

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## *Editorial*

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

***"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"***

This is the time of the year when the word "Happy" is used by almost all people everywhere! All wish to be happy. No one like pain and sorrow. Yet the fact of life is that the world is full of pain and sorrow. Turn on the radio or the T.V., and what do we hear and watch, or read in the newspapers? People whom God made in the beginning, in His own image and after His own likeness (Genesis 1:26,27), are killing and destroying one another. Unlike God, Who 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). Then there are diseases, all kinds of accidents, all kinds of evilness and wickedness which causes all men everywhere to suffer in different ways. God loves man. Man hates man. God wants to save man, but man destroys other humans like himself. God is love; He is not causing any man to suffer in any manner. Sin is the cause of all suffering. Whether it is our own sin that causes us to suffer or the sins of others that bring sufferings to us, because we are a part of humanity. In fact, while we wish to be happy, the reality is that we all live in the shadow of pain and sorrow and death every minute of the day! None of us is immuned!

Job, in the long ago, was absolutely right when he wrote: "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow

and does not continue." (Job. 14:1 & 2).

While sin is the source of all unhappiness on the earth, God of heaven is the source of true happiness. To make man happy He came down on earth from heaven in Jesus Christ, His Son. Christ, therefore, said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:31). Sin is the cause of all pain, sorrow and death and hell. Jesus Christ, through His death for the sinners on the cross, by the will of God, is the propitiation for the sins of the world. (1 John 4:10). Romans 6:23 in the Bible reads "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The good news is: God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8). No, Christ, just didn't die. But, HE DIED FOR US! This is the good news, the gospel. Sure, we all wish to be happy on this earth. But there is no true and lasting happiness on this sinful earth. Jesus, therefore, promised before He left this earth: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3). What a joy it will be to live with God in heaven forever! "Thanks be to God", therefore, "for His indescribable gift." (2 Cor. 9:15). He has given us something so precious which we did not deserve, because He loves us. Let this cause us to be happy today and always more than anything else.

## **Who Can Pray?**

**J.C. CHOATE**

Most of us know the importance of prayer, the need for prayer in our lives. We pray because there is Someone greater than we are, Someone who can help us in time of need. But who can pray? All can pray, of course, but the question is, who will the Lord hear? Does He hear everyone? Will He hear all regardless of who they are and what they do? Let's go to the Bible for the answer.

We are told that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23). That means that all of us are sinners, even

though we may have obeyed the Lord to become His children. The difference here is whether we are His children or not. Christ says that one must believe and be baptized to be saved. (Mark 16:16) Peter and the Apostles taught that one must repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38). When one does these things sincerely, the Lord saves that person, or forgives him of his sins, and adds him to His church. (Acts 2:47). Paul says, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26,27).

Now, let's go back to the question, Whose prayers does God hear? Does He hear everyone, or only those who belong to Him, those who are saved, and who are in Christ? If God hears everyone, both the Christian and the non-Christian, what is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian? Surely God would hear His children before He would hear those who are not His children.

We are told that Jesus healed a blind man. On being questioned about the miracle, the man who had been healed said, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." (John 9:31). The Lord Himself did not contradict this statement, and neither did the scripture deny it. This means, then, that God does not hear or answer the prayers of those who are not His children. Rather, He hears and answers the prayers of those who belong to him. Further, He has promised to hear only those of His children who pray according to His will. (1 John 5:14,15).

It is only natural that when one finds himself in great difficulty or need, he will call upon God through prayer. But that does not mean that the Lord will answer his prayer. The scriptures do not teach what is called "the sinner's prayer". Nowhere do the scriptures say that the sinner can be saved through prayer only. Neither does it teach that the Lord will answer any prayer of the non-Christian.

Do you believe in prayer? Do you want God to hear your prayers? Then you need to learn the truth and obey the Lord, that you might be saved. Then, and only then, can you have the assurance that you have a relationship with God-God being your Father, and you being His son-and that you have access to the Father through prayer.

# ***Get a Divorce Before Your Marriage***

**FRANCIS DAVID**

The Pharisees asked a question, testing Him, and saying to Him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And He answered and said to them, "have you not read that He who made them at the beginning, made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and two shall become one flesh." So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate." As we read further Jesus said, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Matt. 19:3-6&9). The only ground which we see here for the divorce is adultery. Jesus has not given or told them any other ground for divorce.

What we see today, that there are couples who want to take divorce just for any petty reason. When they were thinking about marriage they did not care to investigate the problems with their partners. You might wonder that how a person can get a divorce before his or her marriage. A lot of people choose their life partner while they are engage in the friendship. We must choose our friends carefully because they are influencing our lives. Sometimes, precious lives have been ruined because of the wrong friendship. The Bible says, "Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (I Cor. 15:33). We must be watchful about the kind of friendship we keep. In Proverb 4:14-15, the wise man tells us, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on." Do you have someone in mind that you want to make your life partner? What kind of person he or she is? If that person is not the kind that you want then it is better to take divorce from him and don't take a step to make him your life partner. It would be better to get a divorce before you buy the wedding ring or make some other arrangements.

The best thing would be for Christian boys and girls to get

marry with the member of the church. There are occasions that sometimes even a marriage between Christians have problems but most of the time it would be much better and wise thing to do. If you see that the person you want to marry is not having good morals, and if you have any doubts on his or her character, it would be better to take divorce before it is to late. What about the person who smokes and drinks? If you want that your life partner should be a non-smoker and non-drinker then you need to think about it and take a divorce now. If you see the person you want to marry has bad attitude and he seems to be quarrelsome then you must take a step to get the divorce from him. After your marriage you wouldn't be able to take a divorce from him on scriptural ground. So it is wise and advisable to take a right step now.

What do you think, can you spend rest of your life with a person you are going to marry? It would be better if you check before you tie the knot of your marriage. Don't rush, but be wise and think about it seriously. Get married with a person whom you can trust and depend.

When you are engaged in a friendship and are trying to develop a relationship which will lead to your marriage then think before you take a decision. If you are serious about your marriage then make a commitment that nothing will separate you. You will not think about divorce just for petty matters. Better take precautions now, when you are thinking to make someone your life partner.

## ***No Christianity Without Self-Control***

**CHARLES BOX**

Self control is a vital part of the Christian life. Temperance or self-control must be added to the foundation of faith. "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness." (2 Pet. 1:5-6.) Those who have been buried with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-4) must

not allow evil to again become their master. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." (Rom. 6:12-13.) Self-control is that which makes it possible for man to fulfill his responsibility for what he does in his body.

### **WHAT IS SELF-CONTROL?**

Paul wanted the brethren at Rome, and also every Christian, to understand the importance of self-control so he again stated its importance in the words of Romans 8:13. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Self-control is that ability to discipline or control our life under Jesus Christ as Lord. Self-control is gained through prayer, knowledge and an exercise of the Christian faith. Christians must develop the wisdom to discern between good and evil and the strength to choose good. "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:14.)

### **HOW IS SELF-CONTROL ATTAINED?**

The decision to put aside or crucify our own desires is attained through daily following the Lord. "Then He said to them all, if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Lk. 9:23.) This self-control grows out of crucifying the flesh. "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal. 5:24.) This giving up sinful practices and bringing oneself under control to Christ could only be called a crucifixion. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) Every Christian should be motivated to self-control by our personal responsibility and accountability at judgment. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10.)

## **WHEN SELF-CONTROL IS ABSENT**

When self-control is absent Eve will look at the forbidden fruit and take it. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate." (Gen. 3:6.) A lack of self-control caused Achan to take silver and gold from Jericho. "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." (Josh. 7:21.) It was a lack of self-control which led to David lusting after the beautiful Bathsheba and committing sin with her. "Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house." (2 Sam. 11:2-4.) A lack of self-control always leads to spiritual hurt.

## **WHEN SELF-CONTROL IS PRACTICED**

Paul was a great servant of God as a result of self-control. "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:27.) Joseph avoided being a fornicator with Potipher's wife through self-control. "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, Lie with me. But he refused and said to his master's wife, look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:7-9.) When self-control is present men possess one of the qualities necessary for leadership in the church of our Lord. "But hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled." (Tit. 1:8.)

Practicing self-control always blesses you and those touched by your life.

### **WHERE CHRISTIANS MUST PRACTICE SELF-CONTROL**

Self-control must be practiced in good and right things: (1) eating, (2) pleasure, (3) work, and (4) sleep. Self-control must be practiced as Christians completely abstain from: (1) fornication, (2) lying, (3) gambling, (4) drunkenness, and (5) stealing. Christians must control their temper. "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly." (Prov. 14:29.) The tongue must also be controlled by Christians. "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless." (Jas. 1:26.)

Self-control must be practiced because it is part of the fruit of the spirit. (Gal. 5:23.) It is also one of the Christian graces. (2 Pet. 1:5-8.) No one will receive that abundant entrance who does not practice self-control. (2 Pet. 1:11.) Self-control results from bringing our thoughts into captivity to Christ. "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5.) Do you have self under control?

## ***Observing All Things***

**KEVIN CAULEY**

In Matthew 28:18-20, we have these words: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."

The universality of this passage of scripture cannot be denied. Jesus begins with stating that "all authority" has been given to him. Not some authority, not authority over religious things only, not authority over morality only, but ALL authority. The life



of the Christian is to be characterized as living under the authority of Christ. Indeed, that is the essence of what it means to make Jesus our Lord. This universal forever excludes the notion that one may be a Christian and still be a worldling.

What Jesus tells the disciples next is to make disciples of ALL the nations. Again, another universal command. Jesus didn't say, make disciples of the nations that would hear you. He didn't say not to worry about the nations that don't have Bibles. Jesus said ALL nations. Again, the collective obligation of Jesus' disciples is to spread the gospel to ALL nations. Not some, but all. This universal forever excludes the notion that one may be a Christian, yet believe that all of those who have not heard the gospel will somehow be "saved."

Jesus tells his followers how to make disciples. Baptizing them and teaching them. These words are, in the Greek language, participles. The action of the participles are carried out in the lead verb ("make disciples"). The inescapable conclusion is that one cannot be a disciple without having been taught and having been baptized. The description, however, of the things to be taught in this verse is indeed universal. Jesus said, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." It is incumbent upon us, as Christians, if we are going to respect the words of our Lord in the great commission, to teach those who would be Christians to observe ALL of the things that Jesus commanded. There can be no exceptions. This universal forever excludes the notion that we may observe some things that Jesus commanded, but other things we don't have to observe.

Now, I wish to point out a couple of distinctions here that we often fail to recognize in this passage. It doesn't say, "teaching them all things that I have commanded." Some mistakenly suggest that if we must make disciples by teaching, then we must teach them everything that Jesus commanded before they become Christians and that is simply impossible to do. But, it doesn't say that we are to teach everything that is commanded, but to teach them to observe everything that is commanded. That can be done relatively quickly, by letting those who would become Christians know that they are to faithfully hold to the commands of Jesus in their life, as they continue to learn those commands, and that whatever may come, they are to always observe those things.

Another thing that the passage does not say: it doesn't say

“teaching them to obey all things that I have commanded.” It says, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” This is a distinction upon which I wish to focus for the remainder of this article.

Now, before we even get started, I'm not suggesting that because Jesus didn't say that we have to “obey” that therefore we do not have to obey Jesus. Yes, we do have to obey if we want to be saved (Hebrews 5:9). However, there are some who ridicule the idea of obeying Jesus and say things such as “which commands are we supposed to obey?” And they point to things such as washing feet, the holy kiss, women wearing veils, and other things that indeed were commanded, yet obviously are not practiced today. Then these who so criticize very smugly conclude that there is something wrong with our hermeneutic because we do not obey these commands. I would like to point out the fallacy of this thinking.

Jesus said to “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The word “observe” is not the same as the word obey. I must admit that if Jesus had said, “Obey all things,” then it would be impossible for me to do such, namely, because some commands in the Bible are given to women, and I am not a woman; I am a man. It would be impossible for me to obey the command, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). I simply cannot obey that command, but I can OBSERVE that command. I can respect the fact that God desires wives to submit to their husbands. I can teach that fact of the gospel to others. I can expect out of Christian women for them to obey this command. I cannot directly obey that command, but I can observe that command.

Now, having said this, we often use the word “obey” in the sense of “observe.” That is, often times in our desire to be pleasing to the Lord and to submit to His will and not our own, we tell others that they must “obey the Lord,” “keep the commandments,” and etc. Now, if one were to take such things to the extreme literal of their interpretation, then one must obviously come to the conclusion that such things are impossible to do. However, if one understand by “keep the commandments” and “obey the Lord” and other similar imperative statements, that we are saying exactly what Jesus told us to do in the great commission, namely, “observe all things,” then there can be no criticism. For one does

not necessarily have to literally obey all things in order to observe all things.

Let me illustrate. For one to literally obey Jesus' command to wash one another's feet (John 13:14), then I would of necessity have to wash someone else's feet on a more or less regular basis. However, for me to observe this command, doesn't necessarily imply that I must wash another's feet. I may do that to observe this command, but I also may recognize that this example was one that Jesus took from the culture of the day, and that the lesson that Jesus was teaching was in regard to serving one another.

A second illustration is found in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 where Paul's directs women to wear a veil. The context clearly indicates this practice to be related to culture (verse 16). To literally obey in this context would mean that women would have to wear veils in the assembly today. However, to observe such, would not necessarily mean that we must do exactly what they do, but recognize the principle involved in this passage, namely, that women are to respect the authority of their husbands and whatever cultural practices indicate that respect.

This distinction between "obey" and "observe" really makes all of the difference in the world in understanding how we can literally obey some things that are within the scriptures (such as "This do in remembrance of me," 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25) whereas, we are not required to literally obey other things in the scripture (such as, "Salute one another with a holy kiss"). We are required to observe, but not necessarily, literally, obey. Understanding this preserves the integrity of the "Command, Example, Necessarily Inference" hermeneutic, because being obedient to commands becomes not so much literally obeying ALL commands, but without a doubt, observing ALL commands. "Obeying" examples, (examples can't really be "obeyed" per se, but followed) means observing those examples. "Obeying" implications (the term "necessary inference" isn't really correct, but implication is) means that we must observe the things that the scriptures imply. You can see, that one can definitely "observe" "commands, examples, and necessarily inferences" without being strictly, literally, obedient to them. So let's observe what our Lord commanded be done in Matthew 28:20, "teaching them to observe all things...."

# *For What Should a Sinner Pray?*

DILLARD THURMAN

As a young lad, I attended many "revivals" in which sinners were begged to come forward to a mourner's bench to pray for pardon. Having heard them plead for God to be reconciled to sinners, rather than sinners turning to obey God, I can easily see why many sincere folk turned away in frustration, believing that God no longer cared for them. But, friend, God has not taught sinners to pray! They are to first obey, and then, having become children of God, they can pray, *"Our Father in heaven."*

Even of old it was clearly taught, *"Behold, Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:1-2). Whom will God hear? *"We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and does his will, him he heareth"* (John 9:31): Before one is heard of God, and has his prayers answered, he must first become obedient to Him by doing His will.

But if a sinner should pray to God, as some claim, then for what should he pray? Just what is he taught to expect to receive from God in answer to his prayers?

## **Pray for God to Love Him?**

This would be very foolish, in view of what the Bible tells us of the love of God! *"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"* (John 3:16). In view of such a sacrifice, isn't it redundant to ask God to love us? *"But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). How can any religious teacher ask sinners to pray for God to love them, implying that He doesn't love them now?

## **Pray to be Accepted of God?**

When the apostle Peter came to Cornelius with God's plan of salvation, he said, *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him"* (Acts 10:34-35). Sinners do

not have to pray for God to accept them. Rather, they must come to where all are accepted of God: *"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"* (Eph. 1:6). It would be foolish to ask God to accept one who refuses to enter into Christ, where God's acceptance has been located! Until one has *"put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:27), he cannot expect God to accept him, for God has not so promised!

### **Pray for God to Become Willing to Save?**

Who set forth the idea that God has not always been willing to save? The gift of His Son, the revealed plan of pardon and all within it attests to God's willingness to save sinners. *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). God is always willing to save — but only on His terms, rather than on those that man may outline.

### **Pray for Christ to Love Us?**

Why, the Son of God has always reflected the Father's love for lost men! What more could we ask of Him? *"Greater" love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'* (John 15:13). His whole life on earth manifests His love for lost men. *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28). His promise dispels any doubt as to His great love: *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt. 11:28). Don't disparage the great love of Christ by teaching sinners to pray for Christ to love them!

### **Pray for the Gift of the Holy Spirit?**

This has been done so frequently! Sinners kneel at the altar, or prayer bench, and there they ask God to send them the Holy Spirit. But you will never find a picture of this in the New Testament church! The Holy Spirit figured prominently in the salvation of those you read about in the book of Acts. But in what way? Well, first, it was by the Holy Spirit that the apostles spoke forth the words of God. They spoke, *"As the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:4).

When those listeners were *"pricked in their hearts"* and asked, *"What shall we do?"* (Acts 2:36-37), then, *'Peter said unto them. Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name*

*of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Those people didn't pray for the Spirit to come. They obeyed the gospel terms of pardon, and the Spirit was then given to them, according to the Lord's promise. The apostle Paul wrote later, "And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit was never given to make one a child of God, but is given to all who become children of God.*

### **Pray for Salvation?**

Inspired men never told alien sinners to pray for salvation! In Acts 10, we find the prayer of Cornelius didn't save him, but he was commanded to send for Peter, "*Who will speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 11:14). And when Saul of Tarsus saw the Lord, he wasn't told to pray. Instead, the Lord said, "*Rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do*" (Acts 9:6). Then we read Saul's own account of how Ananias was sent to him, saying, "*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16). Ananias found Saul praying, and he stopped his prayer with the command to be baptized into Christ! Wouldn't it be great if these same words could be given today to thousands who "make decisions" in the religious meetings or Campaigns? Just tell them the same thing Ananias told Saul!

### **Pray for Freedom from Sin?**

God has provided freedom from sin, but not through prayer! "*Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life . . . Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness*" (Rom. 6:3-4, 16-18). The apostle Peter also wrote on this subject, "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth*" (1 Pet. 1:22). Freedom from sin comes from obedience to the terms which God

has given in the gospel of Jesus Christ, not by trying to use prayer to circumvent His requirements.

### **Pray for Pardon?**

God's promise has been made on this point: *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"* (Isa. 55:7). Since man sinned against God, it is for Him to dictate the terms of pardon. He says man must turn back to Him, but it must be in obedience, rather than in vain prayer. The Lord Jesus promised, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). One who refuses this plan of pardon obtains nothing by prayer. Jesus asks, *"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46). He asks for obedience, not empty prayers.

### **Pray for God's Grace?**

This has long been a favorite petition at many prayer benches. But what has God said on the subject? *"For 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).

Why pray for the grace of God to come to us in some other way when it has been so abundantly given through the gospel? And isn't it foolish to pray for grace while refusing the teaching which grace has given? God's grace must be appropriated by faith, *"Which works by love"* (Eph. 2:8; Gal. 5:6). Do you have sufficient faith to obey the teaching of grace? If not, then how can you have faith enough to be effectual in prayer?!

### **Pray for Reconciliation?**

Sure, many people have been taught that they should pray for God to be reconciled to them. But inspired men have never taught that! Paul said, *"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by*

*us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God"* (2 Cor. 5:17-20). Don't pray for God to be reconciled to you, but become reconciled to God by accepting His terms of reconciliation.

### **Pray for Light? Faith? Saving Power?**

Again we turn to the word of the Lord. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, And light unto my path"* (Psa. 119:105). That light has been given to all who will walk within it. *"So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Rom. 10:17). Faith is developed by accepting the word of God as true and authoritative, not by prayer. *"The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eyes"* (Psa. 19:7-8). The sinner has only to accept the will of God in obedience to be changed (converted) to Him. *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?"* (Rom. 1:16). Don't pray for saving power while rejecting that which God has given to save you!

### **Now for a Brief Summary**

It does not appear logical for one to call on *"Our Father which art in heaven"* until he has entered into the family of God. Therefore, the sinner must hear the gospel of Christ and believe it. This faith in God, and in His Son Jesus Christ, must then lead to repentance. Then, upon a statement of this faith, he can enter into Christ by being *"baptized into Christ"* (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 7:10; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Then, as a child of God, he has the great privilege of prayer - of being able to call God, *"Father."* And, being *"in Christ,"* he has *"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"* (Eph. 1:3). But don't try to ring "Exchange" before you have installed your telephone! First, be sure you have the proper connection in order that when you talk, God will hear!

## *Teach, Baptize And Teach*

**MIKE BENSON**

Not everybody in the first century wanted to hear what the apostle Paul had to say. Many, in fact, were in such opposition



to the gospel that they went out of their way to hinder its proclamation. Persecution, in its various forms, often followed Paul's evangelistic endeavors. For instance, when he and Barnabas preached in Antioch on their first missionary tour, Scripture says, "...The Jews...were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 14:45). Of course this antagonism didn't stop here; verbal opposition was followed by physical expulsion. "But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (Acts 14:50).

From Antioch, the two men made their way to Iconium, but once again they were met with strong resistance. "...The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. . . . But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled." (Acts 14:3,4-5).

When the pair started their work in Lystra, persecution took a decidedly brutal form. "Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (Acts 14:19). In his commentary to young Timothy, Paul recalled his experiences during those trying days. He spoke of, "Persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra-what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Tim. 3:11). Indeed, had it not been for the Lord's providential care, Paul would have perished at the hands of his Jewish antagonists.

Derbe was next on their mission route. Thankfully, the team was spared any difficulty there and their efforts proved fruitful (cf. Acts 20:4). But then, Paul and Barnabas made a curious "turnaround" and went right back to those very cities where they had encountered such intense opposition. Luke records, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch" (Acts 14:21). They what?! Returned?! The first time I read that sentence I had to stifle a laugh. Why would Paul and Barnabas deliberately retrace their steps in lieu of the hostile Jews and the painful

experiences they had faced in those three cities?! (Had they, simply pushed forward, in a week or so they could have arrived in Paul's home town of Tarsus. That would have certainly been a much safer and more pleasant environment for these missionaries).

The answer is found in the following verse. Don't miss it. "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22). Based on their reception in the aforementioned cities, Paul and Barnabas knew what their fellow saints would, no doubt, be facing. With that in mind, they went back for the purpose of enhancing the faith of those new converts. Despite the danger of further reprisal, the team went back to strengthen and exhort the disciples. The Greek word for strengthening means "to make firm". Likewise, the original word for exhorting means "to encourage" and was used of exhorting troops who were about to go into battle. Lenski comments:

"Beginners who have not been made firm as yet are in danger of falling away (cf. Matt. 13:20-21-mb). A good beginning is a great achievement, but a good continuation is its normal and essential result. Conversion must pass on to preservation."

He's correct. If new Christians are to mature in the faith and endure the inherit hardships associated with kingdom living, they **MUST** continue to receive steady, sound, personal instruction. Paul knew this and willingly faced the possibility of bodily harm in the interest of spiritual development.

But did you notice the apostolic methodology? Paul and Barnabas didn't simply teach and baptize. They taught, baptized and then taught again (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17a; 2 Tim. 2:2). If that sounds vaguely familiar, it's because that was the Lord's commission (Matt. 28:19-20). The team recognized that to be effective personal workers, they couldn't simply "dunk" disciples and then desert them for new prospects. They couldn't just "love 'em and leave 'em." They had to strengthen and exhort those saints through a prolonged and methodical study of the Word.

It has been my observation over the years that many times we communicate, at least by our actions, that we believe in only the first two elements of the Great Commission—(1) teach and (2) baptize. For instance, a mission team went on a two-week

"island hopping" tour along the coast of another country. As the men arrived at each new island, they would immediately set up personal Bible studies and often within hours immersion would follow. This process was repeated on a daily basis. When the workers returned to their home congregation, they reported that there had been "x" number of baptisms. But a year later, when these men returned to the same islands in order to check on the progress of those whom they had brought to Christ during their initial campaign, they discovered that no church existed. No "babes in the faith" could be located. "Why not?" you ask. The answer is obvious. These well-intending brethren had only carried out the first two elements of the gospel. They had taught and baptized, but they had left out the last, but essential part of the discipling process. They didn't continue to teach afterwards. They failed to strengthen and exhort. Not surprisingly, without any means of biblical follow-up, all of the new converts fell away and that once proud "x" was now a "o".

Beloved, when individuals are baptized, our work has just begun. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Jesus said it's three steps, not two. Let's go teach-again!

## **Great Lessons From The Parable Of The Prodigal Son**

**CLIFFORD DIXON**

The account of this parable is in Luke 15:11-32, which we ask you to please read in your Bible. This parable teaches the same great principle that is taught in the lost coin and the lost sheep parables (which precede it): that rejoicing goes on in heaven when a sinner repents. This parable of the prodigal son touches the hearts of all who read it, and gives hope to the sinner -no matter how far down in sin he goes. It also rebukes the hard-hearted 'elder brother.'

Let us notice some of the great 'side lessons' we can learn

from this narrative.

1. We all have blessings which we have not earned, which are bestowed on us by loving parents, friends, and Almighty God. Happy is the child whose parents leave an inheritance that is his! But many children do not appreciate the sacrifices others have undergone for their benefit! Especially is this true of the blessings of God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Health, strength, intelligence, ability to earn a living, home, family, and friends are just some of the great blessings God has blessed us with!

Beyond this he has provided that perfect gift—Jesus Christ. In James 1:18 we read, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." In I Peter 1:18-21 we read, "Forasmuch as ye know ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God."

In this parable, the father gave the son the "portion of goods" due him; and our heavenly Father freely bestows upon us abundant blessings—and then desires that we be cleansed in the blood of Christ so that the broken fellowship between himself and mankind can be restored.

2. Sin is a "far country" from God. The son "gathered all together" and went into "a far country" where he "wasted his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15:13). This represents a person's going into sin, depicting that such an one is: (A) Separated from God, so that God will not even "hear" him (Isaiah 59:1-2). (B) His prayers are an abomination to God because he has turned away his ear from God's law (Proverbs 28:9). (C) The face of the Lord is against him (I Peter 3:12). And, (D) he is without God, and without hope in the world (Ephesians 2:11-12). In this far country of sin, one is "wasting" his life, his talents, his intelligence, his money, his health, and his soul by sinful living.

There is nothing truly "good" about a life of sin. We see it glorified by this world, but if one just comes to his senses, he will realize that there is nothing good about it. All "good" comes from God (James 1:17), and the only good life to live is the life that God has laid out for us in his instruction-book, the Bible.

3. Before a person can get out of that far country he must "come to" his senses. When the prodigal son "came to himself" he began to talk to himself about his awful condition and what improvements he could make. He said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:17). There is a better way than living in sin, and there is a way to the Father (John 14:6). This son made a resolution, and carried it out. His resolution was, "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19).

The next verse says, "And he arose, and came to his father." Some make good resolutions but never do anything about them. Some say, "I will wait until I get my life straightened out, then I will come to God." These people need to realize that to MAKE a good resolution is worth nothing without rising up and going to the Father. Every day we wait to make commitment to God is another step closer to eternity without God and without hope!

4. The father saw him coming from "a great way off"—or, in other words, the father was looking and longing for his return. God is long-suffering and forbearing to us because he wants his wayward children to come to repentance. Paul asked the Jews, "Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

When the father saw this son coming, he ran to him and fell upon his neck, and kissed him. God has such an attitude toward the sinner who come to repentance! The son began his confession—but the father interrupted him to put the best robe on him, and a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and provided a feast with much merry-making going on in that home (Luke 15:20-24). Fellowship was restored! And the past was forgotten! God promises us today that whosoever will, can come and take of the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17). Also: when we come

to God through Jesus Christ he will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and iniquities he will remember no more (Hebrews 8:12).

God is ever looking for you, sinner friend, to come to him. He is ever ready to receive you with open arms. Won't you come to yourself, and come to God today? The plan of salvation is simple enough to understand as found in Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. The plan for the erring child of God is clear enough as found in Acts 8:22 and James 5:16. You need to come to yourself and make the proper resolutions, then follow through—and it will make you so happy—as well as everyone in heaven happy!

5. Since God cares for lost souls and has, provided for their salvation through the blood of Christ, all Christians should have a deep concern for lost souls! We should be doing our part to bring such to the Savior. The unconcern, jealousy, and anger of the 'elder brother' in this parable, about the return of his erring brother, should never be the attitude of Christians. As Paul, we should use all available means to "win some" to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). We should also realize that there is hope for everyone who can be touched and tendered by the gospel, and thereby be made sorry for his sins.

## ***The Bible And Homosexuality***

**YARBROUGH LEIGH**

Increasingly, pressure is exerted upon politicians serving in high levels of legislation and law enforcement to legitimize homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle for all citizens, enjoying the full protection of law, and making it illegal to discriminate against homosexual individuals in any way whatsoever.

In the light of all this, it may be of interest to see what the Bible has to say about this practice. This, we shall attempt in this article.

The word "sodomy," or "sodomite(s)" stems from the wicked practice of homosexuality by the people of Sodom. Because of the promises God had given to Abraham, and because Abraham's nephew, Lot, had made his home in Sodom, God revealed to

Abraham the destruction planned for Sodom. "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know" (Genesis 18:20-21). After agreeing with Abraham, for Lot's sake, that if as many as ten righteous should be found there, the city would be spared, the divine representatives went to Sodom, to Lot's house, to warn him to take his family and flee. And what did they learn of the men of Sodom? They learned that the men of Sodom were not only homosexuals, they were also homosexual rapists, vicious and cruel! "The men of Sodom compassed the house round -young and old, all—from every quarter: they called to Lot, Where are the men which came to thee this night? Bring them out to us that we may know" (i.e., have carnal knowledge, or sexual knowledge, of them) "them?" (Genesis 19:4-5). So great was this crime, both against God and against nature, that Lot offered the unthinkable substitution of his own two virgin daughters (see Genesis 19:7-9). Therefore, from ancient Biblical times, the sins of anal sex, oral sex, and bestiality have been termed, euphemistically, "sodomy." Those who practice such have been termed "sodomites."

And what did the Old Testament have to say of such? The case of the people of Sodom, and God's destruction of both Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the cities of the plain, because of it, will suffice for the time before the giving of the law at Sinai.

The law of Moses condemns these sins in both men and women. Leviticus 18:22-25 reveals that these were among the crimes which had characterized the people of the land of Caanan before it was given to Israel. God said, "Therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants." Leviticus 20:13, 15-16 reveal that God decreed the punishment of death to both men and women who were guilty of these sins. I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46 and II Kings 23:7 all reveal the urgency with which God viewed the need to rid the land of all Sodomites.

The New Testament is just as clear in its condemnation of such practices. "For this cause God gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies

between themselves." For this cause God gave them up to vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the man, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which is meet" (Romans 1:24, 26-27). Again, the same inspired apostle wrote: "Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:9-10). Without squeamishness, embarrassment or restraint, both the Old Testament and the New Testament revelations of God's will to his people leave no doubt that sexuality was intended of God in the human race to be confined to the marriage relationship, and even in that sacred union, is to be practiced within the bounds of nature and decency. The writer of Hebrews noted: "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

This same revelation warns us, as Christians, that we "be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Brethren and friends, sadly, we are daily bombarded through all the public media with enticements to throw off all restraints of modesty and decency and moral uprightness—even to the point of being counted bigoted and Pharisaic if we teach Bible principles of righteousness pertaining to such things.

Let us always stand for what is right—right both Biblically and in keeping with nature itself. Let us never be afraid to be ashamed, and ashamed to be afraid, to hold to what is right!! Let us never encourage, either by word or vote, any who would rule over us who believe in, practice, or lend encouragement to, such views or practices. Let us ever make our influence known on the side of godliness and truth, both in word and in our own lives!

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