

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## *EDITORIAL*

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

*"He who does not love, does not know God,  
for God is love."*

Only the Bible, the book that was written by the inspiration given by God to man, tells us in what way or manner God loves man. There is no other source from which to learn how does God love man. Reading from 1 John 4:9-10 we learn: "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, 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." God's love for man is not in words only. But He loves man indeed! And the only way for us to know that God truly loves us is to know the fact that to manifest His love for mankind God did send His only begotten Son from heaven to earth to be the propitiation for our sins.

God created man. He had created man in the beginning in His own image and after His own likeness. That is, to say that God had created both man and woman a spiritual being like Him, and without sin as God Himself is. (Genesis 1:26,27). And even before God had made the first man and the first woman, He had created all other things, like all kinds of foods, sunshine and other things which were necessary to sustain the physical life of man on earth. But when man sinned by disobeying God's rule, man became a sinner and separated from God. (Isaiah 59:1,2). He was still a

spiritual being like God and therefore would live or exist forever. But he was no longer without sin, as God is. As such, in sin, man would live in sin forever separated from God. But God had not made man to live in sin and to live separated from God forever. How would man become worthy of God? Man had no solution to his eternal problem. Man was helpless. He needed help, compassion and love. God did exactly that. His Word, Who was with God and Who was God, became flesh (John 1:1,14). God came down on earth from heaven, in Jesus Christ. In talking to Nicodemus He therefore said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

There was no power on earth that could have nailed Jesus Christ the Son of God on the cross. It was the love of God, Who "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). God allowed Christ, His Son to die on the cross in our place. He is the propitiation for our sins. The Bible, again, at Romans 5:8 says: "But God demonstrates His love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This great and wonderful love of God should cause every individual to turn to God with heart full of repentance from wrong and submission to His will. For God is not willing that any should perish in sin but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9). Also, this amazing love of God should help us learn that we ought to love one another and all people everywhere on earth. Because the Holy and the Almighty God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son as ransom for all people.

## ***What Is Involved In Worship?***

J.C. CHOATE

Christ said, "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24). What a specific but simple statement! God is a Spirit, the Creator of all things, and He is to be worshipped. But if He is to be worshipped, and if our worship is to be accepted by Him, it must be in spirit and in truth. The reference to "spirit" includes sincerity, emotions, involvement,

and the desire to praise and honor God. This means that one must keep his mind on what he is doing, he must concentrate on each part of the worship, and not allow his thoughts to wander away to other things. "Truth" has reference to submitting to the Lord's will, following His teaching, obeying His commands.

God desires that His people worship Him in spirit and in truth, that it be done on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10), which is our Sunday. He, furthermore, has instructed His children, Christians, members of the Lord's church, to include the following things in their worship:

1. Christians are to gather on the first day of the week to **study God's word**. This is God's way of speaking to His people. He does not speak directly to us, separate and apart from His word, but through His written word only. Whatever God wanted to tell us is written there—all that we must know about salvation, the church, the Christian life, heaven and hell—is plainly stated there. That is why we are to *study* God's word, not just to *read* it casually, but to *diligently study* it. Paul says that we should study to be approved of God (2 Timothy 2:15). Again, he says that God's word completely furnishes man unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17). He also says that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).
2. Christians are to assemble each first day of the week to **pray**. This is the way we speak to God. After some 3,000 people obeyed the Lord on the day of Pentecost and were saved and added to the church (Acts 2:37, 38, 47), we read in Acts 2:42, *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."* Those who had become Christians *continued in the apostles' teaching*. A part of that was worship, and a part of worship included prayers. There are so many verses of scripture that talk about the importance of prayer, and the need for prayer. Paul said that we should pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and that we should let our requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6). We are also told that we should always pray (Luke 18:1), that we are to pray in the name of Christ who is our mediator, our advocate (John 14:13; 1 John 2:1), and that we must pray according to His will (1 John 5:14,15).

3. As Christians we are to assemble on the Lord's Day to sing praises to our Father and to his Son, Jesus. Paul said, "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19). He made a similar statement in Colossians 3:16, and in 1 Corinthians 14:14,15 he said that we should pray with the spirit and with the understanding. No where in the New Testament do we read that the Lord's people are to sing with mechanical instruments of music. Rather, Paul says that we are to make the melody in our hearts. Vocal music, from the instrument of human vocal chords, is the most beautiful music in the world. That is the kind of music the Lord wants when we worship Him.
4. Christians are to meet each first day of the week to partake of the Lord's memorial supper. Jesus died on the cross that we might be saved in this world and have the hope of eternal life in the world to come. He has, therefore, asked His people to gather together on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) to partake of unleavened bread in remembrance of the sacrifice of His body, and all of the suffering that He endured on our behalf (Matthew 26:26). We are to partake of the cup, the fruit of the vine (grape juice) in remembrance of His blood that was shed that we might have the remission of our sins (Matthew 26:27,28).
5. And finally, we are to meet on the first day of the week to give a portion of our money or possessions. Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, "*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come*" (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). He explained further, "*But this I say, He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:6,7). So what does God want? He wants His people to worship Him, and a part of that is to give of our means so that there will be money for the work of the church. How much does God want us to give?

According as we have prospered. How much is that? Surely as much as the Jews gave under the old law, which would have been 10 per cent or more. How would God want us to give? Not grudgingly, but as we have purposed, cheerfully and with thankfulness that we have been blessed with the ability to share. If we give grudgingly or out of the feeling of necessity, then we are not giving in a way that is pleasing to God. Just as Cain's gift was rejected because it was not what God had asked, our offering can also be rejected if it is not given in spirit and in truth.

Now which of these acts of worship could we leave off and still worship God acceptably? Surely we could not omit even one. Yet there are some who think that if they have only partaken of the Lord's Supper, they have worshipped. The Lord's Supper *is* important, but so is our Bible Study, our praying, our singing, and our giving. Please plan to worship each Lord's Day, and plan to involve yourself in *all* of the acts of worship. It is only then that you can worship in an acceptable way.

Also, when you worship, keep your thoughts focused on what you are doing. Don't go to sleep, and don't let your mind wander away from worship to think about your work, what you plan to have for lunch, and a thousand other things. If you meet with the Lord's people for worship, and you engage in worship in spirit and in truth, then you will be benefited, and so will others, but most important of all, the Lord will be honored. You will also set a good example for your family, for your friends, and for all concerned. Please do worship each Lord's Day, and let your worship be scriptural and spiritual. Only then will the Lord accept it.

## **Message of the Cross**

FRANCIS DAVID

Apostle Paul says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (I Cor. 1:18). For Paul, the message of the cross was most important thing in life. Once he said, "And I, brethren when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I

determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (I Cor. 2:1,2). He knew that cross meant for him, because his relationship with Jesus and cross was unique. Because of this relationship with the cross, he again said, "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14). This man was convinced about the cross. He had a great value for it. For him the preaching of the cross was first priority in life. For him it was not something like a theological, philosophical story but an actual experience of the cross.

When Paul was travelling to Damascus, he experienced this cross when he had an encounter with the Lord. When he was persecuting the Lord's people, Christians the Lord met him and told him what he is doing is wrong." And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Here we see his actual experience with Jesus, and that is why the aim of his life was to preach about the cross of Jesus. When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus his complete life was changed. (Acts 9).

When Paul preached about the cross of Christ, two kinds of people were there who received or heard this message. There were people who heard it but for them it was a foolishness, but for the other kind of people it was the power of God. They can see the power of God flowing from cross of Jesus, because it has the power to save them from their sins. For them who are perishing the cross was a foolishness, something which they were not able to accept and that is why they rejected it. they rejected the plan of salvation of God. They were opposed to the Cross.

We need to know why the cross of Jesus is precious and valuable. It reveals that man is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). It tells us that man is a sinner (Rom. 3:23), and because of sins he separated from his Creator (Isaiah 59:1-2). Man needs salvation, a saviour who could save him from his sinful condition. The greatest need of man is salvation from sins. That is why we see God sent His only begotten Son into this world to save him (John 3:16). God's Love was so great that he allowed his Son die on the cross of Calvary. Paul says in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet

sinner, Christ died for us." We were unworthy, sinful but God loved us and wanted to save us from our sinful condition. We need to be grateful for this.

The message of the cross is for you and me and for all the people of the world. Why? Because of sin, we see people are dying spiritually. The tragic results of sin we can see around us. There are so many bad things happening around us, immorality is on the increase, there are broken homes marriages, children suffering and so many die everyday without the message of the cross. They die without Jesus. How sad it is! Sin is not a toy to be played with. We need to give this message of the cross to those who are perishing. We need to tell people, that the Son of God died a cruel, shameful death on the terrible cross. The Bible says, "Sin is all unrighteousness or violation of God's commandments (I Jn. 5:17). Worlds of people are violating God's commands and they all need to come to the cross of Jesus. When Paul came to Corinth, he brought the message of the cross, he could have brought, human doctrines, his own philosophy, his self praise, polished words, poetry, or may be politics. But he did not, instead he brought the message of the cross. His confidence was based on the fact: For to me is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21).

Jesus our Lord is divine. He had the capacity to bear the sins of all the world on the cruel Cross. He became the atonement for our sins, came to earth as man and was despised and rejected by men. He was wounded for our transgression. He left His heavenly habitation. He died for our sins. Friends, the strength of the gospel is in the CROSS OF JESUS, therefore I would urge you to obey the message of the cross by believing in Jesus, confessing Him as the Son of God, repenting of your sinful life and be baptised in the watery grave for the forgiveness of your sins.

## **Jesus—Our Great High Priest**

THOMAS DOHLING

***"Among the lampstands was one like a son of man, clothed with a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest."—Rev. 1:13.***

Let us approach the throne of grace and pause there to behold Jesus as John saw Him, for the church's joy, in his priestly

garments; for remember, He is still a Priest upon His throne, and by the oath of Jehovah, remains a priest forever (Heb.5:10; 7:20). Let us not be afraid to draw near; *listen*, surely He calls! He speaks to you— "See me! See me! See, I am your intercessor (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1). For this cause I wear these priestly garments; and as the high priest of old represented Me, I appear in them down to the foot, and the golden sash (girdle, KJV) round and beneath the chest. What is your cause? What blessings and praises have you to offer for past grace? And what supplications for present and future favours? Behold my vesture (garment) dipped in blood (Rev. 19:13). Think of the *everlasting efficacy* (effectiveness) of My righteousness: and for whom should I make intercession but for transgressors?" Let us fall down with holy reverence and godly fear. Jesus will do with you as He did with John. He will lay his right hand upon you, and say, "Fear not" (Rev.1:17). And we shall realize how precious our Lord is. He is, indeed, the One Who was dead, and now lives for evermore (Rev.1:17,18). He lives to see the fruits of the great salvation He ushered in faithfully and fully applied to every one of His redeemed. His priesthood is forever. His intercession unceasing. We shall see our Lord, by faith, even now standing with the blood of the covenant in His hand, and presenting us, poor, wretched, worthless as we are, as one purchased by His blood to the Father.

Do we not hear His voice in those soul-reviving words, "Holy Father, keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are?" (John 17:11.) "Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may see my glory, which you have given me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world?" (John 17:24.)

Oh glorious, gracious, Almighty High Priest! You are, indeed, "a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6; 7:17). Oh trembling souls! You who have any cause this day to bring before the court of heaven, look unto Jesus, look within the veil, see Jesus there; look steadily, though humbly, and see His hands, His side; your salvation is Still etched on His palms. Nay, do we not see, may we not read our very names, as the high priest bore the names of Israel on his breast, while his hands are lifted up to bless! Yes, Jesus takes up our cause, bears our persons, and all our concerns. How shall either fail, while "he is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25;



cf. Romans 8:34).

## ***"If We Neglect So Great Salvation"***

CLEM THURMAN

*"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and every obedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Hob. 3:1-3).* After comparing the word which God had given to Israel through Moses with the word given to the world through Jesus Christ, the inspired writer referred to the gospel as the message of "so great a salvation."

There are many other salvations mentioned in the Bible, but none of them compare with the salvation which belongs to the Christian. Noah and his family surely enjoyed the salvation in the ark, when all others were destroyed by water, and they disembarked into a clean and fresh world (Gen. 6,7,8; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). The people of Israel were granted salvation from slavery in Egypt, passing through the Red Sea when they were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Their song of victory beautifully shows their joy at their deliverance (Ex. 15). But neither of those salvations compares with the "great salvation" of the child of God in the Christian age. "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. . . which things angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:10-12). There are many reasons why this salvation is so great.

### **IT IS SALVATION FROM SIN**

When God put man in the Garden of Eden, man was sinless

and pure, and had perfect fellowship with God. But Satan knew that only sin could disrupt that relationship, so he enticed man into sin. God drove man from Eden, for, "*Your iniquities have separated between you and your God. Your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear*" (Isa. 59:2). Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, we all have become sinners: "*There is none righteous . . . All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:10,23). The consequence of sin is stated thus: "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die . . . The wages of sin is death. . . Sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death*" (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23; James 1:15).

Jesus certainly knew the result of sin. When He left heaven and came to this world, His purpose was clear: "*The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). He came into the world "*to save sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15), and willingly went to the cross to "*taste of death for every man*" (Heb. 2:9). Having taken our place, dying for the sins which we committed, the Lord Jesus sent the apostles to preach that glorious message of salvation. "*Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them. . . Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16).

When the apostles of Jesus "*went everywhere preaching the word*" (Mark 16:20), their message was just what the Lord had commanded. People in Jerusalem were told of "*the great salvation*" in these words, when they heard the gospel and asked what to do: "*Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins*" (Acts 2:38). Ananias preached this "*great salvation*" to Saul in these words: "*Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16).

### **IT IS CONFIRMED TO US BY THEM THAT HEARD**

This message of salvation was "*first spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard*" (Heb. 2:3). When Peter and the other apostles preached the gospel on Pentecost in Jerusalem, they declared, "*We are witnesses of these things*" (Acts 2:32). Those men spent over three years with Jesus, hearing His message and partaking of His character. They KNEW of a certainty the message which Jesus gave them. The apostle Peter writes in detail about this point, "*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and, coming of*

*our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty"* (2 Pet. 1:16).

Jesus promised the: Holy Spirit to guide the apostles *"into all the truth"* (John 16:13). The apostle Paul wrote, *"Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth"* (1 Cor. 2:13). Their message of salvation was not from themselves—it came from God. Thus, Paul wrote, *"Ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God"* (1 Thes. 2:13).

How was the message confirmed? *"Confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both, by signs and wonders, and by manifold, powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit"* (Heb. 2:3-4). As the miracles Jesus did proved Him to be the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31), so the miracles done by the apostles proved their message was from the Lord. *"They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, confirming the word by the signs that followed"* (Mark 16:20). When we listen to the apostles, we hear Jesus Christ: *"He that heareth you heareth me."* (Luke 10:16). The *"great salvation"* is confirmed!

## **THE GREATNESS OF THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION**

This Great Salvation was *"first spoken through the Lord"* (Heb. 2:3). The Lord Jesus delivered it from the Father. As He said, *"I spake not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak"* (John 12:49). The apostle Paul, writing to a young preacher, defined the source of salvation and the message of it: *"Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Saviour, and Christ Jesus our hope"* (1 Tim. 1:1-2). He then goes on to speak of God's plan for us, *"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:3-4). No one else could save man from sin, only Jesus: *"In none other is there salvation"* (Acts 4:12). That is the reason that His gospel *"is the power of God unto salvation"* (Rom. 1:16).

In the "Great Commission," Jesus promised, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). That salvation is based on the grace of God, and our response to His grace: *"The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation unto 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). This "great salvation" makes some demands of us! That is why the apostles exhorted, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40). It is "a great salvation" because it is offered by Jesus Christ and only He has the right to set the terms under which He will save us.*

## **SALVATION IS GREAT IN ITS SIMPLICITY**

Jesus never intended to make His teaching complicated, nor His requirements unclear. He once prayed, *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide, these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes" (Luke 10:21). In other words, as Paul wrote later, "The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). When people are not willing to accept what Jesus said, His message seems strange and improbable. There is a reason for that: "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them, that perish: in whom the god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them (2 Cor. 4:3-4), When one will simply listen to the Lord Jesus, he can understand (Eph. 3:4).*

With this *"great salvation"* the requirements are spelled out very simply. It begins with FAITH. Jesus said, *"God so loved the world, that he gave, his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Paul wrote that we are "justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1), and: "By grace have ye been, saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). But it doesn't end there.*

Because one believes Jesus, he submits to Him as *"Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). That means that he changes the way he lives: he must REPENT. As Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall, all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3). The apostle Peter told the people in Jerusalem, "Repent ye" (Acts 2:38; 3:19). The apostle Paul declared, "Now he commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). As Titus 2:11-12 shows, God expects us to change our ways when we come to Christ.*

Through faith, one obeys the Lord in BAPTISM. *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). There is the "great salvation," and the Lord set the terms for us! On*

Pentecost in Jerusalem, people believed and asked, "What shall we do?" The Lord's answer was: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). That was the pattern with all the apostles' preaching. People believed, repented and were baptized (Acts 8:12,36-38; 10:43,48; 16:30-34; 22:16). The apostle Paul wrote later, "Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). Because one is "in Christ," he is given "all spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3), including salvation (2 Tim. 2:10). The "great salvation" is simple!

The apostle Paul writes of our being "buried with him [Christ] in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God" (Col. 2:12). He then shows the kind of life we should live and why: "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God . . . For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3). Dear reader, let us never "neglect so great a salvation," which cost Jesus His life on the cross and is given to us as a gift.

## **Caring For Those Who Have Cared For Us**

JIM OLIVE

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

This is spoken of as the "first commandment with promise" (Ephesians 6:2), and it goes right to the heart of one of our societal sins today. Many in our day fail to show proper respect toward and care for those who have cared for them.

The Greeks and Romans held parents in high regard. According to Plato, honor for parents came second only to honor paid to the gods. Roman law gave the father absolute power over his son, even to the point of death. The son was bound to honor his father.

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Even if a father ordered a son to throw a purse of gold into the sea, he should obey him." When you

compare Exodus 20:12 to Leviticus 19:3, you will see that the order is changed in the latter to "Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father." The rabbis would point out that one passage puts the father first and the other puts the mother first to show that both of them are to be honored the same by their children.

These commandments were taken very seriously by the ancients. "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:17; Proverbs 20:20). "The eye that mocks his father and scorns obedience to his mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it" (Proverbs 30:17). In our day, the sentiments expressed in these verses would be laughable to many, but those who take seriously the teaching of the Scripture cannot fail to honor them.

### **HOW DO WE CARE FOR THEM?**

How do we in practical terms care for those who have cared for us? How do we honor our parents? First of all, we do not dishonor them. Honor does not always mean obey because parents might give orders that contradict what God has said. We must obey Him. It may not have anything to do with feelings or loving them if they have not acted honorably in some way. But we dare not dishonor them. Many times young adults may develop an attitude of spiritual superiority that suggests they know more and understand spiritual matters more than their parents. Be careful that arrogance does not lead to a disobedience of Exodus 20:12! Do not make choices that dishonor your parents!

Another way of caring for those who cared for us is by showing gratitude. Children should be grateful for those who cared for them when they were unable to care for themselves. Surely we would have perished without their care.

Obedience is another way we show honor and care. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth' " (Ephesians 6:1-3). A parent certainly must earn the right to be obeyed by living up to the same conduct he or she demands. It must not be a "do it because I said so" but a "leading by example" mindset.

The most obvious way to care for those who have cared for us is by providing parental support when it is needed. Parents in old age deserve the attention, love and support of their children.

The Holy Spirit inspired these words: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). The context concerns the care of widows and the responsibility of children and grandchildren. Earlier Paul had said, "But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God" (1 Timothy 5:4). Every child must find the way that best covers the need, but the obligation is clearly given.

Perhaps what is needed most is love and forgiveness. Sometimes knowingly or unknowingly, parents may have done something to hurt their children. A child may carry around hurt and anger for years. We cannot help mistakes someone else made in the past, but we can keep those mistakes from controlling us. Until we forgive in the love of Christ, we are under the control of something else. The Bible teaches us to show love even to our enemies and to pray for them. Surely we owe a special debt to those who cared for us, even if they made some mistakes.

### **HOW CAN WE PREPARE TO BE CARED FOR?**

In contrast to the despairing view of many toward growing older, the Bible points to the glory of old age. We should grow into maturity with a positive, healthy, biblical view; then we will be a greater blessing to those who care for us. Proverbs wisely informs us: "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31). "The glory of young men is their strength, And the splendor of old men is their gray head" (20:29). Age is not something to avoid but a mellowing period toward which life gradually develops. God used Moses at age 80 for the task of leading Israel to freedom from Egypt. The ruling body of the Jewish nation was made up of 70 elders or older men. The leadership of the New Testament church has always been reserved for the elders, a word that equates age with maturity.

Christian people should lead the way in growing old gracefully because our belief system prepares us for every age of life and for eternity. Of all people, we should follow the poet's counsel to "grow lovely, growing old." We should press toward the mark and finish the race (Philippians 3:12-14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

A hit song a few years ago called "September Song" had the words: "For it's a long while from May to December, but the days grow short when you reach September." Those who reach the

September of life need not worry, not if they and the generations that follow "fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## **Keeping God At Arm's Length**

CORY COLLINS

An enormous, radiant bonfire is wonderful on a cold fall night. It draws people to its warmth and light; it creates a unique fellowship. However, we are often afraid to go too close, lest we become uncomfortable. Our relationship with God can be like that. We may want His presence, but from a safe distance. It is easier to stay where we are, content with a bit of God's warmth, but not wanting too much of His fire.

In *Three Dollars' Worth of God*, Wilbur Rees suggested that we want God, but only to a certain degree and in a limited amount, like buying just enough gasoline to go so far. God keeps calling us closer, so that He can fill us full of Himself. He aims to revive us, change us, and light the fire in our hearts.

Exodus 3:1 describes an ordinary day in which an ordinary man was tending his father-in-law's ordinary sheep, looking for an ordinary pasture in an ordinary place. This man had failed 40 years earlier. He had killed a man and then fled from Egypt to Midian. Now he was 80 years old, perhaps resigned to his ordinary life. The land of Midian was dry, parched and empty; so was he. But after four long decades of this mediocre existence, one day he met God.

Nothing prepared Moses for what would happen that day, the day that God broke His silence. He gathered Jethro's sheep and began his work leading the flock to Horeb, the mountain of God, also known as Mount Sinai. He had no idea that, in the future, God would use this place to give water to His freed people (Exodus 17:6) and grant them His commandments and law (Exodus 19-20). After the exodus God would transform that ordinary mountain with His presence and light the fire.

But first, perhaps as a prelude to that event, God took an ordinary, dry, thorny bush and set it on fire. The bush was not the tallest or the most perfect or the most deserving. But when God



set it on fire, it became extraordinary.

Moses was struck by the fact that the bush did not burn up. What if he had been too busy pursuing his sheep in all directions to turn toward it? What if he had been watching his favorite TV show, caught up in his retirement, or rushing to meet a pressing deadline? What if he had missed the bush?

He just wanted to take a closer look, but God wanted to set him on fire and send him back to Egypt. He was curious, but not committed. Sound familiar? Like many of us, he wanted to be in attendance at the big event, but not give all his attention to it.

Only when Moses turned toward the bush did the Lord call to him (Exodus 3:4). What about us? What wonderful things does God want to tell us in the Scriptures? What great mission or plan does He have? But how can He reach us, if we will not turn toward Him? We will never hear Him if we are pointed in the wrong direction.

Revival can come to our lives, our families, our congregation and our nation, but only when we meet God. We must turn toward the flame and draw closer. Otherwise He can do nothing with us, and He will look for others. When we do personally encounter God, when we hear His voice calling in Scripture, six things will happen.

First, we will bare our feet and bury our faces (Exodus 3:5-6). Put yourself in Moses' position. Feel the heat, hear the voice, and sense the majesty of God. Tremble before Him in your emptiness. Fall before Him in reverence. Know your place because you know His place. Surrender the throne of your heart to the almighty, transcendent, holy God. Wherever you meet Him is a sacred place, so act accordingly. How could we treat worship casually? How could we approach God comfortably when we have met God at the bush?

Second, we will hear the lost crying through His ears (Exodus 3:7-10). God said regarding the captive Israelites, "I am concerned about their suffering" (v. 7 NIV). God finds irresistible the cries of humble, penitent, miserable people. Do we? He not only feels our pain, but also calls us to feel His pain for others. He sent the Christ when we were helpless and ungodly (Romans 5:6-11); now He would send us to others in similar circumstances. How can we ignore the lost, the poor, and the homeless, when we have met God at the bush?

Third, we will see our excuses through His eyes. It is hard to imagine an 80-year-old man arguing with a bush, is it not? Even

worse, how could a man challenge the Lord God? Nothing has changed. God still calls. We still resist with our ifs, ands, and buts.

Moses objected, saying, "Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11-12). It is as if Moses was the one to save Israel. He had failed in his earlier efforts to do so (2:11 -15); he might hesitate to try again. But this was not about Moses; it was about God. "I will be with you." Surely Moses would agree to go now. But it was not so.

Moses went from asking, "Who am I?" to asking, "Who are You?" (Exodus 3:13-15). God responded: "I am who I am." The names Yahweh and Jehovah are taken from the Hebrew verb used here, *hayah* ("to be"). To meet God is to know His nature. He is the eternal, the unchangeable, the ever-faithful, the invincible God. He would rescue Israel because He had promised Abraham that He would (Genesis 15:12-21). How could Moses object further?

Yet he did. He asked, "What if they won't?" (Exodus 4:1-9) and "What if I can't?" (vv. 10-12). God insisted that He would work through the staff Moses held in his hand. That staff was as ordinary as the bush until the presence of God came into it. If God could do that with a staff, what could He do with Moses? If Moses would meet God, he would see the answers to his excuses. So would we. We bring to God what is in our hands—our possessions, our relationships, our time, and our strength -and God does the extraordinary.

Moses' "I can't!" would become "God can!" when he met the Lord. His lack of eloquence (or possibly his speech impediment) would pose no obstacle for the One who made him. God can use the blind, the deaf, the mute, the young and the old, but only if we will come close to Him and ask Him to light the fire.

Yet Moses still hesitated. He asked, "Who else is there?" (Exodus 4:13). Before we become too upset with Moses, let us ask ourselves: "How do we respond to God's call for more preachers, missionaries and personal evangelists?" As long as we keep asking, "Who else is there?" we are right there, at the bush, arguing with God.

How did God react to this resistance? Read Exodus 4:14 and note that His anger burned against Moses. God had been so patient in dealing with one excuse after another. No more. At first it was the bush that was burning; now it was God's anger. How can we presume upon the mercy of God and refuse His mission? How can we avoid His wrath if we do not obey His will?

The fourth thing that will happen when we meet God is that

we will infect and excite His people (Exodus 3:16-17). Elders, preachers, deacons and the entire congregation must see the fire, catch the vision and commit themselves to God's mission. When the church is divided, someone is standing too far from the fire.

Fifth, we will confront His enemy (Exodus 3:18). How could Moses have imagined, when he first saw the bush, that God would send him before Pharaoh? We, too, must meet God and put on His whole armor; when we do, we will take our stand against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Sixth, only when we meet God will we experience His deliverance (Exodus 3:19-20). Ultimately, God would stretch out His hands on a cross at Golgotha to provide us freedom from bondage and death. When we put our faith in Christ and are baptized, we meet God and rise to live a new life. In that new life, we must draw near to God's flame again and again. Then He will light the fire.

As a country song says, "Life is not tried, it is merely survived, if you're standing outside the fire." Wherever you are in your walk with God, take a step closer to the fire. You will never be the same again:

## ***The Sinner's Prayer***

TOMMY SOUTH

Peter's Pentecost sermon concluded with this stinging indictment: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36 RSV). This prompted his convicted hearers to ask, "Men and brothers, what shall we do?" and Peter to respond, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (vv. 37-38). Likewise, when the despairing jailer in Philippi asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?", they responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They also "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house," which must have included the instruction to repent and be baptized, for the next verse says, "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all

his family" (16:30-33).

In both instances, people became convinced of their guilt and their lost state, which led them to ask the right question: "What must I do to be saved?" By inspiration they were given the right answer: "Repent, and be baptized."

Today, however, people who ask the right question are often given a very different answer: "Just pray the 'sinner's prayer' and you'll be saved." People desiring salvation are sometimes given the exact words to pray, although they are usually told that this is only a model to follow. Most models of the sinner's prayer go something like this:

"Dear Jesus. Thank You for the sacrifice You made for me. I am sorry for my past sins and will try my best not to repeat them. I ask Your help to keep this pledge. I know I am not worthy but I willingly accept You as my Lord and Savior, and I thank You for Your blessing over me and my family."

This prayer, or something like it, is probably the most common answer currently being given to the question of how to be saved.

This fact is amazing because the sinner's prayer is found nowhere in Scripture, and no one in the New Testament was ever told to pray in order to be saved. That being true, it would seem that the sinner's prayer is the wrong answer to the right question.

In questioning the validity of the sinner's prayer, in no way am I questioning the sincerity or good intentions of those who teach it or of those who have prayed it in response to their teaching. But we need to examine this answer closely because "What must I do to be saved?" is the most important question that anyone can ever ask, and it is crucial that we answer not simply out of sincerity, but with a clear word from Scripture.

The sinner's prayer is the wrong answer to the right question for several reasons.

The Scriptures that are said to teach it, don't. Naturally, once the practice of praying the sinner's prayer arose, a need became evident to justify it on some scriptural basis. Here are the texts most often offered as justification:

### **Romans 10:9-10**

In these verses Paul stresses the importance of verbal confession of faith and of genuine belief in Jesus. This text is suggested more often than any other as teaching the sinner's prayer, but serious problems arise. For one thing, it says nothing

about prayer. Second, when taken as teaching that "all you need to do is pray," it is taken in isolation from the rest of Romans, especially from Romans 6:1-4, which clearly speaks of baptism as the point of contact between the sinner and Jesus' atoning death.

### **Revelation 3:20**

The image of Jesus standing and knocking and waiting for the door of our hearts to be opened is a beautiful and powerful one. But this text is not about conversion because it is addressed not to non-believers but to lukewarm Christians. And again, it says nothing about prayer.

### **Luke 23:43**

The example of the thief on the cross is often suggested as teaching that one should pray for salvation, but this episode occurred prior to the death and resurrection of our Lord and thus before the apostolic teaching on how to respond to the gospel by being baptized into His death.

### **Luke 18:10-14**

In the case of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we do have a man who prays for mercy before God. But we should note that both the Pharisee and the tax collector were Jews and were already in a covenant relationship with God, although the tax collector had not been living up to it. Again, this text does not help us answer the question of "What must I do to be saved?" in the case of someone not in a covenant relationship with God.

### **Acts 2:21**

In quoting the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 on the day of Pentecost, Peter says, "And it shall be that who-ever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Advocates of the sinner's prayer say that calling on the name of the Lord is done in prayer. But this ignores the fact that later in the same chapter when Peter was asked "What shall we do?" he did not tell the people to pray, but to "repent and be baptized" (2:38). This is obviously the proper definition of calling on the name of the Lord.

The very fact that these Scriptures are the best that can be offered in support of the sinner's prayer confirms our earlier statements: the prayer itself is not found in the Bible, and no one in the New Testament was ever told to pray in order to be saved.

## A SUBSTITUTE FOR SCRIPTURE

The sinner's prayer is offered as a substitute for what Scripture does teach. Because Jesus told the apostles to "make disciples" by baptizing and teaching people (Matthew 28:18-20), and Peter told the people on Pentecost to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38) and the jailer was told to "believe on the Lord Jesus," and then was taught to be baptized (Acts 16:31-33), where did the practice of the sinner's prayer originate?

It is impossible to trace exactly the origins of the sinner's prayer, but it seems to have its roots in the great American revivalistic movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. These "awakenings" were characterized by large gatherings, emotionally charged preaching, and large numbers of public responses to the message. Many of these meetings were held outdoors or in large "tabernacles" constructed just for that purpose and containing no baptistries.

The sinner's prayer seems to have emerged as a substitute for baptism in order to allow for large numbers of on-the-spot conversions. It was not the only substitute to arise from that environment, however. C.G. Finney (1792-1875) urged potential converts to occupy an "Anxious Seat" where they were to meditate and pray until they felt themselves forgiven. Ironically, Finney acknowledged that this action was a substitute for baptism, which he admitted was the apostolic practice. Later, Billy Sunday (1862-1935) told his listeners to "walk the sawdust trail" (i.e., the sawdust-covered aisles of the tabernacles where he preached) and shake his hand as a sign of their intent to follow Christ.

Eventually the sinner's prayer became the method of choice among evangelicals for securing conversions and remains so today. Many, however, are now returning to a biblical view of baptism's role in conversion. (See, for example, the excellent article by Robert H. Stein, "Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Spring 1998). Ironically, as many evangelicals are coming to realize the proper place of baptism in conversion, some brethren in churches of Christ are downplaying it in order to be more acceptable to a wide spectrum of evangelicals! How sad that we are missing out on a great opportunity to join with sincere students of Scripture and to point people to the biblical way of conversion. A greater degree of unity with other believers in Christ would indeed be a wonderful

thing, but not at the expense of biblical teaching about something as serious as the means of responding to the gospel.

### **TEACHES EASY BELIEVISM**

The sinner's prayer teaches a simplistic idea of what it means to be a Christian. Often it is prefaced with something like, "Just say this prayer, and you will be saved." This teaching smacks of what is often called "easy believism," the idea that salvation can be attained without any substantive changes in one's life, by "just believing," or in case of the sinner's prayer, by "just praying." This error may not be the intent of some who teach the sinner's prayer, but it is easy to see how their intention is misconstrued.

Baptism into Christ, on the other hand, speaks of dying to sin and living a new life, of commitment to God and His will, of "an appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). One critic of the sinner's prayer calls it a "prayer of reapeatance rather than a prayer of repentance." Of course, the same problem can be with baptism, if it is done with inadequate teaching or with no real intention to lead a new life. But a biblical understanding of baptism and of genuine commitment to the Lord will keep it from becoming a substitute for a changed life.

It should also be noted that those who teach the sinner's prayer as the means of conversion fail to make the connection between genuine conversion and becoming a part of the church, the body of Christ. In the rush to secure a conversion, very little is said about the obligations of discipleship which are inherent in dying and rising with Christ.

### **CONFLICTS WITH JESUS' TEACHING**

The sinner's prayer conflicts with Jesus' own teachings about obedience. Jesus never taught that any one event, whether baptism or a prayer, is "all you have to do" to be saved or to be His disciple. Rather, He taught, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is heaven" (Matthew 7:21). "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?" He asked in Luke 6:46. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The sinner's prayer concept goes against what Jesus said about obedience.

One idea that paved the way for the sinner's prayer as a

substitute for baptism (and other forms of obedience) is the faith/works controversy of the Protestant Reformation. Eventually baptism was labeled a "work," and because no one is saved by works, baptism cannot be a part of conversion. The Bible never calls baptism a "work," but it does command it. Any understanding of grace and faith that rules out the necessity of obedience is simply not biblical. No one can be right with God without being committed to obedience to the Lord.

Returning to the book of Acts, the example of Saul of Tarsus should help us in concluding that the sinner's prayer is not the way to salvation. According to Acts 9:1-18, Saul was blinded by his vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was led into Damascus to await further instructions. The reluctant instructor was Ananias, who was told where he would find Saul, and that he was praying (Acts 9:11). What do you suppose he was praying for during the three days prior to Ananias' coming? A good guess would be salvation! When Ananias arrived and laid his hands on Saul, he received his sight. Ananias said, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (22:16). Surely if anyone could be saved through prayer, Saul would have been saved before Ananias ever arrived, and his sins would have already been washed away. Saul's example of praying about his standing before God is a noble example and one that we should encourage, but it is not how he washed away his sins.

The sinner's prayer is not the way to salvation: It is simply the wrong answer to the right question. When sincere people are asking, "What must I do to be saved?" let's continue to point them to what the Scriptures say: "Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name."

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