



**THE
BIBLE
TEACHER**

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SPECIAL BIBLE LECTURES

Speaker

Mr. J.C. Choate

(ALL LECTURES WILL BE TRANSLATED
INTO HINDI)

Date : 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 October, 1981.

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ALL ARE WELCOME

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"You Are Always Preaching On Baptism"

Any time that you teach the truth, there are always some who don't like it. This is either because they don't love the truth or else they have been deceived. In response to our radio sermons and to our literature, there is invariably someone writing to complain that we are constantly preaching on baptism, the church, and other similar subjects. If I wanted to debate the issue I could say that I know of many who are forever teaching that faith only saves, that the church is not important, that there is nothing in a name, that there are many ways to heaven, and so on.

It is true that we do a lot of preaching and teaching on baptism, the church, the name, worship, and the importance of going to the Bible for everything that we say or do in the name of religion. There are several reasons for this;

1. We desire to preach only that the Bible says. If the Bible teaches that one must be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), then we must preach that. If it teaches that there is but one church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4), that it wears the name of Christ (Romans 16:16), that its members are to be known as Christians (Acts 11:26), then we must teach the same. How could we fail to teach it and still please the Lord? Now it is true that those who believe and practice otherwise may not like to hear that, but why would such people claim to believe the Bible if they don't like to hear what it says? So don't criticize us, but complain to the Lord.

2. We preach the basics of Christianity and we do that often. We realize that we are living in a very complex world. People are so busy. They hear so many things religiously and otherwise. Even though God's will is presented to them, they may soon forget that or confuse that with what others are saying. So we continue to proclaim these simple truths with the prayer that eventually those who are hearing it will understand it, believe it, and obey it.

3. We preach these truths again and again because there is so much false doctrine. If you will go to books like Romans, Galatians, and other books of the New Testament written by Paul, you will find him constantly discussing the law, showing the superiority of Christianity over the law, and encouraging the Christians not to go back to the law. Now I can imagine how what a lot of people got tired of hearing Paul say so much about the law, especially those who were trying to follow the law, or those who were considering the possibility of going back to it. But he taught a lot on that subject because that was the chief problem of that day. In our day, we are not bothered all that much by people wanting to follow the law, but we are confronted with those who are teaching that one can be saved without baptism, that one can be saved without being a member of the church, and many other denominational doctrines. Now, what should we do with all of these false teachings? Should we ignore them and allow false teachers to go on unchallenged, and therefore to mislead the majority of the people? Or should we speak up and tell the world what the Bible says on these subjects? What would Paul do if he

were here? What did he do while he was living? He opposed false doctrine and he would do the same today if he were living. When you think about it, he does so that today through the written word. We also must oppose false doctrines and teach the truth on every Bible subject.

Actually, we get tired also of having to deal with denominational teachings. How wonderful it would be if there were no denominations, no false doctrines, and teachings of men. How wonderful it would be if there were no divisions among us and we were all speaking the same thing, being of the same mind and of the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10). How wonderful it would be if we were all one in Christ, all just Christians. (Galatians 3:26-28; Acts 11:26). In that case it would not be necessary to preach on some of these things so often. But since that is not the case, then we must continue to teach God's word, condemn error, and encourage one and all to return to the Bible for all that they say and do in the name of religion. The Apostle Paul charged the young preacher, Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of the season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2). Someone has explained that verse in this way: "Preach the word when they like it and when they don't like it." We must do likewise today.

It is also sad that we must constantly point out the errors of our denominational friends while the world is listening and looking on. Christ prayed in John 17 that we might all be one that the world might believe that the Father had sent him. In other words, with division among believers in Christ then this would hurt the Lord's cause, and as a result of it, many would not believe in him. He therefore prayed that we might all be one so that this would not happen. But Christ himself would be the first one to condemn division and he would encourage his disciples to do the same. As sad as it may be to have to do it while those of other religions look on, it is better to condemn it than to condone it or to ignore it. As far as those of other religions are concerned, they are also familiar with division among their own people, since all religions are divided into many groups or sects.

Finally, let me say that after so much preaching and teaching on what the Bible actually says, surely by now you should know what the Lord would have you to do to be saved, and what it will make of you when you obey him. If after all of the things that we have taught, after all of the repetition on these matters, and you still do not know the truth on these subjects, and you have not obeyed the Lord, but rather you find fault with what is taught, then it is evident that you are like those that Paul described as being one who is ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:7). That means that you are treading on dangerous ground, and even though you may claim to be one who loves the truth, the evidence points to the fact that you do not love the truth.

I would urge you to think seriously about these matters, to re-consider the things that are being taught, to go to the Bible to see what it teaches. If it is the truth, then accept it, but if it is error, then don't just complain about it, but show us wherein we are in error. If you will do that we will greatly appreciate it.



**associate
editorial**

"The Church Of Christ Does Not Believe In Miracles"

HAVE you been told this? If so, you have heard a lie. Because the church of Christ believe in all the miracles found in the Bible, both of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. What in fact the church of Christ does not believe is that no man today can perform miracles as Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit

baptized apostles were able to perform. There is not a man who can walk on the sea as we do on our roads, and feed a great multitude of people with a few loaves and fishes today, like Jesus was able to do. There is not a man who can go to a grave-yard and call a dead man from his grave and raise him up, like Jesus raised Lazarus. No one today can cleanse lepers. But Jesus spoke and they were cleansed immediately. He gave sight to those who were born blind. He gave new arms and new legs to people. He said or touched and it was done that very moment whatever he desired. And the same was true of his apostles, after Christ's death and burial and resurrection. They raised dead, spoke in languages of people they had never studied, and probably had never even heard. Also, they did many other miraculous deeds which no man can do today.

In fact, God has not given power to man today to work miracles, because there is no purpose of miracles today. All the miracles Jesus and his apostles performed accomplished a very definite and specific purpose. Firstly, to convince the people that Jesus was His Son, God used miracles. Now, suppose if Jesus had gone to people claiming that he was the Son of God, the Christ. How would they believe in him? They needed proof. The miracles of Jesus proved to them that he was truly God's Son. When the Jews asked him, If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. The record says, "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." (John 4:25). Thus, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews one day confessed before Jesus in these words, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." (John 3:2). His disciples, who had seen his mighty works, confessed unto him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16). John, one of Jesus' disciples, at John 20:30, 31 said, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

The same was true of his disciples whom he had sent into all

the world to preach his good news of salvation. They did not have a Bible or a New Testament to preach from. Of course, they had seen and heard Jesus. But how would they convince people, who heard them, that what they said was truth? So God gave them power to perform miracles. Thus, the record at Mark 16:20 says, "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." The signs or the miraculous works performed by the apostles confirmed or proved to people that what they said or preached was truth. The miracles assured them that what they were hearing was the word of God. And they consequently believed in the preaching of the apostles. The Bible's record says, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people...and believers were more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter, (*the apostle*), passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: **AND THEY WERE HEALED EVERY ONE.**" (Acts 5:12; 14:16). Here we see that miracles were done by the hands of the apostles and NOT by the hands of believers or other Christians, although there were multitudes of them by now! And it says that they were healed *every one*. Because these signs were done by the power of God. But remember, however, all of those signs and wonders were performed by the apostles not merely to provide physical healing, neither to raise funds or gain publicity. But to convince people that their preaching was the word of God. They were not sent by the Lord to perform signs and miracles but to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16). But the Lord worked with them to confirm the word they were preaching with the signs which followed.

The apostles were able to do many signs and wonders because they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised them before his death, resurrection and ascension (John 14:26; 16:33; Acts 1:5-8; 2:1-4). But there were only twelve apostles. The Lord, however, had commanded that the gospel

was to be preached everywhere in the world. Therefore, as we go a little further in our study of the Bible concerning the matter, we find that the apostles laid their hands on certain Christians, and therefore they also received the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:3-5; 8:17). One of them, on whom the apostles had laid their hands, went into the city of Samaria, and the record says, "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lamed, were healed...But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:6, 7, 12). But there is no record in the Bible which shows that those who had received the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit by the laying of the hands of the apostles on them were also able to impart this gift to others by laying their own hands on them. See Acts 8:14-18. Therefore it follows that after the death of the apostles and of those who had received the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit through the apostles, miracles ceased. In fact, the apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth had already written about it when he sent them the great message of love. He said, "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." (I Corinthians 13:8-10).

Of course, God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are same today as they were in the beginning. They can still perform miracles and signs individually and through people as they did then. But since there is no purpose of miracles today God therefore is not allowing them to happen. Because now the perfect has come. Books of the New Testament of the Bible were being written at the time the miracles were taking place. But today we have them all in the Bible, which is God's perfect book or the perfect law of liberty. (James 1:25). In the absence of God's perfect revelation he used miracles, signs and wonders to cause people to

believe in his word which was spoken through his spokesmen. But when he revealed his perfect will through his Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2), and confirmed it through signs and wonders (Mark 16:20) by the hands of the apostles, then he took away miracles. Today we have God's confirmed will with us. We can read and study and believe and obey it. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17).

What Is The Church Of Christ ?

John Wadley

A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE TO A CATHOLIC'S QUESTION

Christianity is the religion of an "open mind" and "the open book". To be noble in God's sight we must receive the word with all readiness of mind, and then search the Scriptures daily to see if it is so (Acts 17:11). A faithful disciple will always "be ready... to give answer to every man that asketh... a reason concerning the hope that is in" him (I Peter 3:15).

Churches of Christ exist in approximately 165 nations of the world. Here in America, we number some 3 million members in 17,500 separate congregations. To understand our approach to our faith, there are some things you must know.

Our Standard of Authority. We recognize the absolute Lordship and Headship of Jesus. He has "all authority" in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He is head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22). Whatever we do in word or in deed must be done in his name, i.e., by his authority.

We recognize the complete and binding authority of the New Testament of Jesus. The words that Jesus spoke "will judge us in the last day" (John 12:48). Those who abide not in the teaching of Christ have not God. Only those who abide in his teaching

have the blessing of the Father and the Son (II John 9). Paul warns us "not to go beyond the things that are written" (I Corinthians 4:6). The Scriptures are given by inspiration of God and are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete; furnished completely unto every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

The truths of the New Covenant were revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets who taught them to the first Christians. Guided by that same Spirit, they later wrote them in permanent form in the books of our New Testament. Christ promised that the Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). Paul calls upon all to acknowledge that the things he wrote were the commandments of the Lord (I Corinthians 14:37).

The New Testament they wrote is complete and allows no additions. It holds for us all essential religious truth (John 16:13). "All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16 RSV). Since the Scripture alone will make us complete and furnish us completely to every good work, what else could we need? Solomon warns us "add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:6). John closes the New Testament with a similar warning (Revelation 22:18-19).

We are not under the regulations of the Old Covenant. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter would have equally honored Moses the lawgiver, Elijah the prophet and Christ the Son. But God spoke from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). The Old Covenant was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14-17). We teach men to observe all things that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:20).

Human traditions are not allowed to supercede or displace Biblical authority. Christ condemned those Jews who made void the word of God by their tradition (Matthew 15:6). He further

said, "in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the prospects of men" (Matthew 15:9). Because God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are superior to our ways, our human ideas and opinions are valueless in religion (Isaiah 55:8-9). "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

Thus we are a church totally loyal to the authority of Christ, guided, regulated and circumscribed by the word of God. To be otherwise is to forfeit God's fellowship (II John 9).

Some Facts About Christ's Church. The church was *founded by Jesus*. He promised the apostles, "upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). It was founded *upon Christ*. "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). The church began in Jerusalem fifty days following the Lord's death on the day of Pentecost. Its beginning is recorded in Acts chapter 2. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, empowering them. They preached the good news of Christ's death, resurrection and lordship. Sinners were convicted and asked what they must do? They were told to "repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). "And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47 KJV). Prior to this point in time all references to the church are future tense. From this point onward the church is presented as a present reality. (See Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:26). The church is always the product of the word of God being taught. Jesus said the seed of the kingdom "is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). Without the seed there can be no church in new soil. The church in Corinth illustrates this point. Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. "And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized. "...and he dwelt there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:5-11). The result was "the church of God which is at Corinth" (I Corinthians 1:2).

The Role of the Church in Man's Salvation. Christ is "our great God and our *Saviour*" (Titus 2:13). The blood of Jesus "cleanseth us from all sin (I John 1:7). The church is the family of the saved. God adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Christ himself is "the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). The church then is not our saviour rather it is composed of those who are saved.

The Oneness of the Church. Jesus promised he would build his church (Matthew 16:18). He did not say churches. His prayer was that all who believe on him through the apostles' teaching would be *one*, even as he and his Father are one (John 17:20-21). Paul besought the Ephesian Christians to give "diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". For "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..." (Ephesians 4:3-6). That same apostle wrote "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among you..." (I Corinthians 1:10). Surely the scandal of a divided Christendom is displeasing to our God.

The Structure of the Church. Two different aspects of the church are revealed in Scripture; the church universal and the local congregation. Christ is head over all things to the church which is his body (Ephesians 1:22). This contemplates all the saved in the universal kingdom of Christ. Paul wrote "to the church of God at Corinth", i.e., a local congregation of saints (I Corinthians 1:1-2). This is the significance of Romans 16:16 "All the churches of Christ salute you".

In Bible times each local congregation was self-governing. Elders (also called bishops, Acts 20:17-28) were appointed in every church (Acts 14:23). These elders were authorized by God to "tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight... according to the will of God" (I Peter 5:2). Ministers and deacons serve under the supervision of their own local elders or bishops as members of the congregation. We have no extra-congregational organization that has authority over the local group. The church

in Jerusalem chose their own deacons (Acts 6:1-6). So today each congregation selects its own elders and deacons according to the divine instructions given (I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus, 1:5-9). It likewise chooses its own ministers and disburses its own funds. A given congregation can thus remain loyal to Christ if all the rest should go astray.

The church has no credal standard except the New Testament of Christ.

The Ministry of the Church. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. Peter writes "ye also...are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5). Every Christian is charged to present his body as a living sacrifice holy, acceptable to God. (Romans 12:2). Thus any Christian man in good standing may officiate in any aspect of public or private worship including the administration of baptism and presiding over the Lord's Supper. In the Great Commission Jesus commanded that we go make disciples and baptize them, and then teach them to do that very thing themselves (Matthew 28:19-20).

Elders of a congregation may select a man to work with them as a minister. Timothy served with the elders of the Ephesian church doing the work of an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5).

Following Jesus' instruction, no religious titles of distinction are given to ministers. "Be not ye called Rabi: for one is your teacher and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled..." (Matthew 23:8-12).

Following the New Testament practice, ministers are allowed to marry. Paul asked "Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord and Cephas?" i.e., Peter. (I Corinthians 9:5). Jesus

healed the mother-in-law of Peter (Matthew 8:14). The Hebrew writer says "Let marriage be had in honor among all..." (Hebrews 13:4).

The Worship of the Church. The hallmark of New Testament worship was its simplicity. There was no ritual, liturgy, or pagentry. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Those who preach must proclaim the word of God (II Timothy 4:2). Christ is exalted in the pulpit (I Corinthians 2:2). Preachers are expected to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

We worship with a cappella singing because this was the universal practice of the early Christians. The first instruments were introduced in 670 A.D. and the practice was not widely accepted until the 11th century. Paul exhorts us to sing and make melody in our hearts unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:19). That we do

In the Lord's Supper, we commemorate the suffering and death of our Lord. "Jesus...took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do *in remembrance of me*. In like manner also the cup...saying...this do as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me" (I Corinthians 11:23-25). We do not view the emblems as transubstantiated. It is a simple memorial. All worshippers partake of both elements and are answerable only to God. "Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (I Corinthians 11:28).

Prayers are offered to God through Jesus as our only Mediator (II Timothy 2:5). Our prayers are spontaneous rather than memorized or read. Repetitions are avoided (Matthew 6:7).

We present our gifts unto God as an act of worship on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:2). Each worshipper does "according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or

of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7). We have no taxing or assessments. There are no other fund-raising projects for the church and her work.

The Work and Mission of the Church. The central purpose for the church's existence is to evangelize the world for Christ. Jesus said "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation..." (Mark 16:15-16). Having made a convert we must bring him to maturity in the faith. Christ gave us evangelists, pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Caring for the poor and needy is another divine obligation laid upon her (James 1:27). She is to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Opposing the great moral evils of society is within her scope of duties. The church of the New Testament is not pictured as a political force, or business enterprise. It is not a social action organization. Rather her mission and work are spiritual in nature.

How Are Members Received into the Church? Since God adds the saved to the church, we really need to ask how are men saved, so they can be added? It is a cardinal theme of Christianity that sinners are saved "by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works..." (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy that we are saved (Titus 3:5). His gracious gift is received upon the terms which Christ laid down. Faith in him is essential (Romans 5:1). Repentance is commanded (Acts 17:30) as is baptism (Acts 10:48). Thus "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

We baptize by immersion since that is the first century definition of the term *baptizo*. Paul writes that we have been "buried with him in baptism" (Colosians 2:12). This explains why John needed "much water" to baptize in (John 3:23). Also it explains why Philip and the Ethiopian both went down into the water when Philip baptized him (Acts 8:38).

Only those old enough to make a personal decision and commitment are baptized. Jesus' commissioned us to *teach* and

baptize those who *believed* (Mark 16:15-16). Peter charged the people, who asked "what shall we do?, to *repent* and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Since infants and small children can neither believe or repent, they are not proper subjects for baptism. This does not mean that we leave them without salvation, for children are free from guilt until they *know* to do good and do it not (James 4:17).

Our Plea : We have committed ourselves to restore the original faith and practice of the first Christian. We look to the New Testament to discover what that faith should be. We are convinced that if we

Believe as they believed,
Teach as they taught,
Worship as they worshipped and
Serve as they served,

then we shall be what they were. They were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). Their congregations were "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16). That is our goal.

The Hardened Heart : Prelude To Damnation

William F. Irby

In the parable of the sower, the Lord teaches concerning the possible responses man may make to the word of God. That this is true is clear from Christ's own explanation of the parable wherein He says "The sower soweth the word" (Mark 4:14). The most tragic condition revealed in the parable is that of the hardened heart. These hearts are represented by the soil on the way side which in no way allowed the word of God to take root. Mark records these words of Jesus : "And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up (Mark 4:4) And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan

cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts" (Mark 4:15). It is the purpose of this article to consider the implications of that perilous condition called the hardened heart.

WILL NOT UNDERSTAND

The Bible student can learn that a hardened heart limits understanding. Christ said, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side" (Matthew 13:19). But this facility is predicated on having a proper understanding of the matter under consideration. The ultimate relevant situation is the problem of man understanding how to obtain salvation. Paul had reference to this when he said "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:22-24). Men can understand that God wishes them to be obedient to His will (through faith, repentance, confession and baptism) and therefore lay hold on eternal life. A hardened-heart, however, gives rise to a lack of understanding of a simple gospel of Christ.

SATAN'S POWER

Another consequence of the hardened heart is that such provides Satan with a free hand. In the parable of the sower, Satan came immediately and snatched the seed from those by the way side. Satan is a beastly old demon and the person in the pew with a concrete conscience is susceptible to his devices (II Cor. 2:11). The only way to be fully prepared to stand against the tricks of the evil one is to take "the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:16-17). The word of God, proven to be the only sure defense against the devil, is not available to the hard of heart! Through the use of emotional prejudice and religious

error Satan catches away the word, and leaves the sinner defenseless. Peter characterized the devil as a "roaring lion" who "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8). The devil dearly loves to see prey sitting smugly and confidently in the morass of unsound doctrine born out of an imperious attitude toward the word of God. The hardest hearts provides the softest spoils for Satan.

LEADS TO CONDEMNATION

The most tragic consequence of a hardened heart is the fact that this condition, unchecked, leads to condemnation. The Lord said, "Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). God's word must have its place in the heart of man if it is to do its work. Faith is created by the word of God (Rom. 10:17), so if the word is refused faith cannot be created. A man without faith in Christ is doomed! Christ Himself made the statement, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

YOUR HEART

A hard heart can come to belong to anyone. All men are creatures of freewill and because this is so men have an opportunity to accept or reject God's word. A problem develops when men become worldly, materialistic and desirous of self-importance. When people like this contact the gospel of Christ they soon see the contradiction between what their lives should be and are in reality. The soft-hearted person who desires to do God's will is disposed to bend his will to God's. The hard-hearted individual cannot operate this way...the love for sin is much too strong and the lusts of the world are much too effective. His will is actually already bent, not toward God, but toward Satan!

EVIL FORCES AT WORK

The forces at work in creating an ever-hardening heart are

sometimes subtle. Many so-called religious people have hearts as hard as stone. They see the practice of New Testament Christianity as too simple (or too complex), too emotional (or lacking in emotional content), too unorganized (or over-organized). No amount of book, chapter and verse Bible preaching can move their wills closer to God. True trusting faith cannot be created in them because their hearts have been closed and hardened by Satan-pleasing religious (or superstitious) prejudice. This same principle is at work with the humanistic "do your own thing" crowd. Instead of religious prejudice, pseudo-enlightenment is the opiate. Their hearts are made hard through the belief that the concepts of God, Christ, the church, etc. are fanciful and needed only by the mentally-deficient and unsophisticated segment of society.

It is a terrible tragic fact that hard-hearts outnumber good, honest hearts in the present religious environment. If we, as Christians, are to do the will of God we must keep our hearts soft and encourage those we contact in the world to see the folly of hard heartedness which is a certain prelude to damnation. Let us therefore remember to be like the good ground, "having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

Does God Hear Sinner's Prayers ?

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

This is a question that is frequently asked of gospel preachers and Bible teachers. I will answer it promptly with a decisive NO and then give sustaining proof from Sacred Scripture.

By sinners here we mean those who have never obeyed the gospel. Hence, they are aliens as Paul expressed the matter in Ephesians 2:12. They are people who have never become the children of God. Hence, God is not their Father. He is their Creator or Maker but not their spiritual Father.

Surely, no reader will deny that God's hearing or answering prayer false into the category of spiritual blessings. Yet Paul teaches in Ephesians 1:3 that all spiritual blessings are in heavenly places in Christ. If all spiritual blessings are in Christ and prayer is a spiritual blessing, then those who have never come into Christ are not yet on praying terms with Jehovah. When one takes the position that God hears and answers the prayers of alien sinners, then he has removed prayer from the category of being a spiritual blessing or else has removed ALL spiritual blessings from being in Christ. If not, why not? To be in Christ one must have heard the word, believed in the Deity of Christ, repented of sins, confessed faith in Christ and been baptized into Christ (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:9-10; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4). When he does this he is no longer an alien but is IN Christ and is in that royal realm where he may pray to the heavenly Father to be heard.

Testimony is abundant from the Old Testament in proof of the correctness of my initial answer to this interesting and frequently asked query. David said, "The eyes of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (Psalm 34:15-16). Alien sinners are not righteous people Biblically speaking; they are the ones who do evil. That is why they are still aliens from the Spiritual Commonwealth of the Mighty Messiah. In another psalm the Sweet Singer of Ancient Israel declared, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). The alien sinner is not without the presence of iniquity or wrong doing in his heart and life. That is what keeps him an alien sinner. Solomon, the Wisest of the Ages, wrote, "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. 15:29). The alien is still in all his sins. This makes him wicked in the eyes of Heaven's pure God. Solomon did not say that God hears the prayers of both the righteous and the unrighteous did he? He restricts God's hearing of prayers to the righteous only. One of the clearest verses in the Old Testament has this to say, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9). The alien has turned his ear from hearing the gospel plan of salvation. His sins have made him alienated from God but his

refusal to hear and heed the conditions of salvation compounds his problem all that much the more and retains him securely in his chosen role as an alien sinner. Prayers of such people are abominable to Jehovah.

The New Testament offers additional evidence relative to the correctness of my initial answer. Peter says to Christians scattered throughout the five provinces of Asia Minor, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers : but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). The eyes of the Lord are over whom ? The righteous. The ears of the Lord are open unto whose prayers ? The prayers of the righteous. Righteous people and alien sinners are not synonymous people by any stretch of the imagination.

The blind man of John 9, now healed, had this to say just subsequent to the great miracle of which he was the rich recipient, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners : but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth (John 9:31). Some have discounted this statement because it was made neither by Christ nor any apostle. But did not the healed man speak a truth that is based on the strikingly accurate sentiments of the very Old Testament passages earlier quoted in this article ? None of the enemies sought to negate his statement. When John the apostle later incorporated it into his gospel record he gave no indication at all that the healed man had spoken incorrectly. The healed man presented an unanswerable argument favorable to the fact that Jesus could only have performed this fundamental feat and stupendous sign upon his life-long blind eyes if God were with him. If Jesus were a sinner, as per the claim of the angered Pharisees in this chapter, then God would not have honored what the Son did in this marvelous miracle. John 9:31 is a clinching argument relative to this matter of whether God answers sinners' prayers. He does not !!

Joy In Salvation

God wants his creatures to be happy. He has made abundant

provisions for the happiness of the human family. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Not only does he supply the material needs for life, joy and happiness, but he also provides all Spiritual blessings for the joy and contentment of man's soul.

HOW TO ENTER THE WAY

JOY IN GOD

There is a great joy in salvation. Habakkuk, facing times of extreme hardship said, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:18). David, having fallen into sin, realized the loss of favor with God, and with that loss the joy of salvation, prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Psa. 51:12). Paul, one who knew the blessedness of salvation cries out, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). In a world of trials, labours, and tears, only those who know the joy of salvation can be truly happy.

SIN DESTROYS HAPPINESS

But many people are not happy regardless of God's abundant and readily available provisions for their happiness. Why aren't people happy? No doubt many reasons could be given, many of them petty, some very serious—but the chief reason—the greatest reason why people are not happy—is sin, shame and guilt, that plague their souls, hounding their steps,

ENTER INTO THE WAY

"Enter ye in at the strait gate... which leadeth unto life" (Matt. 7:13, 14). There is the "strait gate" and "narrow way" that leads to the joys of salvation. The gate must be passed through, the way must be traveled. Jesus used another term to denote salvation in saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Salvation greatly involves one's relation with Jesus Christ. He is the way; salvation and eternal glory is to be had only in him (2 Tim. 2:10).

Seeing that salvation with eternal joy is only in Christ and may be obtained only in Him, the Way and the Truth, is it not but logical and Scriptural that one must be in Christ, the place salvation is located, in order to have salvation and its joy?

HOW TO ENTER INTO THE WAY

Scripture teaches that penitent believers are baptized into Christ: "...that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:3); "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). To be baptized into Christ is to be "born again (anew)," to be "born of the water and the Spirit," it is to experience "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

With one's baptism into Christ one becomes a new creature: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17). New life is in Christ; one received new life by being born again in Christ by baptism. There and then by that process one becomes a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

PRESENT AND ETERNAL JOY

With the new birth, one's becoming a Christian, the real joy of life and salvation begins. At that point the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). He had all reasons to do so. Some of those reasons stated are: "All Spiritual blessings in heavenly places (are) in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). We perhaps could not enumerate all the "spiritual blessings but we could speak of the peace of God, heard and answered prayers, our relation with God as our Father and Christ as our brother, His wonderful grace, the redemptive power of his blood, the hope of the resurrection and the eternal home over there.

No day is so dark but the joy and hope of salvation does not lighten that day. Words of cheer come from the Holy Book to one in Christ, one in the "strait and narrow way", one who has been raised from the grave of baptism to "walk in the newness of

life" (Rom. 6:4, 5). He has the living hope of the "inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Pet. 1:3-5). His days are joyous for he is a child of God and an heir in the riches of his Father's glory (Rom. 8:17, 18).

Was Simon The Sorcerer A Genuine Convert ?

James Meadows

"But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria; giving out that himself was some great one :...Then Simon himself believed also, and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done...And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter : for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (Acts 8:9, 13, 18-24).

Simon's sin, so soon after his conversion, is taken by many as proof that he was not a genuine convert. Albert Barnes wrote that "Simon was not a Christian...that Simon was at this time an unconverted sinner...These expressions show conclusive that Simon was a stranger to religion..." (Acts pp. 142-144).

Several facts show that Simon was a genuine convert and that all claims to the contrary are false. **First**, those who make this claim believe in the impossibility of apostasy. Simon did fall, so the advocates of this doctrine have to argue that he never was saved, or they have the example of a saved man falling. The latter won't fit their doctrine. **Second**, if Simon was not saved, then the Samaritans were not saved. The divine record states that they all did the same things, namely, heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 8:12, 13). **Third**, one who declares that Simon was not saved takes issue with the Lord. He declared that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Luke says Simon believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13). **Fourth**, if conversion means that one can never again be influenced by his old habits, then Simon was not a genuine convert. But both Scripture (I John 1:7-9) and common sense show that old habits can and do lead us into sin on occasions. **Fifth**, if Simon was an alien sinner why didn't Peter tell him to repent and be baptized like he did the Jews on Pentecost? He didn't tell him to repent and pray for all the sins he had ever committed, but to repent and pray about, "this thy wickedness" and "the thought of thy heart." **Sixth**, if Simon was not already converted then he passed the inspection of inspired men three times. Philip was "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3) but he never accused Simon of hypocrisy. Peter was baptized in the Holy Spirit and he never pointed Simon out as a pretender. "Finally, and if possible, more convincingly, Luke, the inspired historian, with all the facts before him; namely, the faith, baptism, amazement, and defection of Simon" records for all ages and generations. "And Simon also himself believed: and being baptized, he continued with Philip: and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed." If Simon did not really believe, Luke knew it; but he says nothing about it." (Goodpasture). **Seventh**, if Philip baptized one that later fell short, then we should not be discouraged if some of our converts do the same.

Abraham's Faith

Curtis Dowdy

For the past several weeks, during the Bible study hours, we

have been studying events in the life of Abraham. What an interesting Old Testament character! And like so many others there are things which we would like to know about him that have not been revealed. Nevertheless, what we do know impresses us with the fact he was a man of real faith.

Many religious teachers try to find in Abram the pattern of SALVATION for aliens who would be saved by faith "alone." This is figured on the basis of the statements recorded at Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:3 :

And he believed in the Lord : and he counted it to him for righteousness.

For what saith the Scripture ? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

One rule of exact Bible study is to always return to the original setting to understand a quotation in the New Testament which is from the Old. So to appreciate what Paul discusses in Romans chapter four one needs to rehearse the background of both Abram and the book of Romans.

Just when or how Abram first became a righteous man has not been revealed, although it had to be upon the basis of his faith and God's grace in anticipation of the perfect "lamb" (Heb. 9:15). Abram was still in Ur when God instructed him to leave for a new land, and God promised him through the righteousness of faith that Abram would become the heir of the world (Gen. 12:1-3; Rom. 4:13). It was some years later that God promised Abram that his seed would be as numberless as the stars and the statement was made which we quoted from Genesis 15:6 above. However, it is certain that this was not the beginning of his right standing before God through faith. Still later, maybe as many as fifteen years, God promised that Sarah would bear a son, whom they would name Isaac. Even though both Sarah and Abram were as good as dead, from the aspect of producing an offspring, still Abraham's faith was strong and he believed God. (Gen. 17:15-21):

To this point Paul wrote Romans 4:19-21 with verse 22 which tells us, "And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

It would be possibly another twenty-five years that the great test testing would come to Abram, then Abraham, as recorded in Genesis chapter twenty-two. James speaks of it on this wise, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:21-23). Thus, we find Abram or Abraham (depending on the time) being reckoned righteous on the basis of faith over a rather extended period of time.

Paul's purpose in Romans was not to give the specific plan of salvation for those of us living this side of the cross, but to show that righteousness was not depended upon the law of Moses, Abraham lived and died prior to that law, and too, that righteousness is imputed on the basis of faith and grace, **NOT FAITH ALONE.**

We are now ready to appreciate Romans 4:1, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found," and verse 16, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all." Here, then, it is affirmed that right standing with God is accomplished through faith by means of grace, and that our association with Abraham in the promise is by possession of the **KIND** of faith characteristic of him. The confidence that Abraham expressed over and over again as he followed directions from God is called **FAITH** by the author of Hebrews (see 11:8-19).

The **FAITH** that makes one an "heir according to the **PROMISE**" is that which brings one into Christ (Galatians 3:26-29), and that includes, never excludes, baptism into Christ.

Let it be understood that the gospel is a system through which God's grace is freely offered to all who by faith follow the instructions found therein. Salvation comes today not in doing WHAT Abraham did, but in doing LIKE he did.

When Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16), he was speaking to all mankind! Have you been baptized into Christ?

Except

Owen G. Solomon

The Bible is so rich in its instruction to man that many lessons of spiritual benefit can be learned from the study of a single word. Such is the case with the word "except." This article will give attention to Bible lessons using this little word.

Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Jno. 3:5). This new birth involves a death, for Jesus said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if did, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Jno. 12:24). Paul teaches in Romans 6:2-4 that a sinner becomes dead to sin, is buried with Christ in baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life.

Again, Jesus said, "...for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (Jno. 8:24). The American Standard Version says, "For except ye believe that I am he...".

Further, Jesus said, "I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3,5). Repentance is a prerequisite to salvation. A man cannot be saved except he repent! God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

Again, Jesus said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Peter said, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Except a man believes that Christ is the Son of God, he will die in his sins (Jno. 8:24 ASV). Except he repents he will perish (Lk. 13:3), and Except a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (Jno. 3:5). All of these acts are involved in the conversion of a sinner, and no man shall enter the kingdom of heaven except he be converted (Matt. 18:3). Have you obeyed these commands of Christ?

Words of Life

SUPPOSE YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD ETERNAL LIFE! And after death woke up in torment (Luke 16:22-23). Jesus said that the vast majority will not go to Heaven: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it," Matthew 7:13-14.

Most people think that they are saved. Yet, after comparing their response with the standard—the Bible, many do not have assurance from God. Sadly, many have stated, "I know what the Bible says about how to become a Christian, but I feel saved in my heart. You can't tell me that I won't make it to Heaven." Jesus once had an occasion to speak to a group of people who had this attitude. Notice what he said: "Not everyone 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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." From this passage it is clear that the statement "Many will say...", indicates that a large number of people will claim to have performed numerous good deeds, but He will profess unto them "I never knew you," indicating they had never properly obeyed the Lord's will and thus, their service to Him was in vain as far as their eternal destiny was concerned.

Many sincere people are searching for the truth concerning salvation. For others, it has never crossed their mind to search the scriptures and determine if they have really accepted the Lord as He has directed.

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