

The Gospel Preceptor

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

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Men May Be Wrong, But The Bible Is Right

Jerry C. Brewer

The Bible is God's inerrant revelation to man. As such, it instructs mankind in the way God desires to be served and worshiped. But through the ages, men have perverted that revelation and created hundreds of religions to suit themselves. The ancient denominational falsehood that, "God accepts everyone who is sincere" has become the basis in religion today for postmodernism's idea that truth is whatever one **perceives** it to be. That foolishness can be illustrated by simple mathematics: The sum of two plus two is four. But along comes a man who says, "I believe the sum is eight." Another says, "I believe it is three," and another says, "I believe it is sixty." Who is right? **All** are correct according to postmodernism, which holds that the truth of a proposition is whatever an individual perceives ("believes") it to be. That is the devil's lie. Truth is truth **regardless** of my perception of it. The Bible is as true today as when it was first written, regardless of what I "believe" it to be. Truth is unchangeable and means what it means, regardless of what I **think** it means.

Whenever viewpoints oppose each other, both cannot be right. They may both be wrong but they **cannot both** be right. The hundreds of religious denominations in our world, all of which teach conflicting doctrines, cannot all be right. Even a cursory examination of the various doctrines and practices of the religious world ought to convince anyone that **something** is wrong.

Methodists, Catholics and Lutherans say baptism is performed by sprinkling water on a person. The Bible says baptism is an immersion, or burial. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him..." (Col. 2:12). Which is right? The Bible is right. Catholicism says the pope is the head of the church. The Bible says Christ is. "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead..." (Col. 1:18). Which is right? The Bible is right. Baptists say one is saved before and without baptism. The Bible says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Which is right? The Bible is right. Can anyone, with a modicum of common sense and logic, believe that all of these opposing doctrines are right?

The divisions that exist among those professing to follow Christ are the result of man presuming to sit in God's place. Exalting human reason above divine revelation, man presumes to legislate for God. That was Jereboam's problem when he arrogantly changed the Israel's worship (1 Kings 12) and that remains the bane of men today. It has always been our plea—and God's will—that men give up their human doctrines and stand upon the word of God. That is the only way to worship and serve Him and go to heaven at last. Men may—and can—be wrong, but **the Bible is right**.

Solving the Problem of Sin

Cled E. Wallace

As prevalent as sin is and as tragic as its consequences are, man is lamentably incapable of comprehending the problem and is far less qualified to solve it. Every human

woe is directly or indirectly due to the fact of sin. "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4 ASV). The supreme law is the will of God. The fact of sin and the cause of it are summed in a brief remark of Paul: "And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works." (Col 1:21 ASV) Evil works proceed from an alienated mind, a mind poisoned with contrariness toward the will of God, and they mark the evildoer as an alien and an enemy.

The ultimate consequences of one single sin staggers the imagination, and when the number of sinners and the sum of sin are considered, it is somewhat amazing that there is any happiness or amity left on earth. It is no wonder, therefore, that a prophet of God said that "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). "Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29 ASV).

God alone, who has an exhaustive understanding of sin, its nature and results, is competent to solve the problem. A sick man may know nothing of the causes of his disease, its diagnosis, or its cure, and it would be extremely foolish of him to refuse treatment until he learned as much about it as a trained physician. Yet there are sin-sick humans who will not avail themselves of the only cure for sin for the reason that they do not know as much about it as God does. The competent physician knows, and the patient cooperates by faith. God knows, and the patient must humbly submit to the will of God. This is surely sensible and right.

The cure for sin is in the blood of Christ. It is revealed as a **fact** to be accepted by faith. Human philosophy lends very little aid here, and it is not a problem for the scientist and his laboratory. "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21 ASV). The wisdom of God surveyed the possibilities and found the one solution—the death of Christ. Had anything less than this been adequate, we may conclude it would have been resorted to. The death of Christ made it possible for God to be just and at the same time justify the believer in Christ (Rom. 3:26). Beyond this, which is clearly revealed, speculations on "the atonement" have usually led to unhappy and confusing results.

But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:8-11 ASV).

This profound statement of the ground of redemption should be humbly accepted. "Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever" (Rev. 1:5-6 ASV).

Power and merit belong to God and flow unto sin's victims through divinely-appointed means. Man must, and can, exercise faith and any reader and believer of the word of God must know that there are conditions of faith to be performed by man. There is an apt illustration in Acts 8. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached the gospel to a multitude of sinners. We are told that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16-17). "But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:11-12 ASV). It is obvious that these baptized believers were saved, forgiven of all their sins. It may be depended on that all who do likewise will also be forgiven. Practically, then, here is an easy solution for the problem of sin, which is no more difficult than persuading the sinner to believe and accept it.

That none may be discouraged because of the greatness of his sin, it is recorded that even Simon, the wicked sorcerer, became a saved disciple. Some have doubted this and sought to disprove it, but unconvincingly, and obviously in defense of a false theory. It is said that "Simon also himself believed: and being baptized, he continued with Philip;

and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed” (Acts 8:13 ASV).

That Simon believed as, and what, the others did and was baptized as the others were is clear from the record. Surely, then, he availed himself of the same merciful offer of pardon the others accepted and was equally blessed. This involved nothing less than the full pardon of this guilty wretch. These aliens became citizens when their faith led them to baptism. “For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27 ASV). “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

There is a life to be lived following the forgiveness of the sinner. He is not promised unconditional immunity throughout his life as a child of God. God has solved the problem of sin which is present in the life of the believer, and the solution involves conditions to be performed on the part of the Christian. “My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2 ASV). “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9 ASV). Christians have constant and instant access to a throne of grace through Jesus as our High Priest.

The case of Simon sharpens this point. Simon sinned. An evil thought led him to seek to obtain the gift of God with money. He made this wicked proposition to Simon Peter and received a becoming rebuke, albeit a scathing one. He was told to repent and pray that he might be forgiven. This was not addressed to an alien, but to a baptized believer who had fallen headlong into sin. A modern preacher is doing some tragic wobbling when he applies this language of Peter to the unbaptized. “My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20 ASV). Yes, even the brethren may stand in need of conversion that they may be saved from “death.”

In Ephesians 5, Paul warns Christians against engaging in numerous sins he mentions by name. He warns them against becoming “partakers with the sons of disobedience.” He warns them that the wrath of God will surely be visited upon all such. “Let no man deceive you with empty words.” Should a false teacher come along and persuade these brethren that if they were true believers and had been once saved, they could never be lost regardless of what they did or with whom they became partakers, he would be deceiving them with “empty words.” The doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy is a deceptive theory of “empty words” which the New Testament condemns. Christians should avoid all such and devoutly accept the divine solution of the problem of sin.

A Dialogue on Sodomy, (Concluded)

Editor's Note: This is the last of two email dialogues that passed between a Christian and his friend who announced that he had embraced the sodomite lifestyle. The Christian is my son.

The Friend's Response

As far as discussing the specifics of the Bible I know them. The specific passages most commonly used by “Christians” to condemn homosexuals and support their prejudice and fear are listed below. The problem with this is that the passages are taken individually without reviewing the context in which they are being written. Almost any viewpoint can be supported by selectively choosing passages out of context.

To each passage I respond thus:

Genesis 19:1-5 (KJV) And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash

your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

My Response: The key word here is “know,” the translation of the word *Yada*. The best translation is indeed rape. The men of Sodom intended to rape the angels. When taken in context with other passages the sin here is not directly that a man is to engage in sex with another man, but instead the evil that is in the hearts of the citizens of Sodom and indeed with rape in general. Ezekiel 16:49-50 states: “Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, overabundance of food, prosperous ease, and idleness were hers and her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abominable offenses before Me.”

Leviticus 18:22 (KJV)

“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”

Leviticus 20:13 (KJV)

“If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”

My Response: For the two from Leviticus I will respond in combination. Both of these passages are taken from Levitical law. Laws that were to be followed by all Israelites until the Messiah established a new covenant. This new covenant was established when Jesus Christ died for our sins. To anyone who would quote these passages as support for their condemnation of me, I would ask them to explain how it is that they would enforce these Levitical laws only on homosexuals.

This attitude isn't new. Early Christians didn't want to let go of their “Laws” and were especially keen to enforce them on the Gentiles whom they considered an abomination (sound familiar?). It was Paul who pointed out that if any one tries to follow Levitical Law or enforce the Law upon others. God will hold us accountable for following each and every one of the Laws—no exceptions (Gal. 5:1-6).

If that were to happen then you would have to put your children to death for cursing or disobeying you, or kill someone for reading their horoscope. You could have as many wives as you wanted and if any of them cheated, they would have to be stoned to death. My point is this—“law” has no more bearing than all of the laws that are conveniently “left out” when using these passages to support the point of view that homosexuals are an abomination.

I also don't want to discount the intent behind such laws either. The intent of Levitical laws was to promote holiness, respect, family, and health. All four tenets are as valid in today's society as they were when the Levitical laws were written. Jesus responds to the nature of these laws in Matthew 22:34-40 ESV in which he replies to the question “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Jesus replies: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Deuteronomy. 23:17 (KJV)

“There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.”

My Response: To this passage I simply say that this one hinges entirely on translation. In the most widely used version, King James, translators used the word sodomite for the Hebrew word *Qadesh* as a generic term for what was then considered “unnatural” sex. Back in the start of the 17th century CE, when this version of the Bible was translated, the term “sodomite” referred to a person who engaged in what were then

called “unnatural” sexual acts of any type. This is further supported by other translations of the same passage never mentioning “sodomites.”

ESV: (English Standard Version): “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, and none of the sons of Israel shall be a cult prostitute.”

LB: (Living Bible): “No prostitutes are permitted in Israel, either men or women.”

NIV: (New International Version) “No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.”

NLT: (New Living Translation): “No Israelite man or woman may ever become a temple prostitute.”

RSV: (Revised Standard Version): “There shall be no cult prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute of the sons of Israel.”

1st Corinthians 6:9-10 (NAS): “Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Timothy 1:9-10 (NKJ)

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.

My Response: For both Corinthians and Timothy, the message here hinges on the translation definition of the Greek word *arsenokoitais*. This word is slang and has been translated as “sodomites” and as “abusers of themselves with mankind.” Neither is certain and therefore translation was ambiguous at best. To determine the true meaning behind the passage common sense and context must be used. God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

In an article by Paul R. Johnson for *Second Stone* magazine titled “A New Look at Arsenokoitais” (1994 January/February issue) he wrote,

The Greek compound term *arseno-koitais* literally means 'the male who has many beds.' The word *arsen* means 'male', the adjective *o* means 'the', and the term *koitais* is defined as 'many beds.' Thus, the entire phrase means a male with multiple bed-partners; a promiscuous man. Everywhere that the word *koitais* is used in the plural in the Bible denotes promiscuity. However, when the same word is used in the singular form, the Bible gives approval because the singular denotes monogamy.

The original Greek text describes the two behaviors as *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Although often translated by modern Bibles as “homosexual,” we can be fairly certain that this is not the meaning that Paul wanted to convey. If he had, he would have used the Greek word *paid-erasste*. That was the standard term at the time for male homosexuals. Thus common sense would conclude that he probably meant something different from persons who engaged in male-male adult sexual behavior and more likely towards promiscuity or selfish behavior (like that of the sodomites.)

Romans 1:21-31 (NAS) (excerpt)

...For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error...

My Response: In this passage the problem of course is, what is “natural”? The word “natural” comes from two Greek words *phusikos* and *phusis*. These words literally mean that which is a persons “natural disposition” and something that comes “instinctively” to them. In other words, it is who you are naturally; without reprogramming, counseling, or any other form of behavioral modification that attempts to change your

behavior to that which society has deemed acceptable.

So what is natural? This perhaps is the crux for anyone questioning whether or not homosexuality is a choice. So let's look at Paul's use of the Greek phrase *para physin* which in this case is translated (perhaps with bias) as "unnatural." But when used elsewhere in the Bible it is translated as "unconventional." In First Corinthians 11:14, Paul uses the phrase to refer to long hair on men as unusual and not ordinary. In Romans 11:24, Paul used it to describe God's positive actions to bring Jews and Gentiles together.

My point being, the term natural is subject to the inclination of the translator or even the person reading, however who is to say what is natural to God? We exist don't we? What is "natural" to me is not to you and vice versa. So how is that homosexuals have existed throughout time and exist in nature everywhere. It can only be because homosexuality is a naturally occurring phenomenon in nature, affecting every species including humans. For some reason, in God's magnificent plan of creation, He has planned us to be this way. "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God the Maker of all things" (Eccl. 11:5 NIV).

In closing, I did not take offense to any of your comments but I had to exercise my right to take exception. I also hope that you know that I am not taking aim at you and meant no offense in my response. I do still consider you a dear friend that I love, as I always have. You, as well, will always be welcome.

The Christian's Response To These Arguments

I admit that your letter forced me to study intensely what the passages you listed teach, and I like to think I did so with an open mind by considering that you may have been correct.

Genesis 19:1-5 You write that "The best translation [of *yada*] is indeed rape." Why? What linguistic scholar(s) maintains this? You can't just say that since the best translation is "rape," that "the men wished to rape the angels, and we know this because 'rape' is the best translation." That's begging the question.

Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by Vine, Unger and White lists several definitions for the English word "know" and its variations, but "rape" isn't one of them. According to page 130 of Vine, et al., "The 'knower' has actual involvement with or in the object of the knowing. In Gen. 4:1 Adam's knowing [*yada*] Eve also refers to direct contact with her in a sexual relationship." The context of the passage you cite does not warrant translating *yada* as "rape."

Yada is used in the context of rape in Judges 19:25. "But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go."

But the word *alal*, translated "abused," clarifies that rape is discussed. No such clarification exists in Genesis 19:5, and the context doesn't demand rape.

According to page 394 of *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, *yada* may involve sexual intercourse, but rape is not implied. That's why *alal* was added in the Judges passage. Passages in which rape is discussed:

1. Deuteronomy. 22:25—Rape is listed as punishable by death here. "But if a man force (*chazaq*) her, the man shall die."
2. Samuel 13:14, 22—Rape is also discussed using the English word "forced" which is translated from *anah*.
3. Lamentations 5:11—Rape is referred to as "ravished," also translated from *anah*.
4. Isaiah 13:16; Zechariah 14:2—Rape is also referred to as "ravished," though translated from *shagal*.

If rape was the sin under consideration in Genesis 19:5, any of these three words above could have been used. Or *alal* could have been added to explain the non-consensual nature of *yada*, but it wasn't.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

You write that these were,

...taken from Levitical law. Laws that were to be followed by all Israelites until the Messiah established a new covenant... To anyone who would quote these passages as support for their condemnation of me, I would ask them to explain how it is that they would enforce these Levitical laws only on homosexuals... My point is, this 'law' has no more bearing than all of the laws that are conveniently 'left out' when using these passages to support the point of view that homosexuals are an abomination...

You seem to concede that God condemned homosexuality under the Law of Moses, but you maintain that the prohibition isn't applicable under Christ's covenant. Is this correct? Question: If you do concede that homosexuality was condemned under the Law of Moses, how could God make certain people that way, and then condemn them for it? That would make Him arbitrary and cruel.

Though the Law of Moses isn't applicable today, couldn't this be a lesson for us regarding God's view of homosexuality? God's moral law preceded and succeeded the Law of Moses. An example is God's prohibition of murder in Genesis 9:6 before the Law of Moses was given and in force. It was wrong to murder before the Law of Moses, and it's still wrong after the Law of Moses.

Both Leviticus passages refer to homosexuality as “abomination.” According to Ezekiel 16:50—a passage you cited—Sodom was destroyed for “abominable offense.”

Deuteronomy 23:17

You write “To this passage I simply say that this one hinges entirely on translation.” The translation in question is of the word *qadash*. The definition: “a male prostitute” (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). Certainly promiscuity is condemned, but so is any type of homosexual activity, monogamous or not (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13).

1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:9-1

The Greek word translated “effeminate” in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is *malakos*. According to *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, this means “of a catamite, a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness.” A catamite was a homosexual—specifically “a boy who has a sexual relationship with a man” according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. So the “unnatural lewdness” refers to homosexuality.

The same lexicon gives the following definition for the Greek word *arsenokoites*: “one who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite.” The emphasis is on what is forbidden is any sexual activity between males.

The context indicates “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV), “homosexuals” (NAS) isn't dealing with promiscuity. Paul has already addressed “fornication”—general sexual sin—and “adultery”—sex with someone besides your spouse. The next two terms/phrases deal with a different class of sexual sin—homosexual sin.

Romans 1:21-31

You write, “In this passage the problem of course is, what is 'natural'? . . . These words literally mean that which is a persons 'natural disposition' and something that comes 'instinctively' to them... So what is natural?... What is 'natural' to me is not to you and vice versa...”

Regardless of what “natural” means, what is condemned in Romans 1:26-27 is men leaving women for men and women leaving men for women. Obviously homosexuality is under consideration.

What is “natural”? The word in these two verses is defined by Thayer as “agreeable to nature.” The context indicates it is natural for men and women to share a marital/sexual relationship. It doesn't indicate that what is natural for one person isn't for another, and what is sinful is not being true to yourself. Look at the context—men leaving women for the same sex and vice versa is under consideration and condemned.

God made man, then made woman for him. The man and woman are to come together and “be one flesh.” Man and man are not. The same is true for woman and woman. Considering this is the only way for the species to continue—the compatibility of the male and female reproductive organs illustrates this—it's what God designed as natural.

This is why Jesus gave His divine stamp of approval to this (male and female) marriage arrangement as God instituted it (Matt. 19:4-6). Nowhere in the Bible is divine approval given to homosexuality, to two women or two men becoming “one flesh.” It's always—and only—a man and a woman.

We don't read of any homosexual Christians in the New Testament. It's never spoken of as an acceptable lifestyle, and there are no examples in the Bible of homosexuals acceptably serving God.

Paul addresses the husband-wife relationship in Ephesians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:18-19. Homosexuals existed, so why isn't the husband-husband or wife-wife relationship ever addressed, if God approves of homosexuality?

Children are commanded to obey their parents in the New Testament. Paul even references the 5th commandment to honor father and mother (Eph. 6:1-2). Marriage and the family all revolve around man and woman coming together. That's God's plan. That's what's natural. Men turning to men and women turning to women for the marital/sexual relationship is not.

Conclusion

I would like to get back to your assertion that the Bible is fallible. If it is, why go to the pains to exegete passages of the book to make your case? If it's errant, why bother? Which parts of the Bible are true, and which are false? Could it be that you've attempted to harmonize God's word with the lifestyle you've chosen? To do so takes some extreme contorting of passages to make them mean, or not mean, what you wish.

You are interpreting passages from the viewpoint that God created you as a homosexual, so He must approve of the lifestyle. But set aside the issue of whether you were born a homosexual and consider this: Is it possible, just possible, that you've **chosen** this lifestyle? Is it even possible that psychological and emotional factors played a role in the emergence of this form of sexuality? If you grant the intellectually honest position and concede just the possibility that homosexuality is a choice and not the result of genetics, the biblical evidence opposing homosexuality appears strong and clear.

Again, I hope you receive this in the spirit in which it is intended. I have your best spiritual interest at heart.

Editor's Note: The friend never replied following the Christian's response.

What About the Baptism of Jesus Christ?

Nana Yaw Aidoo

Recently, this writer came across a meme that appealed to the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in order to deny the Bible's teaching that baptism is required before a person can receive salvation. The meme carried this quote: “If baptism was required for salvation, then why was Jesus baptized since He is God, was sinless, and didn't need saving?”

You would notice that inherent in this quote is the implication that we are baptized for the same reason(s) as our Lord Jesus Christ. This position is erroneous and thus it justifies a response.

Why was Jesus Christ Baptized?

When John the Baptizer appeared on the scene, it is written that “...he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” (Luke 3:3). As a result of his preaching, “...there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Mark 1:5). Clearly, John's baptism had to do with the sins of the people.

However, friends, the Bible is clear in its teaching that Jesus Christ had no sin. The apostle Peter wrote: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:21-22).

Our Lord was the epitome of sinless perfection. He “was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15). Therefore, since John’s baptism had to do with the sins of the people, and since Jesus Christ had no sin, then it follows that John’s baptism of Jesus Christ was for all intents and purposes, a very unique incident.

Why was Jesus Christ baptized? Two reasons readily stand out from the gospel accounts. Jesus Christ was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15) and to enable John identify Him as the Son of God so as to “manifest to Israel” that the Christ of whom the prophets spoke had come (John 1:29-34).

Are We Baptized for the Same Reasons as Jesus Christ?

The quote so implies. We **deny** that it is so.

Notice if you would that Matthew records that John was hesitant to baptize Christ when our Lord went to him to be baptized (Matt. 3:14). Even though John hadn’t come to a full understanding of who Christ was at this time, he knew enough to conclude that he was not in position to baptize Him. Since John’s baptism was for sinners, then John’s hesitancy was as if to say; “What! Shall the Master come for baptism to the servant—the sinless Saviour to a sinner?” (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown*). Jesus Christ in response to John’s hesitancy told the Baptizer to “...suffer it to be so now...” (Matt. 3:15).

The word “suffer” in the text means “allow.” What this means is that John was to make an allowance or an exception. And he was to make the allowance “now.” The *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown* commentary has this explanation; “Let it pass for the present.” For that very moment, John was to make an exception. Jesus Christ did not tell John to suffer it to be so “from this time forth.” Rather, He told John to suffer it to be so “**now**.” The exception was for that very moment in time and that very moment in time alone. Why? Because “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23) with the exception of Christ.

Honesty and a love for the truth demand we admit that since our Lord was sinless and we are not, then the reasons our Lord was baptized are not and cannot be the same reasons why we are baptized today.

Why Are We Baptized?

Unlike Jesus Christ, we have sinned. And because we have sinned, the Bible tells us that we are to be baptized “unto the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38 ASV), to wash away our sins (Acts 22:16) and to receive salvation from our sins (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). All who deny that baptism has such a design are still faced with the Bible’s assertion that baptism puts us “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). This, my friends, is why we earnestly contend that no one can be saved who has not been baptized because no one can be saved outside of Christ (Eph. 1:3, 7; 2 Tim. 2:10). If baptism puts us into Christ, which is the sphere of salvation, then we don’t hesitate to say with the apostle, “... baptism doth also now save us...”

Conclusion

We do not deny that Christ is God, was sinless, and didn’t need saving. We however **deny** that we are baptized for the **same reason(s)** He was. Because He was sinless and didn’t need saving, His baptism was an exception from the norm. On the other hand, it is the case that we are not sinless and so we need saving. And the Bible teaches plainly that baptism is the point at which we receive that salvation as our Lord Himself said; “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

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The New Testament—Our Guide

J.D. Tant

When the church was established and began to work, Paul wrote 14 letters to churches and preachers telling them how to live. James wrote one letter, Peter two, John three, and Jude one. These are all letters of church discipline and government, telling church members how to live.

The last book in the New Testament was written by John. The Revelation not only tells of the past and the present in the first century, but crosses the river of death and tells us of the future home God has prepared for those who love Him and do His commandments. He tells us that on the other side of the river of death there is no night, but one eternal day; no sickness, sorrow, pain, or death. The river of life and the tree of life are found there. So the New Testament—properly divided, read, understood, and obeyed—is a safe guide to lead us into the city whose Builder and Maker is God.

In summary, there are 27 books in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell me what I **must believe** in order to be saved. Acts of Apostles tells me what I **must do** to be saved. The 21 letters of Christian instruction that follow tell me how I **must live** and work **after** I am saved in order to finally reach the heavenly home we read about in the last book of the Bible.

My brethren are often condemned for preaching so much in Acts of Apostles, but this will be our leading book as long as we teach salvation to a dying world, for this is where we find the plan of salvation first taught by the apostles after they had Holy Ghost baptism which qualified them to preach the gospel to all the world. As long as we teach the same things the apostles taught them to do, we are sure we are teaching the word of God, and we are also sure we will be rewarded at the last day for so doing. So, let all be satisfied with the simple word of God, to teach and fight it out along that line, knowing that if we do this, heaven will be our home.

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Judging Oneself Unworthy of Eternal Life (Acts 13:38-46)

Kent Bailey

New Testament Christianity is a taught religion. Because such is the case, proper knowledge is essentially connected to that of following truth. Because one must as an individual must believe and obey God's truth freedom of personal choice is a crucial concept that one must personally exercise (John 6:44-45). God thus has procreated us when we reached a specific point in our lives in becoming accountable or responsible for our actions to have the capacity to use our reasoning abilities to ascertain truth and in so understanding such to believe and obey such, thus becoming Christians—members of the church of Christ.

Because God through His love has made adequate provisions for our Salvation, and because Christ through His love and devotion paid the ultimate sin debt for us to obtain Salvation does not mean that all accountable sinners will believe and obey the conditions to be saved from their sins. Given the fact that we are free moral agents in the decisions that we make there have been and always will be those who reject both the facts and conditions of the gospel and thus refuse to obey such.

As we carefully study Acts 13:14-51 we read of such a situation that developed in the preaching of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia. As they came into this community they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. After the reading of the law the rulers of the synagogue gave them the opportunity to present a word of exhortation to those gathered there.

The record in Acts 13 informs us that Paul stood up and gave a summary of Old Testa-

ment History as it related to National Israel regarding its formation and the scheme of Redemption that would be offered to the world as it would come through Christ. Paul, with great power demonstrated that Christ was revealed in the person of Jesus; how His work was prepared by John, how He confirmed His Deity by his death, burial, and resurrection from death.

At the conclusion of this sermon the Jews left the synagogue and the Gentiles besought Paul and Barnabas to remain another week and engage in additional preaching that related to the gospel. The next Sabbath day brought the city together to hear God's truth. The Jews were moved with envy and opposed the gospel of Christ. By divine inspiration Paul spoke to them stating that they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.

This same action in the minds of rejecters of truth happens today when upon hearing the gospel moves individuals of their freedom of choice to reject the opportunity of salvation in Christ that God grants unto all accountable individuals through the Gospel. Let us consider how individuals judge themselves unworthy of eternal life.

One judges self unworthy by refusing to be an honest hearer. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). The word of God is truth (John 17:17). Yet if one is unwilling to look at God's truth in an honest way one's personal dishonesty will bring about self condemnation (Acts 13:44; Matt. 13:15; Luke 8:15).

One judges self unworthy by refusing to discern the reality of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ. The Old Testament prophecies regarding Christ are clear. It is beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Old Testament prophets spoke about Jesus of Nazareth. In Acts 13:32-42 the evidence was made clear that such applied to Jesus as the Christ. The ultimate evidence was His resurrection from death (2 Cor. 3:12-15).

One judges self unworthy of eternal life by the sin of envy. Envy has always been a great problem leading to sin. Such was the case after creation regarding Satan, who envied God. Such was the case during the personal ministry of Christ and during the first century regarding the preaching of the gospel and such is also the case today. Envy involves strong displeasure regarding the advantage or prosperity of others (Acts 13:45; Matt. 27:18; Gal. 5:21).

One judges self unworthy of eternal life in speaking against the word of God. Such is opposition to the truth (John 8:32; 17:17; Luke 10:16; Acts 13:45; 19:9). Speaking against the word of God is speaking against God.

One judges self unworthy of eternal life in contradicting and blaspheming the truth of God. Contradicting and blaspheming the truth of God means to verbally oppose and speak in a way that one rails against truth as demonstrating an attitude of hatred for such, Such indeed is a grievous sin (Acts 17:45; 18:6; 13:50; 1 Tim. 1:19-20).

One judges self unworthy of eternal life by denying his God-given privilege of acceptance, obedience, and faithfulness to the gospel. Consider the great price that has been paid for the salvation of humanity (Heb. 2:1-9; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16-17; 10:12-13). We injure God when we sin against Him. To deny one's God-given right to the gospel only adds insult to the original injury. Can one fully comprehend the righteous fury and terrible punishment that awaits all who will never accept, obey, or remain faithful to the gospel of Christ?

One judges self unworthy of eternal life by putting the word of God from him. When we discuss the concept of putting the word of God from the life of any individual we are not discussing only a failure to accept, obey, and/or be faithful to such; we are discussing a complete rejection, repudiation, and a turning away from the truth that is irreparable. Such is a total rejection of truth where he can **never** receive or obey such (Acts 7:51; 13:46). One in such a condition can **never** be saved from sin as he has burned his last bridge.

Giving Fuel to the Atheist's Fire

David Ray

theists don't believe in God or any higher power outside of the universe that could have created the universe. Oftentimes they aren't content to just disbelieve, but are antagonistic toward those who do believe. They hate a God they don't believe in and are intent on proving that He doesn't exist (i.e., proving the unprovable). Sadly, there are several ways in which those who profess belief in God actually add fuel to the atheist's fire. Here are a few.

Violence in the Name of Christianity

Every act of violence in the name of Christianity has only done harm to the cause of Christ. Most notably throughout history would have to be the Crusades during the medieval period. Never did Christ or any of His inspired apostles command Christians to conquer land, even the alleged "Holy Land" of Jerusalem. Such military actions can never be harmonized with passages like John 18:36, Romans 12:18, and Hebrews 12:14, and have given atheists unmerited ammunition against God.

Today, misguided "believers" commit criminal acts in the name of Christ, such as setting fire to abortion clinics. No words can properly express the hatred we should feel for the murder of innocent babies in their mothers' wombs (and now even **outside** the womb); but this in no way justifies such unauthorized retaliation, and, in the eyes of the atheist, only brings Christians down to their worldly level.

While most of us don't go on crusades or blow up Planned Parenthood offices, do we get angry and hateful toward those who oppose us, returning hate for hate instead of overcoming evil with good (Rom. 12:21)?

Religious Error

There are many erroneous views among professed believers regarding Christianity and the Bible, many of which are so opposed to the Bible's teaching that even atheists can recognize this and use them against what they perceive to be Christianity.

For example, Calvinism attributes to God everything that happens in life (including the salvation or damnation of every soul, regardless of a person's actions). This results in the view that "everything happens for a reason" (i.e., every single thing that happens in this life is exactly what God desires and even causes to happen). This is demonstrably false: e.g., sin abounds in the world, but God hates it; it's a violation of His law and He cannot and will not be part of it (cf. 1 John 3:4; Hab. 1:13). Therefore, He never desires it, is never pleased with it, and would certainly never cause it! This shows that when bad things happen (i.e., sin), they're the result of **man's** doing, not God's.

However, the atheist, or really anyone thinking logically, can rightly conclude, based on Calvinism's claims, that God is to blame for everything bad that happens in the world (and there are **lots** of bad things happening), most significantly the eventual destruction of the lost in Hell. An atheist might conclude "why would I follow a God who, regardless of my actions, good or bad, may condemn me to die in Hell?"

According to Calvinism, the Christian has no response other than to say "it is not within the creature's jurisdiction to call into question the justice of the Creator for not choosing everyone for salvation" (Steele et al. 28). In other words, "Mr. Atheist...you're right!" That's more fuel for the atheist's fire, even though he and the Calvinist are dead wrong on this view (cf. Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13; and every other passage that teaches that God is no respecter of persons and that a man's actions **do matter**)!

There's also the view that faith is believing something to be true without having any real, tangible evidence. It ought to be obvious how self-defeating this view is, and how easily an atheist can use this against those who believe it, claiming "atheists believe facts; Christians believe myths!"

But true Christians know that faith is based on evidence. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17); and the Bible gives the honest reader ample evidence of its Divine origins, stating scientific facts thousands of years before mankind had the ability to know them, as well as providing numerous detailed

prophecies, **accurate** predictions of future events, something mankind is incapable of doing on its own. The Bible provides irrefutable evidence of the existence of God and therefore can be trusted to guide our souls away from Hell and to Heaven.

Religious Division

How many times have we heard atheists with whom we are trying to study the Bible bring up religious division as an excuse not to pursue Christianity? They say things like “why should I be a Christian when Christians can’t even agree?” Although these folks have a faulty understanding of who is and isn’t a Christian, their point is not without merit. Think of all the good that could be done in the world if all those who claim Christianity actually were Christians and were unified!

Paul commanded in 1 Corinthians 1:10 “that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Unity among believers is commanded and could do so much to counteract the efforts of atheism in our world.

Faithful Christians cannot control what ignorant and/or disobedient believers say and do. But we must be cognizant of the damage that they cause and make every effort to teach them the truth. We must also lovingly show the atheist that all these additional fuels for his fire only destroy the **false** ideas about Christianity, not true biblical Christianity.

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“What Wilt Thou Have Me...?”

G.L. Mann

From the lips of man has never come a greater question than that above. It concerns the salvation of man's soul. This question was asked by Saul when halted by the Lord on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there and make havoc of the church of Christ. Saul was a zealous persecutor and had been engaged in that business for some time. He believed that Christians were wrong and was making every effort to abolish Christianity.

Before beginning his journey to Damascus, he went to the high priest in Jerusalem, “And desired of him letters, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring the bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2).

On the way, the great persecutor was halted by the Lord. “There shined round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said who art thou Lord? And the Lord said I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 9:3-5). It was while Saul lay prostrate on the ground that he asked the Lord this great question. He thought he was doing right in persecuting Christians (Acts 26:9). Realizing that he was wrong, he inquired of the Lord, “What wilt thou have me to do?”

The thing Saul wanted to know was what to do to be saved from his sins. The Lord did not tell him he was already saved, or that there was nothing for him to do to be saved. Christ told him to arise and go into the city and there it would be told him what he **must do**.

Was Saul a believer at this time? Yes. He had seen the Lord and heard Him say, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Was he saved the moment he believed? No. It was after this that he asked the Lord what He would have him to do. If Saul was saved the moment he believed—according to the false doctrine of salvation by “faith alone”—he had a “better-felt-than-told feeling of salvation.” But neither he nor the Lord mentioned such a thing in their conversation. Therefore he was **not** saved the moment he believed (Jas. 2:24).

Saul became a penitent man at this time. His purpose, or will, was changed. Before being halted by the Lord, Saul was thinking of what **he** was going to do. But now it is, “What wilt **thou** have me to do?”

But he was not yet saved from his sins. Jesus said, “Go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou **must** do.” The **Lord** did not tell him what he must do because the preaching of the gospel is committed to men (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2). Neither deity nor angels ever told a man what to do to be saved in the book of Acts.

Saul went into Damascus as directed and was there praying for three days and three nights and did neither eat nor drink, and was still in his sins. The Lord did not forgive him as a result of his prayer. There was still something for him to **do**. In a vision, Christ instructed Ananias, a disciple, to go to Saul for the purpose of telling him what to do to be saved from his sins. Ananias said unto him, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

Do you think the Lord would have sent a man who would not tell him the truth? This is the only thing he was told to do. Therefore this is the thing Christ said he **must** do. Salvation is in Christ (Acts 4:12; Eph. 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:10). Saul was **out of Christ**, though at that time he was a penitent believer. Baptism is the door through which we enter into Christ (Gal. 3:27). Saul was baptized into Christ and saved from his sins (Mark 16:16).

Many people say if they are ever saved, they will be saved just like Saul of Tarsus. That's true. One must take the same steps as did Saul, but one who expects the Lord to come and speak to him in a miraculous way and forgive his sins is sadly mistaken. The Lord did not do this for Saul.

If you will read Acts 26:16-18, you will learn the purpose for which Christ appeared to Saul. Christ never made such an appearance to anyone to save them from their sins.

Satan's Best Servants

Jerry C. Brewer

There are only two spiritual kingdoms in the world—Christ's and Satan's—and a great war rages between those two kingdoms for the souls of men. The servants of Jesus Christ call men to faith in Him, repentance of their sins, confession of Him, and baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). That is the **only way** to enter the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47). When one does those things he is delivered from the power of darkness (Satan's kingdom) and translated into Christ's (Col. 1:13).

Satan isn't concerned about one who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God because even “the devils also believe and tremble” (Jas. 2:19). Neither is Satan concerned if one wants to confess that belief. The demons who possessed the Gergesenes confessed Him: “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?” (Matt. 8:29). Nor is Satan concerned if a person is religious and lives a good moral life. Cornelius was described as, “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). But despite this, Cornelius was lost (Acts 10:4-6; 11:13-14).

Belief in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24), repentance of one's sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31), and confession of Him as the Son of God (Acts 8:37), are all necessary requisites of baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). But one can do all of those requisites without leaving Satan's kingdom and entering Christ's because neither faith, repentance, nor confession crosses that line between the two kingdoms. It is only in baptism that one leaves Satan's kingdom and enters into Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27). That is **why** Satan works so hard to prevent sinners from being baptized, and that is where Satan's **best servants** do his work.

There is only one way to heaven (John 14:6) but many ways to hell and Paul lists a number of ways one can travel that broad way that Jesus described in Matthew 7:13-14:

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

Those who practice such things are great servants of Satan, but they are **not** his **best servants**. It is not likely that a fornicator, an idolater, a sodomite, thief, a covetous person, a drunkard, a reviler, or an extortioner is concerned if one wants to be baptized for the remission of sins. Who then **are** Satan's best servants? They are the preachers and practitioners of denominational religions. They are the **pretenders** to Christianity who sweetly woo the unsuspecting and Biblically ignorant individual who inquires of them about becoming a Christian. Paul also described denominational preachers and practitioners:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as ministers of righteousness; whose ends shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Like the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians—the denominational industry of Jesus' day—who hated one another, but ignored their differences and formed an alliance against the Lord (Matt. 22:15-33), Satan's servants in denominations today band together to oppose the Lord's command to be baptized for the remission of sins. These modern religionists are ministers of Satan, doing his work of sending souls to hell, and, because they are transformed into "ministers of righteousness" multitudes of sincere, misguided people fall prey to their lies. Let me relate a classic example of this.

I knew a woman who was one of the sweetest, kindest, most morally upright persons I have ever known. She was a very strong and devout Pentecostal who married a Baptist preacher's son and led him into her religion. She was the unchallenged spiritual leader of her family and her doctrine was accepted without question by her children and grandchildren.

This woman died in 1967 and her mantle descended upon her third child—a daughter. This daughter was like her mother in all of her kind, sweet ways. She was morally upright, loving, tender, and devoutly Pentecostal, believing she was "touched" by the Holy Spirit, and raised a son who became an Assembly of God preacher. Consequently, her brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, grandchildren—except one niece and one great-nephew—continued to look to her for spiritual guidance, never questioning her Pentecostal doctrine.

Her niece became a Christian in 1966. Many years later, her great-nephew became a Christian. Knowing that his parents were lost souls in his aunt's religion, he attempted to persuade his father to be baptized into Christ as his father suffered from a terminal illness. He asked me to call his father and talk with him about being baptized, which I did. But he did not believe he had to be baptized. His wife had "talked to the family" and "the family" (the aunt) had told him he did not need to be baptized since he had been "saved" in a denomination. The aunt, who was one of Satan's very best servants, had done her master's evil work. He never entered into Christ.

A morally upright person who wants to be a Christian and do what is right to go to heaven has no problem rejecting the advice of those whom Paul described in First Corinthians 6:9-10, but can easily fall prey to the servants of Satan described in Second Corinthians 11:13-15. A little lie mixed with a truth is far more dangerous to the soul than outright falsehood. Satan added one small lie to God's prohibition to Adam and Eve. God told them, "...of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17) God had said, "thou shalt surely die" but Satan inserted a single three letter word, saying, "Ye shall not surely die" and ruined the human race (Gen. 3:4).

Satan's **best** servants are **not** hedonists, atheists, idolaters, sodomites, drunkards, thieves, murderers, pornographers, or wiccans. His **best servants** are the morally upright, sincere **preachers and practitioners of denominational religion** in every

town in every country in the world who rail against baptism for the remission of sins. Satan's **best servants** are morally upright people who tell you that salvation comes by praying a “sinners’ prayer” or by “faith only” and that baptism “is not necessary for salvation.” Like the two women we described, they may be as sincere as Saul of Tarsus who served God in good conscience while persecuting Christians (Acts 23:1), and sincerely thought he should oppose Christ (Acts 26:9), but they are servants of Satan—his **very best**.

Baptism

Jess Whitlock

In Ephesians 4:5 we read, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Almost the entire religious world will agree that there is one LORD. It is amazing that virtually the entire denominational and interdenominational world disagree with the simple statement that there is **one faith** and **one baptism**. The apostle Paul wrote those inspired words circa A.D. 62. The one baptism of which he wrote is the baptism of the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why should one be baptized into Christ? Baptism cleanses our sin by the washing of water (Eph. 5:26). We are baptized into the name of the Godhead (Matt. 28:19.) Because it is **for** the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Baptism does **now** save us (1 Pet. 3:21). To have all past sins washed away (Acts 22:16). We must be baptized into the name of Christ (Acts 10:48). Then, we can walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Baptism is essential for one to be saved from sin (Mark 16:16). Baptism is the only way to get **into Christ** (Rom. 6:3-4 and Gal. 3:27).

Regarding that latter point, I recall my first public debate. I had signed to affirm the proposition that, “The Scriptures teach that water baptism to the penitent believer is for (in order to obtain) the remission of sins.” One of my charts reflected the fact that in New Testament baptism that we are baptized **into Christ**. To support that statement I had printed in large and bold letters: **Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27**. The arguments presented, in the words of the late brother J.T. Marlin, were “ungetoverable.” My Baptist opponent, Mr. Ballard, contended that I had only used two Scripture references in proving that point. He further argued that the reason that I did not use more than those two cited references, was because I did not have more! You know something, he was absolutely right. In my next rebuttal speech I asked my opponent, “How many times does God have to utter a statement to make that statement true?” We had a brief discussion about the term “gopher wood” which is found one time, and only one time in the entire Bible! Then I reminded my opponent that we were still waiting for just **one** Scripture reference from him that would demonstrate that the **one** baptism of the New Testament is **not** for the remission of sins! On that point, he remained as silent as the proverbial tomb!

One is not saved until after he has been baptized **into Christ for** the remission of sins. One hundred forty nine of the ripest scholars the world has ever known (KJV and ASV of 1901) affirm this Truth.

In Matthew 26:28 We notice that Christ Jesus shed His blood “for the remission of sins...” Then, in Acts 2:38 we take note that one must repent and be baptized in His name “for the remission of sins...” If one argues, as my opponent did, that the English word “for” in Acts 2:38 means: “because of, or on account of, or in order to declare...” then it must mean the very same thing in Matthew 26:28, and if not, then why not?

In 1 Peter 3:21 the inspired Peter states, “the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” On the first night of that debate I placed a portion of that Scripture on a blackboard, i.e. “baptism doth also [**now/not**] save us...” I challenged my opponent to erase the word that did not belong in that inspired statement. I pressed him on that in every speech delivered. He continually ignored the blackboard and its message. In his final speech on the final night of that debate, he finally walked over to the blackboard and erased the word

“not.” As he walked away he muttered that he did not see what all the big deal was about that. Also, as he walked away from the board this message glared at him: **“Baptism doth now also save us...”** In my closing speech I told the audience what the big deal was about my opponent’s actions. I re-read the proposition that he was affirming: “The Scriptures teach that water baptism to the penitent believer is **not** for (in order to obtain) the remission of sins” (emphasis mine—JW). I explained to the audience that when Mr. Ballard erased the word **“not”** he had given up his proposition and indeed, he had!

How many today still try to pervert the reading of 1 Peter 3:21 to make Peter seem to say, “Baptism doth also **not** save us...”? Have you obeyed the teaching of Christ and His holy apostles by being baptized into the name of Christ **for** the remission of sins? If not, “...now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

A Time to Remember

Marvin L. Weir

The account is one that is well known and preserved in Holy Writ. Most people, however, pay very little attention to the tremendous principles the incident so forthrightly reveals. A poor beggar by the name of Lazarus, while living in this world, had a difficult time finding food to sustain himself. He was in need of not only food but clothing and medical attention (Luke 19:20-21). Lazarus died without receiving the help that he so badly needed.

A wealthy man who lived in the same locale as Lazarus had everything his heart desired. The Scriptures record: “he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day” (16:19). The only thing the rich man seemed to **not** feast upon was the Word of God. His riches, however, could not prevent the chilling hand of death, and he too passed from this life. We will do likewise one day, so let us remember!

Death in many ways is the great equalizer! It has an unique way of bringing everyone to a common level. Please observe that situations **can** and often **do** change after death. The rich man after death desires to be attended to (wanting Lazarus to cool his tongue with water) by the very one he did not take time to show mercy to while on earth (16:24). One thing is for certain—not all will be in death as it has been in this world! We need to remember this truth.

Things that were unimportant while living take on tremendous importance after death. The rich man died but did not lose his ability to remember and to feel pain. It is **not** true that at the moment of death nothing else matters! The rich man after death is very conscious of **right** and **wrong**. Righteousness now becomes important, and he desires to warn his five brothers in an attempt to keep them from suffering his fate.

But the rich man is too late! Some things are impossible! Once the hands of time have wound down, one will not be able to do good deeds or influence others for the cause of Christ. Abraham said,

They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead (Luke 16:29-31).

This principle is still true today. Some say they would believe and obey if Jesus were back on earth. The Lord's answer: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say” (Luke 6:46)?

Things can change dramatically from one second before death to one second after death. Lazarus' living conditions were deplorable while on earth but upon death he is comfortable in Abraham's bosom. The rich man was living “high on the hog” in this life, but upon death he was in immediate “anguish in this flame” (16:24).

There are many folk today who will never obey the precious gospel. For whatever reason, they simply never submit to the Lord's will (Matt. 7:21). Perhaps some people in-

tend to obey the gospel, but they are waiting—perhaps waiting only for a time to remember. How tragic if such is the case!

Some who profess to be members of the body of Christ are not faithful (cf. Matt. 6:33; Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 15:58). Lip service only is given to loving the Lord with all their heart, soul and mind (Matt. 22:37). These folk are at the worship of the church **only** when it is convenient and they have the time. They are not interested in availing themselves of **Bible classes** and evening worship to further their knowledge of the Scriptures. One day there will be plenty of time for them to remember.

Other people live in willful sin. They drink, steal, embezzle, lie, dance, gamble, and commit fornication. Many divorce their God-given mates for some trivial (non-Scriptural) reason only to marry another and live in adultery (Matt. 19:6, 9). Yes, one can **live** in sin (Col. 3:7)! Those who practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (cf. Gal. 5:19-21). The Scriptures do not matter to many people now, but one day the **Bible will** matter—and they will remember.

God's Word is truth (John 17:17). The same truth or Word will be our judge in that Day (John 12:48). But truth is rejected, neglected, or conveniently overlooked by many brethren and the majority of people in this world. One day these folk will have the **time to remember**, but like the rich man, the memory will only bring eternal torment.

Our memories in the hereafter will either torture or comfort us throughout eternity. What are you doing **now** to **prepare** for those memories? One cannot begin too early in life to prepare for eternity. God affirms this truth in saying, “Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccl. 12:1).

The Uniqueness of Jesus, No. 1

Ron Cosby

Jesus Christ is the greatest person who ever lived. His moral character, His teachings and His influence upon history demonstrate that He is indeed unparalleled.

His Pre-existence

No human can claim that which is true concerning Jesus. He existed before He was born in Bethlehem. Jesus is not simply unique, but He is unique in that He is God, God in the flesh.

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8 ASV).

Jesus' pre-existence is taught in prophecy. God did not wait until the Lord was born to declare the Messiah's eternal existence. Micah 5:2 (ASV) made known that Jesus has existed from eternity to eternity, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah...out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” In the early days of the Lord, scribes quoted and applied this verse to Jesus (Matt. 2).

Jesus' pre-existence is taught in His being **before** Abraham and being **I AM**: “Jesus said...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was born, **I AM**. They took up stones therefore to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple” (John 8:58-59 ASV). Contrast the concept “Abraham was” with “I am.” One has accurately noted, “Jesus' life was from and to eternity. Hence the formula for **absolute, timeless** existence, **I am**.” The Jews' reaction demonstrates they knew He was claiming to be deity—eternal.

Jesus' pre-existence, and therefore His deity, is taught in the magnificent declaration that He created the heavens and the earth (John 1:1-3 ASV): “In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.” Nothing was created without Him, no tree, no earth, no moon, and no angel. Jesus is from everlasting unto everlasting. He is not a created being; He is deity.

The facts are these: The Word was in the beginning **with** deity because He **is** deity, and God has no beginning or end. Because man needed to be redeemed, the Word left the comforts of heaven and was born in the flesh of the virgin Mary. When the shepherds and the wise men looked upon Jesus, they looked upon God. They worshipped God.

Though He is no longer on the earth, Jesus is **still God**, and He is still the Savior of the world. Is He your Savior?

His Birth

The declaration of the angels indicates that there was something unique about Jesus.

And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased (Luke 2:7-15).

You knew there was something unique about Jesus when the wise men sought to worship Him (Matt. 2:11). Jesus is unique because He was born of a virgin. Isaiah predicted, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). *Almah* is translated *virgin*. Seeking to cast doubt on the Bible and the Lord, modern versions mistranslate this passage, saying “the young woman is with child.” Folks, there is nothing unusual about a young woman or maiden being with child. How could a young woman who is not a virgin being with child be a “sign” as Isaiah predicted? Matthew gives an inspired commentary on Isaiah's prophecy by quoting and applying the passage to Jesus (Matt. 1:22-23). Matthew uses a Greek word that means *virgin*. If that is not enough, he adds, “[Joseph] knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS” (Matt. 1:25).

Jesus is so unique that supposed believers doubt the virgin birth. “I do not believe in the Virgin Birth and hope that none of you do” (Harry Emerson Fosdick, spoken from the pulpit of the Riverside Church in New York City). Hmmm! Mr. Fosdick **knows** Jesus was not born of a virgin because he was not there?

Fortunately, we do have eyewitnesses to Jesus' unique birth. The Angel of God who spoke to Mary declared it (Luke 1:30-35). Mary's response of not “having known a man” declares it. The Angel of God to Joseph declared it (Matt. 1:18-25). Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Elisabeth declared it (Luke 1:41-45). When we compare the integrity of the eyewitnesses to that of Mr. Fosdick—well, there is no comparison. God did indeed make Jesus like unto His brethren to save them (Heb. 2:14-18). Someone has properly said, “If God wanted to relate ultimately to us, if God wanted to show us love, acceptance and compassion, if God wanted to express an understanding of all we go through, God's only option was to become one of us!” He did indeed become one of us.

His Childhood

Even the childhood of Jesus demonstrated that He was unique. Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the Father when He was 40 days old (Luke 2). Shortly thereafter, they fled to Egypt, where He lived for a few months (Luke 2). The next account of His childhood is when Mary and Joseph found Him in the temple at the age of twelve. He was intelligently conversing with the spiritual elite of His day (Luke 2:41-51). Each of these events has elements that show the uniqueness of Jesus.

Lacking further divine narration concerning the childhood of Jesus, some have felt compelled to invent foolish stories. From a second century contrivance, we hear that a five-year-old Jesus took the life of a playmate because the child supposedly dispersed pools of water that Jesus had gathered. Centuries later, another fiction writer imagined that Jesus spoke when He was newly born. Writers have been so bold as to advocate that, as a child, Jesus turned children into goats. The reliable words of the eyewitness John assure us that these things never happened: “This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee...” (John 2:11 ASV).

Compare such foolishness with the sensible truth about his infancy revealed in the Bible. When He was a day old, shepherds heeded the angelic heralds of heaven and visited Jesus in the manger (Luke 2:16-18). At the age of eight days, He was taken to the temple to be circumcised (Luke 2:21). Thirty-two days later, Mary and Joseph took Jesus back to the temple where the righteous prophet Simeon and the principled Anna saw Him and, by the Spirit, made known how special He was (Luke 2:21-39). While an infant, Herod sought to kill the Lord. Based upon the warning of the angel of God, Joseph and Mary took Jesus and fled into Egypt, living there for a number of months.

The last time we see the Jesus as a child is at the age of twelve in the temple (Luke 2:41-51). What are most boys doing? Talking to a group of lawyers or, playing outside? Playing, of course! Not Jesus. He was listening and answering and asking questions of the religious elite and demonstrating His unparalleled knowledge. Though superior to His parents, He purposely submitted to their authority (Luke 2:51). Unusual indeed!

Jesus' uniqueness is demonstrated in His response to His mother. Contrast what Mary asked with the Lord's answer. Mary said, “thy father...” Jesus answered, “...I must be in my Father's house” (Luke 2:49 ASV). Jesus was not disowning Joseph as His “supposed” father (Luke 3:23). Instead, being virgin born, He was making a clear proclamation of who He was—the only begotten Son of God. Unique indeed!

Luke concludes with two plain and simple proclamations: “Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52 ASV).

His Baptism

Can you pick out the four events surrounding Jesus' baptism that set Him apart and demonstrate that He is unique?

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffereth him. And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:13-17 ASV).

When John objected to baptizing the Lord, he showed that Jesus was unique. John **knew** that Jesus was **sinless**, and he also knew that his baptism was “unto remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). How could he baptize someone unto the remission of sins who was sinless? He couldn't. John's objection demonstrated the sinlessness of the Lord. It also shows that there is more to being baptized into Christ than simply “obeying God.” It must be “unto the remission of sins” to be valid (Acts 2:38).

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens did not simply open, but, as Mark says, “the heavens rent asunder” (Mark 1:10 ASV). Mark uses the Greek verb *schizomenous*. The Greek word means *split* or *divide*. The heavens were divided. What a magnificent wonder to behold!

The descent of the Holy Spirit in the bodily form of a dove set Jesus apart from all men. God had promised John that the Spirit would descend upon the One who “was before” John and who was greater than all (John 1). When the Spirit descended upon Jesus, John knew He was indeed the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

The last event in this context that set Jesus apart and demonstrated that He is without

parallel among men is the voice of God out of heaven. The heavenly announcement declared Jesus to be special. He is the only begotten Son of God. No baptism had ever, or will ever, witness such a divine display of approval. Unique indeed!

If we fail to realize that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, we miss the whole point. If we fail to submit to Him, we will deprive ourselves of being with Him (Mark 16:16).

His Life

One has accurately observed, "Of the religions of the world, Christianity is unique because it stems from the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the greatest man who ever lived." The life of the Lord was marked with His character of life and His treatment of others.

We acknowledge His uniqueness when we see He was sinless. He was tested in all things in like manner as we, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). Not even His enemies could find fault in Him (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 21-22). The cross was the most difficult test (Heb. 5:7-9). Eyewitnesses describe the Lord's suffering as exquisite sorrow, literally crushing out the Saviour's life (Matt. 26:37-39). His agony produced sweat "as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44 ASV). Except for Jesus, none has ever lived a sinless life (Rom. 3:23). All must be born again (John 3:3-5).

We acknowledge His uniqueness when we see Him as the powerful prophet of God. While Jesus walked the earth, Rome ruled in all power and glory. But Rome also ruled in all cruelty. Contrast the compassionate, caring, yet powerful Jesus, "...Jesus went about all the cities...teaching...and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them..." (Matt. 9:35-36 ASV). While on the earth, Jesus walked on water, not people. He laid on healing hands, not cruel hands. He lifted the hearts of the downtrodden, not the political fortunes of the rich and famous. He viewed all without respect of person. Napoleon Bonaparte said,

I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world, there is no possible comparison. I have founded empires, but upon what do they depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him.

We acknowledge Jesus as unique when we see that He practiced what He preached. Though the attitude and action of the world is "You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto," Jesus taught and practiced the principle of self denial (Matt. 16:24-26; Luke 9:58). Though the attitude and action of the world is "Look out for number one," Jesus taught and practiced the principle of loving others more than self (Matt. 22:39). Though the world's attitude and action is "Winning is everything," Jesus taught and practiced the principle of dying for others (Matt. 16:25-26; 20:28).

His Teaching

Nicodemus who was a teacher in Israel respectfully called Jesus a teacher (John 3:1-2). Other teachers of renown fail to compare in ability or doctrine. Eyewitnesses describe Jesus' teaching. At the early age of 12, He amazed His hearers (Luke 2:47). This admiration was not just for the moment. It was continuous throughout His teaching life (Luke 4:22). Hearers were astonished at His teaching and authority (Matt. 7:28-29; Luke 4:31-32). Even after hearing Him for three years, His words still captured the disciples' hearts (Luke 24:30-32). Albert Barnes says, "This is an expression denoting the deep interest and pleasure which they had felt in his discourse..." If we could have been there, we too would have admired the Lord.

Centuries later, even antagonists publicly extol the Lord as a great teacher. A Unitarian Universalist clearly acknowledges Jesus as a great teacher, "... Jesus remains a great religious teacher..." From the pen of another antagonist, we have this acknowledgment, "Many Wiccans view Jesus as a great teacher and prophet." The PBS program, *Frontline*, said "[Thomas] Jefferson discovered a Jesus who was a great Teacher of Common Sense." Add to these, the *Confessions of a Deist* in which the writer says, "I

think Jesus was a great teacher, a great healer, a great philosopher, a great man.” Would your enemies publicly express admiration for your capabilities?

Compare the Lord's teaching with others. Those who heard Him classified the Lord as better than any they had heard. “The officers answered, Never man so spake” (John 7:40-53 ASV). Compare the suppressing teaching of Buddha. The Hindu *Vedas* command the wife to throw herself alive on the husband's burning funeral pyre. Consider the self-serving teaching of Mohammed. Someone has accurately observed, “When Mohammed wanted another wife, a revelation was forthcoming to sanction it. When he wanted to marry the wife of another, divorce was sanctioned by a “revelation.” Consider Zoroaster's misconceptions. In his view, material prosperity and godliness went hand in hand. Consider Socrates' uncertainty. Plato tells us that at his death, Socrates said, “Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation...or, as we are told, it is really a change...” (*Apology*, 40c-d). Why say such? Because of his basic teaching. Dear reader, Jesus is certain. We **can know**. Peter is right. “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God” (John 6:66-69). **(To be concluded next month)**

The Gracious Justice of God

Lee Moses

The Biblical statements about God's grace find no peer among all the religions of the world (cf. Rom. 5:6-8; Eph. 2; Titus 3:4-7). Holy Scripture portrays a God of grace, who desires the salvation of every soul, who has done and will do His part to make that salvation available to all (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Yet Scripture also portrays a God of swift and severe justice, a “consuming fire” who will “devour the adversaries” (Heb. 12:29; 10:27). The full impact of such justice will only be truly seen “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-8). Many sincere people have difficulty harmonizing the grace of God with the justice of God. They read, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22), and find what they believe to be irreconcilable attributes.

The justice of God troubles people. Some hear the Gospel's warnings about judgment to come, and assert that such violates their sense of what is right. Some make such statements as “I refuse to believe in a God that would condemn people to an eternity of hell.” Some even go so far as to aver, “If any of my loved ones are going to be in hell, I want to be there too.” They claim that the justice of God is too strict and too severe to be righteous.

Justice is defined as “the giving to every person that—and all of that, and only that—to which he is entitled, whether good or bad, and that without partiality or favor.”¹ In clear distinction to the modern “justice” (or failure to achieve thereof) often displayed by the American court system, God's justice matches this definition. It is a self contradiction to say that God's justice is not righteous—even the Biblical words translated “judgment” and “justice” can also be translated “righteousness.” God will vindicate those worthy of vindication. As Solomon observed, “Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes (“the noble,” American Standard Version) for equity” (Prov. 17:26). God cannot punish the guiltless, for He is infinitely good (cf. Matt. 19:17). Contrary to the blasphemous doctrine of “original sin,” and its subsequent “total hereditary depravity,” God will hold no one guilty for sins that person has not committed himself (cf. Ezek. 18:20). But there are times when punishment must be administered. It is then, and only then, that God punishes—and He will never fail to do so at such times. This is regardless of one's social status, influence in government, or stockpiles of riches. God's impartiality in justice is certainly praiseworthy; whether seen in His verdict of guilty or innocent, whether seen in His administration of punishment or reward. God is described as, “Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7).

In the courts of this country, the accused or accuser in a trial is occasionally able to

“pull the wool over the eyes” of judge and jury. The defendant and his attorney may be able to persuade the judge that the defendant is truly penitent, and that he does not require the punishment that meets his crime. They may be able to convince the jury that the defendant is not guilty of something that he actually did. Conversely, an accuser is sometimes able to convince a jury that the defendant is guilty of a crime that he did not commit. Such lies make a mockery out of a court system designed for the welfare of society. But such mockery will not be made of God’s justice: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8).

Notice from the aforementioned passage that God has the responsibility of pronouncing eternal sentences. This is because sin is an eternal offense. Once sin has been committed, one cannot wish or wash it away of his own doing. Since sin separates man from God (cf. Isa. 59:1-2; Hab. 1:13), one who enters eternity having a soul fouled with sin must be punished by eternal separation from God (cf. 2 Thess. 1:9). This means eternal separation from all things that are good, for “Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). Where God has removed His presence, there can be nothing good. And as “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), the sentence for entering eternity with sin can only be an eternal punishment of death.

It can be difficult to see the grace of God’s justice when His potential punishment involves oneself or one’s loved ones. When a convicted criminal is put to death or sentenced to life in prison, that criminal and his family members are not usually among the ardent supporters of the punishment being carried out; the criminal’s deserving the punishment notwithstanding. But as much as some might wish for God to lay aside His law on the day of judgment, God can only do right (cf. Psa. 92:15; Jer. 9:24; Rom. 9:14). One who is honest can see the righteousness of God’s punishment, whether administered to one’s own self or to another. The “angel of the water” said of the severe judgment of the Lord, “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus” (Rev. 16:5). The psalmist realized, “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right; and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psa. 119:75). Perhaps only on the day of judgment will we fully appreciate God’s justice and the necessity of the punishment of the sinful.

But as certain as is the punishment of the sinful, so is the reward of the righteous. God does not have uncertain nebulous law, which can be interpreted one way by one judge and completely differently by another. In spite of the horrendous atrocity that sin is, God has provided through Jesus Christ the means of forgiveness for all mankind from sin (cf. Rom. 3:23-24; Acts 2:38). There need be no doubt for the faithful Christian that he will receive the reward: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

It is by the wonderful grace of God that every man and woman can enter judgment knowing that he will be judged by the righteous Judge. None has to be in doubt as to what his sentence will be. Each person will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). No one will be punished more than what he deserves; and each person who has availed himself of God’s grace while on earth shall reap life everlasting. May God be praised for His gracious justice!

1 Rex A. Turner, Sr., *Systematic Theology* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1989), p. 50

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Jesus Christ Built Only His Church

E. M. Borden

Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build **my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Notice, He said “my church”—not Luther's, Wesley's, Calvin's or any other man's. Notice also that the word “church” is in the singular. It is **one**—not many. Now, are we right when we refer to it as “the church of Christ?” It was not the Jewish congregation, but the church of Christ.

Jesus not only said, “my church,” but He said, “The gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it.” That same church is in existence now and all Christians are members of that church. To be a Christian is to be a member of the church of Christ. On the day of Pentecost the Lord added the saved to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). The Lord does not add people to the Methodist or Baptist churches, or any other man made denomination. He adds them to **His** church.

The popular idea of a person becoming a child of God and then joining the church is absurd. It is true that a person can become a Christian, then afterward join some human institution to his own detriment. But when one becomes a Christian he becomes a member of the church of Christ by a spiritual birth (John 3:3-5), and Paul said that church is, “the house of God”—God's family (1 Tim. 3:15). How can a man join a family **after** he has been born into it? Think on these things.

Scriptural Pragmatism

Dub McClish

Introduction

Our English word *pragmatic* generally connotes that which is practical, that which “gets the job done,” sometimes to the exclusion of reasonable or artistic considerations. When I was a youngster growing up on a central Texas ranch (before the advent of duct tape), baling wire was the remedy for a wide variety of problems and emergencies. Its use sometimes defied reason, and always art, but it “worked” for everything from mending fences to repairing a muffler on a truck. To call one a “pragmatist” in the general sense would generally be considered a compliment. It is an innocent word that conveys no evil in itself.

However, a school of philosophy called “Pragmatism” has adopted this good word and given it an altogether blasphemous connotation. Pragmatism gained some prominence in the first half of the last century, led by the likes of C.S. Pierce, William James, and John Dewey. These men advocated abandonment of all dogmatism or accepted truth in favor of whatever “works.” The new credo (dogmatism?) they preached was “if it works, it is true.” Applied to religion, the philosophy accepted no doctrine or principle as absolute or dogmatic, on the assumption that we do not know which type of religion is going to work best in the long run. Applied to morals, it denied moral absolutes in favor of freewheeling amorality—whatever “works” for oneself. John Dewey, generally recognized as “the Father of American public education,” applied this principle to education, leading him to abandon time-honored and proved principles of instruction in favor of experimentation. When he coupled his Humanism with Pragmatism, we should not wonder that our public education system has so miserably failed to educate our children for several generations.

Although the word *pragmatism* has been seriously tarnished by the heinous philosophy described above, I submit that the Bible teaches a philosophy of pragmatism. This philosophy, which we might name “Scriptural Pragmatism,” consists of the idea that God's way—the way of life set forth in the Bible—“works.” Consider now some illustrative principles of God-ordained pragmatism.

Marriage and the Home

Marriage, in which a man and a woman pledge their lives and loyalties to one another until death, has been God's plan from Creation (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19; 4-6; Eph. 5:31; Rom. 7:2-3). The home thus created—society's fundamental unit—is the place God has

provided for bringing children into the world and nurturing them until they begin their own homes (Eph. 6:1–4). Sexual unions (whether with one of the same or of a different sex) outside of Scriptural marriage, constitute adultery or fornication (Mat. 5:31–32; 19:9). These practices (sins) will cause those who refuse to repent of them to be damned (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Rev. 21:8). However, besides the eternal consequences of marital infidelity, there are hideous personal and societal consequences.

Fifty years ago divorce was comparatively rare in our nation. It and its participants were generally stigmatized. Our culture has so radically changed in the last half century that divorce (often repeated by the same persons) has become commonplace and single-parent “families” number in the millions. Every divorce implies broken vows, unhappiness, shattered dreams, and suffering. All of these are multiplied when the union has produced children, who often suffer the most.

The widespread unfaithfulness to their marital vows by husbands and wives (coupled with the influence of radical feminists) has relegated marriage to the status of an undesirable arrangement in the minds of many. Thus, millions of men and women (led by most of the entertainment luminaries) are no more inclined to “bother” with marriage than are barnyard animals. They live openly in adultery and/or fornication and feel no shame or guilt for their sin. Many mothers have slept with so many men that they cannot certainly identify the father of their children. Obviously, many do not believe God-ordained marriage “works.”

However, it is not marriage that does not work, but the **people** in the marriage that fail to make it work. God wants us to be happy. He created man and then created woman from and for man. When He brought them together to be one, intending them to thus be till death broke the bond between them, He did so for their ultimate happiness and welfare. Marriage “works” when husbands love their wives, give themselves up for them, and nourish and cherish them, as Christ did the church, His bride (Eph. 5:25, 29). Marriage “works” when wives submit themselves to and love their husbands, being sober, chaste, home-workers, and kind (Eph. 5:22; Tit. 2:4–5). The home “works” when parents lovingly nurture their children in the chastening and admonition of the Lord and when children obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1–4). How badly the people of our nation—and of all the nations—need to become Scriptural Pragmatists regarding marriage and the home.

Personal Relationships

All sorts of evil deeds are done and words are spoken because of hatred, jealousy, unkindness, anger, lust, and other ill-begotten selfish attitudes. Such words and deeds destroy personal relationships. They cause us to ill-treat others. They break up marriages, divide brethren unnecessarily, alienate employers and employees, and sever friendships. James observed that such behavior was not very practical; these ways just will not “work” if one is seeking peace and happiness.

Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not. (Jam. 4:1–2).

On the other hand, the Lord’s plan for relating to our fellows is perfectly practical. A skeptic once chided a Christian for believing in his antiquated, behind-the-times Bible, the teachings of which had long-since been outmoded by modern sophisticates. The Christian pointed to the utter fallacy of such an averment by citing only one statement from the Lord: “All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12). “Men have not even begun to measure up to this one challenge,” the Christian added.

We can only imagine what gargantuan improvement would come over even a small town if every resident acted upon this one passage. They could dismiss the police force and turn the jail into a museum. Door locks would be superfluous, and angry words and deeds would disappear. Immorality would not be known. None would have insufficient food or clothes. Neighbor would not try to cheat neighbor. There would be no more church splits over personalities and mere matters of opinion. Would this not be a

wonderful place to live?

Paul gives us a great sampling of the ingredients of good personal relationships in every sphere of life in Ephesians 4:25–32. God is still waiting for most people to thus live, but He knows that His way to live “works” to produce good personal relationships.

Financial Matters

The world is consumed with covetousness and materialism. People often make moral compromises and even engage in criminal behavior in order to gain more and more money. As I write these words, radio newscasts are telling of the long queues of people who are waiting to buy lottery tickets for the Texas Lotto jackpot of \$76,000,000. Robbing and killing in order to gain money are constant occurrences. Some who have honestly gained great wealth selfishly cling to it as their god.

God’s way of dealing with material things is diametrically opposed to the foregoing descriptions. Jesus warns against heaping up earthly riches at the expense of our spiritual treasures:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also (Mat. 6:19–21).

As unpleasant as it may be to contemplate the annual tax deadline that comes around every April, the Lord still said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mat. 22:21).

We are wise and will be amply rewarded in this life—as well as in that to come—if we will realize that life does not consist in material wealth. We will certainly not carry any of it with us to the grave (Luke 12:16–21; 1 Tim. 6:7). Paul urged: “Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17). We are to work, not just for our own livelihood, but that we may have somewhat to give to others who cannot supply their own needs (Eph. 4:28). Paul summarized God’s giving principle we are to follow: “But this I say, He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6).

By obeying Him in money matters we can find great happiness and joy, and we will also stay out of trouble! Many can testify that the Lord’s way “works” in handling their financial affairs.

National Morality

The decline in morals and the culture corruption in our nation over the past thirty-five years have been almost breathtaking in degree and extent. The entertainment industry (Hollywood, Television, and much of the music industry) and a few self-styled “artists” have pushed the sex, violence, and filthy language limits so far away from all standards of decency and propriety that standards hardly exist any more. Pornography is a multi-billion-dollar business. The sin for which God destroyed Sodom is now glorified and defended as if it were normal and innocent. Legalized gambling was once confined almost exclusively to Las Vegas and Reno. Now many of the states not only allow privately owned casinos, but most of the states actually sponsor gambling and commercially advertise its “virtues.” Illicit drug usage is rampant and consumption of the legal drug of alcohol is taken for granted by most. As a nation, we are committing suicide by drowning ourselves in a cesspool of wickedness.

The corrupt Clinton administration and the public response to it further demonstrate the general moral collapse. The absence of a concerted national outcry against such behavior in our president and his cohorts is unquestionable proof of how low our nation has sunk. Should one need it, the elected officials who placed party above principle, excusing his behavior and demonizing his just accusers, serve as an additional barometer of national moral degeneracy. All of these behaviors are of the devil and they do not “work” except for our sorrow: “Shall I not visit for these things? saith Jehovah; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” (Jer. 5:29).

God holds nations accountable for their national behavior, even as He does individu-

als. Solomon's inspired observation is no less true now than when he penned it 3,500 years ago: "Righteousness exalteth a nation; But sin is a reproach to any people." (Pro. 14:34). Do not Jehovah's words through Moses to Israel have an extended application to every nation, including ours? "And now, O Israel, hearken unto the statutes and unto the ordinances, which I teach you, to do them; that ye may live..." (Deu. 4:1a). God's warning to Israel about forgetting Him in their national prosperity and success are good for us to hear also: "Beware lest thou forget Jehovah..." (6:12a).

No nation's real strength lies in its territorial or population size, its prosperity, or its military might, but in its righteousness: "And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of Jehovah; that it may be well with thee..." (v. 18a). Here again we see demonstrated a Scriptural Pragmatism. God's way of righteousness "works" in the preservation and prosperity of nations, as in every area of life and experience. The dedicated Christian is the ultimate "pragmatist."

Religious Confusion In *The Penny News*

Jerry C. Brewer

Confusion in religious teaching is rampant in our world, usually coming from those who are, themselves, confused. That's the case with an article published in the Nov. 20, 2014 issue of *The Penny News*, a free weekly shopper published at Elk City, Okla. Under the title, *Believing The Gospel Of Jesus Given To Paul?*, the article says on page 14:

Most believe the message 'Christ Crucified'. But what about Grace being a Gift from God, saving us by Jesus before time began, not in accord with our own acts (1 Tim. 1:9)? Does not scripture say that Jesus is the Saviour of ALL mankind (1 Tim. 4:10) and all created creatures are reconciled to God by the Blood of Jesus (Col. 1:16-20)? A lot of people believe in 'Hell' but there is not one mention of it in Paul's writing! Why the different beliefs? Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 4:3 there will be times when men will not tolerate sound teaching, following teachers in accord with their own desires, and believe in myths."

One would be hard pressed to find more gobbledegook in such few words as these. The writer apparently concocts a contradiction between Jesus and Paul. Note the following:

1. The message of "Christ Crucified" is "Grace (sic) being a Gift (sic) from God." It was God's grace that sent His Son to die for all men.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8).

The grace of God that sent His Son to die for us was motivated by His love for all men (John 3:16).

2. "...saving us by Jesus before time began, not in accord with our own acts (1 Tim. 1:9)?" The reference to First Timothy 1:9 is incorrect. The passage the writer had in mind was probably Second Timothy 1:9, which says, "...who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." This passage does, indeed say God purposed our salvation before the world began. Before the world began, God purposed to save a class of people. Those were to be the ones who would be "in Christ." Every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), which includes being chosen as His adopted children (Eph. 1:4-5), being accepted of Him (Eph. 1:6), being redeemed and having forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7), and having an inheritance (Eph. 1:11) all are obtained in Christ. That was God's purpose from eternity—to save all who would be in Christ. That raises the question of, "Who are those in Christ?" They are those—all men—who have been baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4) Search the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation and you will find no other way to get into Christ, except through obedience to Him in baptism. Christ died for all and the provision has been made for all to enter Christ, but God saves **no one out of Christ**.

3. “...and all created creatures are reconciled to God by the Blood (sic) of Jesus.” Now that is a strange statement, indeed! Does the writer really think Christ died for “all **created creatures**?” Moses wrote,

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind, and God saw that it was good. ...And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:20-21, 24-25).

“All created creatures are reconciled to God...?” Elephants? Catfish? Moose? Monkeys? Baboons? Whales? Vultures? Rattlesnakes? That’s the conclusion of this inane statement. Christ did not shed His blood for “critters.” He died for **men**. Animals are not created in the image of God. Which animal did God forbid to eat certain fruit? (Gen. 2:16-17). Which animal disobeyed God? Of all God’s creation, only man is made in His image. Only man sinned, and it was only for man that Jesus died. It is a stretch of mighty proportions to apply Col. 1:16-20 to reconciliation of all animals to God!

4. “A lot of people believe in ‘Hell’ but there is not one mention of it in Paul’s writing!” Does this mean the writer of this article does not believe in hell? Is he **sure** Paul never mentioned hell in his writing? Is he pitting Paul against Jesus? That’s the tactic of infidelity. There are no contradictions in the Bible.

How does the writer explain Paul's statement to the Thessalonians?

...seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power...(2 Thess. 1:6-9).

That Paul here refers to hell is evident from Jesus’ description of the final judgment. “Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:41, 46). Paul spoke of hell when he referred to those, “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.” His “everlasting destruction” is the same as Jesus’ “everlasting fire” which He termed “everlasting punishment.” No mention of hell “in Paul’s writing?” What did Paul refer to in 2 Thess. 1:6-9, if not eternal hell?

5. In an apparent effort to explain, “the different beliefs” on hell, the writer says, “Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 4:3 there will be times when men will not tolerate sound teaching, following teachers in accord with their own desires, and believe in myths.” Paul **did** say that and what he said is true. In fact, denying the reality of hell because Paul didn’t mention it by name is, “in accord with their own desires, and [a belief] in myths” and is precisely what Paul was writing about to Timothy. To say there is no hell is a myth.

The writer of that article needs to heed Paul’s admonition to study the word of God, (2 Tim. 2:15), before making false allegations against Paul and adding his personal confusion to an already confused religious world. A knowledge of the Bible will cure such nonsense.

God Accepts No Substitutes

Alan E. Stout

One of man's most common practices is substitution. Sometimes it is of necessity and sometimes the substituted product is better than the original. But substitution has its

place. The wise may substitute for the ignorant, but the ignorant cannot substitute for the wise.

Instead of making every man suffer the consequences of every sin, God substituted his own Son as a sacrifice for our sins in order for us to escape the penalty of them (Heb. 5:8-9). But man may not substitute for God. In spite of this truth, man has always tried to substitute his own ways for God's commands. That effort has always failed and always will.

Man attempts to substitute sincerity for truth. The doctrine that "It makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you are sincere" is a vastly popular one. Saul of Tarsus was a sincere, religious man worshipping God according to his conscience, but was "chief of sinners" at the same time (1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:9). Sincerity does not save. Only the truth makes one free (John 8:32).

Men substitute prayer or sacrifice for obedience to the truth. It was that very substitution that cost Saul the throne of Israel. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Paul wrote, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). Only obedience to the doctrine of Christ will save us. No amount of sacrifice or good moral living will take the place of it.

Christ is the Saviour to all who obey him (Heb. 5:8-9). The Bible teaches that faith in Christ, repentance from sin, confession of Christ as God's Son, and baptism are necessary for the remission of sins are necessary before the promise of salvation is ours (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:10). Prayer is of no avail if we neglect to obey these commands.

Paul was a penitent believer, had confessed Christ, and was praying. Yet he was told to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). If these commands are neglected, even our prayers are abominations (Prov. 28:9). If we neglect to obey the plain commands of God while we have opportunity in this present world, we are destined for certain eternal punishment (2 Thess. 1:8).

Many substitute the precepts of men for the plain doctrine of Christ. We cannot hope for a happy resurrection unless we remain true to Christ's doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). Those who teach any other gospel or doctrine rest under the curse of God (Gal. 1:9). Those who are deceived by these false doctrines are likewise condemned (Matt. 15:9, 14) and a curse instead of a blessing will be a surprising disappointment to them in the day of judgment (Matt. 7:22-23). The only sure preventive measure against false doctrine is to "search the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Modern religion substitutes entertainment for true worship of God. The items of divinely appointed worship are eating the Lord's Supper, prayer, singing, teaching the word of God and giving of our means to support the Lord's work. All of these are to be done on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Eph. 5:19-20). This is a simple system in which all men can participate and glorify God as he has directed.

But some have substituted an elaborate system of entertainment by which they glorify themselves. They offer music concerts, puppet skits, dramas, and human testimonials in place of God-ordained worship. One of the very first lessons man was ever taught was that God will not accept a substitute for an item of worship. Abel offered a blood sacrifice as God directed. (Heb. 11:4). But Cain offered a substitute sacrifice and God rejected his (Gen. 4:5).

God commands that "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Cor. 16:2). That financial arrangement for support of the Lord's work is divinely appointed, but man substitutes his own devices such as car washes, garage sales and carnivals in order to please himself. God will accept no such substitutes.

Jesus defined how God is glorified. "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). God is glorified only by **doing his**

will as he has directed. Jesus did not substitute his own work for that of God's. God has never accepted a substitute for what he commanded. We dare not substitute our own ways for God's today. He simply won't accept them and we will be lost for so doing.

The Editor's Travels

On the Lord's Day evening, Sept. 1, we preached for the Yukon, Okla. church. Sunday morning, Sept. 8, we preached at Willow, Okla. Sunday, Sept. 15 we preached morning and evening for the Eastside church in Lexington, Okla. where Pat Craig, our faithful brother and friend of more than 50 years, preaches. We again preached Sunday evening, Sept. 22, at Yukon, Okla. Our September travels ended at Chillicothe, Texas on Sept. 29 where we preached at Sunday morning worship.

“What Saith The Scriptures?”

Harrell Davidson

This Month's question:

I have fallen in love with a fine Christian lady, whom I desire to get married to God willing next year. However, there is this older brother in our congregation who contends that in order for a man to be happy in his marriage and gain the respect of his wife, he ought to take time, make lots of money and acquire some property of sorts before venturing into marriage. “If” says he “you allow your wife to go hungry, she would not respect you.” Thus, his solution is to wait and make a lot of money and some property. He says he's speaking from experience.

By God's grace, I have a degree in marketing (with the intention of doing further studies) and a job and I believe if we live or spend within our means, then by God's providence, we won't go hungry.

For some reason this man's view doesn't sit well with me and I'd be very grateful if as an experienced man and preacher, you could give me your views on the position of this teacher.

Thanks for your question and your patience in getting to this answer. We have several questions in the queue to try to answer and we are thankful for each. We fully realize that we have had this question for sometime thanks again for understanding.

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:18-24).

Our Lord Jesus Christ sanctioned this arrangement when in His personal public ministry, He said, “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female” (Matt. 19:4) which He took from Genesis 1:27.

Moreover, Jesus said, “And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5).

The word “cleave” means to hold on and not let go. Thus, marriage is to be a permanent arrangement until the death of either partner (cf. Rom. 7:1-4) or fornication, unfaithfulness to the spouse one is married to and can be Scripturally put away and another Spiritually lawful marriage be gone into.

I am sure that you know of these marriage laws of God due to the wording of your question to me. I suggested these Scriptures because they include the arrangement that God placed on marriage and not man’s advice.

Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). When this kind of love persists between a marriageable man and woman it meets God’s full requirement.

God never mentioned wealth! In fact, the Scriptures point out the danger of wealth.

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich (Lu. 18: 18-23).

One command Jesus left out and that was covetousness—“Thou shalt not covet.” Possessions can, and may, rule the heart and lives of individuals. Your personal attainments are more than sufficient to be able to finance a marriage to the love of your life. Educational attainments within themselves do not guarantee and a good, happy, Scriptural, sustainable marriage.

Countless couples have gotten married who had little to no educational attainments with little to no money without the promise of much in the future. Where there is genuine love from within the hearts of both the man and woman and their determination to love each other until time is no more for them, that marriage will be successful.

The individual that is indicating things that you should do before you marry should be dismissed by you altogether. His unwanted advice may be good for himself but is not in tune with the most important thing in marriage—love, to cleave to, and hold on, and not let go. He is adding things that God never required. Furthermore, a husband and wife who respect each other completely will be successful if their delight is in the law of the Lord and that respect will only grow as time passes us by.

I wish you well in your intended marriage to the woman you love.

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

“First of All”

Doug Post

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

What is the significance of the phrase “**first of all**”? Some translate it qualitatively as “**of first importance**” (NIV), meaning “first in rank”, “the best”, “and “foremost”. The implication is that this is greater than any other doctrine found in the Bible. It is presumed to be “chief” among all doctrine, everything else is deemed insignificant. Some then conclude that the definition of the “Gospel” is to be found exclusively in verses three and four, **only**, being defined as the death, burial and resurrection of

Jesus, **only**.

These conclusions are actually assumptions. They are not based on proper exegesis, and such conclusions result in inevitable absurdities. For instance, this doctrine of “first in rank” implies that the doctrine of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus must be more important than the doctrine of the existence God, or the doctrine of the nature of God. Breaking it down further within the context, it even implies that the doctrine of the death of Christ must be more important or significant than the burial and resurrection of Christ. Who could believe such nonsense?

More related absurdities have freely flowed from the “first in rank” concept. One is that “mercy” is said to be more important than “obedience” (Matt. 12:7). Some are suggesting we need to ignore false doctrine (show mercy) and simply have fellowship with anyone believing in the “pre-eminent” doctrine of 1 Cor. 15:3-4. Feeding off this, some conclude that believing Jesus came in the flesh is really all that matters (2 John 7-9). All other doctrine is considered inconsequential. Absurdity breeds absurdity and the circular reasoning of the “first in rank” doctrine brings us back to our text.

While *protos* (πρῶτος) may be used to mean “of first importance” it is not used that way in this passage. Certainly believing in the existence of God (“God is” – Heb.11:6) would logically come first in the **order of things** to be believed, then His nature, etc., which is the subtle point being missed here. Paul is indeed speaking of the order or succession of things. The Greek word “protos” also means: “first in time or place” or “in any succession of things or persons.” In other words, it can be used quantitatively—in a chronological sense—showing order of succession, and that is exactly how Paul uses it here in this context.

Chapter 15 is about Paul’s treatise on the General Resurrection, and this begins with the logical chronological process. Paul’s sequencing naturally begins with: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The order of succession is His death, His burial, then His resurrection. This is not rank, but successive order. However, that is not the end of the chronological sense in this first section of the chapter. Paul continues: “and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (vv. 5-7).

Again, we can see the continued chronological sense as Paul lists, in order, the sequence of the appearances of Christ. Paul makes clear he was not just the last eyewitness in seeing Christ, but that he was the final or last apostle. Note the use of the word *eschaton* (ἔσχατος). Although it may be used to mean “least” it also means “last in order or sequence” or “last” chronologically. Here it means “last” chronologically, which is very disturbing to those advocating modern day apostles or the papacy. Paul is making a definite theological claim that he is the last apostle.

In this section, Paul is not teaching that the Gospel is the death, burial, resurrection, **only**, as some aver, nor is he declaring this to be the most important doctrine to be believed. Rather, Paul is simply discussing the chronology of events as they happened, as they unfolded, sequentially with regards to the Resurrection. This is the emphasis and significance of *protos* in this context—a context and chapter dealing with chronology and order, rather than rank.

The next section within the chapter, beginning in verse twenty, begins Paul’s theological argument concerning the resurrection, which happens to be chronological in nature. He begins in order with Christ being the “firstfruits” of the dead (v. 20, 22), followed, then, by the rest of mankind. The chronological sense or order is demonstrated by the use of the word “**then**.” Christ is raised first, **then**, “those who are Christ’s at His coming” (v. 23), “**Then** comes the end ...” (v. 24). The text continues with the chronological sense: “For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (vv. 25-26).

Furthermore, this chronological nature is repeated in verses 45 and 46, where both *protos* and *eschaton* are used together. Paul writes about the “**first man Adam**” and of the “**last Adam**”, who is Christ. Note, again, the use of the word “**then**” (v. 46), which is used in marking out the chronological sequence of that which is “first and last.”

The clear emphasis of chapter 15 is of the resurrection from the dead. It is not necessarily about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but how those elements fit chronologically, or sequentially, in leading to Paul’s treatise on the reality of the general resurrection of the dead.

Well, then, just what is the “Gospel”? Paul says: “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). We note the present tense, continuous action. First, it is and continues being the power of God to salvation. Second, it continues being the power of God to salvation for everyone who “believes,” or continues believing. Now if the gospel is just the death, burial, and resurrection,” then one could believe in that but teach that the mode and purpose of baptism is inconsequential; or that instrumental music in worship is optional; or that women may serve as preachers and elders; or that fellowship with denominations is acceptable to God because, after all, we all believe the “core” facts of the Gospel, and as long as we “continue believing” the death, burial, and resurrection, then, according to Paul, that it is all that is necessary for salvation. That is the necessary result of such a view.

Now if the gospel is **just** the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, then what about believing in His virgin birth? Some Gnostics denied His fleshly birth and even some today do as well. Well, some will claim that is included, but then they have just expanded their very own definition of “Gospel.” What about all the recorded events of His nature and His life? What about the fact that Jesus actually differentiates Himself from the gospel (Mark 8:35; 10:29)?

Of course, Jesus also said that His Word would be our standard of judgment (John 12:48). The Word of God is also what sanctifies (John 17:17); it gives light or understanding (Psa.119:130); it cleanses (John 15:3); it purifies (1 Pet. 1:22); it begets brings forth (Jas. 1:18); it brings about our spiritual birth (1 Pet. 23; John 3:5); it converts (Psa. 19:7); it gives life (Phil. 2:16; John 6:63); it reconciles (2 Cor. 5:19), and above all it saves (Jas. 1:21; Acts 13:26).

However, if one believes that the **facts** of the “death, burial, and resurrection” (“Gospel”) save them and, yet at the same time, the Word saves, then which one saves? The gospel or the Word? Do people have a choice? Or is the “death, burial, and resurrection that which initially saves, and then folks must now turn their attention to the Word of God? Now if the death, burial, and resurrection, alone, saves, then is a person saved but still not yet sanctified, lacking in understanding, uncleansed, unpurified, not begotten, without spiritual birth, unconverted, without life, and unreconciled to God by the Word of God, even though they have been believed in the death, burial, and resurrection (“Gospel”) of Christ? This kind of reasoning is akin to Mac Deaver’s teaching that one is a child of God by water baptism, but not yet in the kingdom of God until baptized in the Holy Spirit—an erroneous bifurcated system!

Now the denominational world did, indeed, make a distinction between “Gospel” and “doctrine” or Word. Typically there are two lecterns used in their service, one for the reading of the “Gospels,” which represent the death, burial, and resurrection associated with Christ. The other lectern was for reading the Word of God which contained doctrine. The gospel was seen as “invitational,” while doctrine, the Word which contained doctrine, was simply for instruction for those already saved by the “Gospel.” Is this what the Bible teaches?

We learn Jesus preached the Gospel but we know He preached the Word, which will judge the world (John 12:48). He also said a true disciple is one who continues in His Word (John 8:32). He declared His Word is Truth (John 8:31-32). Now is are Gospel, Word, and Truth three different things? Actually, they are all the same thing.

Peter preached the Truth (1 Pet. 1:22); but he preached the seed (1:23); but he preached the Word (1:23), “And this is the word which by the gospel was preached to

you” (1:25). Paul said he preached the Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) but he also preached the faith (Gal. 1:23). Of course, a multitude of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7), which certainly was the Gospel (Rom.1:16-17). This is true because all Christians are those who are sons of God, and Paul clearly says: “For you are all sons of God through **the faith** in Christ Jesus. For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27). Just as Jesus said that a true disciple must continue His Word (John 8:31), Paul says that in order for one to continue God’s grace they must continue in **the faith** (Col. 1:23).

Paul also taught that we are saved by grace through **the faith** (Eph. 2:8) and that Christ dwells in the heart through **the faith** (Eph. 3:17). Does Christ dwell in the heart through the Gospel or through “the faith”? **Both**, because they are the same thing. Paul said we are to contend for **the faith** of the gospel (Phil. 1:27), meaning contend for the body of teaching of the Gospel, and there is a vast amount of teaching found in the faith of the Gospel we must contend for (Jude 3). Paul speaks of teaching doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3) which he also calls the commandment (1:5), which is law (1:8-9), which he also calls sound doctrine or teaching (1:10) and the glorious Gospel (1:11). Luke records that the Gospel was preached (Acts 14:21) and that the folks were admonished to continue in the faith (14:22).

Paul continued speaking “the word” (14:24). Again, all these expressions are synonymous. Luke records Peter saying that God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile and purified their hearts through **the faith** (Acts 15:9). Here Peter is referring back to Pentecost where he preached the Gospel, which means he also preached the faith. Interestingly, however, Isaiah said **the law** of the Lord would go forth out of Zion (Isa. 2:2-4), and this was fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 1:8, 2:1-47).

Therefore, the Gospel is also the law as we noted previously. Luke goes on to say that the churches that had been established were strengthened in **the faith** and increased in number by the same **the faith** (Acts 16:5), but the Spirit prevented the “word” from being preached in Asia (16:6) but allowed them to preach “the Gospel” in Macedonia (16:10). Paul also taught the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6) referred to metonymically as “the Spirit (3:6) or the “ministry of the Spirit” (3:8), all of which was the preaching of the word and truth (4:2) and the Gospel (4:3).

The death, burial, and resurrection are **not the entirety** of good news (“Gospel”). Rather, they are facts of the Gospel that are to be believed. Associated with these facts are commands needing to be obeyed (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 4:17). These facts and commands are essential to the Gospel but they are not the only essential elements of it. There is much more teaching needing to be obeyed that is essential to the Gospel, the faith, which one must continue in (Col. 1:23; cf. 1 John 1:7-9).

The Son Who Came Home

Jerry C. Brewer

The song, *Lord I’m Coming Home*, says, “I’ve wandered far away from God/ Now I’m coming home/The paths of sin too long I’ve trod/ Lord I’m coming home/Coming home/ Coming home/ Never more to roam/Open wide thine arms of love/Lord I’m coming home.”

In Luke 15:11-24, Jesus told a parable of a son who came home. We call it, “The Parable of The Prodigal Son.” Today, there are many prodigal sons who are loved by family and by their Heavenly Father who need to come home. Many modern prodigals still have tender consciences that can be touched by the love of God and family and we pray they will do as the young man in that parable and, “come home.”

Sin is enticing. Satan tugs at every person through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17), and Christians are no exception. How many, who began to walk in the path of righteousness and the light of the gospel many years ago, have turned back and no longer walk with the Lord? (John 6:66). The wages they are working for in their present condition is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). The Lord is not mad at any of them. He still loves them and calls, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and

are heavy laden...” (Matt. 11:28). The arms of the Saviour are opened wide and ready to receive all who will come home.

Departing from the Lord’s house begins in thoughts of wandering away. The son in the parable began that way. “...A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living” (Luke 15:12). And, as certainly as **thoughts** of wandering enter one’s mind, so departure soon follows. “And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country...” (Luke 15:13a).

The young man’s father was a man of great means. He had hired servants, a comfortable house, food to eat and all that one could desire in the way of material comfort. Our Heavenly Father owns not only all that earth is and has (Psa. 24:1), but also eternal life, riches, and glory beyond human conception. Why that young man would leave his loving father’s home is beyond comprehension. Why one today would want to leave his only hope of eternal life to “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” is hard to understand. There is no comparison between the “pleasures of sin for a season” and eternal life. When sin’s season ends, there is nothing but eternal anguish facing the prodigal, but in his Father’s house there is eternal life.

Having thought of leaving his father’s house and having received his inheritance, the young man did not just “move away.” Jesus said he, “took his journey into a far country” (Luke 15:13b). Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me...” (Luke 11:23). When one departs from God, he does not remain “almost” saved, or near by. When one steps out of God’s light, he steps into the far country of darkness. There is no light between the kingdom of God and Satan’s kingdom of darkness (1 John 1:5-7).

Away from his father’s sheltering house, in that far country, the young man, “wasted his substance in riotous living” (Luke 15:13c). God has given each of us days that are 24 hours long. Riotous living wastes those days one by one, until they are gone and nothing remains but eternal darkness. Each of us is endowed with natural talents. Those may be as a song leader, a Bible class teacher, or a gospel preacher. But ignored and unused in God’s service, those things lie dormant and are wasted in riotous living until, like an unused, atrophied limb, they are useless and we face eternity with a wasted life. Sin always wastes lives.

How many prodigals today face the same condition as that young man in the far country? He spent everything he had and a great famine arose in the land and he became destitute. In his desperation, he did what no godly Israelite would have done— “..he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine” (Luke 15:15). Swine were unclean under Moses’ Law and no self respecting Jew would raise or tend them. When one goes away from God, into a far country, he not only fails to respect God, but has no respect for himself or any others. That young man had now reached the low point of his life and saw no way out. That is the condition of every child of God today who goes into a far country. How often do thoughts of suicide enter the mind of such an one? But suicide only ends physical life and sends a lost soul into eternity, where his anguish never ceases.

The things of this earth cannot satisfy the soul and when one reaches his low point, he has no anchor of life apart from God. The richest gambler in Las Vegas today is destitute of eternal riches. The child of God who goes back and walks no more with Jesus is as spiritually destitute as that young man and that Vegas gambler. He has exchanged the Bread and Water of Life for that which does not profit, and Peter says he’s like a dog that returns to his own vomit and a sow that was washed which returns to “her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:22).

But the greatest tragedy is yet to come for the prodigal who does not come home. Hear Peter again:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto

them (2 Pet. 2:20-21).

Like the rich man in torment, the prodigal who remains a prodigal will be forever tormented by memory of his wasted opportunities to serve God (Luke 16:23-35).

When the young man's substance and the "good times" were gone, so were his friends. He was alone, penniless, and hungry. Those who had, doubtless, been his party mates in riotous living were nowhere around to comfort him. His, "evil companions" helped to corrupt his good morals (1 Cor. 15:33), but now offered no aid. "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him" (Luke 15:16).

Even now, you may be in a far country, and in that young man's condition. But no country is so far that you cannot return to your Father's house as he did. It was the awakening of his tender conscience, his precious memories of home, and his steeled determination that turned his life around.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants (Luke 15:17-19).

No man is tempted above that which he can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). When a prodigal son comes to himself, considers his lost condition, and is determined to return to his father's house, no force on earth can prevent him from doing that. It's simply a matter of **willing** to do God's will.

The boy's father in the parable represents God, and his reaction to his son's return is one of love, kindness, welcome, and joy. He did not even wait for his son to complete his trip, but saw him "a great way off... and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Nor did the father scold him or try to shame him. He received him in loving arms and treated him as though he had never been away. He rejoiced that his son was home from the far country, and there is more rejoicing in heaven today over one lost lamb who is returned to the fold of God, than over a hundred who need no repentance (Luke 15:3-7).

Prayers ascend to heaven and parents grieve daily for lost sons and daughters in the far country, who were once safe in their Father's house. They need not perish while time and opportunity permit. While the breath of life is in them, on this side of eternity, they can come home like that son did. They can leave that far country behind, along with their fair weather, party-loving "friends" and come home to walk in the blessed hope of eternal life. There is no sin they have committed that cannot be washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Mothers pray for you, fathers pray for you, your brothers and sisters pray for you, and Jesus waits with open arms. Won't you come home? If you will, your family will rejoice, as will the hosts of heaven.

How May I be Freed From Sin?

Gayle Oler

If you are going to break the hold of sin upon your life, and clear your record of its blot, you are interested in the answer to the question, "How may I be freed from my sin?"

Paul said to the Romans, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18).

We are made free from our sins when we obey that form of doctrine that Paul delivered. But what is that form of doctrine that man is to obey? In the same chapter—Romans 6—we read Paul's explanation as to what they had obeyed.

Paul says in that chapter, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into

death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-5).

Clearly, the form given to us was that of baptism in which form we have the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

As proof positive that it is in beautiful baptism that a man is really freed from his sins, Paul declares that we are baptized into the death of Christ, (v. 3), and that the death that Jesus died, He died to sin (v. 10). As we die to sin in baptism, we die with Christ. Paul says in Romans 6:7, “For he that is dead is freed from sin.”

But is that all? Valid baptism is always preceded by honest faith in Christ. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16). Without faith it is impossible to please God. And Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

So the man who is a sincere believer in Jesus must repent of his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38). Have you done this that you may be freed from your past sins?

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“We're All Sinners”

Jerry C. Brewer

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).

When one condemns sin in the life of another, the retort is usually hurled that, “We're all sinners. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” That smug reply **assumes** that since all have sinned, therefore no one can condemn sin in another. 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. C.E.W. Doris wrote,

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 committeth 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 the 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**, who was also guilty of adultery, to Jesus. 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 but were **not parties to it**. In this instance, those witnesses were "without sin." 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 observe. Therefore, Jesus merely followed Moses' law, saying that 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. 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. His reply that, "Neither do I condemn thee" was a legal response consistent with the Law. He had not witnessed her adultery and, therefore, could not condemn her to death under it. Had He done so, He would have violated the Law Himself. Neither did He condone her sin. He told her to, "go and sin no more," indicating that she had, indeed, committed sin.

The scribes and Pharisees who brought the woman to Jesus slunk away when He refused to fall into their trap. They knew they had no case under the Law of Moses without the man who was as guilty as the woman, and the witnesses refused to execute her in violation of Roman law. That is *prima facie* evidence of their intent to discredit Jesus—not to respect God's law—and they were entrapped in their own dilemma.

John 8:3-11 does *not* mean that since, "We're all sinners" we cannot condemn sin in the lives of others. 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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God's Law Vetoed

G.K. Wallace

Theologians refuse to admit or approve the law of God. They think they have the right to set aside what God says for how they feel or believe. We have lost our Bible. Most people in America own and often carry a Bible but it is nullified in various ways. The word of God is vetoed or set aside in the following ways:

Claims To Special And New Revelations

The Bible teaches that the word of God is complete (2 Tim. 3:17). The word of God furnishes the man of God completely unto every good work. Any work not authorized by the Bible is not a good work.

God's divine power has granted us everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Paul says in Ephesians 4:13 that we have "the unity of the faith." That means that when the New Testament was finished we had all the faith. Any claim to a new or extra revelation other than what the apostles taught incurs the wrath of God. Paul says, "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. 1:8). The curse of God rests on all who claim to have messages that were not received and preached by the apostles. Claims to new revelations veto the word of God.

Men Veto The Word Of God By Their Consciences

Some allow the word of God to be set aside in favor of their conscience. Conscience cannot be a safe guide because it may be mistaken.

Paul's conscience was clear while he persecuted the church (Acts 23:1). Paul **thought** he should do things contrary to the will of God but he was wrong (Acts 26:9). Conscience may be hardened (1 Tim. 4:2). Conscience may be weak and defiled (Titus 1:15). Conscience is a creature of education. It approves what we believe to be right and disapproves what we believe to be wrong. It is not believing that saves, but what you believe. “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Experiences And Feelings Veto The Word Of God

Many are heard to say, “I don't care what the Bible says, I know how I feel.” Feeling is not an act of obedience, but the result of a viewpoint. The new birth is an act that takes one out of the realm of Satan and into the kingdom of God. A change of state is an act and not a sentiment or feeling. One feels good because he has done what he believes to be right. If what he does is not right, feeling good will not make it right.

Those who rely upon feelings rely upon their own judgment. The final decision is upon man's judgment and not the word of God. If feelings are placed above the word of God, then anything can be considered the will of God.

Ignoring the word of God for feelings, or what is called “the obedience to the spirit,” spells anarchy. This is true because there are as many “inner spirits” as there are “outer bodies.” To reject the word of God is to reject God. There is no such thing as “accepting Christ” while at the same time rejecting his revealed will.

So-Called Personal Encounters Veto God's Word

When religious services are made up of personal testimonies, these testimonials relate how Jesus or the Holy Ghost came to them and spoke peace or gave directions. These testimonials ignore the fact that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Too, those who **testify** veto God's law about the operation of God's power to save. Jesus Christ is forbidden to speak directly to mankind. When Jesus wanted Saul to be an apostle he appeared to him on the Damascus highway (1 Cor. 15:8). However, he told Saul to go to Damascus to learn what to do to be saved (Acts 9:6). The Holy Spirit cannot tell a man what to do to be saved except through the revealed will of God. God's will for man is revealed and no one has a personal encounter.

Some years ago I was preaching in a certain city and staying in a hotel near the meeting house. On the way there, a person stopped me and asked, “Are you a Christian?” I replied, “Yes, I am a Christian and a gospel preacher. Come and go with me to the service at the meeting house.”

He replied, “Sir, I am sorry but the Holy Ghost spoke to me and told me to ask you that.”

I replied, “That is odd as the Holy Ghost knows that I am a Christian, as I was baptized in His name. There is a ghost after you and he is not Holy.”

In the last days there will be “seducing spirits” to lead men astray (1 Tim. 4:1). If you have had some personal encounter it was with some spirit other than the Holy Spirit. So-called “testimonials” are not only misleading, but they are outlawed by the word of God. Paul says we are not to preach ourselves (2 Cor. 4:5). When one is testifying, he is preaching himself. If you wish to tell us what God says, say on. If you wish to preach yourself, please excuse me as I have something better to do than listen to revelations from evil spirits.

Internal authority leads to self-worship. Modernists tell us that our conception of God comes not from revelation, but intuition. Paul said man made God in his own image (Rom. 1:23). The sin of setting self-will above the will of God is that which caused the downfall of the human race (Gen. 3). Religious worshippers have no way of knowing what God wants except through what God says. To accept any source of internal au-

thority is a denial of God. “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Those who accept special revelation, inner light, and personal encounters reject the word of God as a “dead letter” and depend wholly upon their own feelings. In so doing, they veto the word of God.

There is only one source of authority. This authority is in Jesus Christ. He has all authority (Matt. 28:18-19). The source of this authority is God who gave it to Christ. God and Christ have revealed themselves through the Holy Spirit, in the Bible. The Bible is the revelation of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Does God speak to man directly or through the word of God? The answer is clear. Deity speaks through the word of God. When men accept the Bible as the full and complete will of God, they are not far from the kingdom of God.

Can a Saved Man be Lost?

Hulen L. Jackson

Our position relative to the question, “Can a saved man fall from the grace of God?” has been, and is today, greatly misunderstood. We believe—because the Bible so teaches—that when a man actually possesses eternal life he cannot, and will not, lose it. The point of difference between us and many of our religious friends is, “When does a person receive everlasting life?” Does he receive it in this life or in the world to come? Jesus says if a man leaves the things of this world for His sake and the Gospel's sake, he shall receive in this life a hundred fold of all these, and “in the world to come” eternal life (Mk. 10:30). Hence Jesus says that eternal life is received in the world—or life—to come.

In what sense then can I receive everlasting life when I believe, as God says? In only one way. As a believer in the Lord, I have the **hope** of life eternal. In Titus 1:1-2, the apostle Paul says he is a servant of God **in hope** of eternal life. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentile world did not actually possess eternal life, but as a believer he had the hope of that eternal life.

He also told the Romans that as children of God we are heirs of God and joint with Jesus Christ. Heirs of what? In Titus he has already told us—eternal or everlasting life. Therefore, the Bible teaches that a person does not actually receive everlasting life in this world, but as a disciple of Christ he has the hope or promise of receiving it.

I've often been asked, “If a person is a child of God will he not always be a child of God?” I answer, emphatically, “Yes, indeed!” But a son is often disinherited in this life by his father. If a son becomes disobedient, the father often refuses to let him have his inheritance with the rest of the family. Does that mean he is no longer a child of his father? Certainly not!

I was born into my father's family several years ago and by reason of that birth I am still in that family and shall be as long as life lasts. By reason of my spiritual birth, I am a member of the family of God and shall remain a member of that family regardless of the type of life I may live. Yes, I may become ungodly and therefore be lost in eternity but I'll be lost as an ungodly child and not as an alien or stranger from the family of God.

When we withdraw from a brother because of his sinful life, are we throwing him out of the church or family of God? Absolutely not! We did not put that man in the church and therefore have no right to take him out of it. Any church that a man can add you to or take you out of is not—and cannot be—the church of the Bible. We simply withdraw fellowship from the ungodly church member as the Bible directs because of his life, but that man is still a child of God and a member of the church.

According to Acts 2, when a person believes the gospel, repents of his sin, and is baptized as God directs, the Father adds him to the church which is God's family (1 Tim. 3:14-15). At the end of time, in the judgment, those who have not remained faithful to the Lord's commands will be taken out of His family and placed with the unbelievers. 1 Peter 4:18 tells us that two classes of people will be lost—the sinners and

the ungodly. The “ungodly” are those in God's family who have fallen from His grace and not lived as He commanded. Along with the sinners or unbelievers, they will be cast out in eternity.

Notice the following several verses from 2 Peter:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: [and notice this last part] for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. (2 Pet. 1:4-10).

This one passage alone is sufficient to convince one that a saved man **can be lost**. Verse four says they have been saved from sin, and verse five says besides this, or in addition to this, there are other things to do. The saved man must add the Christian graces. If he does not do it, he is barren and unfruitful. The Lord says the branch — the Christian—that is unfruitful shall be cut off and cast into outer darkness and destroyed. Why then exhort saved people to “make your calling and election sure” if it is already sure and certain that they will be saved eternally?

The latter part of verse 10 proves conclusively that I can fall from His grace. Why say, “if ye do these things ye shall never fall”, if they **cannot** fall? What is the purpose of the condition expressed? When the condition has been fulfilled, then the blessing is ours. If we continue to add the things expressed in the above verses, we shall not fall. But if we do not continue to add these graces but rather faint by the wayside and become unfruitful, we shall fall. This conclusion must be accepted. Yes, I **can fall** and **will fall** if I do not **abide in the teachings of the Lord** delivered unto me as His disciple.

But again, a parallel passage to this one is found in Galatians 6:9. Speaking to saved people, Paul said, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.” Yes, in due season we shall reap or inherit eternal life, but under the condition that we “faint not.” If we do faint or quit working as God commands, what shall be the result? We shall not in due season reap the harvest—eternal life.

If those Galatians, by fainting in their work for Christ would not inherit eternal salvation, the same must also be true of men today, for the word of God does not change. We obey the gospel and become saved from our past sins and a child of God in His kingdom or church. But we must work and pray as He outlines in the New Testament, or else we will fall from His grace and be lost in the judgment.

If you believe that, as a saved man, you cannot become unsaved, then listen to another passage from Paul's writings. In 1 Cor. 10, he is discussing with the saved people of Corinth a comparison between them and the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. Several examples are given of the Israelites as God's children sinning until God took their lives. They were children of God. They sinned and God took their lives. Then in verse 11, Paul states that those things happened unto them for our examples and are written for our admonition.

Then he concludes with verse 12, saying, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” To whom was he speaking? To Christians who were living in sin. To them, Paul says, “take heed how you live or you will fall.” How can anyone read that one verse and still believe that he cannot fall from the grace of God? You cannot misunderstand that statement without some help. It is too simple and plain to be misunderstood. Why not let the Bible speak and then be honest enough with ourselves to accept what it says?

Links to 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

New Bible Lesson Series on You Tube

We have two new series of Bible lessons on our You Tube channel—A study of the book of Galatians, taught by Jerry C. Brewer, and A Study of The Holy Spirit, taught by Ron Cosby. The Galatians study will consist of 15 lessons of approximately 30 minutes each and the Holy Spirit study will be about the same length.

The first few lessons of each series are now posted for viewing at these links:

Galatians

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSkVG8Jjn3CZ5IPkWTdm_dE6SzYRSgnfA

The Holy Spirit

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSkVG8Jjn3CbV8skt---HNY42R1jJB370>

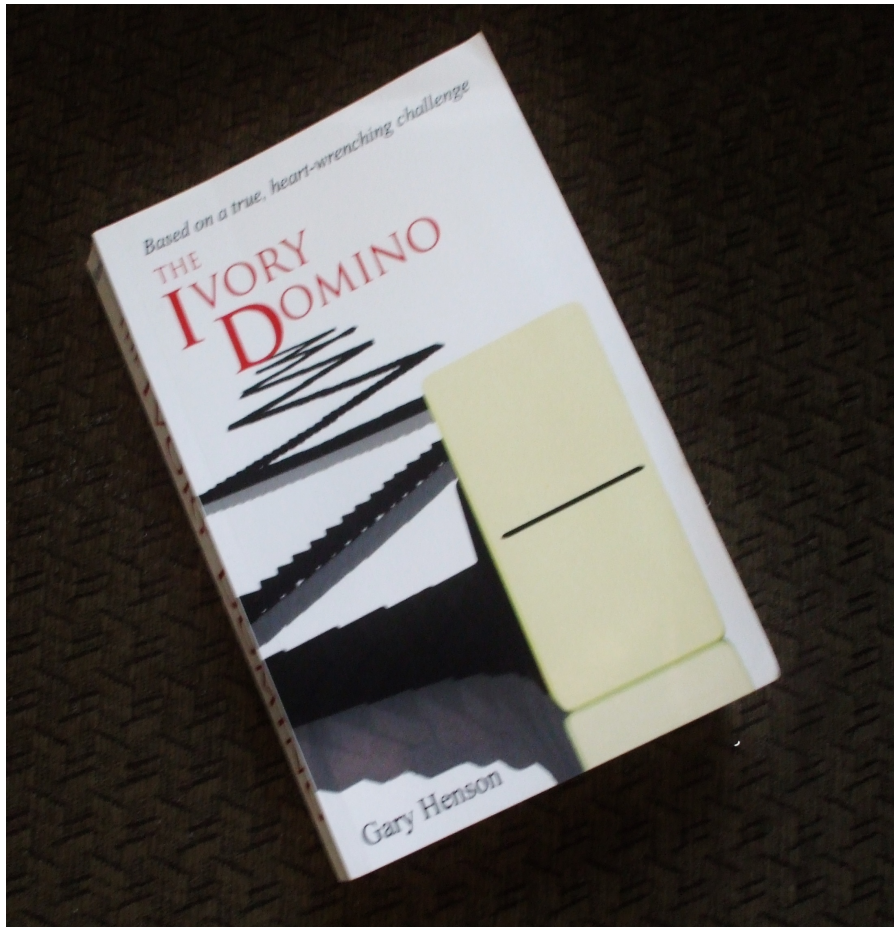
Additional lessons will be posted until the full series of both are completed.

Other Bible articles, downloadable books, and links to audio and video sermons may be found at the website of *The Gospel Preceptor* at <http://thegospelpreceptor.com/>

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From His Website - <https://theivorydomino.com/>

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Jerry C. Brewer
Editor & Publisher
The Gospel Preceptor