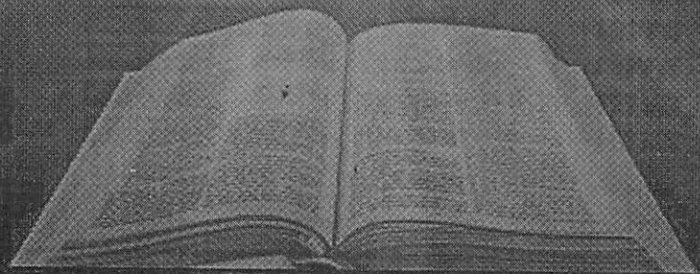


Monthly

September 2020

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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).

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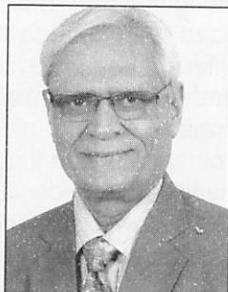
September 2020

No. 5

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

"The Fool Has Said In His Heart, There Is No God"



THERE ARE SOME WHO believe that the universe is a result of some inexplicable and unknown chance combination of interacting forces. It is thought that there was a time when there was a sudden "Big Bang" that created the universe. According to this theory it is supposed that billions of years ago there was a great explosion that resulted in the formation of universe. What do explosions produce? Do they produce beauty, design, order? Explosions do not create or build anything beautiful or orderly, rather, they destroy everything that already exists. On the other hand, when we observe the universe, we see in it a design and beauty, and order. It is most certainly inconceivable to imagine that the vastness, the order, the magnificence, the complexity that we observe all around us just happened by some blind chance of interacting forces! Can something come out of nothing? How can life evolve from nonlife?

Then there are the evolutionists who believe in what is called "continuous creation." Of course, by this they do not mean that something was made out of nothing, but rather, as making something shapely out of shapelessness. This theory of continuous and progressive creation presupposes that each state of the material world was preceded by a previous state. The problem with this theory is that such presuppositions would make it impossible for the

universe ever to have had a beginning, for each state must logically have been preceded by a previous state. The question is, what was in the beginning, since something in the beginning evolved from something? Where did that something come from? How and when did that begin to evolve? They believe that man was evolved from monkey, which has evolved from another lower state, and that from another lower state, and that from another, and that from another..... But, again, the question is from where did that first one come from which the process of evolution began? And, why is monkey still a monkey? Why monkey has not changed into something else? Also, why man is still man, who has supposedly evolved from monkey? Why is man not evolving into another being?

What is most important? Mind or matter? Of course, it is the mind. Therefore it is most logical to believe that this wonderful, beautiful and orderly universe was created by the living, wise and almighty God, than to believe that lifeless and mindless matters have given birth to life, intelligence, and the orderly universe. The Bible, at Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declares the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork." The Psalmist said, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well." (Psalm 139:14). In Psalm 14:1 he declares, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." How logical and wonderful it is to believe that "In the beginning God created heavens and the earth" as the Bible states on its very first page in Genesis 1:1.



THE BROAD AND NARROW WAY

J.C. Choate

THERE COMES A TIME in one's life when he must make an important decision: He must determine which road he is going to take—the broad way or the narrow way. Christ laid down this truth in the sermon on the mount, when he said: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:13, 14). Now think seriously about what the Lord had to say, for such not only touched the lives of those present but it also

involves each of us.

To begin with we should note that there are two roads, or two ways. How many are there now? Just two and no more. This means then that we are going to have to travel upon one or the other. There is just no way of getting around it. In other words, one cannot travel on both ways at the same time. There is no middle road in this case. If you are on the broad way then it means that you cannot be on the narrow road, and vice versa.

Next observe that one of these ways is broad and the other is narrow. No doubt about it, there is plenty of room on the broad road, but the other is quite the opposite. Also observe that there is nothing said about the broad way being strait, but the Lord emphatically declares the narrow way to be strait. This suggests, then, that one is crooked, but the other is such that a person can tell where he is going.

The Lord now states that many shall be upon the broad way but only a few upon the narrow way. This indicates that one is popular and the other is not. Christ surely knew what he was talking about because history bears out such a truth. Not only so, but just look around you, and you can readily see what the Lord meant.

The sad part about all of this is that one of these ways leads to destruction, specifically, the broad way. Since the Lord said that the majority would travel upon the broad way, we know where the masses of the people are going. But what about the other way? Well, the Lord says the narrow way leads to life, but since he tells us that only a few will travel upon this way, we know by divine authority that only a few will eventually go home to heaven. Of course, many may be saved as far as we are concerned but in comparison with all the lost, it is even as the Lord has said: Only a few will be saved in the world to come.

Christ invites all to enter the strait gate; he doesn't force people to enter but he does invite them to. If one will enter, the Lord will surely bless him. However, if one so desires, he may travel upon the broad way. Again, it should be remembered that man is a free moral agent and has the power to make up his own mind about what he will, or will not, do.

To travel upon the narrow way is but to travel with the Lord. On the other hand, in taking the broad way one is doing nothing more than following the Devil. Christ is always pleading with man to enter the strait gate, but the Devil works just as hard to keep man on his side. So you can see, there is a continual warfare going on between the Lord and Satan. Not only is that true, but when one makes up

his mind about who he will stand with, he immediately takes up the fight.

My friend, if you have reached the age of accountability then cast your lots with the Lord. However, if you have been walking with the enemy for some time, why not reconsider and give your allegiance to him who died for you? Remember, every time you hear a gospel sermon or meditate upon the truth you have to decide who you will accept, and who you will reject.

You may enter the straight and narrow way through obedience to the gospel of Christ. Then if you will but travel upon that road, ever being faithful to the Lord, one day it will lead you through the gates into heavenly city. Christ has said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

I WILL NOT LISTEN

Will Hanstein

THE ATTITUDE OF GOD TOWARD worship and morality is different from the attitude most men have concerning those topics. Many today feel that as long as they attend worship once a week they have done enough to secure their place in heaven. They feel that God will overlook certain "minor" sins they engage in during the week. God, in their opinion, really only cares about their worship, and they feel that worship "buys" them a certain amount of freedom in not fully complying with God's will.

Yet, according to Isaiah, God feels very differently. He writes, *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats' "* (Isaiah 1:11). According to Isaiah, God was not just *unaccepting* of the worship of the children of Israel; He *abhorred* it. Isaiah gives the result and the reason in verse 15. He says, *"When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood"* (emphasis mine, WH). After reading the book of Isaiah, we see that the children of Israel had become grossly immoral, and therefore God refused to accept any worship they might try to offer.

Isaiah shows us that the way we live Monday through Saturday affects what occurs on Sunday. If we engage in sin, God will not accept our worship. The notion that God will overlook sin if we just

“put in our time” on Sunday could not be further from the truth. He did not during Isaiah’s time, and He will not during our time either. Let us all strive to live godly lives during the week so that God will listen to what we have to say on Sunday.

“The Second Coming Of Christ”

Jimmy Young

Introduction: The second coming of Christ has always been a much debated subject. It need not be, for Scripture is very clear in teaching the return of Christ. Let us note some Biblical facts about the “second coming of Christ” that all must understand.

I. The Proof of His Return

- A. He promised to return (John 14:1-3).
- B. It has been proclaimed by the angels (Acts 1:11).
- C. It was preached by the apostles (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10).

II. His Purpose for Returning

- A. First, let us note why Christ is *not* returning:
 1. He is not returning to plead for the lost to be saved (Matthew 1:21).
 2. He is not returning to persuade the erring to repent (James 5:19,20).
 3. He is not returning to provide a “second” chance to be saved (2 Corinthians 6:2).
 4. He is not returning to set up His kingdom (church) (1 Corinthians 15:24).
 5. He is not returning to proclaim a new plan of salvation (Jude 3).
- B. Second, let us note why Christ *is* returning:
 1. He is coming to keep His promise (2 Peter 3:9).
 2. He is coming to take vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).
 3. He is coming to receive His bride (Ephesians 5:27).

III. What Will Happen When Christ Returns

- A. The dead will be raised (John 5:28,29).
- B. God will destroy the earth and its elements (2 Peter 3:10-13).
- C. He will deliver up the kingdom (church) to the Father

(1 Corinthians 15:24).

- D. He will pronounce (declare) judgment upon all (2 Corinthians 5:10).

IV. The Time of His Return

- A. His delay in coming is because of His desire that everyone have opportunity to be saved, not because He is lax about keeping His promise (2 Peter 3:8,9).
- B. Neither we, the angels nor even Christ know—only God knows (Matthew 24:36).
- C. There will be no signs (warnings) given (Matthew 24:42; 2 Peter 3:10).

V. Our Preparation for His Return

- A. We will have to apply the three L's.
1. Listen to Him (Colossians 3:17; Mark 16:16).
 2. Love Him (John 14:15; Matthew 22:37).
 3. Live for Him (Matthew 16:24; Colossians 3:1,2).

Conclusion: It is a fact that Jesus is coming again; we do not know when. It is a fact that God through inspiration has given all we need to "know" and "do". Are you ready for His return?

Studying and Growing in the Knowledge of the Lord

George Akpabli

THE BIBLE SAYS IN JOHN 3:16 that *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."* Proof of God's love is that Jesus died that we might be saved from our sins. To enable us to be saved and to stay saved, God gave us the Bible which is His power unto our salvation (Romans 1:16). Without the Gospel, we would not know what to do to be saved from our sins. Man must obey the will of the Heavenly Father to inherit eternal life. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus warned, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."* It is therefore essential that we **study** that we may **know** the **truth** which has the power to save us (See John 17:17 and John 8:32).

The Holy Scriptures admonish us for our own salvation in 2 Timothy 2:15 to **study** to show ourselves approved unto God,

workmen that have no need to be ashamed, because we are rightly dividing the word of truth. It is vital that we follow the example of the Christians in Berea, who during Bible times were not only excited with the teachings they received, but they also gave serious attention to the word, searching in the holy writings every day to see if the things they were being taught were so. This is important. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 also tells us that all things should be tested; so that we can keep what is good. If we fail to do this and we follow error, we will lose our salvation. Matthew 15:14 also says that if a blind man is guiding a blind man, the two will go fall into a ditch together. The responsibility is placed upon ourselves and not upon any other person.

The Holy Scriptures also admonish us in 2 Peter 3:18 to grow (be increased) in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We must diligently pursue knowledge of the will of God, and follow what He says to avoid destruction.

The urgent need to study the Scriptures is further demonstrated when we acknowledge that not everything taught in the name of religion is true and right. The Bible instructs us to believe not every spirit, but to test the spirits (teachers) whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Read also the following passages:

(Proverbs 14:15) *"The simple believes every word, But the prudent considers well his steps."*

(Matthew 7:15-20) *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."*

(Romans 16:18) *"For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."*

(2 Peter 2:1) *"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction."*

(1 Thessalonians 5:21) *"Test all things; hold fast what is good."*

The serious consequence for you and me is that our worship is

described being in vain if it is not based on God's will as revealed in the New Testament but on the doctrines and commandments of men. Jesus stated this warning in Matthew 15:9: "And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Again in Matthew 15:13 Jesus said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted."

Dear Reader, no matter what your religious belief, God's counsel is to study diligently, in order to grow in the knowledge of His Word.

DO WE REALLY WANT JESUS TO BE OUR LORD?

Byron Nichols

I BELIEVE THAT THE GREAT majority of people realize that we are in need of a savior, one who can somehow free us from our guilt, and hopefully one who can also provide us with real hope for the future. Even without a great deal of diligent study of the Bible, many conclude that they are ready to let Jesus Christ be their Savior.

This is wonderful, isn't it? Would to God that all people everywhere would be willing to let Jesus be their Savior. A fact that is frequently and easily overlooked, however, is that in order for Jesus to be our **Savior**, we must first make Him our **Lord**.

It thus becomes essential that we understand the term "Lord" as it is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. The Greek New Testament uses more than one word which is translated into English as "lord", but *kurios* is by far the most commonly used Greek word used with reference to Jesus. This word appears more than 600 times in the New Testament.

A look into the background and secular usage of the word *kurios* will be helpful in determining its significance when it is used with reference to Christ. This was the normal word of respect in addressing other people, much like the English word "sir". This same word was used with reference to an "owner", such as the owner of a vineyard. It was also used for our English word "master", identifying the master or owner, as opposed to a servant or slave (Matthew 6:24; Ephesians 6:5,9). This was the word used to designate the "head of a household". Furthermore, this was at times a legal term, identifying one as a "guardian", one who was responsible for providing help and protection to those in need of such.

Surely the picture is beginning to take on a rather definite form, allowing us to see that this word "lord" was a word of authority. This becomes even more apparent as we see three additional uses of

the word. Over time this word became the accepted title of the Roman Emperor; it was used more and more with the names of gods and goddesses; in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) *kurios* is used for the name of Jehovah, thus becoming in essence the name of God. It is said that it is used this way at least 150 times in the New Testament.

It appears that "Lord" became the great title for Jesus. The scholar W. E. Vine stated that, with only two exceptions, after Christ's resurrection there is no record of *kurios* ever being used again by believers in addressing anyone but God and Jesus.

With all of this background information in mind, when we refer to Jesus as Lord, or when we call Him Lord, we ought to mean that we acknowledge that we are His servants or slaves and that He is our Master, that He is the owner, the possessor of our life. We ought to think of Him as the Help of the helpless and the Guardian of those in need of protection. Calling Him Lord ought to mean that we accept Him as having authority over all our life, our thoughts, and our actions. In calling Him Lord we need to be thinking of Jesus as the King and Emperor to whom we owe and give our homage, our allegiance, and our loyalty.

The question with which you and I must deal is this— "Does Jesus really mean all of this to us?" As was stated earlier, Jesus cannot be our Savior unless we are willing to make Him our Lord. Someone has stated, "If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all." What a sobering thought!

Lord is not a word to be used flippantly or irreverently. Notice the importance that Jesus attached to the word and its proper usage when He asked, "*And why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say*" (Luke 6:46)? Again, Jesus declared in Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.*" Jesus thus makes it clear that if He is to become the Lord of our life we must treat Him as Lord, and not just address Him as Lord.

Jesus is Lord, whether we accept and acknowledge Him as such or not. We can either confess Him and make Him our Lord now in this life, or we can delay until it is too late to do anything but confess Him as Lord (Philippians 2:9-11). May we choose to make Him our Lord now, rather than wait and be forced to only acknowledge Him as Lord.

APOSTOLIC DECLARATIONS ON THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Armando A. Alaniz

THE WRITERS OF THE New Testament unanimously agree when writing on the nature of Jesus. Each one of them presents evidence of the perfect deity of the Lord. The thoughts which they give leave no doubt of the identical essence of Jesus with that of God. Undoubtedly, the apostles demonstrate by their experiences, the education of each one of them at the feet of the Master, and by their inspired words from the Holy Spirit that Jesus is very God. This purpose is clearly seen defined in almost all the pages of the New Testament. That which philosophy could not explain about the "logos", that which heresies could not explain about the nature of Jesus, the apostles define clearly in their epistles. Post-modernism, like the gnosticism of the second century, tries to unite philosophical thought with the religious. It declares that Jesus is not God, but simply a spiritual superhuman. But what does the Bible say?

*"The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for **no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him**" (John 3:2).*

*"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that **God was his Father, making himself equal with God**" (John 5:18).*

*"**I and my Father are one...**" "The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that **thou, being a man, makest thyself God**" (John 10:30,33).*

*"And Thomas answered and said unto him, **My Lord and my God**" (John 20:28).*

*"Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh **Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen**" (Romans 9:5).*

*"Who, **being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God**" (Philippians 2:6).*

*"Who is the **image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature**" (Colossians 1:16).*

*"For in him **dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily**" (Colossians 2:9).*

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

“Who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3).

“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1).

A FAMINE IN THE LAND

Hugo McCord

THE TIME WOULD COME TO ancient Israel when the people would crave a Bible lesson, but it would not be available. Bible classes are available today for all ages. May they be so appreciated and attended that the all-knowing Lord will never take them away. But He was forced to do that in the 8th century B.C.: *“I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it” (Amos 8:11,12).*

Prisoner-of-war Howard Rutledge, dying from starvation, thankful for a “bowl of sewer greens”, found that “my hunger for spiritual food soon outdid my hunger for a steak” (*Christianity Today*). “Now I wanted to know about that part of me that will never die...I had completely neglected the spiritual dimension of my life” when I had lived in Tulsa. “Now I wanted to talk about God and Christ and the church. But in heartbreak solitary confinement there was... no Sunday-school teacher, no Bible, no hymn book, no community of believers to guide and sustain me.

“I tried desperately to recall snatches of Scripture, sermons, the gospel choruses from childhood, and the hymns we sang at church...I had not seen (during 18 years in a Tulsa Sunday School) the importance of memorizing verses from the Bible or learning gospel songs. Now, when I needed them, it was too late.”

Just to think “about one memorized verse could have made a whole day bearable. One portion of a verse I did remember was, ‘Thy word have I hid in my heart.’ How often I wished I had really worked to hide God’s Word in my heart...All this talk of Scripture and hymns may seem boring to some, but it was the way we

conquered our enemy and overcame the power of death around us.”

What can we learn from Howard Rutledge?

“You Shall See Disaster NO MORE”

Wayne Barrier

DISASTER CAN COME IN many different ways. Most of us are familiar with the coming of natural disasters—floods, drought, hurricanes, tornadoes, and volcanic eruptions. These events make big news and we see how in a few short minutes, many thousands of people can lose everything they own and even their life. One minute everything was as it had been throughout a person's life and the next minute nothing is the same, or ever will be again. Entire families are killed in an instant. Fortunes that have taken a lifetime to accumulate are lost forever.

Natural disasters usually touch massive numbers of lives and are not the direct consequence of anyone's action. The just and the unjust are affected alike.

Other disasters, resulting from man's activity and actions also can be equally devastating. Train wrecks, airplane crashes, fires, wars, acts of terrorism, industrial accidents, and many other events often destroy property, injure people, and take lives without warning.

Sometimes disasters are much smaller. A single person can experience disaster, while no others are touched by the event. Accidents, disease, and criminal activity cause individual disaster events. The victim is just as unsuspecting of what is about to happen in this case as the victim of a large disaster.

In all cases, disaster victims are hurt, suffer as the result of something out of their control, endure great loss, and experience great need immediately. For many, relief can be provided and lives can be rebuilt. What about those who do not survive? What about those who never completely recover? These people, as harsh as the reality of the truth can be, must bear some burden the rest of their life. Sometimes, it seems that there is nothing in the world that can be done to remove the burden.

The word of God is filled with instruction, guidance, warnings, exhortation, teaching, etc., to help man prepare for both life on earth and for eternal life after physical death. Instruction concerning ways to deal with hard times, physically, is provided in the Bible.

The words of the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah record powerful guidance for men of all ages. The conclusion of his message is intended for our encouragement. Zephaniah 3:14-20 says, "*Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; **You shall see disaster no more.***"

"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

Israel had suffered greatly at the hands of her enemies. Zephaniah's message is for those who have maintained faith in God. These words suggest permanent relief, not only to Israel in Zephaniah's day, but to men of all ages.

That relief comes from God. It is offered to everyone who will be a part of God's family on earth. Today, we can be added to God's family by following the teaching of his Son, Jesus (2 Peter 1:17), as we obey His commandments (Matthew 7:21), and live faithfully until death (Revelation 2:10). The Christian can be free from worry (Matthew 6:25-34) about things of this world and can be relieved of all anxiety (Philippians 4:6).

With God's help we can endure and overcome anything in this life (Philippians 4:13) and look forward to a future home of eternal reward and happiness (Revelation 21:1). We can hope for and look forward to the day when "*we shall see disaster no more.*"

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE FINDING COMFORT

David Deffenbaugh

IT IS HARDLY A NEWS FLASH, but this is a sin-sick and sorrowful world. Sometimes that nagging truth is much clearer and more pointed than at others.

There are times when we are caused to suffer from physical ailment, as did Job, or to endure deliberate mistreatment from others, as did Joseph, or to cry out from the loss of a dear loved one, as did Mary and Martha, or to weep over the spiritual callousness of humanity, as did Jesus. The fact is, the condition of the world in which we live and those with whom we share it, demand the need

for comfort from time to time.

As Paul opens the second letter to the church at Corinth, he addresses God in a very beautiful and beneficial way, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"* (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

From that beginning and on through verse 11, the idea of comfort is mentioned ten times. Since we most definitely are in need of comfort, we would be well served to understand something of that comfort which comes from "the God of all comfort".

God is the only genuine source of comfort. Paul speaks of his experience in Asia bringing despair even of life itself (verses 8-10). Being in that circumstance led him to the conclusion that it was God alone who was worthy of man's trust, for it is God only on whom man may depend for deliverance. That hope is real comfort.

We are comforted in order to comfort (verses 5,6). So many times the means of God's help to others is through His own children. While we are well aware of our need of being comforted, God also has in mind that we comfort others, having been comforted ourselves.

Both suffering and comfort are a part of the Christian experience. Naturally, we want the comfort, not the suffering, but the Christian life is not all joy and comfort. God never promised to keep His children from all hurt, pain, and sorrow. He didn't keep His own Son from those agonies of soul. These things have their place in helping develop our character as Christians (Romans 5:3-5).

Certainly we say with Paul, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort."*

The Church And Salvation

Ron Bryant

THE SALVATION OF MAN IS THE central subject of the Bible. Why is that the case? Just a moment's reflection prompts one to ask the question voiced long ago by the psalmist: *"What is man that thou art mindful of him?"* (Psalm 8:4).

This question is one of continual challenge. The fact that the God of heaven is mindful of man is the centerpiece in the matter of salvation. Being mindful of man, God has provided a **Savior, a**

Gospel, and a Church.

The Savior of mankind is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is God's power to save. It is indispensable to God's purpose.

The Church is also His. It is made up of the redeemed. Jesus purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28).

The salvation of man is firmly established in the love and the eternal purpose of God. Additionally, the church of Jesus the Christ also stands firmly established in the love and purpose of God. The pivotal role the church plays in God's scheme of things is set forth most eloquently in the book of Ephesians. There it is declared that

- *Through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the world.*
- It is in the church, the **body of the redeemed over which Christ is head.**
- That God and His purpose are glorified (Ephesians 3:10,11; 3:21).
- The love of Christ and the death of Christ are revealed as being *for the church* (Ephesians 5:25).
- It is the body to which all the saved—the reconciled—are added (Ephesians 2:15).
- The church is one body (Ephesians 4:4-6).

One cannot properly understand the past or the present work of Jesus without an understanding of the church, for the church is the body of Christ, and He is head over all things to it, and He is the Savior of it (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23).

Regrettably, far too many do not have a biblical view of the church. When our view is not biblical we are short-changed. The real need we have is for each of us to see the church in its biblical simplicity and beauty, **not a building but a body of people.** We need to understand that it is in the church that believers have communion with God and fellowship with one another. In it the children of God share life and hope, love and peace. In it are vested the plans of God for ministry and for the proclamation of the Gospel. God has no other plan for the preaching of the Word than through His people, the redeemed, the church. To it He adds all the redeemed, and through it He calls all men to be reconciled to Him (1 Corinthians 10:16,17; Acts 2:47; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Salvation and the church are inseparably connected. The church exists to give glory to God (Ephesians 3:20,21).

IT'S NO NEW ADVENTURE

G. Devadanam

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, whether or not you realize it, does not call for any *new* adventure, the Hebrew writer maintains. As we are in the arena, fighting the battle of the life of faith, running the race of faith, he says, "...we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1).

While a ball game of some kind is being played, the **experts** are on the field, and the **amateurs** as well as the fans are seated in the spectators' gallery, witnessing and applauding the skills and heroism of the players. But in the spiritual world it is different. The dexterous, the skilful, the experts par excellence through the ages, who campaigned in their own generation and received the highest honors ever, are seated in the spiritual spectators' stand, while the amateurs and the fans are on the playground!

Let me illustrate further: On one occasion, a young preacher trainee was facing an audience of about three thousand people, comprised of mature Christians, elders, deacons and eminent Bible scholars. The young preacher became extremely nervous. There would be nothing strange about that, of course. In his opening remarks however, he said, "We all know that Daniel was in the lions' den; but today, I am kept in the den of Daniels." I can understand his feelings, and you can too. The Christian life is like that!

If we as Christians could only comprehend the reality of the spiritual world, and if we could see the great cloud of witnesses watching us run our race—the prophets, the martyrs, the saints of ages past—we would surely feel more nervous than that preacher trainee! But, at the same time, surely we would walk more carefully in the footsteps of Christ, knowing that those who have walked in those steps before us are witnessing our trials and our response to life.

When our goal in all that we say and do is simply to please God, if we are hated—hated to the extent of being killed by our own family members—how do we take it? There are places in the world today where such dangers exist. And, yes, among that "great cloud of witnesses" are some who faced that kind of hatred and died rather than give up their faith! This path of being hated is not a new one.

Does your family distract you from walking with God? Keeping family relationships running smoothly, and meeting all the responsibilities without neglecting the prime relationship with God, is a constant challenge. Among the witnesses is a man who walked

faithfully with God for three hundred long years! God was so pleased with him that at the end of his journey God invited him to a place of rest. This path of resisting distraction is not a new one.

It is one thing to be one among many; and it is entirely a different thing to stand alone for God. There was a righteous man, blameless man among the people of his time who walked with God (Genesis 6:9). When the whole world literally was on one side, he with his wife, sons and daughters-in-law stood together through God's judgment on the earth. They watch our journey, and they remind us that the path of being alone is not a new one.

The father of all of us who believe, the man whose faith directly influenced three generations of his descendants, and who continues to influence all the generations down the centuries thereafter, is one among the witnesses surrounding us. He believed in the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). He watches us, with his son and grandson who shared the promises, despite suffering many hardships and waiting long in patience for the fulfillment of God's promises. The path of endurance is not a new one.

The young man who was hated by his own brethren and was sold into slavery, who later faced sexual temptation, was accused falsely, detained in the prison wrongly, and neglected for two years witnesses our journey, too. He has shown us that the path of righteousness in spite of ill-treatment is not a new one.

Next comes the meekest of the earth, and one who was faithful in all God's house (Numbers 12:3). Other witnesses who were faithful in the face of every kind of challenge, temptation and hardship were Joshua, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through their faith accomplished many mighty things for God (Hebrews 11:30-35).

In the same stadium, as it were, others who refused to deny God were tortured for their faith, hoping for a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were put to death by the sword. They went in sheep-skins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated (Hebrews 11:35-37). These, too, remind us that the path of faithfulness—whatever it may require of us—is not a new one.

In this generation, we are the players in the stadium, the athletes in the race. How do we fare? Are We willing to face hatred for pleasing God, to the extent of being killed like Abel? Do we walk with God in an undisturbed relationship so that God will be pleased to take us

like Enoch? Is any one of us unique in the whole world as to be recognized by God like Noah? Are we like Abraham, the father of the faithful? Do we fear God as Isaac did or rely on Him like Jacob? Do we display a sublime attitude like that of Joseph? With whose achievements of faith can we compare our own walk?

Writing to those who were facing one of the cruellest persecutions ever, Peter says, "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the painful trials you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you*" (1 Peter 4:12). It seems that nothing we endure now can be equated with the distinct record holders of the past in the realm of faith.

If there is anything of merit in our life's accomplishments, it must be that we have not only been the **recipients of the grace of God**, but that **we are obeying Him in sharing that grace with others**. For "*God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect*" (Hebrews 11:40). This is the gracious provision of God because of Christ! We are of the generations who have been entrusted with the greatest gift and the greatest responsibility of all—of giving our time, and talents, and our very lives to the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world. This is what it means that "*only together with us would they be made perfect.*"

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

*"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him Who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, **you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood**" (Hebrews 12:1-4).*

Oh No! Is It My Jacey?

Billy Colburn

WHAT WAS I TO DO, that Lord's day afternoon, December 20, 1992, when the cracking voice at the other end of the telephone was telling me that my daughter, Jacey, had been involved in a terrible car accident? As God-loving and Godfearing people, how could this be happening to us? Was this a mistake or a nightmare? This was our beautiful seventeen-year old Christian daughter, our star high school athlete, the class president every year, the kind of

daughter that every Christian daddy prays and hopes for in life. Is it really my Jacey?

The fear stung me to the very marrow of my bones. Could it possibly be true? In fear and panic I moaned silent prayers to my God. "Lord, she loves You, as our entire family does." "Jacey—Jacey," I moaned, "so full of life, so young, so very pretty. She loves her mother, her brother, and me, her dad, so very much, as we do love and honor her." The world for the entire Colburn family had just turned upside down.

The word passed through the yard and house that our son Roman had just arrived from the campus of the University of Alabama, where he was preparing for the national championship game against Miami. As Joy, my wife, and I sliced through the gathered masses of friends, relatives, and church people, we went to him. Though alarmed and bewildered by the unexpected crowds of people, Roman had no way of knowing that Jacey had died. Everyone had left that to us to reveal.

Joy tearfully broke the truth to Roman, and like us, it almost destroyed him. He and Jacey were so very close. We wrapped our arms around each other to literally help support one another. As we huddled and held each other, everyone left us alone to be with God, with the pain, the tears, the sobbing of the three of us, and the pure agony of the loss of our beloved Jacey as it engulfed us.

And, as we supported each other with God right there in the middle in spirit, we reaffirmed our commitment to God and to each other, through the help of our Lord. We would not let this destroy our family. For every thing there is a reason. The time for Jacey to depart this world had come that day, and we had to learn to accept that reality, or die a thousand deaths ourselves. We never once blamed God or even asked why. We all knew that our belief in God's Word and His divine promises to us as His children would somehow pull us through this tragedy.

As a high school athletic coach and classroom teacher, my wife, an elementary school teacher, and Roman with all his credentials and honors, we were known as God-fearing and God-loving Christians. Now we were being challenged to put into action all that we had ever taught our students, athletes, Sunday School students, and friends. We had always "talked the talk," and now we were about to "walk the dreaded walk." The three of us would learn firsthand a new depth of hope and faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We knew we had a living assurance. Psalm 116:15 reads, "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*" As our

family regrouped, and under the guidance of God's Word, I firmly believe these aspects of God's teaching helped us regain control of our lives and do the will of the Lord.

1. Like King David, we understood that our child could not come back to us, but we could and would go to where she is, by the grace of God. The Lord gave us that promise. Philippians 1:21 states, *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is to gain."* Understand this with all your heart—the Colburn family are servants of the Lord Jesus. A home in Heaven we seek.

2. I believe through this promise of God that we will have a great reunion with Jesus and our daughter. John 5:24 states, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."* The most important thing we can do is help those who have not yet found the key to that life.

3. We will go on in life and do the best we can in the name of Christianity. We will make mistakes, we will have some failure, we will lose some battles—but we will never surrender. *"If God be for us, then who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31).

In conclusion, may I say to all who mourn for a loved one, let the battle be the Lord's. Jeremiah 17:7,8 states, *"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit."*

May it be well with your soul.

COURAGE

Sandra F. Cobble

THIS IS NOT THE FINAL WORD on courage, although it may be my final word that you will see published, for my medical prognosis is not what the doctor calls good.

Courage is not a veiled death wish as seen in the lifestyles that defy all reasonable expectations. Courage is not the instantaneous acts that most persons think of as heroic. Though many such acts are to be lauded, there is seldom much thought given to the consequences of one's actions.

Do not the Scriptures teach that we are to exercise wisdom, good judgment, and prudence? Courage analyzes all known factors, then

decides upon a course of action based on that analysis. Yes, one may be fearful of the unknown. He may be even more fearful of known potentials. But courage acts, even though harm may be to one's self. When David is talking about the person who will abide in God's presence, he says in Psalm 15:1-4, "*Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that back-biteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.*" Note that even when a person swore to his own hurt and yet had the courage to keep his oath, David pronounced him blessed.

Courage is preparing to live in such a way as to glorify God, despite having been pronounced as terminally ill. **We are born terminally ill.** "*For it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). As we mature and become aware of death we may begin to make some type of arrangements for expiration, even though the idea of our own death seems unreal. We buy insurance. We make wills. And the more mature among us begin thinking about making peace with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves.

But then comes the announcement, "Your form of cancer has no known cure. The symptoms can be treated to some extent with radiation and chemotherapy. But you are dying. You should make arrangements to enter a nursing home so someone can care for you."

Generally persons tend to react in one of two ways. Many do not accept what their doctors have told them. They search everywhere for that elusive cure. Others simply give up. They take to their beds and lie there bemoaning their fate and waiting for death. Some may begin to enjoy the extra attention they are getting. They act in such a way as to evoke the sympathy of others.

But there is a better alternative, one that will glorify God. Even a smile can do wonders for another. So can a simple "please" or "thank you." Taking time to listen to another's problems can ease his burdens. These simple things glorify God.

And a person who is terminally ill can feel freer to ask, "How about a hug?" Both persons will feel better and will glorify God. And when a person comes to cheer up one who is terminally ill and leaves feeling better than when he came, then God has been glorified.

True courage does not ignore obstacles. True courage recognizes problems in the way, but goes on to glorify God despite all obstacles.

Mark Twain put it this way, "Courage is *resistance* to fear, *mastery* of fear, not *absence* of fear."

William Cullen Bryant said, "So live, that when thy summons comes to join the innumerable caravan which moves to that mysterious realm, where each shall take his chamber in the silent halls of death, thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night, scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave, like one that wraps the drapery of his couch about him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

However, Paul's inspired statement gives more comfort than any of the writings of ordinary men. He said in Philippians 1:23, "*For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.*"

Those of us who have put our trust in the Lord and have accepted His grace through an obedient faith can take to heart the statement of Paul, for the great promise it contains. We can face the future with courage:

DISAPPOINTMENT IN ANOTHER

Leon Barnes

HAVE YOU EVER FELT BETRAYED? Have there been times when someone you believed to be a dear friend let you down and the disappointment welled up into your heart? How do you react when you are disappointed in another?

When Paul had been disappointed in Mark because he turned back and did not go on with him and Barnabas to the work, his reaction was to not want Mark along again on a journey. He felt if Mark turned back once he probably would do so again when the going got tough. But Barnabas lovingly and forgivingly said to Mark, "Come with me and we will go another direction to serve the Lord." It would take time, but years later Paul would write about John Mark to Timothy and say, "*He is profitable to me for the ministry*" (2 Timothy 4:11).

When Demas disappointed Paul by forsaking him in the crisis hour, Paul felt the hurt and noted it to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:10). We don't know beyond that report what happened with Demas afterward. Could he have regretted his departure and have come back again before Paul was executed? Did he move further and further into the land of sin? We don't know.

What is clear is this: all of us are at times disappointed in people, sometimes because we expect too much; sometimes because we fail to see it is two-sided and they are equally disappointed in us; and sometimes we are wronged by those we should be able to depend upon.

But no matter what men do, our need is to stay close to God and continue His work. Even if we misjudge some who disappoint us, as Paul did Mark, time may give us the opportunity to see the mistake and grow closer than ever before. Disappointments aren't fatal unless we allow them to be so.

ELUSIVE VICTORY

Mike Hinton

Fire Never Wins....

Oh, it wins battles quite often, but it never wins the war. There have been forest fires that raged unchecked for thousands of acres, but always the rains or rivers or earth and stone come between the fire and its hunger to consume everything in sight.

There was the Chicago fire in 1871 that nearly wiped out the city, but once again water finally won. At times fire has burst forth in a mighty effort from places like Vesuvius, Krakatoa, and Mount St. Helens, sure that this time things would be different. But, alas, even these were finally stifled.

You see, the fire can never really win in a world that's made up mostly of things that aren't flammable. But it dreams. Each day as the sun passes overhead the fire dreams of that time when it will win, when it will reign supreme. And hope springs eternal in fire, "Someday, someday," it says, "I'm going to win." Yet, for now, save for an occasional outburst, fire remains confined, controlled, enslaved.

Christians are like fire in some ways. Sometimes it seems we can win a battle or two, but the ultimate victory eludes our grasp. From time to time we burst forth and sweep through large areas, converting thousands of the lost. But always we are stilled by the forces of this world—materialism, humanism, paganism—and like the fire, we sometimes just run out of fuel. Each day, though, we look toward the Son and dream of a day when we will win, when we will emerge triumphant in this seemingly one-sided war. But for now we must remain in a world made up mostly of people who can't seem to be ignited by the gospel.

In spite of the opposition, God's remnant here on earth can dream. We can plan and we can work and we can purpose how we will inflame the whole world with the gospel. And we can wait for that final victory God has promised us.

You see, someday both Christians and fire will finally win! Read 2 Peter 3:10-14. *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief*

in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

Coping With Loneliness

W.T. Allison

ADMIRAL RICHARD E. BYRD SPENT the long Antarctic winter nights alone at Boiling Advance Weather Base. During his four months of isolation, he lived in a small shack buried in the Antarctic snow. He lived with constant danger and discomfort. However, his greatest enemy was the solitude and loneliness.

Loneliness is as common today as physical hunger, especially in the great cities of the world. Millions of people crowd the busy streets; however, they are closed off from one another because of fear, selfishness, and unconcern. In a lonely world how vital and relevant becomes the community of Christians called "the church." Jesus developed an amazing strategy. Down in every community He planned to place a group of people gathered around His risen presence where people could count and could simply say, "I belong."

In coping with loneliness, each person has a responsibility. We must get involved with life. The world will let us shut ourselves off from the rest of society. Most of our problems begin when we get up in the morning to start our day. We don't really *start our day*... We just get up! One of the most famous neurosurgeons in Atlanta said that the first five minutes of each day determines the way the day will go. We would all do well to begin each day with this prayer: "Oh, God, don't let me die until I am dead." I've witnessed people who seem to die while they were still alive. I don't want this to happen to me. So, in the morning, don't just get up...face up, and anticipate what a good day it can be. You can choose to live a lonely life of solitude, or you can invite the world into your life. Don't die until you are dead!

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