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EDITORIAL

What Does The Bible Teach?

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”

People all over the world are living in fear. Fear of terrorism, fear of war, fear of destruction and fear of death. And our fears are not unfounded. There are evil people all over the world who have evil hearts and minds and designs. The Bible describes them as the people who have hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, and feet that are swift in running to do evil, and God hates them all. (Proverbs 6:16-19). Because there are evil and wicked people on earth and because there are weapons of destruction and death in the world everywhere, therefore our fears are genuine.

But, notice, what the Lord Jesus Christ said in the passage cited above from Matthew 10:28. He said that we should not fear those who can kill only the body but cannot kill the soul. But we should rather fear Him or God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Man and all the weapons that he has created can kill the body, but cannot destroy a soul that is made in the image and after the likeness of God. (Genesis 1:26&27). We are the offspring of God. (Acts 17:29). God is Spirit (John 4:24). And

we have been created in the image and after the likeness of God (Genesis 2:7). Therefore, each person who has ever lived and is living and shall live in the future, will live forever as does God. Because the spirit is indestructible, can never be destroyed on earth. Just as God, the Spirit, lives forever, so will we exist for ever, because we are, like God, spiritual beings. (1 Thessalonians 5:23). When it comes to physical death, no one can escape it. Because it has been appointed by God for all people to die once. (Hebrews 9:27). While it is sad to see innocent people becoming targets of terrorists activities or dying in various attacks. But there are others who become victims of accidents each day. Others die of sickness or in some other ways. But the fact is that all must die at some point.

What we call death, is the separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). At death the human body is destroyed, but the spirit return to its God's appointed destination (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Both the rich man and Lazarus were in different places, in Hades, after their death. While Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom, or in Paradise where Jesus had entered after His death (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:27,31), the rich man was in torments (Luke 16:23). This is exactly what happens at death everyday. Some are going in Paradise and others are entering into torment, in Hades. Christ spoke of the day or the hour which is coming, in which all, He said, will be made alive. (John 5:28,29). Physical bodies of all peoples who have ever lived and shall ever live will be made alive, by the Power of God. This is called resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 chapter. "But someone will say," says the apostle Paul, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Foolish one," he said further, "what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:35-53). This is how Christ too was resurrected. His soul was not left in Hades, according to Acts

2:31. His body was buried in a tomb or a grave, but His soul was in Hades. At resurrection His body was raised (Matthew 28:1-7; Romans 1:4). And His soul had left the Hades, to reunite with the resurrected body.

On the day of resurrection, when all will be raised in the same fashion, there will be only two classes of people, of whom Christ spoke in this manner: "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46). Notice, that the punishment of hell is everlasting, just as the eternal life of heaven is forever. Physical death is not the end of man's existence, therefore.

And, it is for this reason, Christ taught, "And do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in the hell." Physical or earthly body cannot exist forever, it is perishable. But the soul or the spirit is going to live forever, and the same will be true of the resurrected, changed and immortal body. The saved will live forever in heaven. But the unsaved will live in hell for ever. And if we fear God then we will listen to Him and will do what He has said we all must do to be saved through His Son Jesus Christ, who is the propitiation of our sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 John 4:10) Remember, though, God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell, but man can only kill the body. Therefore the wise writer in the Bible, in Ecclesiastes 12:13, said that one must fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man on earth.

Who Should Be Baptized?

J.C. CHOATE

In the book of Acts of the New Testament we read of at least 11 cases of conversion to Christ. Some of these were of individuals and others included large crowds of people. We also read of several families being converted to Christ: Lydia and her household and the jailor and his household obeyed the Lord, as recorded in Acts 16. We also read, in Acts 10, of Cornelius and his family being converted.

There are those who believe in infant baptism, with parents dedicating their babies to the Lord and then having them immersed in water (the Greek Orthodox practice) or having water sprinkled on their heads (the "baptism" of the Roman Catholic church and of Protestant denominational groups who have this practice). Authority for infant "baptism" is based on the idea that there would have been some infants or children in the households or families that were converted to the Lord, and if so, the conclusion is drawn that infants and children would also have been baptized. On the surface, that may sound like a good argument for infant baptism, but it is not.

When we study the Scriptures we learn who is counted as a sinner and who is not, those who are safe and those who are lost, those who are subject to baptism and those who are not. An infant is safe, being without sin. Jesus said "*of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" He also said that one must be converted and become as little children to enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3). From these statements we must conclude that when the Scriptures talk a *family* being converted, only those who were proper subjects for baptism were baptized. even though there might have been infants or young children in the family, they would not have been baptized along with the adults because they had not sinned and thus they had no need for baptism at that point in their life. Once they became old enough to know right from wrong, and to choose the wrong, and when they were mentally mature enough to understand the Lord's will for them, and the need of salvation, then at that point they could be and should be baptized. The same is true today.

The gospel of Christ is directed to those who can hear, understand, and obey the Lord's will. We are told that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Christ commanded the apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel so that those who would believe and be baptized might be saved (Mark 16:15,16). Again, He said that they should go and teach all nations (Matthew 28:19,20). But whom do you teach? Those who are old enough to hear and understand the truth, old enough to repent of their sins, old enough to confess with their mouth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, old enough to be baptized or immersed in water for the

remission of their own sins. (Hebrews 11:6; Acts 17:30; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21).

Who are you? What is your age? Are you reading what I am writing? Do you understand what I am saying? If you do, and if you have not obeyed the Lord in repentance and baptism, then you need to do so as we have already pointed out

The Bible is the word of God and it is directed toward those who are able to **read and understand** it. The gospel is to be preached to those who are able to **hear it and understand** it. The Lord wants those who **know and understand** His will to decide for *themselves* what they will do. This does not include babies and little children who are too young to understand God's will and to obey Him. If such obedience was actually required of babies all of them would be hopelessly lost until they reach maturity, because it is impossible for them to learn what the Scriptures require and to believe the Gospel and obey its commands. God has never required to anyone what cannot be done. Babies are safe.

A Place Where Many Want To Go

FRANCIS DAVID

There is a place where many people want to go or maybe you are one of them who wants to go there. But let me tell you that this is the kind of place where I also want to go. There are many people who want to go to some beautiful countries. Some like to go to United States, Some want to migrate to Switzerland or New Zealand and there are other beautiful places where people want to go and even settle there.

The Bible tells us about a beautiful place which is called Heaven. This place is the most beautiful place that you can imagine and this place is made by our God almighty. We read in the Scriptures, when Paul says: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. (2 Cor. 5:1-3). Just imagine, a place which is

built by almighty God for you. This place is a eternal place and there will be no wars nor desolations but only peace will be there. In this world we go through all kinds of pain and sufferings, but the people of God do not lose heart because they walk by faith and not sight. (2 Cor. 5:7). We read and Paul says: "Therefore we do not lose heart, Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. . . . while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Yes, our this dwelling place will be an eternal place.

There are a number of songs written about heaven. All these songs describe the beauty of this wonderful place. In the book of Revelation we read about the beautiful description of heaven. Chapter 21 of Rev. tells us: "Then, I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." The further verses of this particular chapter tells us the real beauty of heaven. Just think how wonderful it would be to dwell in such a place. I know, you want to go to such a place but the question is are we doing the things which God expects from us? Are we living the kind of lives which He wants from us? How are we behaving on this earth? Are we walking with him?

God has given us time to live here and we do not know when we have to leave this world. The heaven will be a kind of place where you will find all the spiritual and good moral people. "And there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:27). The Cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars cannot enter this place and they will have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Friends, heaven is a real place, and no doubt you want to go there. If you want to go there then you must check your life

and do what God expects you to do. You may be a kind of person who is far from God and not walking with him but no matter what you are and how bad your life is, you can still come to God and He will accept you through His Son Jesus. Jesus our Lord said: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28). If you have not obeyed the gospel of Christ, you can do it today by believing in Jesus (Jn. 3:16, Mark 16:16), by repenting of your old sinful life (Acts 17:30; 2:38); and confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be buried in watery grave in baptism. When you do this you will be added to the church and when you live a faithful Christian life then heaven will be your dwelling place. We must prepare our selves for such a beautiful place because this place is prepared for the prepared people. We must understand that our Journey on this planet where we are right now is very short, so let's be faithful to God and His commandments so that we may live with God in heaven for eternity. Do you have a desire to go there and dwell with God? The Bible tells us about those who had a fervent desire or a heavenly hope. Hebrews 11 and verse 16 reads like this: "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Are we preparing ourselves to go there?

How Does One Become A Christian?

BATSELL BARRETT BAXTER

There are a great many people in our world who are not Christians. When we speak of those who are not Christians we usually think first of the millions who do not call themselves Christians, but we must also recognize that there are millions who do call themselves Christians, some of whom are within the shadow of the church building, but have never come to Christ. Many of these are not Christians because they do not know what to do in order to become Christians. They have never been

taught in any complete sense what Christ commands.

To those of us who are Christians the act of becoming a Christian is very familiar and very simple. Even our children who are ten or eleven or twelve years old can explain accurately and well the acts involved in obeying the Lord. However, to those who are not Christians, who do not yet have a full understanding of the Bible, the act of becoming a Christian is not always clear. To them, it is often confusing, mysterious and even a bit formidable. For that reason, we need regularly to answer the question, "How does one become a Christian?"

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

One of the wonderful things about Christianity is that all men and women are eligible to become Christians. The last recorded words that Christ spoke on earth were addressed to the apostles and through them to all Christians. They are as follows. "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I command you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:19-20.) Every human being on earth is invited to come to Christ and be saved. There are no exceptions.

All races are invited to come. The apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28 said, "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus." Racial and geographic backgrounds are no impediment to becoming a Christian, because God is just as near to one locality as another and is just as concerned about one race as another.

In similar fashion it can be said that men of all walks and vocations of life are invited to Christ. God is not concerned with our vocation, just so long as it is honourable, but invites the farmer as well as the businessman the sailor as well as the teacher, the secretary as well as the housewife, and so on through all honourable vocations. All ages, likewise, are invited to come. The old as well as the young have a place in Christ's kingdom. We understand of course, that babies are not lost and therefore that they do not yet need to be saved. Everyone who is

old enough to understand what sin is, to understand what it means to turn from sin toward righteousness, and to believe in Christ as the Son of God is old enough to become a Christian. On the last page of the Bible, Revelation 22:17, the apostle John wrote, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely." All men are eligible for salvation in Christ. All men are invited to come.

WHAT IS NOT REQUIRED?

In the course of the centuries, many things have been taught as necessary for salvation which do not find a place in the inspired word of God. For example, a *direct call* from God is not required. There are many who believe and teach that before one can become a Christian he must have some special, spectacular indication that God has called him. Perhaps, it would be a dream, or a still, small voice or a great light. No such teaching is found in the scriptures. Rather, the New Testament pattern is: hear the gospel, accept it and obey it. In Romans 1:16 Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Notice that the gospel is the power unto salvation. In I Corinthians 1:21 we find, "It was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And again in Romans, this time Romans 10:13-15, we read, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?"

The New Testament is filled with examples of people who became Christians with no miraculously call or sign of God's special approval to them. On the day of Pentecost more than three thousand people heard Peter and the rest of the apostles preach, after which they inquired what they should do to become Christians and then were obedient to the instructions given. Later in the book of Acts the same thing was true of the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was instructed from the Bible by the evangelist Philip. He became a Christian during the same period of study.

Lydia, in Philippi, also, is an example of one who had no direct call or supernatural evidence of God's election. She simply listened to the apostle Paul tell of Christ and after she had believed him she was willing to obey the simple commands given. Today, as through all the ages past the gospel is the power that saves mens' souls, when that gospel is heard, believed and obeyed.

A season of agonized prayer at the mourner's bench is not required. There have been many in times past more than the present time who have advocated the use of the mourner's bench. However, when reading the New Testament, we find no single example of the mourner's bench. Never was a person who wanted to become a Christian told to "pray through." Nor was he told to agonize in prayer until the Lord would give him some evidence that he was called. Rather, they were told immediately what to do: believe on the Lord Jesus, repent of your sins, confess the name of Christ and be baptized.

Still another unnecessary requirement is that of the *voting of a church* to receive a prospective member. Again, the New Testament does not provide an example of any group of Christians who voted on any person who desired to become a Christian. It is not possible for human beings to know the motives in the hearts of other people, so it is not possible for Christians to pass judgment on whether another person should be allowed to become a member of the church or not. Only God knows the inner workings of the heart, so only God can pass judgment on those who come. Fortunately, for all of us, this is the way the Lord's system works. After a person has obeyed the Lord's commands, God himself adds him to the church. Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved." Voting on the part of a congregation is unnecessary and unscriptural.

Sometimes men have also believed and taught that before a person can become a Christian he must have a *knowledge that he can live the Christian life to the end*. While it is certainly commendable for a man to seriously consider the long view of Christianity before making a beginning, it is unreasonable to wait until one is certain of successfully finishing the Christian life before giving himself to the Lord. We do not use such reasoning

in any other matter. A student starts to the first grade Without knowing that he can finish grammar school, let alone high school and college. A man takes an offered job with a new company, without knowing that he will be successful in the work, but believing that by hard work and study he will be able to satisfactorily discharge his duties. Even when we sign on the dotted line to buy a car or a house, we do not know with certainty that we will be able to finish paying for these sizeable items. However, when there is a "presumption of success" we usually have the faith to undertake the work. The same must be applied in Christianity. It is our deep conviction that if we will begin, the Lord will help us find the strength to carry on until the end. It is far better to begin, even if we may later fall away, then never to try at all.

There might still be others who feel that some *financial consideration* is required before one can become a Christian. Such is not the case. While it is usually true in other organisations that there is an initiation fee, or a downpayment or some other financial requirement, this is not true in Christianity. The teaching of Christ is that after we have become Christians we shall give "as we have been prospered." (1 Cor. 16:2.) If God blesses us generously, we give generously back to him out of love, but financial matters are never mentioned in the process of becoming a Christian. The pauper is just as welcome in the church as is the millionaire.

WHAT IS REQUIRED

Turning now from those things which are not required, we come to those things which the Lord does require of those who will be saved. The first of these is *faith*. Hebrews 11:6 reads, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." Christ said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." This does not mean, however, that faith by itself will save. Unless faith leads a man to obey the other commandments of the Lord then it is not real faith and salvation does not result.

On Pentecost for example the three thousand who became Christians, after they had believed, were told to "repent and be baptized." Almost the entire second chapter of James is devoted to emphasizing the importance of deeds or works. James put it this way, "Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself . . . Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith . . . As the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead." (James 2:17,24,26.) Christ also said it very clearly in Mark 16:16, "He that believeth *and* is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."

A second positive requirement is *repentance*, or a change of will in regard to sin. In the passage mentioned earlier, Acts 2:38, Peter said, "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." Similarly, the apostle Paul said to the Athenians in chapter 17, verse 30, of the book of Acts, the following words: "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent."

This is the most difficult part of becoming a Christian. Man must bring his stubborn will under control and give his love and his allegiance to God. It involves turning away from all past sins. It involves a positive commitment to love and follow the Lord wherever he leads. It is relatively easy to believe, if one will take the time to read the Bible. It is relatively easy to do the other commandments that enables God to save one's soul, but the act of turning away from sin is an act that required tremendous will power. No one can reach heaven who has not repented.

A third requirement in becoming a Christian is that one *confess the name of Jesus before men*. Notice that this is not a confession of one's own past sins. Man repents of his past sins but confesses the name of Christ. Notice also that this is not, as the manual of one of the large churches of our day suggests, the confession "That God for Christ's sake hath pardoned your sins." No, for this is merely a confession that one believes that he is already saved. Rather, the confession required in the New Testament is a confession that one believes in Christ as the Son of God.

For example, in Acts chapter eight we read the story of the

conversion of the nobleman from Ethiopia. Beginning in verse 36 and continuing through verse 38 we read, "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded that chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch; and he baptized him."

This also agrees with the teaching of Christ earlier when he said, "Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is an heaven." (Matt. 10:32-33).

There is one last requirement before one can consider himself a Christian. It is *baptism*. There are some who feel that baptism comes after one is already saved, but this is not the teaching of the scriptures. For example, in Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "He that believeth *and* is baptized shall be saved." Notice that it does not read, "He that believeth is saved and should be baptized." To read it in such a fashion would be to change the teaching of the Bible.

Further, we find in Acts 2:38 that when the people had heard Peter and had believed the message which he presented about Christ, they asked, "Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ *unto* the remission of your sins." They were commanded to repent, be baptized *unto* (leading toward) the forgiveness of their sins. This is made even plainer in Acts 22:16 where Ananias, a faithful preacher of the gospel, was sent by the Lord himself to Saul of Tarsus, who had spent three days fasting and praying. When he arrived, this God-sent preacher said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." There is an action in baptism that helps to cleanse and save the sinner.

Jesus had earlier taught, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." I Peter 3:21 finds the apostle Peter saying by inspiration, "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through

the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The very significant place that burial in water, baptism, plays in the Christian religion is further pointed out by the apostle Paul in Romans 6:3-5. Surely all can see when these scriptures are examined that baptism is necessary in order to become a Christian.

Sometimes we hear it said, "Join the church of your choice." No, this is not the language of the scriptures. Rather, the Lord teaches us that we must obey God's commandments and that he will then add us to *his* church. We need accept no man-made creed, no denominational doctrines. We need wear no name but the name of Christ. If all of us will simply take the scriptures for what they say, obey the simple commands as outlined within them, we will find that we are members of the one church described in the Bible. We will also discover that we are united with each other in a very wonderful way. It is our fervent prayer that these passages may guide you to become a part of God's family and reach heaven.

Early Reminders of Life's Temporal Nature

MICHAEL GIFFORD

The Bible is replete with statements and examples concerning the temporal nature, indeed that brevity of this life. The wise woman of Tekoah said, "For we must needs die and are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again" (II Sam. 14:14). Job noted that his days were "swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job 7:6). Just two chapters later we read his statement that his days were "passed away as the swift ships, as the eagle that hasteth to the prey" (Job 9:26). Psalm 102:11 declares, "My days are like a shadow that declineth and I am withered like grass." How different we humans are from God Almighty (Ps. 102:12). How different this old earth is from the land beyond (Heb. 1:10-12; Matt. 25:46).

The Psalmist once marvelled at the glory and intricacy of his surroundings (Ps. 8:3,4). With just a causal observation, as we

imitate the sweet singer of Israel, we can see all around us evidence of life's temporal nature. For instance, when a death occurs, especially the death of a close friend or a relative, we are struck with the realization that death is the end of all men, that not a one of us shall inhabit this earth or dwell in this body of flesh forever. Ecclesiastes 12:5 states that "man goeth to his long home."

The change in the seasons also serves to remind us of life's temporal nature. The bare trees sport buds in the spring which turn to flowers and then to leaves. The leaves, in their verdant beauty, turn to flame in autumn and float to the ground, leaving us once again with a forest of skeletons. The seasons change. The weather changes. Day changes to night and night to day. How different this is from man's eternal home where nothing ever changes. The punishment in eternal hell remains constant for ever and ever (Rev. 20:10). Even in the Hadean realm of Torments there is no opportunity for relief (Luke 16:19ff). The reward in heaven is changeless with the saved reigning with the Lord for ever and ever (Rev. 22:5). The words of the song "Amazing Grace" bring to mind the eternal nature of the next life in the phrase, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."

Personal illness is a reminder of life's temporal nature. The beautiful portrait of heaven painted with the brush of inspiration informs us that heaven will see no sorrow, nor crying, nor pain (Rev. 21:4). But oh, how different this life is. Bones break and muscles ache. Hearts weaken, eyesight dims, and hearing diminishes. What an accurate description of life's infirmities is given in Ecclesiastes 12:1-5. Each ache and pain should remind us that this is only a temporary state in which we live.

There are many other earthly reminders of life's temporal nature. Our children remind us of how short life is, for one day they are babes in arms, the next they are running to Dad and Mom with scraped knees the next they are graduating from high school and college and the next they are gone. Our material possessions, our clothing, our automobiles and other earthly treasures wear out and become useless. No wonder Jesus instructs us to lay up treasure in the eternal heaven rather than

on the temporal earth (Matt. 6:19-20).

Evidence of life's temporal nature is all around us. Atheists and agnostics do not like to think about it, for all they are looking forward to (in their view) is a leap from this life into a black hole. Disobedient men and women do not like to think about this because they dread the thought of standing before God in judgment. But faithful Christians glory in these small reminders of life's temporal nature, for we know that we are going to a better place which is eternal in nature.

May the reminders of life's temporal nature be sources of encouragement for us. May we freely bear the marks of Christ in our bodies here on earth (Gal. 6:17) and take up our crosses daily for our Saviour (Luke 9:23). "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Cor. 5:1).

Gossip

SIDNEY WHITE

In James 3 the inspired writer discusses the power of the tongue, stating in Verse 8 that no man can tame the tongue. Such emphasis shows the importance of constantly guarding the tongue to prevent this misuse. This was evidently a problem in James's day and it has not ceased. Gossip has continued through the years and most of us at one time or another have fallen victim to it. Gossip has separated friends, caused strife and has done harm to the church beyond repair in some cases.

To my knowledge the word "gossip" is not in the Bible as such but the idea is found in various phrases. "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people. . . ." (Lev. 19:16). "A perverse man soweth strife: and a *whisperer* separateth chief friends" (Prov. 16:28). ". . . and he that uttereth a *slander* is a fool" (Prov. 10:18). "*Speak not evil* one of another, brethren" (Jas. 4:11). "An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire" (Prov. 16:27). So from these

passages it is abundantly clear that gossiping is a sin, a sin that will lead one into the pits of hell as quickly as any other sin if the gossipier does not repent.

But why would anyone be so unkind and unloving as to spread damaging information against another? Perhaps it might be through carelessness. How many times have we repeated things not knowing if they were so? It happens and when we pass along damaging material or information that is not totally correct we are not guiltless. Another reason for engaging in such activity is idleness. There are some people who seemingly have nothing to do except "dig up evil" and then spread it and the convenience of the telephone has made it so much more easy. Paul wrote of these people in I Timothy 5:13 by saying, "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not." "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies" (2 Thess. 3:11). And concerning these in Thessalonica instruction has just been given to withdraw from the disorderly, which would include the gossipier. But the church today will not even withdraw from fornicators, much less people who fail to control their tongues. Then there are those who gossip out of a spirit of retaliation. Peter wrote concerning how we ought to "love as brethren" and "not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing . . ." (I Peter 3:8-9). Jesus also dealt with the attitude of "an eye, for an eye, and tooth for tooth" in Matt. 5:38-39. Gossip also comes from those who have a tendency to be critical. A critical heart shows itself in open criticism of others. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he . . ." (Prov. 23:7). ". . . for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Lk. 6:45). Yet others gossip because of a failure to love their brethren. Paul said of love that it "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (I Cor. 13:6). Yet some brethren rejoice to hear something against another. Paul clearly points to a lack of love in such cases. But of all the reasons that one may list as to why people gossip it can NEVER be said that people gossip because they are faithful Christians who love God, faithful Christians who love neighbour as self and faithful Christians who love as brethren.

The techniques used by gossipers vary. Some are very blunt and state emphatically that they have no use for brother _____ and then proceed to tell everyone who will listen why such feelings exist. Others express their gossip through the screen of "frankness," but they confuse frankness with truthfulness. Then there is perhaps the most popular approach to gossip that prefaces gossip with "I heard" or "they say." That usually means "I feel this way" or maybe one or two people feel that way. When someone begins by saying "I heard" or "they say" or "several people have said" they usually mean "I want to express my feelings but I want to blame it on someone else." Paul gave the source of his information (I Cor. 1:11), but he didn't gossip with it. He went to those with whom there was a problem. Another technique is more subtle than the rest. "She is a nice person BUT . . ." and what follows the "BUT" certainly doesn't fit that "nice person." I can't think of anything more cowardly and unchristian than one who has something to say about someone but will tell everyone but the one against whom they speak. I have known of people who would write anonymous letters to people. Such material is not worth the paper on which it is written.

But in this framework we need to consider some other sins that are related to gossip. What about the desire to hear evil of another? Is that not a sin? "A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue" (Prov. 17:4). God calls one who receives gossip a "wicked doer" and a "liar." A song some years back expressed the idea that "bad news travels like wildfire, but good news travels slow." How true that is! Some tell what they know others want to hear. If there was no one to receive the gossip, the gossipier would not exist. Another sin relating to gossip is the desire to believe evil about another. But where love is this attitude will not exist because love "thinketh no evil" (I Cor. 13:50). Some seem to thrive on receiving gossip. That makes our ears nothing but garbage disposals where others dump their garbage. A third sin related to gossip is that of magnifying the shortcomings of others. We use the expression "Making a mountain out of a mole hill," and that is exactly what is done in some cases. If certain people are involved we try to make mole hills out of mountains, but when certain others are

involved we do stretch the situation out of proportion. Such is nothing more or less than lying. This same principle involves the sin of partiality and James states that "if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin" (Jas. 2:9). Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (I Cor. 13:6).

When people set out on a course of gossip they should consider the results of their action. There are barriers erected and friends destroyed. "... and a whisperer separateth chief friends" (Prov. 16:28). "... so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (Prov. 26:20). "the words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 26:22). Gossip will certainly kill enthusiasm and discourage members. Many good programs and people have been stopped by those who gossip, especially by those who spread malicious rumors and lies. People lose confidence in the gossiper. If a person will talk to you about someone else, he will talk to someone else about you. Gossip will also destroy the influence of the church. Not only will the world see the lack of Christianity in the members of the church, but unfortunately the world will believe at least some of the gossip. An additional result directly related to the gossiper is that his/her religion is vain. "If any among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (Jas. 1:26). The ultimate result of gossip is that it condemns the gossiper. "But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36,37). Surely one who would consider these results would want to refrain from the grievous sin of gossip.

But what are some practical pointers in overcoming gossip? First, don't listen to it. Then we will not be tempted to engage in it. Secondly, before we criticize or gossip against one, go to that person and discuss any problem you have with him (Matt. 18:15-17). Thirdly, apply the golden rule. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: For this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Do you want people gossiping about YOU OR YOUR FAMILY? Then why not be more considerate of others? A fourth pointer

that will help overcome gossip is prayer. "Set a watch O Lord, before my mouth keep the door of my lips" (Psa. 141:3). It is impossible to honestly and earnestly pray for someone and then gossip about them.

Therefore let us use our tongues to the glory of God and to the edifying of one another. Remember, "He that keepeth his tongue keepeth his soul" (Prov. 21:23). Gossip is public sin and must be repented of before it can be forgiven!!!!

The Untouchables

DAVID THURMAN

Elliot Ness was the renowned untouchable. The label was given to him because he was unwilling to take a bribe as a law enforcement officer. In an era when many law enforcement officials at all levels were taking money from criminals, Ness and his men were untouchable.

Long before there was a crime fighting unit, there was another group of people who were literally untouchable. They could not just enter into a community. Where ever they went they had to cry out in warning to others. They were the lepers of ancient times.

These unfortunate victims were defined as unclean under the law of Moses. There were strict guidelines to follow to determine if a person was unclean due to the problems of leprosy. *"As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp"* (Lev. 13:45-46). If the disease was present, the victim was sent to live outside the camp, away from all other people.

These lepers were literally untouchables, and were to cry "unclean" anywhere they went, so that healthy people would not come in contact with them and come down with the disease.

They could not have a normal home life, they could not worship with other believers. Anyone who came in contact with a leper was considered unclean as well. So, they were social, spiritual and physical outcasts. They were condemned to a life of isolation and ostracism by all of the healthy members of the community.

Mark tells us a powerful story about one such untouchable. Word had already spread about Jesus' power to heal. One leper decided to go have a little talk with Jesus. *"And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, If You are willing, You can make me clean. And Jesus moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed. And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and He said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them. But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere"* (Mark 1:40-45). This encounter between Jesus and an untouchable can teach us many lessons.

ALL SIN IS UGLY

God chose skin diseases such as leprosy to stand as a symbol for sin. God probably had many reasons for doing this. Such diseases are often highly contagious, so the Lord wanted people to be protected from contamination by coming in contact with lepers. But God also wanted people to see how He views sin. He did this by choosing a disease that was ugly in all its forms. God wanted mankind to see how ugly sin looks to Him.

Leprosy was horrible in all its consequences. Physically, the sufferer could lose fingers, toes, ears and more as the disease progressed. If the disease continued, it would lead to death. Moreover, the victim could not associate with anyone who was not diseased. That meant no family contacts, no hugging the kids or grandkids. That meant the leper could not go to worship God

with other believers. Worst of all, the victim was often treated as a sinner, somehow deserving this cursed fate.

All sin looks this way to God. *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear"* (Isaiah 59:1-2). God wants to save man, wants to be near man—but God keeps man at a distance because of sin. You might think your "little" sin is no big deal. But to God all sin is ugly. To God, sin in any form is disgusting.

Sadly, all of us have come down with the disease called sin. *"There is none righteous, not even one . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:10,23). Every one of us looks ugly before God, just as ugly as any leper would look to us. We cannot look down on those whose ugliness is different than ours. We cannot pretend our particular disease is better than someone else's. We are all sinners, and we all look ugly to God.

COMPASSION MOVES GOD

The leper chose to come to Jesus. Jesus had already begun His public ministry and word of His power to heal had spread. The leper probably thought he had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so he obediently approached Jesus. We know he trusted Jesus to do something for him, he had faith. We know he was obedient as he would not approach Jesus too closely so as to cause Him to become unclean.

Jesus was filled with compassion. He cared for this poor man who had suffered from this disease. Jesus looked beyond the ugliness that was there and saw the human being underneath. Jesus could not stand by and let leprosy win this battle. Jesus acted out of compassion.

That is the nature of God. God reaches out to sinners like us because He loves us, ugliness and all. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). The nature of God moves Him to reach out to us, just as Jesus reached out to the leper. God does this, in spite of how ugly our sin looks to Him. *"But God demonstrate His own love*

toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Never doubt how much God loves you. He is willing to reach out to sinners like you and me and save us, in spite of our failure, our mistakes, our sins.

GOD GIVES MORE THAN WE ASK

Jesus does an interesting thing with this leper. *"And moved with compassion, he stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed"* (Mark 1:41). Jesus healed the man, but first the Master touched the man. How long had it been since anyone had touched him? How long had he gone without any human contact of any kind? Whatever the status of his disease, the leper felt the touch of a human hand for the first time in a long time.

Jesus runs a risk in touching the man. According to the law He would be unclean if He touched a leper. But Jesus looked beyond the man's obvious physical need for healing. The Lord saw the man's need for human contact, for acceptance, for love. So, before He healed the man, Jesus touched Him. Jesus knew the man's need better than the man himself.

So it is with us. Jesus knows we need to be forgiven. But He knows much more than that. He knows we need to get along. He knows we need love and acceptance. So the Lord reaches out to us as well, even while we are unclean. He loves us Himself, and places us in a body of believers who will also love us. *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"* (1 John 4:7-11).

God looks beyond the surface requests we make of Him and gives us more than we can imagine. *"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and*

ever" (Eph. 3:20-21). How that leper must have felt to have a human hand on him. You and I can only imagine how good it will be when God reaches out to us and gives us more than we can ask or think.

THE CLEAN CRY OUT

Jesus tells the leper to follow the law of Moses, go show himself to a priest who will examine him to see if he is clean. Then the former leper would be admitted back into society, back into his home and family, back into the congregation of believers. Jesus also tells the man to keep this private, to tell no one.

But the man has experienced too much blessing to be quiet. He spread the news. What a story he must have told, how Jesus not only healed him, but this new teacher reached out to him and touched as he was healed. Jesus may have wanted the man to keep it private, but the man had been given too much. He spread the news around.

That is what happens when people meet Jesus. They cannot keep quiet. When we realize the ugliness is gone, we want to tell others. When we feel the touch of God and the blessings he gives beyond what we expect, we want to tell others. As God reclaims sinners, it is a natural process that they will want to tell others the story of their cleansing. *"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary"* (Psalm 107:1-2).

BE CLEANSSED AND CRY OUT

We invite you to come to Jesus for cleansing today. Put your faith in Him, recognizing that only He has the power to cleanse you. Turn from the ugliness of your sin, and then let Jesus cleanse you with His blood as you are baptized into His death and rise to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). Then, with other believers, you can begin to tell the story of the day Jesus touched you.

