

THE BIBLE TEACHER

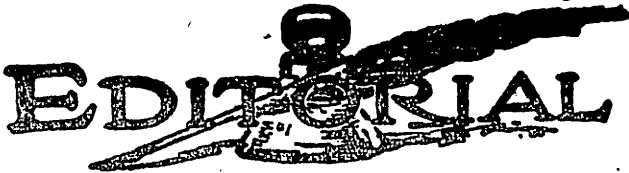
Pleading for the restoration of pure New Testament Christianity

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EDITORIAL



Why Do All Suffer ?

Often the question is asked : "Why is it that God would allow us to suffer in this world ?" One of the realities of life is the reality of pain and suffering. We live in a world full of pain and suffering. There are sickness and death, there are poverty and lack, there are accidents and calamities. We must, however, understand that this is not God's desire that man should suffer. God is not causing man to suffer in any way. He is the Creator of man and therefore He want for man to be happy. He provided man the way of escape from sin and eternal suffering of hell when man had sinned and gone away from Him. God did not create man to suffer. In the beginning when He had created the first man and the first woman He had put them in a most beautiful and comfortable place, called the Garden of Eden. But man sinned against God by doing that which God had forbidden him to do and thus paid the price of separation from God. Living away from God man has since continued to live in sin and consequently brought upon himself divers pain and sufferings.

Sin is man's greatest problem, and much of man's pains and sufferings are sin-related. Many people bring suffering upon

themselves and upon their families because they live immoral lives. There is fornication and adultery and other such sex-related sins which have caused millions of divorces, envying and strifes and murders; and killing diseases such as AIDS. Those who drink alcohol bring miseries on themselves and upon their families. They become worthless as they lose their characters and jobs and health and finally die early, leaving behind their wives and children to suffer. The same would be true in case of those who become drug addicts. Those who smoke are not only burning all that money that might be used for the betterment of their homes and families, but they are also inviting dangerous diseases and early death for themselves. Another common sin is the sin of covetousness or greed which results in stealing, jealousy, envy, and killing. On and on we could go to list every sin in man such as, lying, cheating, bribing, etc., that causes man to suffer in various ways. The inference is, man, and not God, is responsible for pain and suffering on earth.

Then there are those who are suffering for their own foolishness. They do not stop and think. They are inflicting sufferings to themselves by their unwise actions. In this category could be listed those who continue to have many children, even when they are not in a position to support a family of more than two or three. They say, children are a blessing from God, so they continue to produce them, and when they have too many and suffer then they blame God for their poverty. They use their God given power to produce children, but not their minds to think. In this case not only the parents suffer but their children also suffer, and this is not the end of it but the society and the government and the whole nation suffers.

Again, in some cases, and they are growing day by day now, little children suffer in many ways and family lives of many people are almost destroyed because both parents want to go out and work to earn a little more money and have more comforts. They don't realize what they are missing in life and what a great harm they are causing to their growing up children and to their entire family. Dowry is another social evil and the cause of suffering in many families in our country. Many parents would

borrow money, even on high interest, for giving handsome dowry to their daughters in their marriages, and then they suffer for years as they would have to pay back the money they had borrowed. If there are more than one daughters in a family then the family suffers in debt all of their life. There may be cases where people are forced to give dowry, but in most cases it is a matter of status to give a "big dowry". If they didn't give big, they think, "what would others say?" In many casas people want to out do others, not only in giving dowries but in lavish spending on decorations and lights and in inviting hundreds of guests for a sumptuous dinner. Such things have given birth to greed, quarrel and killing of young brides. May be you also can think of many other such things of similar nature which man does that causes him to suffer in different ways.

It is true that man suffers much on account of his own wrongs, but it is also true that so often innocent people are caused to suffer because others did some wrong. Well, this is the price we all must pay for belonging to this great human family. It is true that Adam, the first man, died spiritually when he sinned (Genesis 2:17), but we all have to suffer the consequences of his sin in that that we all have to die physically, because when Adam sinned death spread to all men, and even little children who know no sin have to die. (Romans 5:12, 14; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Being a part of humanity we cannot escape pain and sufferings caused by the actions of others. We cannot isolate ourselves from others. Some time people throw a bomb or a missile at a crowd of people which causes injuries and death to several innocent people. A bus driver driving under the influence of liquor might cause a terrible accident and bring fractures and death to several passengers. There are people on our earth who are manufacturing adulterated food items and spurious medicines for their own gain which are causing serious health problems and deaths. Then there are those who are living immoral lives and thus are spreading dreadful diseases among innocent people. The Bhopal gas tragedy is still fresh on our minds. Thousands of people lost their lives and many thousands more are still suffering, not because they had done some thing wrong. All of this goes on to show that living in this world we cannot escape pain and

suffering, because we belong to the family of humanity.

On the other hand, in life we also reap many blessings that really we do not earn. We all use electricity every day and enjoy various things it does for us. We have taken it for granted. None of us has suffered in any way to invent electricity or electric bulb that gives us light. But think of a world without electricity! How blessed we are to have electricity! Then, there are various means of transports for travel and sending things. There are aeroplanes, trains, automobiles. How backward we will become if we didn't have those things today. Some people had invented them several years ago and we are using them today. They had made sacrifices, they had suffered in many ways in inventing those things, but we are using them and enjoying them and are blessed because of their presence. Now, if we are willing to accept the blessings that have come to us free through the hard labour and efforts and sacrifices of other people, then we should also be willing to accept some of the pain and suffering that come our way. These are two sides of the same coin. We have to accept both.

There is, however, also a positive aspect in pain and suffering. History is filled with testimonies of such men who attained the characteristic of greatness only after they had experienced hardships. When we are faced with hardships and difficult times it demands of us dimensions which the fair weather never asks for. Hardships can burn away the impurities from our lives and make us what we ought to be. One who knows no suffering, knows no sympathy, and one who has never tested pain, knows no patience. The Apostle Paul wrote and said, "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character hope." Christ endured the cross, despising the shame, "for the joy that was set before Him." (Hebrews 12:2). To Christians James wrote, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1: 2-4). The Apostle Peter also exhorted in these words, "Beloved, do not think it strange

concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice to the extent, that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified, but let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." (1 Peter 4:12-16). Christ said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for their is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:10-12).

As a matter of fact, every possible pleasure in life carries within itself the very possibility of pain and suffering. We enjoy electricity; it gives us light. With its help we run fans, coolers and motors. It helps us watch T.V., and hear radio. etc. Yet there are people who get killed when they come in contact with a live electrical wire. Fire is good. It gives us warmth and helps us eat cooked food. We need it every day. Yet if one puts his hand in fire, he will suffer injury. Fire can be dangerous and devastating. The same is true with water. We can't live without water, we need it every day. But too much water can cause floods, and if people are not careful they might get drowned in water. Many parents buy toys for their children, such as cricket ball or roller skater or arrows. They want their children to have a lot of fun and joy. But sometimes those things can cause serious injuries and even death to children. These two sides of the reality of life are often two sides of a coin. Just as there are joys, there are also sorrows. Just as there are pleasures, there is pain also. The very thing that brings joy and pleasure to us, can also be the cause of pain and sorrow for us.

Here is the point though, because there is sin in the world, and because we belong to the great family of

humanity, we cannot, therefore, escape pain and suffering. If we will not bring them upon ourselves, others will bring them on us. Jesus said, "In Me you have peace, in the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). Christ had endured the worst the world could bring upon Him, but He did not yield to the world's temptations of lust and pride. He remained faithful in all things to His Father in heaven until He breathed His last, saying, "Father, into your hands I commend My spirit." (Luke 23:46). He certainly did overcome the world, and through Him we also can overcome the world. He is our example. (1 Peter 2:21). In Him we can have peace and comfort, knowing that if we will remain faithful to Him in our tribulations and sorrows, and even until our death, then He will give us the crown of life, the eternal life in heaven. (2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 2:10). And not only that, but to those who love God, by keeping His commandments (John 14:15), God's promise is that all things, yes, all things, even tribulations and sorrows, will work together for their good! (Romans 8:28).

Why Some Do Not Obey The Lord

J.C. Choate

The world is lost in sin. This means that the majority are living without God and without hope. Babies, and even children who have not reached the age of accountability, or knowing the difference between right and wrong, are safe. A small percentage of the overall population have obeyed God and are trying to remain faithful to Him. All others throughout the world are spiritually dead because of their sins.

But the picture doesn't have to remain that way. It is possible for all who are in sin to be saved. Christ died on the cross to make salvation possible. (Romans 5:8). Yet, the majority continue in their sin and misery. Why? There is no logical reason, but some would offer excuses.

Perhaps the majority would argue that they are good enough, that they are living good moral lives, that they try to do right,

and therefore they feel that they are all right as they are. What such people don't realize is that one cannot be so good that he can be saved within and by himself apart from the Lord. While one may not have been born in sin, or has not inherited the sin of his parents or forefathers, still when he reaches the age of knowing right from wrong, then he becomes a sinner and he stands in need of a saviour. We are reminded of Cornelius and his household in Acts 10 and 11 and how good they were, yet they were lost and it was necessary for Peter and others to visit them so that they might hear the gospel and have the opportunity to obey it. Once they had learned the truth and had obeyed it then they were saved. Prior to this time, in spite of their goodness, their prayers to God, etc., they were lost. It is certainly commendable to live a good moral life but that within itself is not enough to save one and to take him to heaven. To try to be saved through one's own goodness is an attempt to be one's own saviour, and, of course, this is not possible.

The vast majority of those who are religious are lost because they have never obeyed the Lord. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, Saul, and many others of the past, they may have a religion and be members of some church, they may worship on a regular basis and even take the lead in teaching others, but they are deceived and therefore they are lost. The Lord found the Pharisees and Sadducees of his day to be very religious but he rebuked them and condemned them for following the doctrines and commandments of men. (Mark 7:7). After Saul was converted to the Lord, he looked back on his past and he described it like this: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." (Acts 26:9). There are many today who claim to be following Christ but they are in man-made churches, wear the names of men, and practice and teach many things that are contrary to the teaching of Christ. It is hard to reach this kind of people because they think they are already saved. To those of this category, please go to the scripture and read and study it, be honest with yourself and be honest with God. Forget about what man teaches or what you believe. Be determined to know what the Bible itself teaches about salvation, the church, worship,

etc., and compare that with what you presently believe and practice. If you need to make a change, by all means do so. It would be better to admit that you have been wrong, correct it, and be saved, than to insist that you are right even when you are wrong, and be lost.

Then there are those who have become so sinful and wicked in their lives that they feel that in spite of the Lord's grace and mercy, they could never be forgiven. If you are one who would argue in this way, please take a look at the people on the day of Pentecost who heard the Apostles preach the gospel and then obeyed the Lord. Some of them had actually participated in the crucifixion of the Lord. In preaching to them, and trying to convict them of their sin and to instill in them a need to obey the Lord, Peter and the Apostles said to them, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands and have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts 2:22-24). Please notice that it was pointed out that they had with wicked hands crucified and slain the very Son of God! Then if you read on, a number of those were cut to the heart by the words they heard and they wanted to know what they should do. On being told, they repented of their sins, were baptized for the remission of their sins, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord added them to his church. Were they rejected because of their sin? Not if they were willing to believe in the Lord and to obey him. Surely, if those who had crucified Christ could be saved, anyone today, or of any age, who will turn to the Lord and obey his teachings can also be saved. We should remember that Christ died for the sinner, to save man from his sin. Another man we could consider was Saul. He had opposed the Lord and persecuted his church. As bad as this was, when the Lord appeared to him (Acts 9) Saul just simply said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Later when he was told what to do, he obeyed the gospel and his sins were washed away. (Acts 22:16).

Thereafter he spoke of himself as the chief of sinners, teaching that if the Lord could save him after all he had done, surely He could forgive anyone. Hear Saul's words, as he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Timothy 1:15, 16). No, my friend, your sin cannot be so great that the Lord cannot forgive you. All you need to do is to turn to God, repent of your sins, and obey him, and he will forgive you of any and every sin in your life. Only your unbelief and unrepentant heart can cause you to be lost.

There are many who know the truth of God, and admit that they need and should obey him, but they have simply neglected or procrastinated in doing that. If you are among this number, let me urge you not to neglect your salvation. The Lord cannot and will not save you until you have complied with his will. What a shame to go through life knowing what you need to do but never doing it. You will be just as lost in the end as that person who never knew the truth or who felt that he was good enough without the blood of Christ. So, do not wait any longer. Quickly arise and obey the Lord while you still have the time and the opportunity. Be like the man from Ethiopia as recorded in Acts 8. On hearing God's will, ask, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Then after your obedience you can also be like him as you go on your way rejoicing.

Actually, there is no legitimate reason for not obeying the Lord once one comes to know God's will. You are urged to obey Him today. Christ invited you to come and learn of him and to follow him. (Matthew 11:28-30). He also promises that if you will believe in him and be baptized that you may be saved. (Mark 16:16). Remember that Christ has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

Will The Good People Of All Churches Be Saved ?

Batsell Barrett Baxter

The last 17 years of Jacob's life were spent in Egypt, where he and his elder sons, who had sold Joseph into Egyptian bondage many years earlier, feared for their lives. The brothers thought that their father was dead, Joseph would take his revenge upon them. They came cringing in fear to beg for their lives at the hands of Joseph who was governor of Egypt. When he heard their plea, Joseph said, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" (Genesis 50:19 ASV). Joseph had the keen insight to realize he was not their judge.

In Romans 14:4, the apostle Paul, in an entirely different kind of situation, asked a very meaningful question. He wrote, "Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth."

The Pharisees of Jesus' day left the impression that they thought they were better than everyone else and were so good they could climb up on God's throne and judge everyone else. How wrong such an attitude is!

God is the judge, and all of us will be judged when the final judgment comes. The self-righteous, holier-than-thou attitude is certainly foreign to the teaching and the spirit of Christ, but God has told us the criteria by which He will judge.

First of all, we know with absolute certainty that only those who love God will be saved eternally. Jesus stated the greatest commandment of all as follows: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:29, 30).

In the second place, we know that only those who obey the

Lord's commands will enter heaven, for Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Jesus also said, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Only those who love God and keep His commandments can expect to be saved.

No man has the right to judge other men, but when some loved one appears not to know the Lord's will or is careless in obeying some plain teaching of our Lord, each of us has the responsibility of going to him, making certain that he understands the will of God on the point in question, and urging him to obey God's command.

As an example, if some friend of mine is not a believer in Christ, my place is not to pass judgment upon him, for God already has passed judgment on those who do not believe. "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" (Hebrews 11:6).

My responsibility is to talk with my friend in such a way that he may come to have faith in God and in Christ the Son of God.

Again, if some person I know and respect never has come to realize the necessity of being baptized my place is to read with him such passages as the Lord's statement "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5)

Our attitude toward all men should take into consideration the fact that all of us stand on exactly the same ground before God. That ground is that no man can be saved who does not love God and his fellow men and that loving God must make itself manifest in obedience to the Lord's commands.

Those who do not love God and who do not obey Him stand condemned—not by us, but by God. We gladly leave the judging to God, for "am I in the place of God?"

Directly related to the theme we are discussing is the very apparent teaching of the New Testament that God desires for all His people to be one. Notice that Jesus spoke of His church in the singular, giving no hint that He approved of the idea that His kingdom would be divided into many different groups.

Just a few hours before Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot in John 17:20, 21, He 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." Tragically, this fervent appeal in the final night of our Lord's life largely has gone unheeded even by those who have called themselves Christians.

Not only did our Lord teach the idea of a single, united church, but His apostles also echoed the same teaching in vigorous language. For example, in writing to the Ephesians, Paul said, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

He already had defined the one body as the church in these words, "And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Just as there is one Lord, one Holy Spirit, and one God, there is also one body, the church.

Today, nearly 2,000 years after the beginning of the Lord's church on Pentecost, the modern religious world woefully is divided. One survey listed some 308 different religious groups professing to be followers of Christ.

In view of the emphasis of the New Testament on unity, it seems strange that some would advocate that a multiplicity of churches is actually an asset rather than a tragic liability. Many defend the *idea* of denominationalism, though of course they do not defend the antagonisms that have existed between the denominations.

The argument goes something like this: "Men differ widely in educational, economic, cultural, social and emotional back-

grounds. It is good to have a multiplicity of churches so that each man may choose a church of his choice."

This idea is completely foreign to the New Testament, where the Lord is pictured as the one to determine what the church should be like. Man is pictured as needing to accept the Lord's wishes rather than to provide a church conforming to his own desires.

The idea of a multiplicity of churches with many divergent doctrines is intellectually indefensible. We live in an age when a premium is placed upon truth. In thousands of laboratories countless workers spend millions of hours in the quest for facts.

Ours is a scientific age in which the search for truth in every realm goes on relentlessly. Ours is an age in which the flag of truth has flown from the very top of the masthead.

Because of this insistence on finding the facts, man has been able to go to the moon and to build airplanes that span a continent in a matter of hours, to invent means of communicating instantly with his neighbours around the world by television, radio and telephone, and to extend the years of his own life through the development of medical techniques and wonder drugs of many kinds.

The progress of the 20 century has been achieved because man waged a relentless war on ignorance and thereby discovered fact after fact, which in turn enabled him to lift himself to the present high plane of living. A sentence from the pen of Solomon might well be chosen as the slogan of our time: "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23).

However, when we move into the realm of religion, modern man hauls down the flag of truth and raises in its stead the flag of sincerity, honesty of purpose, and depth of feeling. No matter what faith one may hold, if a man is honest and sincere in his religion, he is judged to be all right. No matter how divergent the doctrines, modern man feels that everyone is on his way to

heaven, simply travelling by a road different from that of his neighbour.

In other fields the facts count. In the field of religion, the facts no longer are sought, but are buried under an avalanche of tolerance and of generosity of feeling toward one's fellow men. The motive behind this generosity of feeling is admirable and fine, but the disregard of truth is tragic.

Who would think of allowing his child to continue in a school where the teacher of arithmetic taught that two plus two equals five or nine or 13? What teacher of geography could get by, even for a single day, teaching that the world is either round or flat, depending upon the wish of the student?

Just a few blocks from the building in which I have worshipped for years, another assembly of sincere people meets. In this second assembly, the general agreement is that Christ is not divine but merely an enlightened leader of the past.

The emphasis of all my preaching is that Jesus is the divine Son of God. Now, either one or the other of these two views is wrong. Both cannot be right. It must be one or the other.

Yet again, approximately three blocks in a different direction is a large and very zealous body of people who believes baptism is not essential to salvation. In contrast, my preaching emphasizes it as one of the necessary things that man must do to be saved. Such passages at Mark 16:16, which says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," lead us to the conviction that this act is necessary.

Both of these views cannot be correct; either baptism is necessary for salvation, or it is not necessary. It cannot be both.

Truth does not lie on opposite sides of the same fence. Truth is narrow and cannot be described in terms of anything man might wish. Christ Himself emphasized the importance of truth

when He said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

As to why modern man has this blind spot in regard to his religion, we know no adequate explanation. We only know that this winking at truth is costly to the ongoing of the Christian religion.

Many modern intellectuals see the absurdity of "everything is all right so long as a man is sincere." This idea is not true in any other realm, and it is not true in the realm of religion.

This playing fast and loose with the truth in the realm of religion has led many thinking people to feel that religion must be a kind of fairy tale because it can be either round or flat, depending upon the wishes of those who play the game.

It is also no wonder that godless Communism looks to the Western world with a quizzical eye when the subject of religion comes up. Communists find it difficult to believe that truth can be handled so lightly and that anything men believe can pass for that which is truth. That this kind of Christianity ever will conquer the minds of those who presently are without faith in God or Christ or the Bible is unlikely.

The idea of a multiplicity of churches, all of which are right, destroys faith in the Bible as the final authority in the realm of religion. When a man reads, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" and then preaches from his pulpit, "He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved," it does something to the respect that men have for the Bible.

When men have spent several generations explaining that the Bible does not mean what it says about baptism, the one church, the name, falling from grace, and many other religious themes, it is no wonder people get the idea that may be the Bible does not mean what it says about marriage and divorce, basic morality, and the importance of being Christians.

The idea of a multiplicity of churches with their divergent

doctrines all equally correct has led many to end their lives in infidelity. The prayer Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on His betrayal night had in it the phrase "that the world may believe."

The unity for which Christ prayed was for the purpose of creating belief in the hearts of the unbelieving masses of humanity. Many would like to become Christians, but they are confused when good men give such different answers to earnest questions about what to do to become a Christian, how to worship God acceptably, and how to live a Christian life.

After 75 generations of Christianity, the world is still not Christian, and only slightly more than half of the population within the so-called Christian nation is church-affiliated. Denominationalism leaves many people thinking they are saved when they have not yet obeyed all the Lord's commands. It leaves many others bewildered and content to do nothing because they have no certainty about what they must do. Satan for a long time has used the tool of divide and conquer as one of his most valuable weapons.

Will the good People of all churches be saved? Only God knows who will be saved; only God can answer this question. Will the good people of all churches be saved? The question really ought to be, "How can all mankind come to be members of the Lord's church?," which is the only church in which is found the promise of eternal salvation.

Man has blundered badly in fractioning the body of Christ into hundreds of pieces. The only real solution to the problem of a multiplicity of churches is to return to the pattern of the church that our Lord died to establish as set forth in the New Testament.

Salvation is to be found in His church and in His church alone. Our concern must be to leave off everything else and become New Testament Christians. This, and this alone, is solid ground.

In the midst of the dark and discouraging picture of vast, destructive division can be seen a ray of hope. This hope is an ever-widening emphasis upon a return to New Testament Christianity.

The slogans ever are sounding forth in wider and wider circles, "Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." "Let us have a 'Thus saith the Lord' for everything we do in our religious faith and practice." "Let us go back to the Bible."

If each of us is willing to leave his own preconceived ideas and return to the teachings of God's inspired Book, laying aside all human creeds and doctrines of men, then it will be possible for all of us to march in one great army under the banner of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. May each one of us, as did our Lord nearly 2,000 years ago, pray fervently, "That they may all be one."

The Christian Life

Mark R. Hooper

The only true, all powerful and all-loving God is a holy God. He is good, without evil, and morally pure in all aspects. If we, as men, want to be His followers and pleasing to Him, we must also do our best to be holy (I Peter 1:14-16). This means our lives must be morally pure, avoiding every kind of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22), and much different from others who do not resist evil and do not follow the truth about God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sin of Drinking and Drunkenness

Many think it is not wrong for a Christian to drink strong drink. But the Bible strongly condemns drunkenness and anything that leads to drunkenness. A drunkard is to be disfellowshipped from the church (I Corinthians 5:11), and will not be allowed to go to heaven (I Corinthians 6:10). Drunkenness is listed as one of the works (sins) of the flesh (Galatians 5:21).

Some argue that Jesus drank wine, so we may also drink strong drink as long as we never become drunk. However, what

Jesus miraculously made and drank at the wedding at Cana is much different from what we call wine today. The word for wine in the Greek, the language of the New Testament, is *vinos*, which gives us the English word vine as well as wine. Wine is made from grapes which grow on a vine. In the New Testament age, wine simply referred to grape juice, whether new unfermented or old fermented (Matthew 9:17). Old grape juice fermented naturally because of lack of refrigeration. So what Jesus made at the wedding was simply grape juice. The wine today sold in liquor shops is adulterated with alcohol and other ingredients, and is intended to intoxicate a person to some degree which violates God's law (Proverbs 23:29-35). However much or little a person drinks, he becomes that much drunk. A true Christian, intending to glorify God by his life, will abstain from the very appearance of evil, and thus will abstain from all forms of strong drink.

The Sin of Lying

Many people today think that lying is not a sin as long as it does not hurt anyone. But the Bible is very clear about speaking only the truth, no matter what the situation. Paul told Christians that they must stop lying and speak only the truth to others (Ephesians 4:25). Paul also wrote that if a Christian has truly repented and has put sin out of his life, he will not lie (Colossians 3:9). John reveals that all liars will be sent to hell (Revelation 21:8). These warnings against lying apply in any circumstance, and even include "little white lies." Often, people justify a lie by reasoning that what it accomplishes is basically good: like getting a job, or getting admission in school, etc. But the end never justifies the action when it is specifically condemned by God. A lie is always a sin before God, and will be punished if not forgiven by the blood of Christ. True Christians must never lie in order to be pleasing to God.

The Sin of Vulgar Talk

Many people who profess to be religious use bad or vulgar words in conversation. The Bible speaks of many sins of the tongue. Cursing is a sin (James 3:9-10). Swearing is a sin, as is unnecessarily using God's name. (Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:33-37). Speaking about immoral actions or using vulgar slang words is

not kind of talk a genuine Christian will use. Jesus said that we will be justified or condemned by the words we speak (Matthew 12:37). Our speech must be pure and holy, as the rest of our actions, if we are to be pleasing to God and imitators of Christ.

The Sin of Bribery

A bribe is a gift given to corrupt the conduct, or pervert the judgment of person who is in a position of trust. Many who profess to be Christians engage in this conduct. Some give money to a policeman so he will not fine them for a traffic violation. Other give money to certain people in a corporation for the favor of recommending them for a job. Others give money or "donations" to a headmaster to get their children admitted in a school. All of this corrupts those in charge and is illegal. A Christian must obey the laws of government (Romans 13:1-7). A bribe-payer is guilty of law breaking and is just as guilty of corruption as the one receiving the bribe. A Christian must hate what is evil and cling to what is good (Romans 12:9) Therefore, to be a true Christian, one should never engage in bribery.

Conclusion

There are many other sins a faithful Christian will not commit. These are mentioned in the Bible and include sexual immorality, jealousy, selfishness, worshipping idols, and many others. (Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; Colossians 3:5-10). But in order to be a genuine Christian, one must also obey and do what God has commanded, and not just stop doing what He has condemned. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15). Although we cannot be perfect, we must strive to live an obedient life, following only the Bible, the truth from God (I John 1:7). In order to be forgiven of sins by the blood of Christ, one must follow God's plan of salvation given in the New Testament, and change from a life of sin.

Please contact the church of Christ to discuss this further. They are a group of people who are following only the Bible and seeking to restore the church that Jesus built, free from man-made teachings and divisions. In order to have our sins forgiven by the blood of Christ, we must obey only God and not man's teachings. Let us all return to the church Jesus built and follow only the Bible.

There Is A God

Edward P. Myers

Turning man's thought to God is difficult to do in today's world. Man says, "We have all we want," and the "all" does not include room for God.

God is an interruption. Man just does not want to think about God. He is too busy, and he just does not have time for God.

Augustine once said, "God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full—there's nowhere for him to put it."

Our regard for God is like an airman's regard for his parachute. We want Him in case of an emergency, but until that time we want nothing to do with Him.

Man regards his time as "his own" and cares not to share it with His Creator. And yet, man is a religious being. He seeks that which is beyond himself and longs for things of the spirit. Man's ambivalence raises the question: Is there really a God?

Logically, either God exists, or He does not. Determining whether God exists is of vital concern. Without a sufficient answer, life is lived with no meaning, value or purpose. If God does not exist, life is absurd. A half-hearted answer causes man to "go limping between two opinions" and live in vain.

Many would say that proving the existence of God is impossible. If one is going to believe in God, he must accept it "by faith." Some say, "No one can prove that God exists or that He does not exist," and with this they glibly say, "So I just don't believe in Him" and go their own way.

This causes the believer to ask serious questions. Is there no compelling evidence for belief in God? Is belief in God a crutch for someone who is mentally inadequate to face life's problems?

Writers of the Bible answer that reason for believing God exists can be found. The psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork"

(19:1 ASV). The apostle Paul wrote, "The invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they [men] may be without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

Testimony from both Old and New Testament writers, therefore, affirms that God's existence can be known through the world in which we live. Such evidence is sufficient for man to be "without excuse" for rejecting such belief.

One might say, "Yes, I see the argument, but how can I know God exists? I need some concrete evidence or compelling reasons for why I should believe in the existence of God."

Consider the absurdity of life without God. William Lane Craig has written about "The Absurdity of Life Without God." He says, "If there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await our unavoidable execution. There is no God, and there is no immortality. And what is the consequence of this? It means that life itself is absurd. It means that the life we have is without significance, value, or purpose."

If no God exists, then life has no ultimate meaning or significance. Without God, no such thing as immortality exists, and every person who exists passes from this life into extinction. If this is true, then why does it really matter whether He ever existed or not? What is the real meaning of existence if there is no God?

One might respond by saying that everyone makes his mark in history by whatever contribution he may leave behind. However, how significant would this be? It may be of relative significance for those he knew or influenced, but what ultimate significance would there be? Ultimately, it makes no difference whether a man existed or not.

Some evolutionists say the universe originated in a big-bang explosion about 15 billion years ago. Suppose the big bang never had occurred. Suppose our universe never had existed. What ultimate difference would it make? The universe is doomed to die anyway, and in the end, it makes no difference whether it existed or not.

Man is of no greater significance than any animal because they all end up the same. Any contribution to science or the advancement of human knowledge is of nothing. In the end, none of this makes one bit of difference.

Each man's life is therefore meaningless, and the long hours we spend in school, jobs, interests, friendships—all these, in the final analysis, mean nothing. All are utterly meaningless.

If there is no God, then life ends at the grave, and the kind of life a person has lived at the values he has kept make no difference. How can one possibly praise virtue or condemn immoral choice or behaviour if there is no God? By whose standard does a man measure right and wrong?

If God does not exist, then man should live only for himself, for it would be stupid for him to live otherwise. Sacrifice for another person would be foolish. With no value of right and wrong, man is reduced to the bare valueless fact of existence in an indifferent universe. In fact, the concept of mortality loses its meaning in a world without God. No one can praise brotherhood equality or love as good; nor can anyone say another is wrong and he is right. If there is no God, good and evil do not exist.

If God does not exist, then life is without purpose. Death stands at the end of life with its arms open wide to accept man, but then what? If there is no God to whom I shall give accounts, then what is my purpose for living? In fact, no ultimate reason can be found for man's life.

Without the existence of a Creator, the universe is a cosmic accident, a chance explosion. It exists for no reason. And man is a freak of nature, a blind product of matter plus time plus chance. He is no more than a lump of clay that has evolved accidentally. He has no purpose in life.

If God does not exist, life is futile and absurd. On the other hand, if God does exist, then life has ultimate meaning, responsibility and destiny for everyone. What are some sufficient reasons for believing God exists?

The cosmological argument is the argument for the existence of God that is based on the nature of the universe. This some-

times is called the argument from first cause. The fact is stated: The universe exists.

Two options are given for explaining the existence of the world: (1) beginning [created], or (2) no beginning [eternal]. If the world had a beginning, it was either caused or not caused. If it had no beginning, then the universe is eternal. But this is not an explanation that science uses to operate.

Science believes in a beginning. The question is: Was the beginning caused or uncaused? No one believes the universe always has been or that it came into existence from nothing: Even the skeptic David Hume admitted that it is preposterous to think anything could come into existence without a cause. The only adequate answer for the cause argument is that there must have been a first cause. Believers identify this cause as God.

The teleological argument is the argument for the existence of God based on the evidence of design, purpose and adaptation in our world. Other names for it are argument from design or final cause. Biblical writers used this argument (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20-23).

The argument is that our world has a design, and a design demands a designer. William Paley popularized this argument with his illustration of a watch. He said that if he were to stumble over a watch in a field, he would investigate it and note all its integral parts and would conclude that it is unreasonable to say the parts just came together. He would say there must have been a watch-maker. Using the same logic, he says, man can view the design of our world and conclude there must be a world-maker.

Does it seem reasonable to say that God does not exist? Not only are good, solid arguments given for His existence, but life really is absurd and meaningless without Him.

What Really Matters

F. Furman Kearley

Meaningless existence is a great problem faced by many in the world today. The exceeding high rate of suicide is attributed

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to the fact that life has little or no meaning to those who take their own lives.

Is there any meaning to life? Does anything matter? What is it in life that really matters, that makes life have meaning and purpose? Is there any purpose for living that can cause one to treasure life and yet live it sacrificially for a worthwhile cause?

The other day I was reading an excellent book and a section that dealt with the question, "What really matters?" The conclusion of the author was that the cross and Christ's suffering and death on it is what really matters. As I reflected upon this, my mind developed the thoughts that follow.

Certainly, the cross really matters. Without the cross and the blood shed to atone for our sins, one could have no hope.

Yet, millions believe in the cross, love and appreciate the atoning blood of Christ, and have faith deep enough to die for Christ, but tragically they still will be lost. The cross really matters, but it is only one part of a great whole, and all the other parts are essential to give the cross meaning.

Before the cross has any meaning, a God really must exist, and this God must have created all of us. Further, He must have specific expectations of us and have revealed His will for man to obey.

Further, the doctrine of sin really matter. If no God exists or if we have no will of God, no such thing as sin would exist, and there would be no need to atone for sins.

The biblical doctrine of sin is true. Man has violated God's will and become guilty of sin. He is doomed in his sin without the grace of God and sacrifice of Christ to atone for his sins.

First Corinthians 15 points out, however, that the cross is validated by the Resurrection. If Christ has not been raised, we are all most pitiable. The Resurrection declares Him to be the Son of God. It gives authority to the words of Christ and to the Bible.

The doctrine of eternal life and the doctrine of heaven and hell really matter. If they are not true and this life is all there is, then, again, life is meaningless.

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment are true and mean that each of us must prepare to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account for the things we have done in this body (2 Corinthians 5:10). Daniel Webster said the most solemn thought he ever had was that one day he must stand before the judgment of all the earth and receive his sentence for eternal life.

What really matter? All of the inspired facts and teachings recorded in the Bible matter, but these are true whether we believe them or not. They are facts whether we obey or not.

God, Christ and the Holy Spirit exist whether people acknowledge them or not. Christ died on the cross, was raised from the dead, sits at the right hand of God, will return, and will hold final judgment whether humans believe it or do anything about it or not.

Ultimately, what really matters is one's obedience to God and Christ. We can believe all the truths of the Bible and still be damned. The devils believe and tremble, but still will be cast into the eternal fire (James 2:19; Matthew 25:41).

Many will confess Christ and call Him Lord, Lord. Yet some of those who confess still will hear Him say at that final judgment, "I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Finally, what really matters now and what really will matter at the most crucial time in history, before the final judgment, is whether we have learned God's will and have done it in our daily lives. Jesus said, "Not every one who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who *DOES* the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Jesus will not say, "Well believed" or "Well intentioned." The adage, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" is true. What will matter concerning the nature of our eternal existence will be whether Jesus' final sentence upon us is, "Well *DONE*, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

A Father's Grudges

Eric Dickey

He entered the train's sleeper compartment wearing the camouflage combat fatigues of his nation's army. A semi-automatic pistol was stuck in his belt. He was carrying a large field pack, two Soviet-made assault rifles, and a sub-machine gun. His skin was glistening from the day's heat. When he saw me, a white man, in his compartment, his eyes narrowed with the intensity of hatred.

"What are you doing in my country?" he asked. When I replied that I was on a missionary journey, he stated, with profanity, that he was an unbeliever. Then he emphasized the point by telling me of his hatred for anything connected with white men, especially the "white man's Jesus."

For the past five months, this major had been fighting and killing black men in neighboring Mozambique. He gave me two reasons for his participation in the killing of his fellow black Africans.

First, they opposed the Marxist Government of Mozambique, and second, they received support from the white South African regime. Obviously, this man was willing both to give his life for his cause and to spend it in the advancement of Marxism.

Because he seemed willing to talk to me, I moved the conversation around to his past. He told me of his military training. He became a guerrilla fighter at age 15. He also mentioned that he had had guerrilla training in Vietnam.

He told about his education in the finer points of the politics of Marx, Engels and Lenin. He was educated in the Soviet Ukraine and in East Germany.

Throughout the three hours of our conversation, his speech was tinged with inflammatory accusation. He considered the British to be despicable dogs, and both the United States' President Reagan and Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini were "the madmen of the Gulf." Any country not Socialist and aligned with the Eastern block was imperialist and racist.

He hated me simply because my skin is white. His contempt for me and all whites was so deep he could not help but return again and again to the theme of the "liberation struggle" of all non-whites. He said he would be willing at any time to take his gun and kill white people.

Several times during our conversation he told me, "I could shoot you right now!" And considering his work among the Mozambique people, he obviously was ready to kill blacks who opposed him.

How does one become so cold toward human life? He was accommodating in supplying the answer to that question.

It all began, he said, when he was 9 years old. He remembered seeing his father come home from work and a visit to the market empty-handed. While apologizing to his children for the lack of bread, the father spoke contemptuously of the white Government blaming it for the inability to provide for his family. In the mind of the 9-year-old, the lack of bread became one with the idea of the suppression by the hated regime.

At age 15, my traveling companion joined up with a band of freedom fighters/terrorists and began taking his own personal revenge for the wrongs done to his father. He told me, "I adopted my father's grudges and decided I would do something about it."

Two lessons can be learned from this encounter. First, as parents, we must be careful that we do not instill our grudges, grievances or prejudices in our children. They may be magnified unreasonably in young minds.

Second, as Christians, we must teach the young people of the world while they still are young and receptive. By the time they have reached maturity, it could be too late. The most firmly held lessons of life are those learned at an early age.

I wonder what kind of man the major would be today if he had learned the lessons about the love of God and the gentleness and kindness of Jesus while he was still young.

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