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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"For we walk by faith, not by sight."

In 2 Corinthians 5:7 the apostle Paul said, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Faith is a great principle. Paul, of course, was writing about things spiritual which we believe and practice by faith. But even in our day to day life, physically speaking, we need much faith to live. Whatever medicine we take, when we get sick, we take by faith, not knowing how it would work. We don't understand electricity, but we use it every day by faith. We believe or trust the automobile, the trains or airplane which help us move from one place to another. We put our confidence in the driver who drives. We have to believe, what people say or write. And on that faith or confidence we give whatever we give and receive whatever we receive. Trading and business depends on faith. Relationships are built on faith. On and on we could continue to point out numerous things in our daily living which depend on faith. For instance, Someone wants to go to a place, he has never been there before, may be a foreign country. He has heard or read about it. So he believes that such a place does exist. That belief or faith moves the individual to prepare for the journey; to apply for the visa, to obtain necessary permission, to purchase the ticket and to catch the required mode of transportation. But, first there was the belief or the faith.

The inspired writer of the Bible said, "Now faith is the substance (or confidence or realization) of things hope for, the evidence of things not seen." He also said, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:1 & 3). Just as we believe that God by His word brought in existence the whole world. So we should also believe that whatever God has revealed to us through His Book, the Bible, He will accomplish all according to His word. Nothing comes out of nothing. There was God in the beginning (Genesis 1:1), who created the whole universe by His word as we read in the first chapter of the book of Genesis in the Bible. "The heavens declare the glory of God;" said the Psalmist in Psalm 19:1, "And the firmament shows His handiwork." How does, everything on earth and above the earth exist? The only logical explanation is God created and made them. And the Bible supports it. We read the whole account, of God creating the worlds, in the Bible. We read it, and believe it. "Faith", the Bible says at Romans 10:17, "comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Who Can Partake Of The Lord's Supper?

J.C. CHOATE

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ Himself before His death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 26:26-28). He said that the bread would represent His body and that the cup, or the fruit of the vine, would remind participants of His blood. He further said that He would not partake of it again until He did so with His disciples in the Father's kingdom or church.

Who would partake of the memorial supper? Christ's disciples, Christians, members of His kingdom, the church, His family (Acts 2:38,47; Acts 20:7). But as we gather on the first day of the week — on Sunday, the Lord's Day — can we always know who is a Christian and who is not?

Of course in a local congregation, unless the number is exceptionally large, the members of the church know one another. But what about when there are local visitors, and especially those who are coming from other cities and countries? What if the local members have not had the opportunity to meet them and to know whether or not they are members? Will the Supper be served only to those who are known to be members, while unknown guests are denied, or will all be given the opportunity to participate?

Some think that only members of the church should be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. This practice is referred to as "closed communion", that is, participation in the Lord's Supper is closed to outsiders. Only known members of the church can partake of it. But when closed communion is practiced, even some members of the church may be denied the opportunity of partaking of the Supper and of engaging in that part of worship, simply because they are not known to those who serve the congregation.

It is true that the Supper is supposed to be only for those who are members of the Lord's church. But what if some eat who are not Christians? In answering that question, let me ask this question: Who has given humans the authority to judge who is *qualified and worthy* to participate in the Supper, and who is not? Of course, we know that if one is not a member of the church, or if a member is unfaithful, he should not partake; but, still, who are we to refuse to serve anyone who desires to eat the Supper? Even concerning those that we would consider to be faithful Christians, we do not know their hearts. Without our awareness, some of them may not be in position to scripturally partake of the Lord's Supper because of immorality in their life, failure to pay their debts, sinful attitudes in their hearts, family wrongs, or other things that we are not aware of at the time. No human is in position to judge the heart of another human.

Instead, to settle all of these questions, we should hear the words of Paul when he said, *"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to*

himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). I think what we are hearing is the stating of a broad rule: **that it is not up to us to examine an individual, but that the individual must examine himself, whether he is right or wrong, on the basis of what the Scriptures teach.** Our job is to do the teaching and then to let each person decide for himself or herself whether they will partake of the Lord's Supper. If we deprive anyone of partaking of it, they may be hurt and refuse to return for further teaching. If they do partake of it, either as an unfaithful member or not a member at all, as they continue to be taught on this subject then surely they will finally come to a knowledge of the truth and will correct their situation.

If one is not a faithful member, and is partaking of the Lord's Supper, we do have a responsibility. We should go to that individual and, in a loving way, encourage him (or her) to correct the sin in his life so that he can partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, as a faithful Christian. Also, if we know of an individual who is partaking of the Lord's Supper even though he has never obeyed the Gospel to become a part of the church, this also gives us the opportunity to go to that person and arrange to have a Bible Study with him. Perhaps through studying together, he or she can be taught more fully the purpose of the Supper, as the Lord intended it to be eaten.

I think it should be understood that when Paul said that one should examine himself before partaking of the Supper, perhaps he had reference to the so-called faithful Christian more than anyone else. No one else knows the inner workings of our hearts. It is our responsibility, before God, to make an honest examination and to correct whatever we find there that is not right.

The Lord's Supper gives us the opportunity each week to renew our commitment to the great sacrifice of Christ, and to see if we are really living the Christian life or not. If we are not what we should be, we have a weekly opportunity to make whatever corrections are needed so that we can worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Are you a Christian? Do you partake of the Lord's Supper each week? Are you strengthened by it? Do you honor the Lord by remembering Him in this way?

Making The Cross Of None Effect

FRANCIS DAVID

Apostle Paul while talking to the people at Corinth says, "For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. "Here we see apostle Paul is not saying that baptism is not important or he is not belittling this command of the gospel but rather he is trying to emphasize that his main mission is to preach Jesus and his cross. If we are not preaching the gospel according to God's will then we are making the Cross of Christ of no effect.

The hope of the world is in the cross of Christ. Judaism could not offer the remission of sins. In Hebrews 10 we read about animal sacrifices which could not offer the permanent solution for remission of sins. It says, "For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect..... But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." The blood of Jesus was the only remedy for the sins and that is why we read as Paul says, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21). It was God's plan that men should be saved through death of Jesus (1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6), "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

But let us see how can one make this Cross or the death of Jesus of no effect? The Gospel of Jesus is simple and when we try to make it difficult for the people then it has no effect. The Bible says the gospel is that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15: 3-4). This

gospel does not require philosophical words, or wisdom, but it is as simple as A B C D. Any simple man can preach this simple gospel. You don't require special dress or degree to preach this gospel. This gospel is of no effect when we add human doctrines and teachings in it. (Matt. 15:8,9). We can make the cross of Christ of none effect when we preach another gospel which is not based on the Scriptures (Gal. 1:6-9). If we add or subtract from the word of God then we are making the cross of Christ of no effect (Rev. 22:18-19). The gospel which Paul preached was God ordained and it has the power to save the sinners (Rom. 1:16).

There is another thing by which we can make the cross of Christ of none effect. When our manner of life as Christian is nor right then we are making the cross of no effect. We must walk worthy of the calling with which we were called. (Eph. 4:1). Paul says, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross." (Phil. 3:18). We as Christians must live in the world in such a way so that through our good lives people may glorify the Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16). What about following the wrong crowd? Yes, some follow the wrong crowd and by doing this they make the cross of Christ of no effect. When Jesus was on trial, Peter was asked questions about his association with the Lord, and we see he denied and followed the wrong crowd. What about Solomon the king? He also followed the wrong crowd when he married the heathen wives. Are we making the cross of Christ of no effect by following the wrong crowd?

The world is corrupt and worlds of people are dying in sins. Only the preaching of the cross of Christ can save them. We must be prepared to take this Cross to the people. Jesus said, Go teach and preach. (Matt 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16). By failing to take the gospel of Jesus to others, we make the cross of Christ of no effect. Today you can make this cross effective by obeying the gospel of Jesus. If you have not obeyed the gospel, today is the time (2Cor 6:2). You can believe in Jesus, confess Him as the Son of God, repent of your sins and be baptised for the remission of your sins.

Christianity—A Joyful Walk with God! (Part 2)

THOMAS R DOHLING

Let us consider Paul's prayer for the Christians in Ephesus [Ephesians 3:16-21]:

"He [God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that you may be strengthened with power through his **Spirit in the inward man**; that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**; to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be the glory in the assembly [church] and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Did you notice what He says [prays]? He prays that God may grant them [Christians at Ephesus] ***strength through His Spirit in the inward man*** that ***Christ may dwell in their hearts*** [the inward man] ***through faith*** so that they, ***being rooted and grounded in love***, may be ***strengthened to comprehend*** [realize] ***the enormous dimensions of Christ's love for them*** which surpasses knowledge [can't be fully comprehended, just realized wordlessly, wondrously and humbly enjoyed] and thereby be ***filled with all the fullness of God, Who is able to do EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY MORE than we ask or think!***

Each day that we consciously walk with God, allowing His will to be done in our lives, we know Him that much better [from experience]. Theology is the study of God and comprises theories and hypotheses about God. We don't dwell on theories and hypotheses, we KNOW from experience WHO GOD IS. And just when we think we know Him, He does something unexpected,

something startling and strikes us with awe and makes us realize that we don't really fully know Him. He shows us that **He is FAR ABOVE** human theories and hypotheses about Him! God Himself has said :

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says Yahweh. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" [Isaiah 55:8,9].

Just walk with Him daily; [talk to] commune with Him with each breath that you take and trust Him to do the best for you and you will KNOW WHO HE IS! Not everything, but what He chooses to disclose to you! **Abide in His Presence.** There is more to life than the physical - God has made us in His image and given us the ability to KNOW HIM in a wordless way, in the inner man, deep within our souls. That is the individual's experience of God for himself. No one can explain it to you. It is between God and you. It will be a dynamic experience, an adventure! **Remember to read and meditate on His word** [by reading the Bible, the evidence about God and His wonderful dealings with, and promises to, man]. Humbly **enjoy your walk with God** on this earth until the time that He calls you all the way to His home to be with Him always! Yes, through thick and through thin, over the mountains (high points in life) and through the valleys (low points in life), He will encompass you by His love and carry you in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His own name [because He wants to], if you will only allow Him! **Enjoy life with your God**, Who desires to be your Father, and Jesus Christ, "the radiance of God's glory!" (Hebrews 1:3), Who leads [and helps you] by His Spirit through His Word.

As our Father, God loves to surprise us! And, being Love, He seeks our good and loves to see us happy as we walk with Him, seeking His will. Oh, there are sad days and there are dreary days; but, we learn from walking with Him that these are to be expected on this earth. Through these difficult times and circumstances, we learn that **GOD is our support, our comfort, our ROCK** and that **He is faithful** and that **we need to trust Him.** However, in our Father's house things are totally different! There's

no sorrow there; no tears, no pain. Only worship, and praise, and joy and happiness as we behold Him in His glory, His goodness. What a Wonderful God we have!

To GOD be the glory now and always, in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

What Life Is All About

JOHNNY RAMSEY

There are many precious things about Christianity that would not be available if the Savior had not left heaven and graced this earth with His presence. How empty and meaningless our daily existence would be apart from the richness and depth of the gospel era. We owe so very much to the resplendent beauty of New Testament Christianity. Whatever the world offers in its most glorious moment fades into nothingness when the radiant hues of the Messiah beam forth. For years faithful children of God have sung:

“Take the world but give me Jesus,
All its joys are but a name;
But His love abideth ever,
Through eternal years the same.”

Mankind struggles in vain to find genuine purpose in life apart from Christ. When the Lord and heaven's message enter our thinking we are transformed from a dreary pursuit of merely existing to an exciting motivation and goal. Following our blessed Redeemer provides a destiny where God “will make all things new” (Revelation 21:1-5).

“Beyond the sunset's radiant glow,
There is a brighter world I know,
Beyond the sunset I may spend
Delightful days That never end.”

Let us notice several key points that Jesus contributes to our sojourn upon the earth (1 Peter 2:11) that we would otherwise be bereft of had He not come.

LIVING FOR JESUS: WALKING IN THE LIGHT

How would you explain or describe the life of a Christian? There are twenty-one epistles in the New Testament which are dedicated to this matter. Romans through Jude contain classic data on the subject of Christianity translated into human conduct. We are richly blessed with such clarity of information in practical language for daily existence in the midst of a vile world that is insensitive to holiness and purity. Not many people in our age exhibit a desire to glorify God in the devotional words of Psalm 96:1-2, "O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day." The essence of a life devoted to Christ is a grateful heart that will gladly submit to a daily walk with God (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1-2). An old and challenging song reminds us:

I am so wondrously saved from sin,
Jesus so sweetly abides within,
There at the cross where He took me in:
Glory to His name!

Once we realize how vain and futile life would be without the loving Savior, we will seek ways to magnify Deity. The power and grace of the Lord reminds us of this bulwark verse of Scripture: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). How could we be so foolish as to launch out into a dark world devoid of the sacred light of His marvelous guidance? A compelling hymn captures this sentiment perfectly:

Without Him I could do nothing;
Without Him I would surely fail.
Without Him I would be drifting
Like a ship without a sail.
Without Him how lost I would be!

Perhaps no other Bible chapter better gives the gist of the solid sojourn of the Christian to the degree and depth of the twelfth chapter of Romans. This dynamic section reminds us that the followers of Jesus lead a sacrificial, surrendered, selfless and satisfying life before God and men (vs. 1-8). The high ethic of the gospel system leaves no room for conceit, laziness or retaliation (vs. 9-20). We focus on serving the Lord and helping those about us (vs. 14-21). Living for Jesus forbids self-pity and mercenary goals. The redemption of the lost becomes our magnificent obsession (2 Cor. 4:13). Trivial matters fade, and spiritual emphases naturally engulf our waking thoughts. Producing the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23) subdues the carnal activities that overwhelm the vast hordes surrounding us. We are seekers of treasure far beyond silver and gold, due to the enormous value of souls.

The rich dividend for the man who truly seeks God's kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) is the glorious improvement it produces in his own walk on the earth. Someone wisely stated, "The highest reward for man's toil is not what he gets for it but what he becomes by it." The "peace of God which passeth understanding" (Phil. 4:7) permeates the pilgrimage of those who follow Christ even when persecution enters their lives. Any noble endeavor is worth the consequences which such action may bring. It is far better to endure hardship as servants of the one who died at Calvary than to escape tribulation because of cowardice (1 Pet. 4:16).

Living for Jesus may mean that we will someday die for Him. Revelation 14:13 emphatically tells us that will be the epitome of blessedness: "**Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.**"

Glorying In The Cross

DILLARD THURMAN

After Paul had contemplated the vanity of one's glorying in fleshly things, he concluded, "*But God forbid that I should glory,*

save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). These words were to move a writer to set forth the stirring hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory."

*In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.
When the woes of life o'er-take me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me:
Lo! it glows with peace and joy.*

Truly, there is great reason why one may glory in the cross of Christ. Let us look at some of them.

THE SON OF GOD ENDURED THE CROSS

That our evaluation of the cross of Christ may be accurate and true, we turn to a reading in Heb. 12:1-2, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." We can glory in the fact that Jesus Christ endured the cross, and thought it joy to make the sacrifice for us! The cross was harsh and cruel, and Jesus became accursed in enduring it: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

The Son of God voluntarily accepted the stigma of the cross to redeem us, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). It should be noted from the first that the cross epitomized the fulness of obedience. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

DIVINE LOVE IS MANIFEST BY THE CROSS

In no other way is the love of God shown more forcefully than at the cross of Christ. There God gave His only begotten Son to die for us! Surely we can glory in the cross when we consider the great love that there became manifest. *"But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life"* (Rom. 5:8-10).

Not only did God, the Father, love us to the extent that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, but Jesus Christ was also willing that the sacrifice be made for us. To explain this, we must recall the words of Jesus, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). That love was demonstrated when Jesus died on the cross for those He loved! How can the love flowing from the cross be explained more clearly than in that long-time favorite passage, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Yes, we can glory in the cross, because the love of God is painted thereon with divine love!

THE LAW OF MOSES NAILED TO THE CROSS

We can glory in the cross because it was there that *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us"* by dying on the cross (Gal. 3:13). He redeemed us from the law by repealing the law by His death on the cross, thus *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross"* (Col. 2:14). Thus, the apostle writes that we are *"become dead to the law by the body of Christ"* (Rom. 7:4).

For centuries the law of Moses had stood as a wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, thus causing enmity and bitterness. This barrier was leveled in the death of Christ on the cross. *"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments*

contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:13-15). By the cross, both Jew and Gentile might be reconciled "unto God in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2:16).

CHURCH PURCHASED BY BLOOD OF THE CROSS

Christians should glory in the cross for it was there that the purchase price was paid for the church of the Lord. Paul told the elders of Ephesus, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of the Lord, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The blood of the cross bought His church! The worth of the church is seen in the price which God was willing to pay. The apostle Paul wrote further, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25). The cross presents the true value of the church as possibly nothing else does.*

The Scriptures declare, *"Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). And Peter wrote, "Knowing that ye were redeemed. . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Again, the apostle Paul writes of Jesus, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). The same blood that cleanses the sinner from sins and redeems him from the clutches of Satan is the blood that purchased the church of the Lord.*

ALL ARE RECONCILED BY THE CROSS

Let us turn back to two passages already studied - Rom. 5:10 and Eph. 2:13-16. Because of our sins, we have been separated from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and thus become the enemies of God. From Rom. 5 and Eph. 2, we found that we are reconciled (brought back into fellowship) to God by the death of His Son. And further, we read that both Jew and Gentile are *"reconciled unto God in one body by the cross."* Being *"reconciled to God by the death of his Son"* (Rom. 5:10), we are thus made children of God (Gal. 3:26-27) and are brought back into fellowship with God.

Paul elaborates on this theme in Col. 1:20-22, *"And, having made peace through the blood of the cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your own mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouable in his sight."* Consider what a great thing it is to have such reconciliation with God, and then you see why we should glory in the cross of Christ.

THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED BY THE CROSS

It was by the cross that the world crucified Jesus Christ. And it was also by the cross that the world is crucified! For every follower of Christ must accept the cross (complete and absolute obedience to the will of Christ) to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Jesus said, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24). This means that a disciple must turn from the world to serve the Lord. As He said, *"If ye love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). The apostle Paul shows the results of that kind of submission to the Lord, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20).

In discussing the process of conversion, Paul had shown that he had *"crucified the old man of sin"* when he *"obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine"* of the cross. He wrote, *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized in Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so should we also walk in newness of life. . . know this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. . . Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness"* (Rom. 6:3-7,17-18).

Friend, why not render obedience to the cross by dying to

your past sins in faith and repentance (Acts 2:36-38), and then be buried with Him in baptism (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4) to be raised to walk in newness of life? God waits to save you at the cross of complete submission.

God's Chain Of Salvation

CLEM THURMAN

Many religious folk have narrow vision about what saves us. Some will claim that we are saved by "faith only," others say we are saved by "grace only," while still others say we are saved only by the blood of Jesus. The truth is that we are not saved by any ONE of those, but by all of them. Let me illustrate.

A farmer makes a bumper wheat crop. A merchant asks, "How is that tractor I sold you?" and the farmer replies, "Great, it made me 25,000 bushels of wheat!" To another he says, "That seed I got from you made me 25,000 bushels of wheat!" To another, "That rain we got made me 25,000 bushels of wheat!" To yet another, "That new fertilizer made me 25,000 bushels of wheat!" Some might contend that the farmer made a total of 100,000 bushels of wheat, but that isn't at all what the farmer meant. All of the factors he named combined to make his wheat crop. It wasn't any one of them that did it.

In the spiritual realm there are many factors that work together to effect our salvation. You can compare it with a chain, where all the links are vital and no one can be left out. The chain is not one link, but many. So it is with "God's chain of salvation." An exhaustive study of the gospel of Christ will demonstrate that there are more than forty different factors that work together to accomplish our salvation. We do not have space to study them all, so let us look at only eight vital links in the chain.

GOD IS CREATOR AND SAVIOR

The prophet declared, "*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and*

my song; he is also become my salvation" (Isa. 12:2). Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17), and that includes salvation. God wants people to be saved. He loved us, and sent Jesus to die for our sins that we could be saved. Even though God hates sin (Psa. 119:104; Prov. 6:16-18; 8:13; etc.), He loves sinners and desires to save them: *"God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth . . . We have our hope set on the living God, who is the savior of all men"* (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 4:10). None can minimize this "link" in the chain of salvation, for without God none can be saved: *"The wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23).

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR SAVIOR

Why did Jesus Christ come into this world? The angel answers: *"Thou shalt call his name Jesus, because it is he that shall save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21). Jesus answers: *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). Paul answers: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief"* (1 Tim. 1:15). That He would be the perfect Savior, we read: *"Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him, the author of eternal salvation"* (Heb. 5:8-9). Peter and John, were arrested for preaching Jesus, and they answered: *"In none other is there salvation, neither is there any other name under heaven, given among men, wherein we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). That is simply another way of saying, "No one else can save!" And that is true. There just cannot be any argument on this point by people who believe the Bible - Jesus Christ saves! But He does not save apart from the other "links" in the chain!

WE ARE SAVED BY THE GOSPEL

We are clearly told that the gospel of Christ saves us: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto*

salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). That, is the reason Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). People just cannot be saved without the gospel. As the apostle Paul wrote, "I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved" (1 Cor. 15:1-2). When Cornelius, a religious man who wanted to be right with God (Acts 10:1-2), prayed to God, an angel was sent to him — not to tell him what to do to be saved, but, - "Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved" (Acts 11:13-14). In order to be saved, Cornelius had to hear the gospel, so Peter preached the gospel to him. James wrote later, "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). The gospel is another vital link in the chain of salvation.

WE ARE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS

The principle is firmly rooted in the Old Testament, and repeated in the New: "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). All of the animal sacrifices under the Law of Moses reminded Israel of their sins and foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 10:1-4). The apostle wrote, "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him" (Rom. 5:8-9). Peter shows the same, "Knowing that ye were redeemed. . . with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Not only were we cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ when we were baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3-4), we are also cleansed by His blood as we walk daily with Him: "If we walk in the light. . . the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Paul shows that all spiritual blessings are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3-6), then states clearly, "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. 1:7). None can be saved without the blood of Jesus. It is, indeed, a vital link in the chain of salvation.

WE ARE SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD

Jesus made clear the need for grace when He said, *"When ye shall have done all the things commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do"* (Luke 17:10). No one can live good enough to be saved, even if he lived in perfect obedience! If we are Saved, it is by God's grace. *"By grace have ye been saved through faith . . . All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace"* (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 3:23-24). As Scripture records, *"Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man"* (Heb. 2:9). Because the *"wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23), we must die, because we all have sinned. But Jesus, by the grace of God, paid our penalty. The grace of God, though, makes demands of us: *"The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world"* (Titus 2:11-12). None can be saved without grace; it is another link in the chain of salvation.

FAITH IS ANOTHER LINK IN THE CHAIN

The Scripture says, *"Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him"* (Heb. 11:6). Over and over, during His ministry on earth, Jesus emphasized the need for our believing in Him: *"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 . . . Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"* (John 3:16; 8:24). When the Ethiopian asked about being baptized, the inspired Philip said, *"If thou believest, thou mayest"* (Acts 8:36-37). Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi when God miraculously freed them; the jailor then asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 16:30-31). The apostle Paul stated clearly, *"By grace are ye saved through faith . . . Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:1).

Faith is a vital link in the chain of salvation. But, contrary to what many teach, faith is not the only link! God's word says that faith must be accompanied with obedience, for *"faith apart from works is dead. . . Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"* (James 2:24,26). One link does not make a chain, and as vital as faith is, there are other "links in the chain" that are also necessary.

WE ARE SAVED BY REPENTANCE

Jesus never came to this earth to save people so that they could go right on living in sin. He came to save people **FROM** their sin. Unless one is willing to turn his back on sin to live for Jesus, he cannot be saved. Jesus forcefully declared, *"Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish"* (Luke 13:3). If anyone would be saved, it is necessary for him to repent. When people in Jerusalem asked, *"What must we do?"* Peter replied, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you"* (Acts 2:38). He later told some of the same people, *"Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out"* (Acts 3:19). Peter reported to Jewish Christians the conversion of Cornelius and his household; *"When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life"* (Acts 11:18). The apostle Paul preached the gospel to the intellectuals in Athens, and concluded by saying, *"The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent"* (Acts 17:30). Surely, none can deny that repentance is another vital link in God's chain.

"BAPTISM DOTH ALSO NOW SAVE US"

Many people don't like it, but the above is a direct quotation (1 Pet. 3:21) from the word of God! Notice the promise of the Lord: *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). People who object to the necessity of baptism have tried many arguments to nullify that verse, but it is still there! A simple question puts all objections to rest: "Where did Jesus place baptism, before or after salvation?" Nowhere in God's word does salvation take place before baptism, nor does baptism take place

after salvation. The order is clearly set forth by the Lord, and verified by every account of conversion in the New Testament! When people on Pentecost asked what to do, God answered by the mouth of Peter, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ. . . They then that received his word were baptized"* (Acts 2:38,41). Beloved, that has not changed; it is still true. After Saul of Tarsus had believed and repented, Ananias was sent by the Lord to tell him what to do (Acts 9:6): *"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins"* (Acts 22:16). The purpose of baptism is clearly stated there, isn't it?

Of course, baptism alone will not save anyone! We need every link in the chain. The Bible states clearly that we are *"baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into his death"* (Rom. 6:3), and *"every spiritual blessing"* is *"in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3). Satan will try every way he can to destroy the "chain" and leave sinners in a lost state. If he can persuade us to leave God out of our lives, he breaks the chain. If he can get us to leave out Christ, His gospel, His blood or His grace, he has broken the chain. If he can persuade us to leave out faith, repentance or baptism, he breaks the chain.

Friend, don't rely on one link to save you! You need every one. Study carefully all of the word of God. Which of the "links" would you leave out, and why? God and Christ gave us the gospel which, by His grace, reveals salvation by the blood of Christ. But there are "links" that depend on our response: faith, repentance and baptism. God and Christ have done their part. Now do yours. Put your trust in the Lord, and forge the rest of the links in the chain of salvation.

The Wicked Civilization

WILLARD COLLINS

These days are exceedingly sinful. There have been other unusually sinful times in the history of our world. For example, the world just before the Flood was an exceedingly sinful time.

What were the sins being practiced in the world before the Flood?

FORGETFULNESS OF GOD

There have been few times in the history of the world when sin was practiced so readily by a large portion of the people. Despite all the good things God had done for them, the antediluvians were forgetful of God. This means they had no value system to live by and men were becoming as gods in their eyes and doing what made them feel good.

IMMORALITY

God made one man and one woman and placed the two of them in the Garden of Eden. Marriage is, according to God, built on one man and one woman for life. In this world before the Flood, Lamech introduced polygamy: "And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah and the name of the other Zillah" (Genesis 4:19 KJV).

Fornication was also widespread: "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (6:1-2).

Modern Bible students hold to the opinion that the sons of God were the godly descendants of Seth who became enamored and consorted with the godless descendants of Cain, thereby wrecking their faith and plunging themselves into wickedness.

VIOLENCE

"The earth also was corrupt before God; and the earth was filled with violence" (v. 11). Murder, thievery and actions of bodily violence were characteristic of this age. It reminds us somewhat of what is going on now with murder, assault, battery and the abuse of women and children.

SINFUL IMAGINATION

The people before the Flood were so sinful that it seems their prevalent thinking was on the subject of evil: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (v. 5). What a state of affairs. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. These people's hearts were so full of evil that their thoughts and actions were producing a continuous stream

of evil across the land.

The Flood was not just another big rain brought by the natural laws of nature, but a worldwide deluge that was a divinely sent judgment upon the people because of their evil.

Now, we have warnings about the coming of a worldwide fire of destruction. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). When I think about the burning of this world and the destruction that goes with it, I am appalled. This is beyond my imagination. God is using gospel preachers to warn people about the coming dangers.

We had better wake up and realize that it is right to help the poor and to preach the gospel to the lost.

"For Me ... For Me"

NEAL POLLARD

Some incredible life stories exist within our great brotherhood. Some may provoke disappointment, but a great many others inspire greater confidence in our brethren and a greater commitment in our own service to Jesus.

One story begins decades ago at one of our Christian colleges. A brother went there to train to become a preacher. Assisting in a funeral, he was overwrought by emotion and soon determined that he was not cut out to be a preacher. Instead he earned a degree in education. Upon graduating, he went to a locale where there was no church of Christ. He made a bride of a beautiful young Christian woman, but they made no attempt to establish a congregation or travel to where one was.

For years, this brother served in that area as a school teacher. Ultimately, he was transferred to work and teach in a major college in another state. They remained in this new community for a few more decades and did not attend church services, although several congregations were in the city. A few years ago, this now-retired couple -guilt-ridden over the many years of delinquency — resolved to attend the church of Christ in their community. They decided to endure whatever embarrassment they might face in explaining their circumstances. In a short

time, they made public repentance for those wasted years. Since that time, this dear couple has become as involved as they possibly can. They do work in and around the church building almost weekly. They travel to attend various brotherhood forums and activities. They are generous financial supporters of church missions. And they are always there when the doors are opened for any of the church's assemblies, including special events such as gospel meetings.

Such was the state of this couple when my family and I met them. During a gospel meeting I was holding with the congregation they attended, they invited us to lunch at their home. We were especially impressed with the vineyard and grove he maintained on what had to be only a couple of acres. He had taught botany at the college level and is nationally recognized as an expert in this field, for good reason. A self-described collector of "antique fruits," this brother had quite an impressive collection. Yet, he was most proud, not of ancient apples, pears or grapes, but of a bush he had growing in a pot on his patio table. He traded a tree of great value to get this bush from a botanist who grew it indigenously.

It was a Jerusalem Thorn Bush. He warned me not to touch it, as the prick of a single thorn was quite painful. He explained that this was quite likely the very type of bush from which Jesus' crown of thorns was twisted together. Then, this now elderly man pressed his own finger against a thorn of it, tears streaming from his kind eyes and down his cheeks. With trembling voice, he repeated—with a mixture of determination and self-incrimination—"For me . . . for me . . . for me."

How this resonated within my heart and has burned itself into my memory. This brother, once spiritually prodigal, now stood again justified by the blood, and the thought of his forgiven state moved him to tears. He could appreciate both the laborer who went into the Lord's vineyard "early in the morning" and the one who went "about the eleventh hour" (Matthew 20:1-6 NKJV). No one would preach with more conviction the need to remember the Creator in the days of youth than this dear brother and sister. Consider, as they have, the many/wasted years and opportunities. Yet, look at their marvelous example. Swallowing their pride and humbling themselves to do what was necessary to return to the Lord, they are giving their remaining time to active service. They also are able to yield a powerful example to others who may need to do just as they did—become people who, with eyes of faith, see the Suffering Servant and rightly conclude, "For me ... for me."