

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the restoration of pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 20

March 1990

No. 11

EDITORIAL



A Fool's Death

Under the law of Moses in ancient Canaan there were appointed six cities of refuge, three each in the eastern and western region of the country. The purpose of these cities was to give shelter to one who had accidentally or unintentionally committed manslaughter. They were so designed that no part of Palestine was far from a city of refuge. The involuntary slayer of his fellowman could escape the avenger of blood by entering to the nearest city of refuge and by abiding there till the death of the high priest. On the death of the high priest he was at liberty to return to his home and enjoy the protection of the authorities. (Numbers 35:9-15; Deuteronomy 19:1-6; Joshua 20:1-6).

In the book of 2 Samuel, in the Old Testament of the Bible, we read about Abner who was the commanding general of King Saul's army. After the battle was over he was returning to go back, but Asahel followed him to kill him. Abner did not want to kill Asahel, but Asahel refused to stop. Thus Abner was compelled to slay young Asahel in self defense. (2 Samuel 2:23). There-

after Abner fled to the nearest city of refuge, but he stood around in the gate with the city fathers. However, Joab, Asahel's brother came following Abner and spoke softly to him and took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, thus deceived him as to his purpose, and then smote him dead in the gate of the city of refuge. Abner was near the city of refuge but he was not inside the realm of safety. So near and yet so far! Abner, like many today, seemed to think standing around the gate was as good as being inside. When David, the king, followed the body of Abner to its grave, he wailed the sad lament, "Should Abner die as a fool dies?" (2 Samuel 3:33). How like the fate of many in our time! They think they are safe, but they are not! They think they are in Christ, but they are not! They think they are going to enter heaven in the day of judgment, but they are not prepared! Let us learn from following examples:

Adam, in the beginning, did not take God's word seriously when he was told, "...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:17). Adam died, that is, he was separated from God, the same day in which he broke the command of God by doing that which God had forbidden.

People who lived in Noah's time died as a fool dies in that that they did not listen to the preaching of Noah. They had the opportunity to repent and turn to God for salvation but they refused. They thought Noah was crazy, and that there would be no flood and no destruction. But they were wrong. (Genesis 6 and 7).

Nadab and Abihu, who were devoured by fire, died as a fool dies. The Bible says, "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." (Leviticus 10:1, 2). Those two priests of the Old Testament order did not take God's word with all seriousness. They took fire, but another fire (Number 16:46), which God had not commanded.

In Luke chapter 12 Christ taught a wonderful lesson regard-

ing the foolishness of trusting in worldly riches. The man in the story of Christ had accumulated for himself so much wealth that he was heard saying to himself, "You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But then God said to him, said Christ, "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" Concluding the story Jesus said, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:19-21).

At Matthew 7:21-23, Christ in providing a glimpse of the judgment day said, "Not everyone who says to Me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." And then He said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?" But the Lord said, "then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." How foolish they were! They had prayed and preached in His name. They had performed many good and wonderful things in His name. What they lacked was, though, they did not do what He had commanded. They might have thought that the things the Lord had commanded were of no significance, They did not take God's word with seriousness, hence they were condemned to die eternally in hell. How foolish!

After His death and resurrection from the dead, the Son of God and man's saviour sent his disciples to preach His saving gospel to the whole world and commanded, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Have you done what the Lord has commanded? Many are trying to do "great things", even in the name of Christ. Yet they have not obeyed a simple command of Christ to be baptized to be saved! Because it seems too simple and illogical to them. Are you in Christ, where there is no condemnation? (Romans 8:1; Galatians 2:37). Act now, while you have time and the opportunity. Believe in Him with all your heart, as eunuch did in Acts 8:27. Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins, as the great multitude of Acts 2:38-41 had

done, and then live a faithful life to the Lord, who has promised, "I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:3).

"Let No Man Despise Thee"

J.C. Choate

The Apostle Paul said to Titus, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." (Titus 2:15). Please notice first that Paul is instructing Titus to do the kind of speaking, preaching, and correcting that could be very difficult, and might cause resentment, hard feelings, and opposition. But he not only asks him to do it but he says that he should do it with all authority. That is, he was to be confident, firm, and forceful in his dealings with these people. But notice in the second place that he was to conduct himself in such a way that he would not be despised. Although he might be dealing with people concerning serious matters, he should do it with love, concern, and in the interest of their souls, but certainly not in an ugly, haughty, and un-Christian manner. He would not be able to have the kind of influence on them that would be for their good if he ended up being despised by them.

At the very time the church was beginning in Jerusalem, after the Apostles preached the gospel to a large crowd of people and some three thousand people obeyed the Lord, the record says, "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47). Notice that it says that they had favour with all the people. No, they did not compromise the truth or fail to preach God's will. They did preach the truth. They even told those present that some of them had had part in crucifying the very Son of God. But they also told them how they could be forgiven. Therefore, they were well received on this occasion. Had they been mean and ugly in their preaching, that would have probably caused a riot and their lives would have been in danger. But as it turned out

three thousand obeyed the Lord, were saved, and the church was established.

It is true that even when the truth is preached in love and concern for the lost (Ephesians 4:15), that some will resent it and oppose it. (2 Thessalonians 2:10). But for some unknown reason, some equate meanness, ugliness, and being overly hard with that of being sound, bold, and faithful in preaching the truth. Such people gain a reputation for being controversial and wanting to debate everybody. They glory in this. But they will not be able to influence many for Christ with this attitude and disposition. If there is to be any hard feelings expressed, let it not be on the part of the one who declares the truth.

Paul said to the young preacher, Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12). It is possible for young people to conduct themselves in such a manner, both by attitude, word of mouth, and conduct, that their elders will resent them, despise them, and reject them. Paul states though that such young people should conduct themselves in such a way that they might be a good example and therefore be in position to have a good influence on other young people, as well as those who are senior to them.

When Paul gave the qualifications for being elders and deacons in the church, suggesting the highest leadership office in the church, he listed things in general that would mean that the ones possessing them would be men of high moral standards, good husbands and fathers, and with the ability to lead both by teaching and the example of their lives. One of particular qualifications for elders was that they must have a good report of them which are without, that is, those who are not members of the church. For men who are going to give leadership to a local congregation of the church, then they should be highly respected and accepted by the people where they live if they and the church expect to have a good influence on them and to grow. Bad characters with questionable reputations are not the kind of

people that can lead the church or be of any help to the Lord's cause wherever they happen to be.

With Peter listing the Christian graces or good moral and spiritual qualities that should be found in every person who follows Christ, then you will note that he also discusses those traits and characteristics that will put that person in good standing before the Lord, with his brethren, and with the world. He said, "And beside 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." (2 Peter 1:5-8). Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit as being "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22, 23). The point is, that when a Christian has the proper attitude, treats his fellowman right, and fills his life with good works, then he will generally be highly thought of by both his brethren and those of the world. As Paul said, "Against such there is no law," or there is no law against doing such good works. This will then make it possible for him to have a greater influence on those around him, and to be in better position to teach God's will.

May the Lord help us to remember that we represent him and his cause always. Let us so live then as not to bring shame and reproach upon the church and the name of the Lord, which would hinder his cause. In other words, let us conduct ourselves in such a way that no one will despise us.

"Fearfully And Wonderfully Made"

Peggy T. Crump

Studies tell us there are 206 bones in the human body, more than half of these in the hands and feet. The thigh bone, which

is hollow, is the strongest in the body. More than 650 muscles surround these bones and soft organs of the body. The ears can distinguish frequencies from zero to 20,000 HZ. The brain has 10 billion nerve cells and can record over 86 billion bits of information daily. The eyes can distinguish millions of shades of colour. Each lung is filled with 300 million tiny air sacs called alveolus. If flattened they would cover 1,000 square feet, the area of three boxing rings. One drop of blood no bigger than the letter a contains 5,000,000 red cells and 5,000 white cells. We are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made"!! (Psalm 139:14).

The human body was divinely created (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7). We did not just happen (Psalms 100:3; 95:1-7). This body has "many members" (Romans 12:4), but each is subject to the mind or head. The head must do its work through its members. All members are important—no matter how small (1 Corinthians 12:14-26). We must take care of each one. All members go the same direction, working the same work which the mind (or head) has told them to do, although each does a different thing.

If a member gets sick or injured, all others co-operate to help it. The life of our body is in the blood. Any member cut off from this blood becomes sick and/or dies.]

The church is made up like our bodies. It consists of many members which cannot rule themselves. Therefore we are subject to Christ, the head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23).

The head must do all its work through the members, carrying the gospel message to others. Each member of this body is also important, as each must work and go the same direction (1 Corinthians 12:13-30), but not all do the same work (Romans 12:4-8).

If one member becomes weak or spiritually sick, other members are to help restore him (Galatians 6:1-2; Romans 14:1; James 5:1-20). The life of the church lies in the blood, the blood of Christ (Colossians 1:13,14; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:2; Revelation 1:5; Hebrews 9:14).

The members of our bodies exalt the head to the highest

pinacle. So should church members exalt Christ to the highest possible height (Colossians 1:18). We should trust our spiritual head to lead his spiritual body, just as we trust our minds to lead our physical body. Christ will then lead us by the Holy Spirit through his written word (I Corinthians 2:13; Romans 1:16; 8:9; II Thessalonians 2:14).

Yes, our physical bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). But the church or spiritual body is more wonderfully made because it was made by the Marvelous Grace of God! His Son gave his physical life for our spiritual (John 3:16).

How And Why Are We Called To Be Saints?

Clifford Dixon

That man is "called" of God is found many times in our New Testament. In I Corinthians 1:2 Paul states that they were "called to be saints." In Ephesians 4:1 we are told to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." II Timothy 1:9 states God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling..." In I Peter 2:9 we are told that we are "called out of darkness into his marvelous light." II Peter 1:10 states that if we add the Christian graces we make our "calling and election sure."

The question is not whether we are called of God, but How are we called of God? The answer to this comes from II Thessalonians 2:13,14: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." So man is called by the gospel. This is the reason it is stated, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). When we accept and obey the gospel, then we become the children of God. (Galatians 3:26-27; Hebrews 5:8-9).

When we consider man's history of rejecting the commands of God, and in general has rebelled against the standard God has given we pose the question, Why does the lord call us? Just why would he give us the opportunity to be saved by giving us the gospel that will save our souls if we with meekness will receive it? (James 1:21).

God needs the help of good men to show him and his will to the world. Paul stated that he and the apostles had "this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Corinthians 4:7). God had angels to be his messengers; yet he chose that through men whom he inspired, the gospel be given to the world.

God has also passed down the task of teaching that gospel to the world, into the hands of men. Timothy was told that the things he received at the mouth of the apostle Paul, he was to commit "to faithful men," who would teach others also (II Timothy 2:2). If you will check out your New Testament cases of conversion, you will find every time a man was told what to do to be saved, he was always told by another man. Never did an angel tell anyone what to do to be saved. Never did God reveal what to do to be saved in a vision, nor in a dream. Angels, visions and dreams had their part during the formative days of the gospel; but the message of salvation was always delivered by men. You see, God has chosen that "by the foolishness of preaching" men believe (I Corinthians 1:21). God still needs good men who will "live soberly, righteously, and godly," to preach the gospel to the lost world (Titus 2:11-12). He needs men who are "rocks" like Peter, who said: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). He needs committed men like Paul—men who "live by faith," and who are "set for the defence of the gospel" (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:17). God needs disciples who are faithful like John who at an old age was exiled to Patmos, but he was still "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10). Yes, God still needs good men to represent him upon earth to their fellow men. Will you hear his call and obey it, so that you will also be one of these who teach others about God?

God has restoration of the human race in mind by giving humanity the gospel call. In Acts 3:21 we read that the heavens must keep Christ until "the restitution of all things." This restoration is not a physical restoration of the earth to a paradise as is taught in so many sects, This is rather a "restoration" of the soul to communion and fellowship with God. Jesus Christ brought this about by his death on the cross (Ephesians 2:16); but man must respond to the teaching of Christ in order to enjoy it. This restoration begins when we heed the gospel call by being "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5), which means to believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). This restoration continues as we who are "risen with Christ" "seek those things which are above" (Colossians 3:1-16). The revamping of life comes when we put off sinful things and put on right things according to God's standard. If we stumble along the way, provision is made for us to repent, confess our faults, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; I John 1:9-10). This restoration will be complete when we receive eternal life (Mark 10:30). A glorious resurrection of the righteous dead will mean that the corruptible will put on incorruption, the mortal shall have put on immortality, and death is no more (I Corinthians 15:53-54). The Lord will take such to meet him in the air (I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The most important thing in life for any of us is to heed the call of God through the gospel. We need to "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). If we do so, God will fill our needs and bless us eternally. There is a yearning in man for his Creator. Do not squash it down with worldly pursuits! Take time for the things of God before it is too late.

The Search for Religious Unity

Clem Thurman

Our Lord prayed, "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may

all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (Jno. 17:20-21). As He prayed for unity of all believers, so all credible witnesses describe a united movement among those early disciples. Since the Reformation movement, and some what even before, believers in Christ have been divided. The picture that the world sees is that of competitive groups, teaching conflicting doctrines, but all claiming to follow Christ. The prayer of Jesus directs the thoughts of true followers in the paths of unity, not denominationalism.

Nearly all those who believe in Christ recognize a need for His followers to be united. Yet division persists. If a group of people, from different faiths, were to embark upon a search for unity, what would be the basis for their search? And what would be its limits?

The Search for a Universal God

The ancient Syrians believed in a "God of the hills" and a "God of the valleys" (1 Kgs. 20:28). When Paul preached in Athens, he found a "city full of idols" (Acts 17:16). The unique teaching of the Jews, that made them distinct from the nations about, was this: "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). The teaching of "one God" is stated clearly by Jesus and His followers, also (Mk. 12:29-30; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6). In order to bring about unity, there must be agreement that "there is one God" (1 Tim. 2:5).

But not only must there be recognition of one God, we must agree that He is God of all the world, and everyone in it. Paul preached to idolaters in Athens, "The God that made the world and all things therein, he being Lord of heaven and earth. . . made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth . . . that they should seek God" (Acts 17:24-27). There cannot be a God for the whites and another for the blacks, there cannot be a God for the rich and another for the poor. Jesus told the apostles, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"

(Mk. 16:15-16). The apostles made it clear that the one God was speaking the same thing to all mankind: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him . . . that through his name everyone that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:34-43). It is this God that tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" (Heb. 11:6). If unity is ever achieved, it must be by all accepting the one God.

The Search for a Universal Teaching

We read of the one God in Heb. 1:1-2, "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by divers portions and in divers manners, hath in these last days spoken unto us in his Son." God spoke through inspired prophets in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 1:19-21), but now He speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ: "The Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life eternal" (Jno. 12:49-50). The message which Jesus gave was, and is, the word of God.

Before Jesus departed to return to the Father in Heaven, He told His apostles to preach His gospel (Mk. 16:15), and He promised: "He that heareth you, heareth me; he that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me" (Lk. 10:16). As Jesus guided the apostles "into all the truth" (Jno. 16:13), their message was "God's word." Jesus declared that, and so did they: "Ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thes. 2:13). Paul wrote later, "All Scripture is inspired of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). If believers are ever united, it must be by accepting the Scriptures as God's word, and uniting upon that teaching.

The Search for Religious Authority

Some contend that one's conscience is supreme, some look to parents and still others allow society to determine their course of action in religion. Whether it is realized or not, each of these

becomes an authority. But if unity is achieved, a common authority must be accepted. What shall it be? Jesus, after His death and resurrection, said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). The word of God, as spoken by Jesus through His inspired apostles, must be our authority. Peter wrote of God, "His divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us" (2 Pet. 1:3). As long as each insists on his "right" to believe what he wants, division will persist. Only Christ has authority, and to be united we must accept that.

Some will contend, though, that the laws of the Old Testament must apply today. But the contrast in Heb. 1:1 is clear: God spoke through the prophets under the Old Testament. He speaks through Christ in these last days. Paul wrote of Christ, "Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). The old law was removed when Christ died, so that the New Testament could begin (Heb. 9:15-17; 10:9-10). His death took away that "middle wall of partition" (the old law) so that both Jews and Gentiles could be "reconciled in one body unto God through the cross" (Eph. 2:14-16). In fact, when one tries to go back to parts of the old law, he is "severed from Christ" and "fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:2-4). If we are to achieve unity, we must accept the word of God as spoken through Christ in the New Testament as our authority.

The Search for a Common Salvation

Jude wrote of our "common salvation" and exhorts us, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). God doesn't offer a "multiple choice" of plans for salvation, even though that idea is certainly offered by the denominational world. Jesus said, "Except one be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Jno. 3:5). He later taught this in the great commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"

(Mk. 16:15-16). This gospel was to be taught everywhere, and when people obeyed, they were "born of water and the Spirit." We see this pattern clearly in the preaching of these apostles later: "What shall we do? . . . Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:37-38). Philip preached Christ in Samaria, and "when they believed . . . they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:5, 12). The first question asked by the Ethiopian when he believed was, "Here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). The Phillippian jailor, upon hearing the gospel for the first time, "was baptized, he and all his, immediately" (Acts 16:33). The Lord told Saul, who had been fasting and praying for three days and nights, "Now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Theirs was indeed a "common salvation," for the pattern was the same for all of them.

The universal nature of this "common salvation" is clearly shown later. One salvation, for all peoples of the earth in every generation, was a dominant theme of the gospel. "For all have sinned and, are come short of the glory of God. . . Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 3:23-24; 6:3). When people heard the gospel, they believed in Christ and were baptized into Christ. Simple. No quibbling. They just did it. "As many as received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). The result is stated in Gal. 3:26-28, "In Christ ye are all the children of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus." That is our common salvation: one gospel for all, one faith, one baptism, and all become "one in Christ."

The Search for a Universal Church

If there is to be real unity, the walls of denominationalism must be broken down and believers be united in one body. But how will it be structured? How organized? How governed? What will be the basis of membership? These questions create insur-

mountable difficulties, if we are left to man's wisdom to decide. But we are not! Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Why can't everyone accept that? Look at it: Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is head of it (Col. 1:18), Saviour of it (Eph. 5:23), that church is His bride (Eph. 5:22-32), and when He saves people He adds them to that church (Acts 2:47). We can never agree on "my church" or "your church", but if we are willing to follow Christ we should be able to agree on His church.

The apostle Paul found a divisive situation in Corinth, not unlike denominations in a given city today. God's teaching was, and is, to the point: "That ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you . . . Each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:10-13). As there is "one Lord" so is there "one body" and "one faith" (Eph. 4:4-5). Any valid search for unity of believers must recognize the "one body" which is the church Jesus built. We can no more divide His body (the church) than we can divide Christ: "Is Christ divided?" The apostle wrote in Rom. 12:5, "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another." To be united, as Jesus prayed, we must recognize that "oneness" with other believers in the body of Christ, His church.

When people around the world come to fully honour God and His word, to trust in Jesus as Lord, to accept His salvation and to live a full life of faith in His church—then the prayer of Jesus for unity of all believers will be answered. Let us all pray, and work, for that result "that the world may believe."

Rend Your Hearts

Johnny Ramsey

Some of the finest, richest Bible teaching can be found in the almost forgotten work of the Old Testament prophets. Joel and

Micah have passage after passage of deep, provocative thoughts that demand careful attention and application. The dynamic beauty of Joel 2:13 beckons to us centuries later and challenges the very best within us. The people of Joel's day, eight centuries before Christ, were masterful artists in the practice of external religion. They could put on the sackcloth ritual denoting penitent lives with the best demonstrators. But their heart was not in it. A great commentary on the situation would be Ezekiel's lament centuries later, "With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness" (Ezek. 33:31).

We may deceive the hapless public and be a subtle fraud, but we cannot fool God. Joel's contemporaries had an outward form of spiritual service, but they had a gigantic inward problem called "hypocrisy." The powerful prophet, speaking for Jehovah, urges the people to cleanse their hearts first and such purity would naturally become external as well (Titus 1:15).

Today it is not enough to just come forward when the invitation song is extended. It is not enough to just sign a printed white card and check the proper category for prayer. It is not enough to perfect the proper decorum for church-house religion. We must start long before that to prepare our hearts—yes, our minds from whence flow our attitudes, thoughts, motives and emphasis in life (Psa. 19:14). Micah wrote forcefully of the folly of folk who sacrificed their children in the fires of Molech, instead of personally getting right with God in genuine ethical conduct: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6:8).

Even today, much of our preaching and teaching is geared to outward, immediate, sensational display instead of lasting response from hearts saddened by sin and the separation from God it causes. Fanny Crosby wrote these sobering words "Hold Thou my hand closer, closer draw me, to Thy dear self—my hope, my joy, my all. Hold Thou my hand, lest haply I should wander, and, missing Thee, my trembling feet should fall." Too many people in Joel's day were merely actors upon the stage of life playing parts. Their heart was not in it. George Moore was

perceptive when he wrote, "Acting is therefore the lowest of arts. if it is an art at all."

With genuine faith we must worship God (2 Tim. 1:5) as we purpose in our heart to cleave to the Lord (Acts 11:23). May we determine to never "play a part" by being a hypocrite but purify our hearts before God (Lam. 3:4). Joel's day did not need more garments ripped and torn, but more hearts put back in place. God, who made us, deserves always the best within us. We will fail, no matter what we do, unless we cleanse the inside too.

Teach Us To Pray

Larry Albritton

Prayer is a wonderful privilege and a powerful source of help. The disciples were greatly impressed with the benefits of prayer in the life of their Lord. They too, wanted to be able to pray effectively so that they might obtain the spiritual strength and help from the Father that Christ so vividly exemplified before them. To be like Christ is to believe in prayer and exercise it often in all facets of life. As followers of Christ we should desire to pray more effectively and should be willing to learn from the Lord how we are to pray.

From a study course entitled, "Learn to Lead," by Jim Martin, we glean the following list of ingredients of acceptable prayer.

1. Address to God the Father—"Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." (Acts 4:24).

2. Praise—"By him (Jesus) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." (Hebrews 13:15.)

3. Thanks giving—"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:20).

4. Confessions—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins." (1 John 1:9).

5. Petitions—We may rightly pray for wisdom (James 1:5); for wants and legitimate needs (James 4:3); for healing of the sick (James 5:16-17); for things in keeping with his will (1 John 5:14); for the lost (Romans 10:1); and for all men and rulers. (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

6. "In the Name of Christ"—"If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." (John 14:14).

All prayers will not contain all of these ingredients, but number one and number six must always be there. If a letter is not properly addressed, it will not be received. So it is with prayers. We must address God, the Father. There are many ways to do this: "O, Lord, our God;" "Dear Heavenly Father;" "Almighty God;" "Holy Father in Heaven." In every case prayer is to be addressed to God.

Again, if a letter is not authorized by the postal service it will not be delivered. In prayer we petition God through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is in his name or by his authority that the prayer reaches its destination. Without a stamp the letter will not get through. Without Christ's authority no prayer can get through. Remember: "No man comes unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5); he is our High Priest. (Hebrews 4:14); "Ye shall ask in my name," he commanded. (John 16:26).

"It is Easier for a Camel . . ."

W.A. Holley

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:24).

Another reference which sheds more light on our subject is:

"And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answered again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24, A.S.V.).

Many commentators seem to have trouble with the expression—"camel" and "needle"—but it seems better to consider them as literal—a real "camel" and a real "needle". The expression used by Jesus seems to have been a proverbial one.

Why were the disciples amazed and astonished at Jesus' lesson concerning those who put their trust in wealth? It was because men and women tend to trust in their wealth rather than in God Almighty. Money therefore becomes their God (Matthew 6:24). Money has no character of its own—it derives its character from its owner. Money spent for holy and righteous causes is good; but money spent for sinful purposes becomes evil. Many Jews thought that wealth was a sign of divine favor. The apostles, since they thought Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom, may have thought that they would receive great honors and wealth when that time came. The "Rich Young Ruler" refused to give up his possessions; but Paul surrendered all for Jesus' sake. (Matthew 22:37-38; Philippians 3:6-9).

What makes it so difficult for rich men to be saved? We shall note:

(1) Many wealthy men have obtained their money dishonestly. Some lie, steal, cheat, defraud, murder, or even sell their bodies that they might gain wealth. On the contrary, we should provide all things honest in the sight of others (Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 8:21).

"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house" (Proverbs 15:27). Greed has caused employers to defraud and mistreat those who work for them (James 5:1-4; Cf. Proverbs 1:18-19).

(2) Material wealth is one of our great problems in our society. We have fallen in love with possessions, houses, cars, clothes, jewelry, etc. and with academic achievements. Many are

more concerned with the pursuit of these items than with the pursuit of God and his righteousness.

The Lord demands perfect and exclusive loyalty. But Israel, like an unruly beast fattened in a stall, refused to submit to God's demands: "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxed fat thou art grown sleek; then he forsook the God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deuteronomy 32:15). Stop and think! "For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matthew 16:26, A.S.V.). Now read Proverbs 30:7-9.

(3) Material wealth causes some to become high-minded. Many rich people look down upon the poor. Arrogance and exalted ego can harden the hearts of the wealthy. Paul wrote, "Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not high-minded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (Margin: "ready to sympathize"); "laying up in a store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed" (I Timothy 6:17-19; Cf. Matthew 6:10-21).

(4) It is a great sin to trust in riches. Money can, and often does, become an idol. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, no unclean person nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5; Cf. Colossians 3:5). A "covetous" persons is one who unlawfully lusts after the possessions of others.

Riches are deceitful, promising what they cannot give (Matthew 13:22). One man said, "If I cannot take my wealth with me, I just will not go." How foolish! Howard Hughes, when he died left 2.2 billion dollars. The Bible teaches: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Timothy 6:7-8). A truer statement has never been uttered!!

It is not money, but the love of money that is a sin (I Timothy 6:10). Money—bribes—can be used to do great harm. "And thou shalt take no gift (bribe): for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the wise" (Exodus 23:8).

(5) It is a sin to fail to use money properly. Hear these words: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation, Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:8-10). We know this passage applies to those Jews who lived under the Old Testament, but there is a principle involved here. The principle of obedience is the same always. They were required to give according to the Old Testament law; we are required to give according to the New Testament law.

We must give as we have been prospered (I Corinthians 16:1-2). We must give as we purpose in our heart (II Corinthians 9:6-7). We must give according to our ability (Acts 11:29-30; II Corinthians 8:12-14). This contribution is to be freely made upon the first day of the week.

These words are written for those special people who love truth and righteousness.

A Sad And Tragic Condition

Yarbrough Leigh

Tragedy is somewhat commonplace in the world. If it happens to us, or to someone occupying a vital place in our life, it tends to blot from our view whatever else of good there might be, leaving us to magnify our suffering. But, there is a kind of tragedy that is exceedingly commonplace, and as a rule, it dwells

in our midst almost, if not altogether, unnoticed. And this is true in spite of the fact that this tragedy is so devastating and, often, is so irremediable as to make any and all other tragedies to be insignificant by comparison.

Of what kind of tragedy do I write? Listen to an inspired account of it as written by the prophet Isaiah some 2,700+ years ago:

“Also, I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and whom will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed” (Isaiah 6:8-10).

There it is: it is the tragedy of developing a mind set—an attitude and disposition of mind and heart which make it impossible to acknowledge any truth against which we hold deep prejudice, or which would cost us dearly in terms of our past commitments, beliefs and actions; or which would cut painfully across what we want to believe to be the truth.

This prophecy was dramatically fulfilled in the Jewish people in the day of Christ's earthly ministry. In Matthew 13:14-15, following the parable of The Sower, when his disciples asked why he spoke to the people in parables, he quoted this prophecy as having been fulfilled in that generation, thus making it necessary to “help” and to “illustrate” the truth by simple parables so that, if possible, they might see the truth of the gospel (parallel accounts in Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10). Again, as Jesus taught his Jewish brethren and saw their unbelief, in spite of his many miracles done before them, he cited Isaiah's description of their tragic condition (John 12:40). While imprisoned in Rome the apostle Paul talked with some of the Jewish leaders there, reminding them of this same prophecy, and urging them not to fall into that tragic disposition and be irrevocably lost through unbelief (Acts 28:27-28). Again, Paul used that prophecy to explain the unbelief of the Jews of his day (Romans 11:18).

What a great tragedy is here described! It is one that seems not to inflict any physical evil, but instead, dulls the mind and heart so as to destroy the love of truth. It crushes truth, and in its place substitutes the imaginations of the hearts of men; as Isaiah prophesied in another place: "forasmuch as this people drew near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men" (Isaiah 29:13). In fact, our Lord Christ applied this last prophesy to the Jews of his day (see Matthew 15:7-9)—"Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men".

The wise writer of Proverbs wrote, "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23). What a precious commodity is truth! There is no substitute for it no matter in what field of activity it is considered. And it is this unique characteristic of truth that makes the impossibility of discerning it to be such a tragedy! How deadly is the disease which masks the truth and hides it from our eyes and ears and minds and hearts so that we can neither see nor hear nor understand it!

It is the truth of God's words (John 17:17) which "sanctifies" men, and which "set men free" (John 8:31-32). It is that word, and that word alone, of which our Lord spoke, saying: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Therefore; how tragic it is when I have so dulled my hearing and perception so as to be incapable of seeing or perceiving and understanding the truth because of the hardness and blindness of my own heart. (see Ephesians 4:17-19)!

Gentle Reader, is your heart prepared to receive the word of God as it is, indeed, the word of God and not of man (I Thessalonians 2:13)? This cannot be until you have acknowledged in your conscience the absolute authority of that word, above and beyond the power and authority of any other word known to

men! Ezra "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). Ezra had repented of all rebellion against God and of all resistance to his will. He had prepared his heart to seek, that is, to search and find out and to understand and to apply the will of God: not that he might debate it, or talk about it learnedly, or argumentatively; but that he might do it, and teach in Israel statutes and judgments!

Hear me, dear Reader: you and I are not prepared in heart to see, or to hear, or to understand God's will until we are ready and anxious to seek the will of the Lord, that we might do it, and show it to others, both by precept and example. This is true, because otherwise (whether I admit it or not) I really do not want to know the truth! In his conversation with Nicodemus, our Lord, having said to him that those who refuse belief in him are "condemned already;" went on to say, "And this is condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:19-21).

What a tragic illness this is that will, unless cured, forever bar me from saving faith in the Lord of grace and mercy and truth! And, the tragedy of this illness is compounded by the fact that it is self induced! Let me ponder this truth prayerfully, and search my heart to know my own response to God's word! His mercy and grace are mine if I humbly receive his word in obedient faith, subjecting my will to his every command. But, if I rebel and harden my heart to the truth, my condemnation is sure and certain, by my own hand!

The Unknown God..The Unknown Church

Lester Kamp

When Paul arrived in Athens on his second mission trip, he

was distressed that "the city was wholly given to idolatry." (Acts 17:16.) Athens was the "intellectual capital" of the world and yet their ignorance of the true and living God was obvious. They had fashioned with their own hands two to three thousand idols to worship and to prevent the possibility of offending any other deity by omitting one they had inscribed under one idol "To the Unknown God."

Paul's words to Rome also apply appropriately to the Athenians; "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." (Romans 1:22, 23.). In Athens there was an abundance of religion resulting in much confusion ... and God was unknown.

To these people Paul was given the opportunity to set forth the reality of God, the God of the Bible, and to refute their false notions about Him. His sermon on Mars' Hill powerfully exposed the foolishness of their popular conceptions of deity.

First, Athenians believed that deity was man-made. They thought that they could make their gods to look like they wanted them to look and to be what they wanted them to be. Paul proclaimed that in reality God "made the world and all things therein" and is not dependent on man for his existence. (Acts 17:24-25, 29). Secondly, the Athenians believed that deity was a multitude of idols. These gods would vary in number and kind from nation to nation. Paul proclaimed that God is one and that his sovereignty is over all people. (Acts 17:26). Thirdly, Paul observed that their ignorance, self-acknowledged by the inscription "To the unknown God", was primarily responsible for their false concepts of God and for their evil practices. (Acts 17:23, 30).

Many in the world today are plagued by the same kind of conceptual problems which have been observed among the Athenians. The modern, popular concept of the "church of God" is so muddled that the church of the New Testament is virtually unknown. In our world there continues to be an abundance of religion resulting in confusion. Because of this many do not know nor recognize the true church. Notice how modern

thinking about the church parallels the Athenian erroneous concepts of deity.

To most the church is man-made. We hear such statements made as "Join the church of your choice" and "It doesn't matter what we believe and practice." Both statements reflect the notion that the church can be anything and everything that man wants it to be. If some can't find a church that is to their liking, it is suggested that they just start one that does reflect their thinking and desires. But the truth is that the church is God-made. Jesus stated, "I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18). This church was built on the day of Pentecost according to Acts 2 and respects the authority (Matthew 28:18) and preeminence of Christ. (Colossians 1:18). The church of God was "purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28).

According to the Bible, it matters what we believe and practice. To accept as "doctrines the commandments of men" makes our worship vain. (Matthew 15:9). God has written, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8). The church does not belong to us to change it as we please, but it belongs to God and it should remain as he made it.

Another popular concept of the church is that it is made up of all denominations. For these people there are many churches—all equally acceptable. Perhaps all of the 1586 religions in the United States (according to Dr. J. Gordon Melton) would, according to this conception, be considered just different representations of the church. But, God states emphatically that this concept, though popular is False. According to Ephesians 4:4, "There is one body". That one body is the one church. (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Jesus built "my church", (Matthew 16:18.) not "my churches"! Jesus prayed fervently for the unity (oneness) of his disciples. (John 17:20-21). The presence of a multiplicity of churches claiming to be the church (or part of it) is in direct opposition to the truth. The conflicting doctrines and practices of these religious groups conflict with the Biblical instruction "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." (1 Corinthians 1:10). Clearly,

the church is not many but one.

Ignorance of spiritual matters in an enlightened age is obvious today and inexcusable. God has revealed the truth which can free us from sin. (John 8:32). We can know it. The Word of God (truth, John 17:17) "is profitable for doctrine" and provides that which is necessary that we "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Copies of the Bible are abundant, but many are unwilling to study and obey it. They remain ignorant. To be saved we must know the truth and obey it. (1 Peter 1:22.) God will not excuse ignorance. (Acts 17:30). Those who were saved in the beginning were taught the truth (Acts 2:38), were obedient to it (Acts 2:41), and were added by the Lord to the church. (Acts 2:47). We must do the same.

Paul's declaration of the truth about God in Athens received mixed reactions. Some ridiculed it, some desired to hear more, and others became obedient believers. (Acts 17:32, 34). Those who hear the truth about the church will react in similar ways. What is your reaction?

But He Can Cleanse Everythings

Mike Sinapiades

In the clothes I received from the cleaners I found a small tag pinned on my shirt. It stated, "...the remaining stains and discolorations, after careful examination, cannot be removed. For fear that in our efforts we may destroy your garment, we return it to you...." I appreciate their candidness and sincerity—they can have my business any day!

This small incident, immediately brought to mind some of the religious claims of our day. In no uncertain terms they'll tell you they can do just about everything for you. From curing all of your ailments to creating riches and wealth, and from offering salvation to short of personally escorting you through the "Pearly Gates." The cleaners were honest and sincere, and readily declared their inability to cleanse some of the spots. But these

religious advocates, will promise you the moon and give you nothing. With their religious prescriptions, they promise to offer you complete and total cleansing from any and all of your sins and spiritual defilements, but ultimately they will lead you away from Christ.

There is however one who can cleanse all of your spiritual defilements, all of your transgressions and trespasses. He can bury into the sea of his forgetfulness ALL of your wrongs and evil doings. This One is Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God!

When you come to Jesus to be cleansed, he will never do you half of a job; he will never send back to you part of your life still soiled, attaching a note explaining to you his inability to cleanse parts of your spiritual leprosy. Of his power to cleanse and purify, the mighty prophet stated: "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18).

The magnitude of his pardon is unparalleled. In the Law we read that he is "the Lord God, merciful and gracious." (Exodus 34:6, 7). In David's inspired words, the Lord is presented to us as being "plenteous in mercy." (Psalm 53:8, 11, 12.) The prophet extolled him by stating that "he is merciful and will not keep anger for ever." (Jeremiah 3:12.) In his New Testament, forgiveness of sins is the cardinal doctrine. Salvation is heaven's gift to mankind as a result of his offering his life on Calvary's cross.

While it is true that Jesus sent out his preachers to preach the Good News of our salvation, he has not sent out the adulterators and deluders of his Word, ever begging and imploring people for their money, their letters, their support; wooing and enticing them with their "miraculous powers" and their claims of direct lines of communication with the Almighty.

False prophets and lucrative seers have always been with us, and shall continue to be to the end of time. To lose your money and be disappointed is bad enough.

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