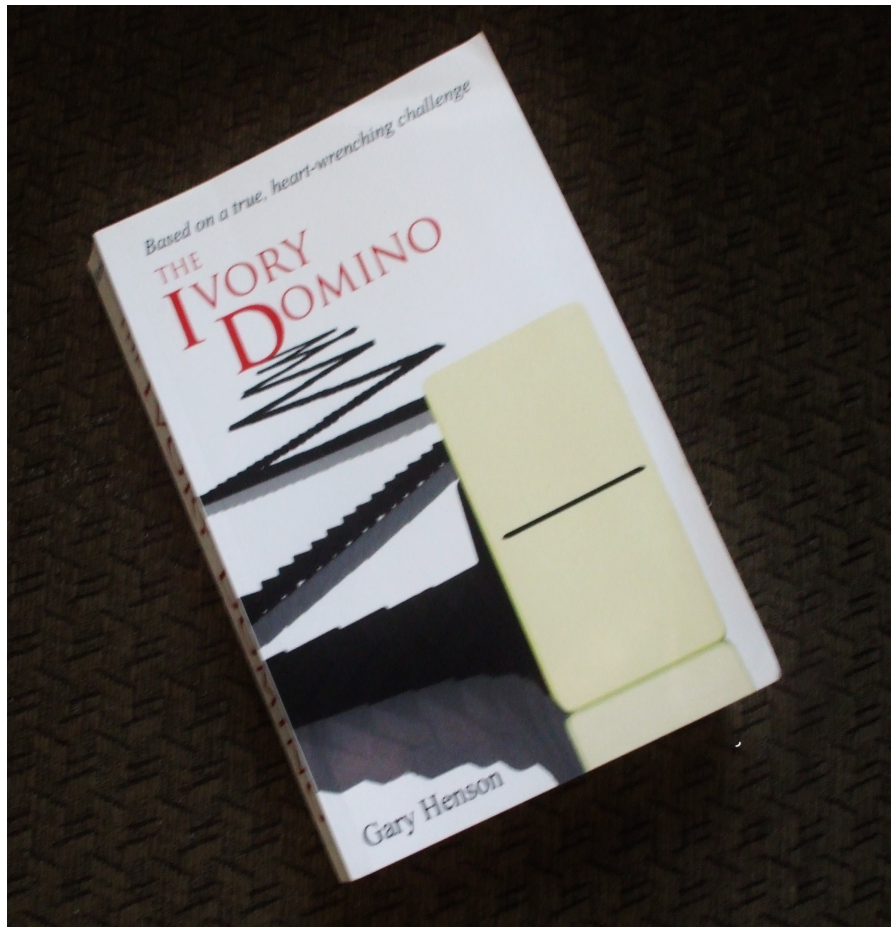
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