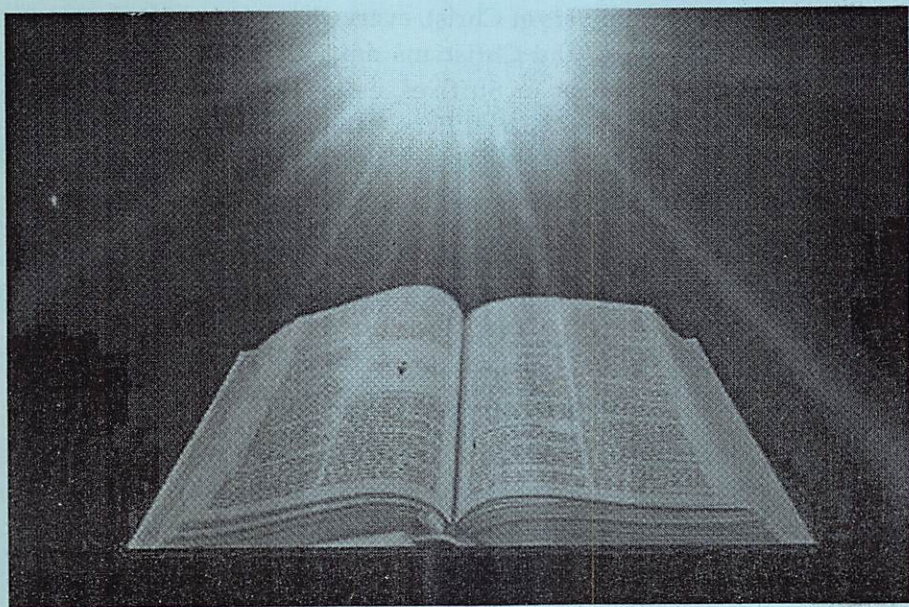


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THE BIBLE TEACHER



Our Plea

Let the Truth Prevail

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18; Col. 1:18). That congregations of the one church of the Bible everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the Church. (1 Corinthians 1:10; John 20:20, 21).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must believe in Christ, repent of wrong, confess Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands to be saved are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, and Christians only, after His name alone, with no Prefixes or Suffixes, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men which contain doctrines and commandments of men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

There Is Such A Thing As Blind And Misguided Zeal

THE APOSTLE PAUL, speaking about Israel, in his epistle to the Romans, said his heart's desire and his prayer to God was that they may be saved, but then he added, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." (Romans 10:2). They were not consciously rebellious to God; in fact, they manifested an apparent zeal for God in their pursuit of the righteousness which they believed would come to them by obeying the law of Moses. (Romans 9:31, 32). However, they were not enlightened concerning the righteousness which God grants to all who will accept it in faith, Romans 4:16, even the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ. (Philippians 3:9, KJV). It was their ignorance of the righteousness that comes from God which prompted them to continue in their vain efforts to obtain their own righteousness through their own religious and good works. They were not deliberately resisting God's will; they just did not understand what His will truly was. While it was commendable though that they had a zeal for God, but zeal without knowledge could be dangerous. It's like someone wanting to fly an airplane, without any knowledge of flying airplane. That would destroy both the airplane and the flyer. There is such a thing as a blind and misguided zeal.



In the religious world today there is a great deal said about the Holy Spirit; especially about the feeling many have concerning a

direct leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Many believe that the Holy Spirit is working today, as He did in the past when the Scriptures were being written, directly and miraculously. This concept which so many have today concerning the Holy Spirit causes them to have a tremendous enthusiasm and zeal. Certainly, this is a response based upon their emotions rather than the revelation, as this zeal is without the knowledge of the written revelation of the Holy Spirit, as is evident in their preaching of contradictory and conflicting doctrines, which has produced confusion and division in the religion of Christ. They all claim to be led by the Spirit of God, but believe and teach differently, and are not consistent or in harmony with what the Spirit actually teaches through the Scripture. Is God the author of confusion? (1 Corinthians 14:33).

The point is the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit are no longer available to man today. The Holy Spirit works today by and through the written revelation of God's word, the Bible, and not directly or independently of the written word. "All Scripture" says 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." There was a time in history when men did not have the Scriptures, God's instruction to man, in its written form as we have the Bible today through which God speaks to all men. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, "God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." (Hebrews 1:1,2). The Son, Christ, while He was on earth, had chosen twelve, men to be His spokespersons. To whom He had promised that after He would go back to the Father, he would send upon them the Holy Spirit, who would guide them into all truth, and teach them all truth and would remind them everything He had taught them while He was with them on earth. (John 14:25-26; John 16:12-13). This promise of Christ was fulfilled on the Jewish day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ from the dead. (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to enable them to speak in languages they had never learned (Acts 2:6-11); to give them power to perform miracles (Acts 2:43); to confirm the word and to make believers (Mark 16:19-20). This was during the time before the New Testament had been given in its written form. Once it was completed, however, then there was no longer any need for miraculous works and revelation. So they ceased. That was to happen according to 1 Corinthians 13: 8-10, when the perfect would have come, that is, the perfect will of God as we have it

today in the New Testament of the Bible, and James 1:25 describes it as the perfect law of liberty. We are, therefore, living in an age when God speaks to us by His Son Jesus Christ, through His New Testament. (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1). According to Romans 10:17 "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain the revealed will of God for mankind. The whole Bible was written by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 2:21). God gave the Old Testament law through Moses to His chosen people Israel, who lived before Christ's death on the cross. After His death and resurrection and ascension to heaven, the New Testament of the Bible was written, which is God's law for us under which we live today.

Surely no one can deny the essentiality of zeal in the life of the child of God. It is this quality that should move us forward with great energy and eagerness to do the will of God. But it is not enough to realize that we should be zealous, something must produce that zeal and fuel the fires of fervency in our daily walk with God, and that is the knowledge of God's word, not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads God's children today by the written word of God in the Bible, and not separately, or apart, independently of the written word. Thus it is most important that people read and study their Bible, meditate and learn to gain knowledge of the word of God, His will, and live by it. There are many who are zealously preaching Christ today and are claiming that the Lord is performing many miracles through them. They are on Television, on radio, in large assemblies of people everywhere. They are not less zealous and sincere in their claims as those whom Christ described in the passage of Matthew 7:22-23 by saying, "Many will say to Me in the last day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in your names, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." What was the problem? They did everything in their zeal, without realizing what the will of the Lord is. Many will diligently, selflessly and zealously serve the Lord, only to hear the Lord say, on the day of judgment, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." What is lawlessness? That which is not done in accordance with the law, in this case the law of Christ, the New Testament. This warning of Christ should stop every person short and suddenly till he is sure beyond all possibility of deception that he truly is doing God's will; and to do God's will one must first learn His will.



THE ALIEN SINNER

J.C. Choate

THE ALIEN SINNER IS that person who has reached the age of accountability but has not yet obeyed his creator. The word alien itself means strange, foreign; one who belongs to another country or kingdom. Thus, those who have not obeyed the gospel of God are citizens of Satan's kingdom, and consequently, are aliens as far as the Lord is concerned.

All people, whether considered good or bad, are classified as aliens until they accept the terms which make them citizens of the kingdom of God. The conditions which transfer one from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light are the same conditions that saves one from his alien or foreign sins. (Col. 1:13,14).

When one enters the world he is without sin altogether, and should he die in such a state he would go home to be with God. (Matt. 18:3). However, as a child grows and develops he reaches the period of his life which is commonly called the age of accountability. That is, he knows right from wrong. Some reach this age sooner than others, depending upon the teaching which they have received, as well as other things. But if an individual is normal, has a good mind, he is going to grow up to know right from wrong. Hence, upon reaching such an age he automatically becomes a sinner, an alien sinner. Of such people Paul has said, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23).

Now if all have sinned then it stands to reason that all stand in need of a saviour. Thus, God sent his Son into the world to save the lost. (John 3:16). Yes, Christ died on the cross to save the sinner. We read: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". (Rom. 5:8). Without Christ man would surely die in his, sin, but with Christ there is hope. Of course, there are those who still die in their sin, but it is not the Lord's fault, but rather their own. God has provided salvation for all who want it.

Briefly now consider the conditions or terms which one must meet in order to become a citizen of the Lord's kingdom. And keep in mind that one must meet the Lord's conditions: man is not at liberty to draw up his own terms. The kingdom belongs to Christ,

and therefore, he has a right to say who can enter and who cannot; and it all depends on a number of factors. But as we continue, please note that the alien sinner must first of all believe in God. The scripture reads: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. 11:6). After faith one must repent of all his sins, for Paul has said: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30). Then after scripturally believing and repenting one must confess with the mouth that Christ is the Son of God. Listen again to Paul: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10).

One is still not in the kingdom even though he believes, has repented, and has confessed Christ, for now he must be baptized to wash away his sins. The Lord himself tells us, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk. 16:16). But now consider this verse of scripture: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus, one must obey the gospel in order to enter the body of Christ. But the body of Christ is the church of Christ and the church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ. (Eph. 1:22, 23; Matt. 16:18,19). My friend, God's way is the only way.

Upon entering the church or kingdom, one is no longer counted as an alien sinner but rather a citizen of the kingdom of God, a child of the most high God. Furthermore, as a citizen of God's domain he is entitled to all of the privileges and blessings of the kingdom. As a child of God he is not only saved, but if he will remain a true and loyal citizen one day he will inherit that upper and better home, to live and dwell with God forever.

WHO HAS THE GREATEST FAITH?

Jerry Bates

AMONG THOSE YOU KNOW, whose faith is the strongest and greatest? Most people would probably immediately say that surely it would be the preacher, elders, or deacons. Many people especially want the preacher to pray for them, as if his prayer is somehow more powerful or more effective than the prayer of someone else.

Hopefully, the faith of the men mentioned is strong; however, there is no assurance that their faith is any stronger than the faith of others. In fact, as we look at the Bible, we find that, oftentimes, the ones with the strongest faith are the ones we least expect.

For example, three times Jesus told a group that their faith was "little" or weak. On two of the occasions, those with little faith were the twelve disciples (Matthew 8:23-27; 16:5-12). The other example was Peter when he was walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-36). This would surprise many people, because these are the very ones who should have had great faith. After all, they accompanied Jesus and learned from Him daily, seeing many great miracles. Yet, their faith did not grow accordingly.

On the other hand, three times Jesus particularly praised some people for their faith. One example is in Luke 7:1-10 when a Roman centurion came to Jesus asking that He heal his son. This man confessed that he was not worthy to even approach Jesus, much less for Him to enter his home. Jesus said the He had not found so great a faith, even in Israel (Luke 7:9).

Another example is recorded in Mark 5:25-34. In this case a poor, sick, Jewish woman firmly believed that Jesus could heal her of a disease so severe that no doctors could cure or even help. She believed so strongly in the power of Jesus that she thought she would be healed simply by touching His clothes as He walked by. Jesus commented that her faith made her whole (Mark 5:34). While it is true that Jesus did not specifically say that she had *great* faith, I think we would all agree that it is implied in that statement.

The third example is found in Matthew 15:21-28. This concerns the daughter of a Canaanite woman who was possessed with demons. She came to Jesus, and at first He seemingly ignored and ridiculed her. However, she persevered and received the blessing that she desired from Him. At the last, Jesus said, "O woman, great is your faith!"

Notice that these examples of "great" faith are comprised of a Canaanite woman, a Roman centurion, and a poor, sick, Jewish woman. Surely, these would not be the obvious choices for having great faith.

What can we learn by comparing these two groups? One lesson is that *mere association does not guarantee a strong faith*. The ones with weak faith were the disciples, those who were closer to Jesus than anyone. I must never assume that my faith is strong simply because I have been a Christian a long time. The person with the greatest faith in a congregation possibly might be the

comparatively new Christian or the one I least expect.

A second lesson is that *great faith involves great humility*. The centurion did not feel worthy to even approach Jesus. The Samaritan woman was willing to confess that she was a dog in the eyes of Jesus. The sick woman only wanted to touch Jesus' clothes. In contrast, the disciples often squabbled over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God.

All great servants of God were humble people. Consider, for example, John the Baptist. Jesus said concerning him. *"Assuredly I say to you, Among those born of woman there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist"* (Matthew 11:11). Those are high and noble words of praise. Yet, later, John preached that Jesus *"...is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose"* (John 1:27). These are truly humble words, especially from someone so great.

A final lesson we can learn, and possibly the most important, is that great faith entails complete trust in Jesus. Complete trust means that we continue to obey Him, regardless of the obstacles that may surround us. The disciples were frequently guilty of looking at this world. Peter was able to walk on the water until he took his eyes off Jesus and started looking at the water. He lost his complete trust in Jesus. Jesus assures us that God can and will take care of us. Do we really believe it? If we don't, our faith is weak (Matthew 6:30).

We must also trust Jesus in the face of discouragement. All of us often have such times. Great faith will see you through seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The woman with an issue of blood found a way through a huge multitude to get to a place where she could touch the hem of Jesus' garments. I wonder how many other people might have given up. because the crowd was so huge.

The Gentile woman persevered, even when it might have seemed as if Jesus was going to ignore her simply because she was not a Jew.

She could have easily been offended at Jesus, but if so, she would never have received a great blessing. I'm sure you have heard or seen, as I have, several instances when people have quit attending worship services because someone offended them. Usually, it seems to others to be a relatively minor offense, nevertheless, it becomes major to them. By cutting themselves off from their relationship with the body of Christ, they also cut themselves off from many great blessings, primarily, an eternal home in heaven. The ones with great faith would not quit God and His Family, and neither should we. No amount of discouraging words

or actions from others should ever deter us from our goal of being faithful to Christ.

How strong is your faith? You can also be one with great faith. May you grow stronger, in spite of every obstacle (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

FOUL LANGUAGE

Louis Rushmor

APPARENTLY EVERY LANGUAGE HAS THEM—bad words! God, through the apostle Paul, in Colossians 3:8 regulates the use of foul language—prohibiting the children of God from using such in their conversations. *“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth”* (NKJV emphasis added). Other translations read “filthy communication” (KJV), “shameful speaking” (ASV), “obscene talk” (ESV), “abusive speech” (NASV), “foul talk” (RSV) or “filthy talk” (YLT). The Greek word *xiischrologia* appearing as “filthy language” (NKJV) in Colossians 3:8 is a compound word meaning “vile or base conversation or words”; it appears only in that verse of Scripture.

Ephesians 4:29 provides similar instruction. *“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers”* (NKJV)—“corrupt communication” (KJV), “corrupt speech” (ASV), “unwholesome talk” (N1V), “evil talk” (RSV) or “corrupt word” (YLT). The Greek word *sapros*, translated “corrupt” (NKJV) means “rotten or worthless” and comes from another, related word that means “to putrefy.” Seven times *sapros* is translated “corrupt” and one time “bad” in the King James Version of the Bible.

Ephesians 5:4 continues with this type of admonition regarding bad words. *“Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks”* (NKJV emphasis added). The Greek word *aischrotes* for “filthiness” means “shamefulness or obscenity” and only appears here in the New Testament.

Notice from the passages already cited that foul language is only one type of sinful words that may come forth from one’s mouth. Angry, hateful speech, likewise, is condemned (Colossians 3:8), as well as is “foolish talking” and “coarse jesting” (Ephesians 5:4). Generally, James 3:2-12 identifies the human tongue or speech as often faulty or sinful. Furthermore, it has always been a grievous

sin to take God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

How should we assess the foregoing information? Overall, especially the Christian's language ought to be free from speech that lacks moral or sexual restraint, devoid of obscenities and cussing or cursing—swear words, not characterized by crude or base jokes, and not regarded as senseless, foolish or silly words.

Another category of bad words is the euphemism. This is when more agreeable words or sounds are substituted in place of vulgar language, but which are intended to convey the same offensive message. For instance, when using the name of God in vain, one might, say "Gad" instead of "God" or say "Geez" instead of "Jesus." When swearing, one rhymes the sound of foul words, using non-words.

There are several circumstances in which one may find himself or herself that promote the use of foul language. These are situations into which the child of God ought not to voluntarily place himself or herself. (Both sexes are employed in this article because the use of foul language is not a sin limited exclusively to one gender.) Two of the biggest temptations to pervert one's speech are: (1) Evil companionships or bad company can corrupt our mouths (1 Corinthians 15:33). (2) Use of drugs or alcohol often leads to additional sins, including foul language.

Anyone who will not censor himself or herself. Jesus Christ will condemn in the great Judgment. *"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matthew 12:36,37 NKJV). Obviously, then, one's speech is a serious matter since: it will affect where he or she lives in eternity.

Remember

- "...put off all these... blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8).
- "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth..." (Ephesians 4:29).
- "neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting..." (Ephesians 5:4).
- "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly

poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:6-10).

- "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).
- "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment, For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37).

True Worshipers

Randall Casebnan

AT JACOB'S WELL, Jesus gives us insight into what God **expects as we worship** Him. Using this well-known narrative, let's examine what constitutes acceptable worship.

• **God desires to be worshiped.** God seeks those who will worship Him. Did you catch it? God **SEEKS**. God is not just sitting around with His arms folded, drumming His fingers, hoping that we will find Him and come to worship Him. God has intervened in human history:

He sent His Son to save us.

He gave us His Word so that we can know Him and what pleases Him in acceptable worship.

He provides us opportunities to worship and serve Him.

God continually pursues people. Will God run? Read the narrative of the prodigal once more.

• **Worship must be in SPIRIT.** Worship has more to do with what **GOD is like** than with *what we like*. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit. You see, God deals with us:

In the realm of the mind

In the heart

And in the soul.

True worship is not some mindless ritual we go through...True worship comes from the heart. Jesus said that the first and greatest command is to love God with all the HEART, MIND, SOUL (Matthew 22:37,38). So true worship will be in that realm, *in the spirit, in the place of the heart, in the mind*. Folks, mindless worship is neither true nor pleasing to God.

• **Worship is to be in the realm of TRUTH.** There are three ways for us to understand what Jesus is saying here about what constitutes worship in truth.

One is that our worship must be according to truth, according to what is right. We pay honor and respect to Him when we worship according to truth, His truth from the Word.

A second understanding of the word that is translated truth is genuineness... Honesty. You see, true worship is to be genuine, honest, from-the-heart worship, and not hypocritical.

Thirdly, **in truth worship** can also be understood as *in Jesus worship*. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE (John 14:6). Jesus said, *"There is no way to the Father except by Me."* Acceptable worship must be in the name of Jesus.

• **Worship takes priority over other activities.** The woman came to the well to draw water, an important task. However, when she discovered Jesus, that task was delegated to second place. Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, *"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"* (John 4:29). Next Sunday, what will take priority over our worshiping Him in spirit and truth?

• **True worshippers are motivated to serve.** When we understand that Jesus is prophet, priest, king, savior—God in the flesh—we will automatically serve Him by telling others, just as the woman did. They said to the woman, *"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, we know that this man really is the Savior of the world"* (John 4:42).

Jesus is telling us that TRUE WORSHIPERS, worshippers that God seeks, are those who will place a priority on worshiping Him from the heart and in truth, in genuine honesty through His Son Jesus.

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

Rick Cunningham

"GOD IS SPIRIT, AND his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

In 1975, I made my first attempt at preaching, offering a devotional at a Wednesday evening service. I used this text and made an appeal for us to work at both requirements, to worship in both spirit and in truth.

As a young Christian I had witnessed many clashes over "spirit" and "truth" issues. Some emphasized "spirit" to the neglect of and

even in opposition to “truth.” Others stressed “truth” in doctrine with almost no love, kindness, or mercy whatsoever. And each side fought against the other.

Now, I have preached literally thousands of sermons, and yet I still come back to this same old problem. Half-baked Christianity still detracts from what Jesus demands from us all—*worship in spirit and in truth*.

If a person's spirit is loving and generous to others, yet his doctrine is false, his worship is unacceptable to God.

If a person's doctrine is flawless, yet his heart is callous to other's needs and he remains unlike God in forgiveness, mercy, and compassion, then his worship is unacceptable to God.

Only those who worship in “*spirit and in truth*” are pleasing and acceptable to God. The two are not exclusive of each other. Those who wish to turn everything into a polemic identify themselves as falling short in either one area or the other.

What about you? Are you an extremist? If so, why don't you seek to balance your life as God instructs? Why not worship “*in spirit and in truth*?”

CONSIDER THE WEAKER BROTHER

Justin A. Hopkins

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT the early Church and her members in regard to religious activities, be it worship, service, or fellowship, we can conceive of practices which fall into one of two categories: matters of doctrine, and matters of judgment.

In matters of doctrine, the Scriptures are clear that compromise or equivocation must not be tolerated. “*It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3). Jude saw it as imperative that we engage any struggle necessary to preserve the system of faith which had been once and for all revealed through the inspired writers of the New Testament. There must be no price too high to keep the Church pure and to keep the saved saved!

Along the same lines Paul encouraged Timothy to “*Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 1:13). We are to hold tightly to the pattern of sound, or healthy teaching revealed in the New Testament.

To do otherwise is unhealthy, and that which is unhealthy for the eternal soul holds grave consequences!

On the other hand, there are those matters of judgment, matters which are neither a part of, nor contrary to that system of faith and pattern of healthy teaching. We meet on Sunday once for Bible class and twice for worship because we choose to. We are commanded to meet on the first day of the week, just as the saints did in the beginning. *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them..."* (Acts 20:7). However, we are given no command or prohibition in regard to when, where, or how many times to meet. This, then falls into a matter of judgment. In such matters we, as Christians, or elders, as the shepherds of the congregation, are free to choose to do as seems best. Could we come together just once, and still fulfill this command? Absolutely! What if we decided to come together for the entire day, rather than just a few hours? There would be no problem, as far as scripture is concerned.

However, let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the majority of a congregation would prefer to come together twice on Sunday rather than three times, as has been tradition for many years. Now, let us also suppose that there was one brother in the congregation who did not understand this to be a matter of judgment, but believed that to fail to come together twice for worship and once for Bible class as he had always done would be sin. What is a congregation to do? Do the wishes of the many overrule those of the one? Should the many sacrifice hundreds of hours and a great deal of trouble for the sake of the one?

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul is addressing just such a problem! In the first century Roman empire there existed a situation which is foreign to many today. Much of the Church had been raised in a culture that worshipped idols. In their false religion, they would offer meat to those idols, and then feast on that same meat as a part of worship. When those precious souls renounced those foolish practices and embraced the salvation that is offered by the one true and living God through Christ, they ceased all of their idolatrous practices. For them, to ever eat such meat again would be participating in the worship of a false god, and so they would have no part.

On the other hand, there were those Christians who understood what Paul was teaching in 1 Timothy 4:4,5. *"For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer"* Therefore, whether it was offered to idols or not, it was meat that

God had created, and they thankfully ate it as such.

What if there were an entire congregation who had this understanding, and they came together for a common meal where such meat happened to be available? Now, what if one member of this congregation believed this to be idol worship? What should they do? Paul tells us:

"But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" (1 Corinthians 8:9-11)

The question comes down to this: What is the worth of one soul? How much should we be willing to sacrifice in order for just one to be saved? What would our savior do, or more rightly, what DID He do? When we knowingly ignore the conscience of one soul what value do we place on the blood which our Lord gave for that soul? This is why Paul goes on to tell us that

"When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. (1 Corinthians 8:12,13)

As Christ's Church, we must be careful in matters of judgment. If we truly believe a thing to be a matter of judgment, let us take care not to trample rough shod over soul for which He died, and make certain that we do not divide His body for the sake of our own personal preferences!

Having a LOVE for the Lost

Jack Dodgen

ON THE PHONE I WAS courteous and patient, but inside I'm ashamed to admit that I was thinking to myself, "Really?" I've not been in ministry long, but I've been in long enough and heard enough of these phone calls to know that this person calling would never show up to worship with us even though they promise they'll be there on Sunday. I've heard enough of these calls to know this person is more than likely fabricating the problem they're facing.

Will they show up to worship this Sunday? I don't know. Are they trying to steal money from the church, or are they genuinely facing economic hardship? I don't know. What I do know is that the person I talked to on the phone was not somebody I loved but a nuisance, and that's a serious problem.

Regardless of why these people called, they are souls created in God's image, destined to live in eternity either with God or away from Him, and I should have treated them like that. In the brief moments of that phone call, I was guilty of not having a love for the lost, and whether you'd like to admit it or not, you've probably found yourself in a similar situation.

Maybe it's not a benevolence call but a friend you know is doing something wrong, and instead of speaking up, you let them continue in their wickedness. You didn't love your lost friend. Maybe it's not a friend but a co-worker whom you constantly talk to about sports and politics but can't quite bring up the conversation about God. You didn't love your lost co-worker. Maybe it's a family member you ignore or a stranger in need you pass by.

People walk in and out of our lives week after week, many of them never hearing or seeing Jesus in our lives. Blame it on time or relationship or whatever else, but the truth is the reason we don't tell others about Christ is because we don't truly love them as we should. That is not to say that everyone is an evangelistic failure. Many Christians regularly open up to others about their faith in Christ, and for that I'm thankful. Do you want to know why some Christians are so great at starting the conversation about Jesus with the lost? They have a true love for God, and that makes all the difference.

When We Love God, We Hope for His Return

To the Philippians, Paul wrote, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved" (Philippians 3:20-21 *ESV*).

Just before Paul penned those words, he encouraged the Christians in Philippi to "join in imitating" him so that they would not end up walking away from Christ as others had before them (Philippians 3:17-19).

The love Paul had for his brethren is evident in this passage. He loved and longed for them. They were his joy and crown. They were his beloved. Where did this deep love come from? It came from, in part, the commonality of hope they shared through Jesus

Christ. They were to inherit the same kingdom together. This realization prompted Paul to have a great love for his brothers and sisters.

This common hope for heaven prompts us to love the lost as well. One day our Lord will return and take us to the place He has prepared for us, a place of immeasurable joy and love. We rejoice in that fact! Knowing we have that home awaiting us should fill us with joy here and now. Knowing that many will miss out on that place should sadden us and, most importantly, inspire us to talk to our friends and neighbors about Jesus. Paul loved the brethren because of the hope of heaven they shared. In the same way, we need to love the lost because of the hope of heaven we could share together.

When we love God, we hope for His return, and that hope causes us to love the lost around us by sharing it with them.

When We Love God, We Ignore Discomfort

The people of God notoriously live very uncomfortable lives. Job lost his family, wealth and health in service to God. Jeremiah was ignored and ridiculed by his listening audience. Daniel faced lions for his faith. Paul endured shipwrecks, beatings and lashes. John lived part of his life exiled on Patmos. Christians faced horrible forms of torture under the Roman government. There are countless other names we could mention, but the point has been made: Christians are often called to live uncomfortable lives.

Oddly enough, those Christians living uncomfortable lives pushed on. Job did not sin in the face of his uncomfortable circumstances (Job 1:22). Daniel chose God knowing discomfort was going to come his way as a result (Daniel 6:8-10). Paul gladly faced imprisonment knowing the gospel was being preached (Philippians 1:12-18).

Their love for God exceeded the pain of discomfort. The same is true for the Christian today. In the face of increasing promiscuity and godlessness, Christians are forced into either compromise or uncomfortable conversation. Those who truly love God, like Job, Daniel and Paul for example, choose the discomfort knowing it may lead to a life of heaven for someone else. When we love God with all our hearts, we see uncomfortable situations as minor hindrances knowing that no matter what happens we still have God. When this is our attitude, we reach out more readily to those who are lost.

When We Love God, We Love Those Made in His Image

Jesus said to His disciples that whoever saw Him saw the Father

(John 14:9). Jesus was the embodiment of God on earth; He was quite literally His image. This type of language is seen regarding humans in Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

You could say that every person is made with a little bit of God within him or her. John phrased it this way: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

The people who pass us by are created in the image of God. If we love God, then those actions become manifest in the lives of those created in His image. Jesus says as much when He gave His disciples a glimpse of the day of judgment.

There Jesus will say: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?' ... And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25:34-37,40).

When we love God, we will naturally love everyone we encounter with the love that only Christians can give.

Want a greater love for the lost? Develop your relationship with God. If we do not love Him as we should, there isn't an evangelism class in the world that will make us better seekers of the lost. Our love for those apart from God is rooted in our love for God. If you want to reach others, you have to start there. Then, and only then, can we truly have a love for the lost.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Clem Thurman

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST is called by many different terms in the Bible, each one of them depicting a different aspect of the Lord's church from the others. Let us see the terms the Scriptures use to describe the church.

The Church is the Kingdom

The Lord Jesus promised the apostle Peter, *"I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"* (Matt. 16:18-19). The kingdom, and its king, had long been prophesied, throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. *"I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land"* (Jer. 23:5). When Daniel, in a vision God showed him, saw *"One like the Son of man,"* he then prophesied: *"And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed"* (Dan. 7:13-14). The same prophet foretold the times of the Roman empire and said, *"And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed"* (Dan. 2:44).

When Jesus promised to build His church, he also promised *"the keys of the kingdom"* to the apostle. This identity of the church/kingdom is also found in Heb. 12, where *"the general assembly and church of the firstborn"* is then referred to as *"a kingdom that cannot be shaken"* (v. 23,28). As Jesus Christ is *"head of the church"* (Eph. 1:22-23), He is also preached by the apostles as the promised King in the kingdom of God (Acts 2:30-36). Those in the *"the body, the church"* (Col. 1:18) are those who have been *"translated into the kingdom"* (v. 13). Christ is now *"King of kings and Lord of lords"* (1 Tim. 6:15). And the apostle Paul shows that at the end of time, He will, *"Deliver up the kingdom to God ... for he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet"* (1 Cor. 15:24-26). Many try to differentiate between the kingdom and the church, but the Scriptures shows that they are identical.

Too many look at the promised kingdom of God as some kind of political, or military, entity. But Jesus, questioned by Pilate, stated clearly: *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence"* (John 18:36). Some are still looking for the kingdom to come. But the Bible shows clearly that it existed during the days of the apostles (Acts 2:30-36; 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 1:9). And the Bible also shows that the kingdom is the church which Jesus built (Matt. 16:18-19).

The Church Is the Family of God

To Timothy, Paul stated, *"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Tim. 3:14-15). The "house" of God is the family of God, just as "the house of David" refers to the family of David (Luke 1:27). The church is the family of God, and those in the church are called *"the children of God"* (1 John 3:1; Gal. 3:26-27). Notice what Paul writes to the church in Rome: *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God ... The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God"* (Rom. 8:14-16).

To enter the kingdom, one must be *"born of water and the Spirit"* (John 3:5). So, one enters the family of God the same way: *"For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:26-27). This simply echoes what Jesus told the apostles, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). When the gospel was preached on Pentecost (Acts 2), people were told, *"Repent ye, and be baptized"* (v. 38). And, *"They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (v. 41,47).

You see, people enter into the church in exactly the same way they enter the kingdom, and the same way they become children of God, members of His family. The church is the family of God. Friend, if you are not in the church which Jesus built, you are not a part of the family of God. I know many people think being part of the church is not important, but if it is important to you to be in God's family, you must be in the church—for that what the church is, the family of God.

The Church Is The Bride of Christ

"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body ... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it... For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. 5:23,25,31-32). The Lord had Paul write to the church in Corinth, *"For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might*

present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Notice the principle of God-approved marriage: "*The two become one.*" The Bible tells us, "*Ye are made dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye might be married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead*" (Rom. 7:4). Look around you—you will see a multitude of different religious bodies, all claiming to belong to Christ. But the Lord Jesus doesn't have thousands of brides! Look again at the passage in Eph. 5: "*The two become one.*" Jesus Christ is married to one bride, His church. He doesn't have "plural wives" nor concubines. He has only one bride, which is His church. He built only one church, shed His blood for only one church (Acts 20:28) and adds people to only one church.

The Church Is the Body of Christ

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). Paul wrote how the death of Christ on the cross brought us to God: "*For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby*" (Eph. 2:14-16). That body in which we are reconciled to God is the church which Jesus promised to build.

Notice the reading in Eph. 1:22-23, as Paul speaks of God, "*He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" Christ is head of the church, which is His body. But how many bodies? Let the Bible answer: "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all*" (Eph. 4:4-6). Now, how many Gods are there? How many Lords? How many bodies? You see, there is only one of each of those seven things found in that passage. Christ doesn't have thousands of bodies; He has only one. And that one is His church.

The Church Is The Saved

Some seek to disparage the importance of the church of Christ by saying, "The church doesn't save anyone." Well, of course, the church doesn't save—the church IS the saved! The membership of the church of Christ is not determined by man, but by the Lord.

Jesus promised, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). After His death and resurrection, when the gospel was first preached, people asked, *"What shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). They were told, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ"* (v. 38). Those that *"received his word were baptized"* (v. 41) and the Lord added them to the church (v. 47). The Lord Who saved them added them to His church. That is what the church is: the saved.

That is the way people became members of the church of Christ 2,000 years ago. It is the way people become members of the church of Christ today. People heard the gospel of Christ, they repented of their sins, they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). The Lord then saved them, and He added them to His church. That is the very reason Paul later wrote, *"He is the head of the church, being himself the savior of the body"* (Eph. 5:23). Christ is the only Savior. Because only Christ can save, only He can make any person a member of His church. When people today hear the gospel, believe, repent and are baptized, the same Lord will add them to same church as He did those 2,000 years ago.

So, what is the church of Christ? It is the kingdom of heaven, it is the family of God, it is the body of Christ, it is the bride of Christ and it is composed of the saved. Now, friend, that is the church of Christ as it is described in the Bible. There are many attempts made by men, for various reasons, to define and describe the church of Christ in some other way. But if we are going to be governed by the Bible, we must accept the definition and description of the Lord's church that is revealed therein.

King of kings

Johnny Ramsey

IN ZECH. 9, THE TRIUMPHAL entry of the Messiah into Jerusalem was predicted five centuries prior to its fulfillment in Luke 19. When we also study the parallel accounts of this climactic event in Matthew and Mark, we learn many powerful truths that put the spotlight upon the sovereignty of God and the fickle nature of man. We learn from Mark 11:9 that the Savior could not be compromised by the applause of the masses nor deterred from His task of spiritual redemption by the shallow concepts of the crowd that yearned for an earthly potentate who would deliver them from Roman rule and give them prowess in governmental realms. The Jews arrogantly failed to see

the need for deliverance from sin by a Redeemer who came out of Zion (Isa. 59:20). They wanted someone like Judas Maccabees to be their hero!

In Luke 19 and 20, we have vivid portraits of the power and glory of the Man of Galilee and yet the humility and devotion of the Son of God. The greatest One who ever lived would ride into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey—a symbol of peace and meekness—rather than on a prancing white horse or a black stallion that would convey prestige and nobility and tyranny. Truly, Christ was the *“Prince of Peace”* which Isa. 9:6 had promised. He is referred to as meek and gentle (2 Cor. 10:1). The Lamb of God had come to take away sin (John 1:29; Rev. 5:5-9) and not to sort our earthly empires. It disappointed the Jewish leaders that the Nazarene tolerated the Roman rulers whom they despised. Tragically, their perversion of Scripture and misplaced emphasis caused them to be ignorant of the real work of the Prince of Glory. Their exultant cry was *“Hosanna”* based on Psa. 118, but their concept of *“save us, we pray”* had nothing to do with spiritual deliverance.

There are many today who are disappointed in Jesus. Thousands still stand at the foot of the Cross and demand that the Lord do this or that before they will believe Him (Matt. 27:29-42). It must break the Lord’s heart to hear the foolish arguments of carnal minds that reject the Savior and demand provision for secular benefits and casual delights. Nothing is so shallow as cheap grace and carnival atmosphere of congregations that would make Christianity an excursion in politics, entertainment, gimmicks and social grace rather than true evangelism, spiritual growth and emphasis on the divine realm. The simple message of the Cross is still offensive to many (Gal. 5:11). Nevertheless, it is the *“wisdom and power of God”* to genuine believers (1 Cor. 1:18).

And whether people accept it or not, the truth is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16) and He is *“King of kings”* (1 Tim. 6:15). As Peter said on Pentecost: *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified”* (Acts 2:36).

Do You Believe In The Son Of Man?

Rod Kyle

HEALED BY JESUS, THE FORMER blind man stands before Jesus (John 9:35), who asks, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

A good question. One which is also the most important spiritual

question you will ever have to answer. Like the former blind man, you would be justified in asking, “*And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?*” (verse 36).

Jesus Christ claimed to be sent to earth by the Creator (John 6:29). He assured His disciples that He was the only way back to God (John 14:6). He promised eternal life and a future resurrection to everyone who believes in Him (John 6:40). So how do we know He was real? Could He have been merely a deluded psychotic?

Aware that people would ask these questions of Him, He willingly held Himself up for examination—John 10:37,38. What proof did He tender?

Into four gospel accounts is compressed the most amazing life ever lived! In a selective way, the writers of these biographies present four areas of proof.

1. He fulfilled prophecy. This was important to Jesus. He refers to it in Luke 24:44. He fulfilled every Old Testament prediction about the coming Messiah—over 350 of them!

2. He performed genuine, indisputable miracles (John 11:47). Although a man walking on water might grab our attention (Matthew 14:24-33), stopping a funeral procession to bring the dead back to life is even more impressive (Luke 7:11-17).

3. His teachings were, and still are, without parallel. He was the first teacher to announce the “Golden Rule” for successful living—Matthew 7:12. His enemies said of His teaching, “*Never did a man speak the way this man speaks*” (John 11:34). But overshadowing all of these proofs hangs one of far greater magnitude.

4. He was resurrected! He promised it beforehand (John 2:19). His enemies anticipated it (Matthew 27:62-66). Yet it happened anyway! Unlike all other world religious leaders, Christ’s mortal remains are not with us. This crowning miracle makes dead liars out of all of them. The evidence for the empty tomb is overwhelming.

This evidence demands a verdict. Is your response that of the man of John 9:38?

Jesus, By Matthew

Rex Banks

ALTHOUGH ALL FOUR ACCOUNTS of the Gospel are unsigned, the first is traditionally ascribed to Matthew Levi. As far as we know, none of the four accounts ever circulated without an appropriate designation as to the author. Early church fathers—Papias, Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome—all say that Matthew’s Gospel was written initially for the

Jews, and this certainly appears to be the case. With a few exceptions, (e.g. "Immanuel," "Golgotha," "Eloi") he does not add explanatory notes when dealing with Hebrew terms and customs or when mentioning matters relating to the topography of Palestine. In his **Introduction to the New Testament**, Theodore von Zahn says:

"The apologetical and polemical character of the book, as well as the choice of language, make it extremely probable that Matthew wished his book to be read primarily by the Jews who were still exposed to Jewish influence, and also to Jews who still resisted the Gospel."

Certainly the Gospel according to Matthew is the most "Jewish" of the four, and throughout the book there is emphasis upon the fact that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament, the one who has come in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and the One who would establish the Kingdom of God spoken of by the prophets. Matthew demonstrates initially to the Jews of his day (both believing and unbelieving), and then ultimately to all of every age, that in Jesus the ancient prophecies concerning the King and Kingdom are completely realized.

The Messianic qualifications of Jesus are set forth in the opening words of Matthew's account where we are introduced to "*Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (1:1). Only in the seed of Abraham would all the nations be blessed (Genesis 12:3), and only a descendant of David could qualify to sit upon His throne in accordance with Old Testament prophecy (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Following the introduction, Matthew continues to emphasize the fact that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy: He is Immanuel ("*God with us*"), born of a virgin (1:22,23), as Isaiah had foretold (Isaiah 7:14); He was born in Bethlehem (2:6), as had been predicted by Micah (5:2); He went to, and was recalled from, Egypt (2:15), as per Hosea 11:1; He was announced by John, as Isaiah had prophesied (Matthew 3:3 cf, Isaiah 40:31); He cured all the sick who were brought to Him (8:16,17), that the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:4) might be fulfilled. In connection with Old Testament prophecy, Matthew uses the word "fulfill" some 13 times, the expression "it is written" some 9 times, and the question "have you not read" 7 times.

Above all, Matthew's Jewish audience needed assurance that Christ's death was not a defeat, and that the crucifixion took place in accordance with "*the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23). Thus we find recorded Christ's own prophecy about His impending death (Matthew 15:21) and resurrection (Matthew 26:32). The account of His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (27:9), the division of His garments as He hung upon the cross (27:35), the abuse hurled at Him (27:39,43), and even His dying cry (27:46) are all said to constitute a fulfillment of Messianic prophecy.

Surely any honest Jew familiar with the Old Testament and confronted by Matthew's testimony would echo the words of Peter, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (Matthew 16:16). Today our hope is to be found in this same confession. †

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