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# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## EDITORIAL

### ***What Does The Bible Teach?***

***“Do not add to His word, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar.”***

What a marvelous time we are living in today! Just look back to a few years and think of the improvements we have made to better our living standards. Communicationally speaking, think of the radio, telephone and television; and then came Fax machine, internet. We are now living in a computer age! More work is now done through computers. Letters are exchanged via E-mail. And just wait some more time, because we are going to be introduced to some more newer things, which will make some of these existing things out dated! We have made lots of improvement through the years and sure we are going to improve more in the years to come. But one thing we dare not improve upon is the word of God; God's will, His words that are written in the Bible. It is a suggestion, it is a command and it is a warning to one and all: “Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar.” (Proverbs 30:6).

Man must remember that God is his creator. That He has also revealed His will for man. That He has spoken and has told man what he must do and what he must not do. He is no longer speaking to anyone directly, or personally. He has once for all revealed His complete, full, absolute will to all humans, and that is written in the Bible. And more than once he warns “DO NOT

ADD!" (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19). The apostle Paul said that even if an angel from heaven comes and tell you something else that is not already written in the Bible then do not accept it. (Galatians 1:6-9). John, another apostle, said, if someone bring you a different teaching then do not accept such a person into your house (2 John 9-11). Matthew 12:48 says that one who rejects God's word rejects God Himself and the word of God will judge, in the day of judgment, them who reject Him now. How do we reject God's word? When we add into God's word; when we take away from God's word; when we make changes in God's word; and when we do not do what God's word tell us to do.

We have numerous examples in the Bible of the people who did such things with the word of God, and consequently they were punished by God, so that they might be an example for us. Such were: Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2), Saul, the king, (1 Samuel 15), and others. Although, it may not sound good, and some may not even be happy for me to write about some of these things, but sorry to say, things have been added into God's word through the years, which find no mention in the Bible at all, yet they have become akin with Christianity and mark of Christianity because such have been practiced through the years by those who believe in the Bible, without looking or seeing in the Bible whether it is taught anywhere in the Bible by a command or an example. Think! Do we read about the use of holy-water in the Bible, or purgatory, or baptizing infants? Christ Himself had said that he would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). Now the Bible says that Christ arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Mark 16:1,2; Luke 24:1-6; John 20:1-18). But lets say Christ died and was buried on Friday and then he arose on Sunday, the first day of the week. Was He in the earth or tomb three nights and three days? Or where do we read of a Good Friday in the Bible? And what about Ash Wednesday? The word Lent means spring time. Or does it mean fasting? But where is lent mentioned in the Bible? And, how about Palm Sunday? The word estre from which Easter is taken means Festival of spring, when Eostre the goddess of dawn was worshipped. Does the Bible speak of Easter? Many years after the death of the apostles and the first century's Christians, some began to celebrate the sacrifice of Christ in a special way on a certain day and began to call it the Mass of Christ. In the years



to come that became Christ-Mas and changed into the birthday of Christ. No, it is not mentioned in the Bible. But through Commercialization this has become a great day for the believers in Christ. As one of the modern song writers has said, "Immanuel (Christ) lives forevermore, because of Christmas day!" But Christ said, "These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:8-9).

## ***When Jesus Comes Will He Find Faith On The Earth?***

**J.C. CHOATE**

After Jesus taught some important lessons, he asked the question, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8). This is an interesting question but one that the scriptures answers.

The question affirms that Jesus will come again. It does not say that he is coming to earth but he is asking if there will be faith on the earth at the time of his coming. The scriptures only say that he is coming again, that he is coming in the manner he went away, and that he is coming in the clouds. (John 14:1-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Jesus is asking if he will find faith, or any that are saved on the earth, at the time of his coming. He is not asking how many of the faith he will find, but if he will find faith on the earth when he comes.

To answer that question we need to go all the way back to a statement made by Daniel. The prophet of God proclaimed, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and that kingdom shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Daniel 2:44). In the context here Daniel speaks of 4 world kingdoms. They were the Babyalonian Kingdom, the Medo-Persian Kingdom, the Greek Kingdom, and finally the Roman Kingdom. He says that in the days of the Roman kings that God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed

but that it would stand forever. The four kingdoms mentioned were to be the last of the world kingdoms, and that they would be replaced by an all powerful, spiritual kingdom, which would be the kingdom of God.

Speaking of the coming of Jesus, Luke wrote, "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:33). The scriptures go on to tell us that John the Baptist came preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. (Matthew 3:2). After John baptized Jesus, he also began to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand or near. (Matthew 4:17). Christ told those gathered around him that those of you standing there would not die until they had seen the kingdom of God come with power. (Mark 9:1). That meant that it would come in the life time of some of those that were present at that time. Then Christ promised that he would build his church or kingdom on the fact that He was the Son of God. (Matthew 16:18,19).

After the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, that power was sent on the Apostles (Acts 1:8) in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. With that power enabling them to speak in the languages of those gathered there, and preaching the gospel for the first time in fact, some 3,000 obeyed the Lord and were added to the church. (Acts 2). The church or the kingdom has been in existence ever since. We read of Philip preaching things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12) and Paul speaking to the church at Colosse said that the Lord had delivered them from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. (Colossians 1:13,14).

The church or kingdom grew rapidly in the first century but even Paul warned that there would be a falling away, and there was. (2 Thessalonians 2). Most of the church fell away, but not all. Remember that it was said that the Lord's kingdom or church would never be destroyed. The remenant therefore continued on, while the majority went on to become the Catholic Church and in the 1500's the Reformation and Protestantism erupted resulting in all of the denominational churches that are with us to this day. But what about the Lord's church? It has continued on up to this time and now may be found in almost every country in the world.

When the Lord eventually comes then will he find faith on the earth? Yes, the Lord's church will still be in existence, made up of the saved, and those that are living at the time of his



coming will be caught up into the clouds to meet him, and with the general resurrection and judgment, the Lord will deliver us up the righteous, the church, or his kingdom, to God, where they shall ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17; John 5:28,29; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:24).

Where will you be when the Lord comes again? You may already be dead and waiting for the resurrection. Or you may be alive, either lost or saved. If you are prepared to meet him when he comes, then you will be caught up to meet him in the clouds. If you are not saved, then you will join all of the resurrected to go before the Lord to be judged and to be sentenced to your eternal destination. Now is the time to prepare to meet God. If you will believe in him, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins, the Lord will save you and add you to his church so you can live for the Lord and be faithful unto death that you may receive a crown of life. (Hebrews 11:6; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:10; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47; Revelation 2:10).

## *Are You Truly Converted?*

FRANCIS DAVID

The Bible, inspired word of God tells us that how God loved the whole world and sent His only begotten Son in this world to save the human race from their sins. (John 3:16). When man was in sin, he was separated from his Creator. The Scriptures tell us that because of our iniquities, we were separated from the Almighty (Isaiah 59:2). We also read that no one is without sin, all accountable people are sinners, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23). The wages for sin is the spiritual death. (Romans 6:23). The almighty did not leave us in hopeless condition. He provided a way of escape for us by sacrificing His Son on the cross of calvary. The greatest sacrifice which was ever made for the mankind is of Jesus Christ. We read and apostle John says: "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29). Paul says: "... For indeed Christ, our passover, was sacrificed for us. (1 Cor. 5:7).

Jesus our Lord after He was risen from the dead, commanded His disciples to go into all the world and preach about

him, and His salvation. In the book of Mathew chapter 28, verses 18 & 19 He said: "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. . . . We as Christians and followers of Christ obey this command and go with the message of Jesus to tell people that "Jesus died for you, was buried in the tomb and was resurrected by the Power of God." This is a good news about Jesus for everyone (I Cor. 15:1-4). There are worlds of people today who are following Jesus but there are few who are actually following him by practising the pure new testament Christianity.

The book of acts describes that how Christianity was established about 2000 years ago. In chapter two of this book we read how apostle Peter preached to thousands of people on the day of Pentecost (a Jewish festival), and the same day about 3000 people were converted and were baptised. After this we read that many conversions took place. In Acts chapter 8 we read about the conversion of samaritans and also a man from Ethiopia, who was a treasurer was converted. There was another prominent man whose name was Saul, he was converted (Acts 9), he suffered a lot for the cause of Christ. There was another religious man whose name was Cornelius, he and his household was converted. (Acts 10). In Acts chapter 16, a business woman was converted and also a jailor of the prison. There are other number of cases that we read in the Bible who were converted when they heard the good news about Jesus and His salvation. We read that every day the numbers were increasing.

Now the question is, were these people were given or offered some material help, before they were converted? No, thousands times no. Did apostles, promise them food, clothing or schooling for their children? No. Today we hear a lot about reconversions of people. Some say that Christians are leaving their faith and are now reconverted. The people those who are really converted to Christianity will never go back.

Those who leave and go back, they were never converted. They might call themselves Christians or may be pretending to be Christians but to tell you the truth, they were never converted. If they were converted as the Bible teaches about conversion, they will never go back. A lot of people misunderstand the word conversion. The genuine conversion means to change from one



state to another state. A complete change of heart and mind. When a person from sincere heart believes in Jesus, confess him as the Son of God, and repent of his past sinful life and is baptised or immersed in water then he becomes a Christian. He is converted and translated into the kingdom of God. (Col. 1:13). A true converted Christian knows who is he and in whom he has believed, like apostle Paul, when he was converted and became a Christian, he said these word confirming his faith in the Lord: "For these reason, I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed for I know whom I believed and am pursued that He is able to keep what I have committed to HIM until that day." (2 Timothy 1:12). Yes, Paul, knew what conversion is for him. He came from Jewish background but never went back after facing so much persecution. He did not quit.

If people think conversion means to get physical benefits, then they have the wrong concept about Christianity. Christ never promised bread and butter for those who will be converted. He never enticed people to follow him and He will feed them. Jesus our Lord once rebuked some people who were following Him for bread, and He had to say these words to them: "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves (rotis) and were filled and then He told them "Do not labour for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you . . ." (John 6:26,27). We must take out this thing from our minds that Christianity means food, clothing, medicine and schooling. It is a good thing to help people and provide their needs but it doesn't mean to entice them for conversion. If anyone does that, that would not be a biblical conversion. A person who really wants to be converted must know what he or she is doing. They must count the cost of discipleship. Jesus said: "If anyone (See the condition here, He is not putting a pressure on anyone), desires to follow me or come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Lk. 9:23).

Are you truly converted? Have you obeyed the gospel of Christ? Have you fully accepted him as your Saviour and Master? The gospel of Christ has the Power to save you from your sins. (Romans 1:16). We are not preaching the social gospel, instead we are preaching the gospel which can give a hope of life eternal. If you are not a Christian or not truly

converted then we will urge you to believe in Jesus, confess him as Son of God, repent of your sins and be baptised, and then you will be added to one true church the body of Christ. (Acts 2:47; Gal. 3:27). When you do these things from the true genuine heart (mind), then your conversion would be a true conversion and then you will know, what you are supposed to do and never go back. Please remember the lines of this famous song. "I have decided to follow Jesus, No turning back, No turning back . . . ."

## *Let the Bible Answer*

ROBERT MEREDITH

Who is Satan? He is the greatest enemy mankind has ever known. God warns us that we should not be ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11-17). Furthermore, Paul tells us that Satan strives to hinder us (1 Thess. 2:18). Satan worked to stop Paul's labours for the Lord and Satan will work to hinder our service to the Lord or our obedience to His gospel. Everyone is involved in a great spiritual war and one needs to be aware of his adversary. The apostle Peter proclaimed, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet. 5:8). Let us notice a few things about Satan.

Satan is known by several names or descriptions. He is called Satan (Job 1:6; 1 Chron. 21:1; Zech. 3:1; Lk. 22:31), the devil (Mt. 4:1; 13:39), the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), the wicked one (Mt. 13:19,38), the father of lies (John 8:44), and the accuser (Job 1:6-7, 9-12, 2:3-7; Rev. 12:10).

The devil works today to lead people away from God. He does not do this directly but indirectly through temptation and sin. In 1 John 2:15-17, the apostle John informs us that there are three avenues of temptation. There may be many different temptations, but they all fall into one of these three classes of temptation: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The devil uses temptation to try to snare one in sin. James penned, "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He*



any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, tells us that the devil works to spiritually blind us. In 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul wrote, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Once again the devil does not directly blind people's minds, but indirectly through worldly cares (Lk. 8:14), false doctrine (2 Cor. 11:13-15; Rom. 16:17-18), Apathy (Hosea 4:6), and a host of other ways.

There are a few characteristics of Satan of which one needs to be aware. The Bible tells us he is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), he is a deceiver (Rev. 12:9), and he is subtle (Gen. 3:1). This is why Peter tells us to be sober (watchful) and vigilant (attentive) in 1 Pet. 5:8. One must realize that this enemy is crafty, cunning and ruthless, and he is fighting for something much more important than land; he is trying to gain your soul.

We are in a great spiritual war (Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; 1 Tim. 1:18), the constant battle between the forces of good and evil. Satan has been and will be defeated. Genesis 3:15, the first Messianic prophecy, has been fulfilled by the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection. One needs to resist the devil (James 4:7) and draw nigh to God (James 4:8), because Jesus, in one of the last parables He taught, informs us where the devil, his angels, and all who follow the paths of unrighteousness will spend eternity (Mt. 25:41). "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

## Podsnappery

KEN MULLEN

You might readily be forgiven if you said, "never heard of it!", or "What's it got to do with religious matters?" The origin of it goes back a long way and we are indebted to the author Charles Dickens for personifying it. In his book, *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens portrays the character of a large portion of society,

whose importance in this little world of ours, if taken at their evaluation of things, is indisputable. This great descriptive writer introduces a character by saying, "Mr Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr Podsnap's opinion". Does that sound like anyone you know?

Dickens continues, "Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness—not to add a grand convenience—in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!' Mr Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him, 'and consequently sheer away,' with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him."

The foregoing gives the origin of the title of this article. Maybe it fits someone you know? Maybe it fits you in relation to your attitude towards God, in relation to your attitude towards his Son, Jesus Christ, and the plan God offers for your salvation from this sinful world. Maybe it describes your attitude towards the Bible as the Word of God, his full and final revelation of his will for mankind. Do you have a tendency perhaps towards putting Jesus behind you and out of existence as far as you are concerned? Is consideration of your salvation so disagreeable to you that you do not want to know about it, or admit its importance? Does consideration of the effect of Jesus upon your life become a difficult problem best dealt with by simply sweeping it away? Is this something which affronts you?

### **Modernism**

Men with arguments for the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible which are absolutely unanswerable, are often swept aside. Instead of facing their arguments many, like Mr Podsnap, would condescendingly wave them aside as traditionalists; well-meaning but impotent.

This is just what the higher critics of earlier years and the "Modernists" of today are continually doing. This is purely for their own convenience. They just wave aside arguments and facts which they cannot meet, ignoring the work of conservative



scholars. To them, it is a good way of getting rid of disagreeables.

Are you assured by the critics? Do you claim that some great men, believing the same, agree with you? Have you no time for "traditionalists"? How often have you received a rejection to God's offer of grace through Christ, or been guilty of saying yourself, "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it"? Do you then put these things away as though they do not exist? Are you like the ostrich which puts its head in the sand and hopes that the problem will have gone away by the time it raises its head again?

### **Modernists Attack The Bible**

We only have space for a few of the countless number of men who have made such utterances as the following:

*Dr Lyman Abbott:* "An infallible book is an impossible conception, and today no one really believes our Bible is such a book."

*Professor Shailer Matthews:* "As for higher criticism, we not only use it in the study of the Bible, but we believe any person who does use it is not studying it wisely or efficiently (so say Russellites, Mormons, Christian Scientists and others, of their books). Most scepticism in college students is due to the extreme teachings of the inspiration of the Bible."

*Bishop Barnes:* "The Old Testament is Jewish literature. In it are to be found folklore, defective history, half-savage morality, obsolete forms of worship based on primitive and erroneous ideals of the nature of God, and crude Science."

*Professor Peake:* "It is no longer possible to insist on the literal accuracy of the Gospel narratives." Again he avers, "Much in Genesis 1 to 11 is of mythical origin."

*Canon Streeter:* The Christian is aware that the infallibility of the historical records of the life of Christ is questioned by the majority of competent scholars."

We could quote many more such examples, right up to Bishop Jenkins, of what is being openly stated in our day. Thus the Modernists' leaders scoff at the Scriptures being infallible and inspired. Much of the Old Testament is discarded or ridiculed; assertions are made that the books of the Gospel are inaccurate and their writers uninspired; that much of the Bible is

merely folklore or pious forgeries which should be scrapped as worthless. "How is it that many true Christians with all this, and much more, in view, are constantly charging Fundamentalists with using extreme language about Modernists, yet they never open their mouths to rebuke the Modernists, for their extreme language about *the Word of the Living God*, and their attack upon almost every vital doctrine therein?"

### For Consideration From The Scriptures

Without making great comment upon any of the following, it might be worth the while of each one of us to soberly and prayerfully consider these few references to the Word of God himself, as he desires to reveal himself and his will to us in every age:

A. In the Gospel record of Matthew Jesus is addressing the crowds, along with his disciples, when he uses the following words concerning the Pharisees: "Practise and observe whatever they tell you, but do not what they do, for they teach but do not practise. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen of men . . . they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. . .". Jesus continues by calling them hypocrites (several times), blind guides, wrong, ignorant of both the Scriptures and the power of God (Matt. 22:29; 23:1-33). Many practise Pharisaism in works and attitudes today, if not in name.

B. Jesus also told a parable "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others". The parable concerned the Pharisee and the publican who went together into the temple to pray, the Pharisee with pride and the tax collector with humility. Jesus' final words on this account were, ". . . every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted".

C. When Paul writes his letter to the Christians in Rome, he says, ". . . I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him" (Rom. 11:3). Remember Mr Podsnap, who "stood very high in Mr Podsnap's opinion".

D. When the apostle Paul was making his defence before king Agrippa, he outlined how he, in his earlier and misguided



days, had sought out Christians with the idea of zealously persecuting them. Paul had become acquainted with Jesus, turned to God, repented, been baptized and was now a preacher of God's Word. Governor Festus accused Paul of being turned mad by great learning, to which Paul replied that he was "speaking the sober truth". Paul then addressed himself again to king Agrippa, asking if he believed what the prophets had written, and Agrippa made the remark, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!"

If we go back a little (to Acts 24:24-27) we have record of an earlier meeting between Paul and Felix, at which Drusilla, wife of Felix, was also present, and on which occasion they had listened to Paul speaking about "faith in Christ Jesus". Felix had become alarmed when Paul raised such issues as "justice, self-control and future judgment". His answer to that alarm was not to examine what Paul was saying with great care as having an important bearing upon his life, but rather, "Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity I will summon you." It was two years later that Paul came before Felix and Agrippa and we are still without record that any of those present to hear Paul's teachings and warnings ever heeded them. Many are still waiting for a "more convenient time". Remember Mr Podsnap again, he thought that by putting things behind him they would go away. He did not want to know. He did not choose to discuss. He would not admit things even to himself. Many will be like that when Jesus returns to introduce his own to God the Father. Many will be pleased to call him Lord in such a day. But we have Jesus' own words for what he will say to them: "I never knew you; depart from me, you evil doers" (Matt. 7:21, 22). Many Mr Podsnaps will be amongst such.

## *The Example of Christ*

JOHN GRIFFITHS

Submissiveness is not a quality that is admired very much in our society today. Submissiveness is often seen as a form of weakness, as a tendency to give in to others, of not standing up for yourself. Society has more regard for attitudes of power and strength than it does for submissiveness. The heroes of our

society are those who are strong and powerful, who don't let others get away with anything, who won't be trampled upon.

However, submissiveness must not be confused with weaknesses. Submissiveness is not a form of weakness, it does not mean allowing yourself to be trampled upon. A strong, powerful person can also be a very submissive person. The supreme example of submissiveness is to be found in Jesus Christ, who possessed all the authority in the universe, and yet adopted a submissive attitude throughout his life on this earth.

### **Christ's Suffering**

In 1 Peter 2:21-25 Peter tells us that Christ has left us an example of submissiveness when we suffer mistreatment at the hands of others. In the previous verses Peter has addressed servants, telling them that they have God's approval if they endure unjust suffering: "But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval." Acceptance of unjust suffering is an attitude that Peter encourages elsewhere in this letter: 3:14, "But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed." 4:13-14, "But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's suffering . . . If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed." 4:16, "Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God."

The acceptance of unjust suffering is seen in the example of Jesus Christ, which Peter points to in 2:21, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." The word that Peter uses for "example" is a word used of a pattern in an exercise book that a child might have to copy. In the same way Jesus provides us with the pattern that we are to copy in our behaviour. As we progress in our Christian lives our conduct and attitudes should get ever closer to that pattern or examples set by Jesus.

Peter develops this thought further when he says that Christ has left "you an example, that you should follow in his steps." To follow in his steps means to follow in his footprints. When snow has fallen on the ground and someone walks through that freshly fallen snow for the first time they leave a trail of footprints. A child might come along behind and try to place his steps into those footprints and follow that person who has gone before. That's the picture Peter gives us here—we are to follow in the footprints of Jesus. He has shown us the way to go and we must



follow in his steps.

Peter tells us how Christ behaved in relation to the suffering he experienced. First of all Peter reminds us that Jesus' suffering was not for any wrong he had done, "He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips." No one, friend or enemy, was able to point to any sin in the life of Jesus. His actions were sinless, his words were without guile, his life was perfect in every way, yet he suffered greatly. If anyone had good cause to complain or protest about injustice or unfair treatment it was Jesus. But He didn't instead He patiently endured the abuse and the mistreatment he suffered: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten." The gospel accounts tell us of the abuse Jesus received during his trial and crucifixion—the verbal abuse, the physical attacks upon him, the mockery, and the final violent suffering of the crucifixion itself. Yet through all of this, Jesus endured in silence, submissive to the ill treatment he did not deserve.

What a contrast Jesus' behaviour is to that which we see so often in our society today. Retaliation is deemed appropriate if we have been severely provoked, abused or treated unfairly. Jesus' reaction to the ill treatment he received was not to retaliate: he did not answer abuse with abuse, he did not respond to violence with threats of his own. Instead, Peter says, "He trusted to him who judges justly." Jesus left the matter in the hands of God, the Just Judge. It is a hard thing to lay aside our feelings of hurt, our feelings of injustice and unfairness, when we think we have been mistreated. But if we are to follow the example of Jesus, if we are to follow in his footsteps, then that is what we must do. We are not to understand that this means we must remain in situations where we are being ill treated or abused. If a child is being bullied at school, we would not expect them to have to endure that treatment; if a wife is being beaten by her husband we would not tell her she must just accept that kind of treatment. Such situations have to be dealt with in the proper manner to end the abuse. What must not occur though is the desire to take revenge, the desire to retaliate with the same kind of behaviour.

### **The Purpose Of Christ's Suffering**

Peter has spoken of Christ's behaviour in relation to his suffering as an example for us to imitate. But there is more to his



suffering than just an example for us to follow. Peter tells us in this passage that Christ's suffering was for the benefit of us all: "Christ also suffered for you . . . He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree . . . By his wounds you have been healed."

The suffering that Christ endured so submissively was endured for our benefit. When Peter says that Christ "bore our sins in his body on the tree" he is looking upon the crucifixion as a sacrifice for sins. When Christ died upon the cross he made a sacrifice of himself, bearing our sins in his body. Peter looks to the benefit that comes to us when he says, "By his wounds you have been healed." These are words drawn from Isaiah 53.5, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." When Peter speaks of the wounds of Christ he uses a word that refers to the marks left on the body after scourging. Prior to his crucifixion Jesus had been scourged by the Roman soldiers, which alone was a terrible experience of suffering. The whole experience of Jesus' suffering from his arrest to his crucifixion was endured for our benefit, so that forgiveness of sins might be available to all.

The outcome for us of this suffering endured by Jesus is stated in v. 24, Jesus "bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." Jesus' suffering on our behalf can change our relationship to sin and the way that we live our lives. Jesus' death for our sins makes it possible for us to die to sin. This death to sin is something that occurs for us at the moment of our baptism (see Romans 6:2-4). At baptism we identify ourselves with the death of Christ, we personally receive the benefits of his death for our sins, we die our own death to sin, and we rise to walk in newness of life. Instead of living for sin, we now live to righteousness.

The new relationship that we have with Christ is illustrated in v. 25 where Peter compares the former condition of his Christian readers with their present condition: "for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls." "Straying like sheep" is a picture of lostness and helplessness. That is the condition we are in before we become Christians, we are as lost and helpless as a sheep that has wandered away from the flock. We notice again the influence of Isaiah 53 on Peter's thoughts, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"



(53:6). In contrast to that former, lost condition, Peter says you "have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls". By turning to Christ in faith and obedience we have returned to the place of safety, security and protection. The sheep is safe when he is back with the shepherd; we are safe when we are back with Christ.

### **Conclusion**

When we consider the suffering that Christ had to endure from those who mistreated him, and the way in which he responded to that suffering, we are confronted with the supreme example of submissive conduct. He did not retaliate, he did not become violent or abusive, he did not threaten. He simply continued to place his trust in God. However hard it may be for us, that is the example that we must seek to follow.

We are reminded by Peter that the suffering Jesus experienced and endured was for our benefit. His wounds brought us our healing. When we give ourselves to him in faith and obedience, when we are baptized, we die to sin and live to righteousness. In seeking to live that righteous life may we be encouraged to copy the example that Jesus has left us, may we seek to place our footsteps into his footprints and walk the way that he walked, drawing ever closer to Him, becoming more like Him in all that we do.

## *Someone To Depend On*

**BATSELL BARRETT BAXTER**

Sometime ago, a number of questions were asked of a cross-section of today's young people, particularly students. One of these questions was, "What is the basic feeling you have towards life?" Sixty percent of them replied with a shocking unanimity: "Fear." We wonder why it is that young people who do not ordinarily impress us as being anxious or depressed should give such a strange answer. People today apparently are shaken by anxiety, a very real fear of the appalling and unfathomable contingencies of life. What can we do about it?

There is no question that there are ample grounds for our fears. The forces of nature conspire to wreak havoc upon our

planet, hurricanes, tornados, flash floods and forest fires. They destroy lives and homes and businesses. A plane carrying a load of people like you and me, each with plans for tomorrow and thoughts of home, falls out of the sky and in a few seconds life is over. Of course we feel fear.

Because of our fears we have invented a system of insurance, spread across the land like a net, to take care of every emergency. There's insurance against fire, flood damage, and theft. On our lives we carry all kinds of insurance to help us when we are sick or when accidents come, to provide for our loved ones at death, and even to help us during old age. There are also many other things that we do to cushion the emergencies that may come. Yet, in all this, we are fighting a losing battle. We do not say that these precautions are not good, far from it. We do say that they are inadequate and ultimately cannot cushion or protect us. Something more is needed—much, much more.

### **The God Who Controls**

What we must do is to stand off and take a more comprehensive view of our world and of life in general. Who or what is in control of our world? Is the universe in the control of God, a loving Father who is concerned about us and hears our prayers? If not, then it is either a huge and meaningless accident, as one of Shakespeare's characters says, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing", or it is in the grip of impersonal tides of history, some kind of immutable laws beyond our grasp. This is the view of the communist world. Actually, so far as I can see, these are the only three alternatives: It is either God; a meaningless chance; or some kind of impersonal laws or forces. In which of these would you put your faith? As for me, I put it in God. Not blindly, but because the evidence cries out that there is a God.

In the beginning chapter of the Apostle Paul's second Corinthian letter, verse three says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. If ever there was a man who had the right to speak on this theme, Paul surely is that man. No sheltered life was his. Shipwreck and



stoning, flogging and imprisonment, ill-health and opposition, the misunderstanding of friends and the Satanic devices of vindictive foes, all plagued him.

If anyone ever could, surely he had earned the right to speak. Notice what he said: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort . . ." In this first sentence he uses the word comfort five times. This is not because he was deficient in vocabulary; it was deliberate. But what does he mean by comfort? The word has sometimes been weakened, and cheapened so that it conveys the idea of nothing more than a tranquillizer for those who are too weak to stand the stress and strains of life. But this is not Paul's meaning. His word is one of the most virile in the New Testament. It is *parakletos*, which means "calling to help". It conveys the idea of a summons which brings reinforcements marching to your aid. When the apostle John spoke of the Holy Spirit as the "Comforter" he was using the same root word, *parakletos*, which means the calling of heavenly reinforcements to help us in time of trouble. In Latin the word is *advocatus*, the counsel of the defence who in the day of trial stands forth as your champion. When the scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit, using this word, He is pictured as the Reinforcer, the Strengthened, the giver of power and might and victory. Our English word "comfort" means the same. It is just the Latin *con* and *fortis*, denoting an accession of strength. Christian comfort is bracing, rallying, invigorating. There is nothing weak or debilitating about this kind of comfort. It is active, virile and indomitable. It replenishes your spent resources. It works a spiritual renovation.

### **Power And Strength**

Listen to Paul again in this same message, now beginning in second Corinthians, chapter 1, verse eight:

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Paul had come so far that he was at the very end of his

tether. He had actually given up his life as lost. And then he was made to understand what it means to have a God who raises the dead.

This emphasizes the strength and power that only God can provide. It emphasizes that the only real source of the kind of strength and power that we human beings need is God Himself. Some have looked for comfort and reassurance in their own ability to provide protection, as in the insurance of which we spoke, or bank deposits or houses and lands. Others have thought they found it in the scientific technology of our marvelous age. Others have felt that it could be found in more expensive and more widespread education, others in crowding their life full of sensual pleasures. Yet, no matter how hard man has sought it on his own, he could not avoid the ills of life with their frictions, stresses and frustrations. Man must have help from outside and that help can only come from God, who created the universe and us, from our heavenly Father, who loves us and cares for us.

In Matthew, chapter 8, verse 23 through 27, we read:

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. And the men marvelled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

When times of crisis come, when the bottom falls out of life, when what we have relied upon is not there any more, when we come to realize that we do not have the answers to life's perplexing problems, what a comfort it is to know that God our Father and his divine Son, Jesus Christ, are there. It is with this confidence that we are enabled to face the storms and carry on the battle of life.

Paul says:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; . . . We do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature



is being renewed every day . . . Because we look not to the things that are seen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (II Corinthians 4:8-9, 16, 18).

### **The Dependable One**

Can we depend on God? This was the question of the disciples as their boat was about to capsize. It surely was the question that prompted Jesus to tell two of his most striking parables. In one parable Jesus told the story of the friend at midnight who came to his neighbour asking for bread. We are led to imagine the difficulty that the man had in arousing his neighbour at midnight, but finally it was his incessant calling that led the neighbour to respond (Luke 11:5-8). On another occasion (Luke 18:1-8) Christ told about the defenceless widow who brought her petition to a certain judge time after time. The judge was preoccupied with other matters and did not respond to her, but because of her continual coming he granted her request. These parables were spoken to encourage disciples who might have said, "I have tried prayer and it doesn't work. You cannot depend on God." These parables were spoken to reassure us that God does hear our prayers.

## ***A Model Congregation***

**G. COWAN**

After leaving Philippi on his second missionary journey, Paul came to Thessalonica and established the church there. The majority of the Jews rejected the gospel, but some Jews, and a significant number of Gentiles, responded obediently to the Christ. Paul may have spent only a month or so there, before being forced to move on to Berea, then to Athens, and finally to Corinth. Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, and later rejoined Paul at Corinth (Acts 17:1 to 18:55; 1 Thess. 3:1-6).

Timothy's report was very encouraging. True, there was some apparent misunderstanding about the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:8 to 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:1-12). Also some were having problems with personal purity (1 Thess. 4:1-8) and with strict adherence to the commands of the gospel (2 Thess. 3:6-

15). But, in general, the Thessalonian disciples showed remarkable Christian character and faithfulness in the face of persecution. We can learn much about true faithfulness from the example of the Thessalonian church. We will focus our attention upon the first chapter of Paul's first letter to them, with supporting references as needed.

### **They Were a Model of Proper Response to the Gospel (1:5,6)**

The gospel was preached to them with convincing power, and was confirmed by the Holy Spirit (1:5, cf. 2:1-12). But, even though the energy and enthusiasm of the preacher may have some positive impact upon the hearer, it is not just powerful preaching that saves people. It is the truth, accepted and obeyed, that brings salvation to the soul: truth that must be dealt with; truth that grows in the mind, burns and glows in the mind and makes it impossible ever to be the same again after one has really heard it.

They received the gospel as from God, and not as the words of men (1:6, 2:13). Their obedience is implied by the resultant change in their lives. They became followers, literally imitators of the apostles. This would indicate that they became as loving and concerned for others as these missionary disciples were (1:5b, 6a and 2:7-9). They must have shared the apostolic zeal for holiness (2:10-12). They reproduced the pattern established in the churches of God in Judea (2:14), and no effort was made to adapt the church to local customs or Gentile concepts. The test of validity for any church is that its members are followers or imitators of the Lord (1:6), and what Paul says here is that they became Christian disciples of Christ in the true sense of the word, and that they were like all others who are truly in Christ and sharing the same precious faith (cf. 2 Pet. 1:1).

Their faith enabled them to endure affliction and persecution in the same way that the apostles and the Judean churches had often done (1:6; 2:14). Persecution did not prevent them from rejoicing in the Holy Spirit.

### **They Were a Model of Evangelistic Outreach (1:7-9a)**

They demonstrated the power of the gospel to change people (1:7). True followers of Christ became true examples for other believers to follow (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12). What a great recommendation for a church, to say that it is a pattern or model



that others could safely duplicate.

Not being content just to live the gospel before others, they repeated to others the words that they had received, "The word of the Lord hath sounded forth from you" (1:8). "Sounded forth" is literally *echoed*. The gospel so stirred the heartstrings of these people that they vibrated with the same message, produced the same sound so loudly and clearly that the same good vibrations were picked up by others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). Evangelism is like a series of objects being tuned to the same frequency. Strike one and it vibrates. The vibrations are picked up and passed along until all the objects are vibrating, pulsing together with one common note. Heaven must be something like that: every soul so perfectly tuned to God that one perfect sound, one thrilling note vibrates from millions of redeemed souls and fills heaven with an eternal song of love and praise! These Thessalonians had picked up the message of salvation from Paul, and they repeated it until it echoed in hungry and sympathetic hearts, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also throughout their whole world. "Everywhere we go", Paul writes, "people tell us about the faith toward God which is being sounded out from Thessalonica" (1:8b, 9a).

### **They Were a Model of Conversion and Living Faith (1:9b-10; 1:3,4)**

They had turned from idols (1:9b). When one accepts the living and true God he cannot keep his false gods. He cannot keep his old religion and continue the worship and service performed for idols. God cannot accept such errors. Some religious movements have tried to adapt or adopt the customs of the pagan people they were claiming to convert to God. But all such compromisers are rejected by God (cf. Gal. 1:6-8). The Thessalonians gave up their idols and turned away from all such errors in order to accept and serve the only living and true God.

The fact that they were waiting for the Son of God to come again from heaven (1:10) shows that they had not misunderstood the heart of Paul's message. Jesus was shown to be the Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead (cf. Rom. 1:4; Acts 17:30, 21). And, though he is in heaven now, he will return in triumphant sovereign glory. He is the only Saviour to save from the wrath of God, the wrath deserved by sin and

invited by idolatry and immorality. This they firmly believed. Their commitment was not to a principle or a programme, but to a Person, Jesus Christ, in whom God's goodness and grace found perfect expression (cf. Titus 2:11-14).

Their service to God as they waited for his Son was "a work of faith" (1:3; cf. 2 Thess. 1:3—"your faith grows abundantly and your love increases"). Faith implies that those who possess it have abandoned their trust in other supposed powers and have transferred their allegiance to God, for the purpose of serving and working for him (1:9). Paul does not limit the idea of faith to an act, or even to the facts of faith which led them to salvation. He alludes instead to faith as the working power, the operative principle in life, the practical effort to master circumstances and not be mastered by them. To be valid, faith must be a working faith, faith that works by love (cf. Gal. 5:6, 13).

Their work of faith can also be called a "labour of love" (1:3). If work is viewed as the thing done, the result, achievement or product of faith, then labour is the process, the sustained effort which produces the result. And love is the proper motivation. People will do many things for love which they would never do for personal gain. The best example of love's labour is Jesus himself.

Their "patience of hope", their steadfast hope is vitally connected to their faith in the Son of God (1:3c; 1:10). Patience is the ability to hold on without giving up, to persevere, to endure without being spiritually overcome (cf. Jas. 5:7-11). Such patience is made possible by hope, the desire and the confident expectation of something to come that counter balances every trial, trouble and loss (cf. Rom. 5:1-5). The Christian's hope is centred upon Jesus Christ and firmly anchored in him (cf. Heb. 6:18, 19). That hope is not an abstract concept. It is a reality which is supported by the faithfulness of God who has promised so much, and provides so much for us in his Son Jesus Christ.

The faithfulness of the Thessalonians was not a passive folding of the hands or resignation to the inevitable. It was not an unquestioning acceptance of one's lot as being irrevocably and eternally fixed by fate. Instead, they joyfully served, spoke out for and demonstrated the character of their Lord and Saviour.





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