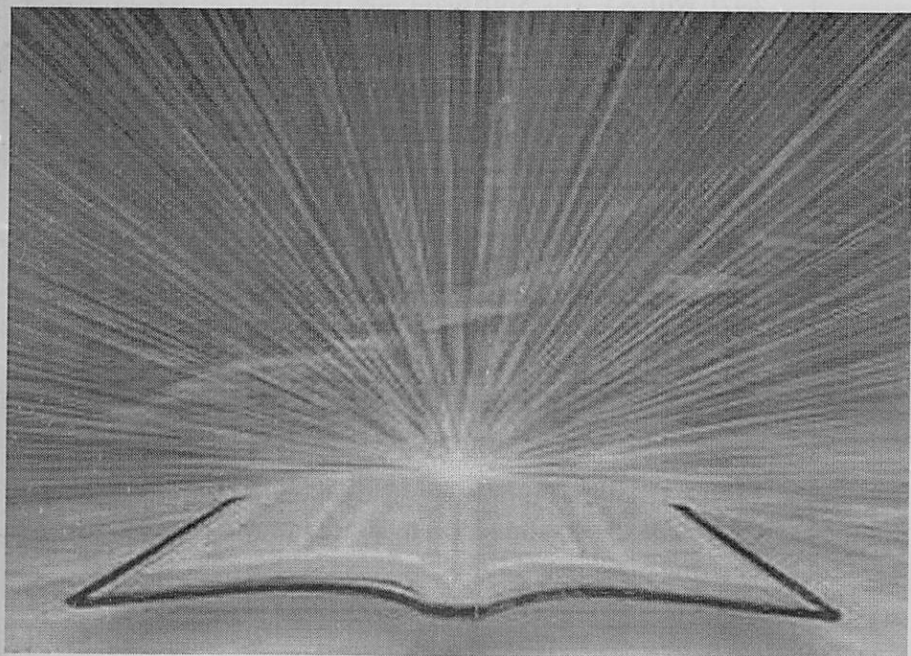


Monthly

May 2021

Price: Rs. 2/-

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

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 52

May 2021

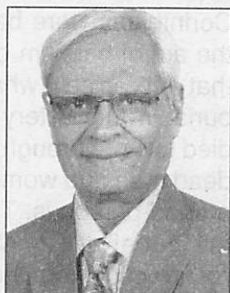
No. 1

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Why Then Are They Baptized For The Dead?

WHILE TEACHING THAT CHRIST'S RESURRECTION was the greatest proof of our own resurrection, which will occur at His coming to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31; John 5:28-29), the apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, "Otherwise what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?"



Some have held that there was a custom then, practiced by some, in the first century, of baptizing people, living persons, for the benefit of the individuals who had died without baptism. It is thought by some that in 1 Corinthians 15:29 the apostle was using an argumentum-ad-hominem, that is, an argument based upon what some Christians were doing at Corinth, that is, they practiced vicarious baptism, baptizing Christians on behalf of deceased acquaintances who, while under instruction and faith development, had died before completing their primary obedience to the gospel. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). The obvious difficulty in imagining such allusion here is met by emphasizing that the apostle did not here evaluate such a practice, with which he would have been in complete disagreement, but merely mentioned it in argument in making his overall case for the resurrection. Moreover, had such a custom existed there or at any other place, in the first century, then certainly the apostle Paul would have denounced it, as he did in every other case where Christians were deviating from the truth, instead of using

it as an example to teach the most important truth of resurrection. So we observe, the apostle rebuked them, when some of them were causing division in the church (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4). He rebuked them for their immorality that was defiling the church (1 Corinthians 5). In another instance the apostle reprimanded the Corinthians for their corrupting the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). One can no more obey God and have the blessing transferred to the dead, than he could disobey the Lord and have that condemnation imputed to some deceased person. Proxy baptism is not in view here.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle was particularly and specifically dealing with the doctrine of resurrection, which certain false teachers were denying. He argued that since Christ rose from the dead, so in the same manner all will rise from the dead. And it was in the hope of resurrection of the dead that they were baptized. The Corinthians were baptized (Acts 18:8). But before going through the act of baptism one must repent or die to sin (Acts 2:38), and that is precisely what they had done. Before their baptism—their burial in the watery-grave of baptism—they had, by repentance, died to sin. Through baptism they were put in the grave of water as dead men and women. A living person is not buried in a grave, but a dead person is. Their baptism was a planting in the likeness of the burial of Christ, and was a raising in the likeness of His resurrection from the dead. They were buried in the grave of water, through their baptism, as dead men and women, and were raised from the tomb of water to walk in the newness of life. (Romans 6:3-5). The inference is, their baptism was in the very likeness of the death and burial and resurrection of Christ. But if Christ had not risen, and the dead rise not, then their emblematic burial in water and coming out of the watery-tomb of baptism had no meaning. So the question: Why then are they baptized for the dead? How vain a thing had their baptism been if there will be no resurrection? Must they stand by it or renounce it? They themselves were baptized for the dead, that is, with the view of their own death to sin, through repentance, they were buried in the tomb of water and had come out of it, declaring their own death and burial and resurrection, to walk in the new Christian walk. Immersion of a believer in water symbolizes his death or separation from the old existence lived under the power of sin, and coming out of the grave of water of baptism portrays the resurrection of Christ after His death.

The purpose, the scope, and the connection will admit of but one meaning – if the dead rise not, what shall they do who are

baptized in the hope of the resurrection? One is "baptized into Christ" to live in Him and die in Him, and finally be raised as justified and saved in Him.

"IN CHRIST"

J.C. Choate

THE BIBLE TELLS US that all spiritual blessings are in Christ—not out of Christ but in Christ. Paul proclaimed in the long ago: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1:3).



Since all spiritual blessings are in Christ it stands to reason that one must be in Christ to enjoy those blessings. But the question immediately arises: "How can one enter Christ?" And the scriptures answer this question. The same writer who says all spiritual blessings are in Christ also informs us that one may enter him through the act of baptism. Thus, he writes: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). Please note that Paul only would have us know that it takes baptism to put one into Christ, but at the same time, he includes himself as being one of many who had been baptized into him. Again he says: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). To put on something is to be in it. For instance, if one puts on a coat then he is in it. Thus, for one to put on Christ simply means that he is in Christ. Again, keep in mind that it is baptism which puts one into the Lord.

There are multitudes of people who frown on baptism. Many laugh and scoff at the idea of going down into the water for the purpose of being immersed. But a question: Unless one is baptized how does he think he can enter Christ? It just so happens that the word of God tells us it is through baptism that one puts on Christ. In light of such it would seem foolish to belittle an act which is so necessary to the welfare of one's soul.

It is said by some that faith is sufficient to salvation, and consequently, faith puts one into Christ. But where does the Bible say that one must believe into Christ? Where is the verse of scripture for such? If there is such a statement in all of God's word it has never been brought to this writer's attention. No doubt about it; faith

is important, but the scripture says that one must believe unto salvation, not into it. (Rom 10:10). Hence, one must believe unto Christ, faith carries one in the direction of Christ, but it alone is not enough to put one into him. The same is true of repentance and confession. (2 Cor. 7:10; Rom. 10:10). One must repent unto salvation, and confess unto salvation. But mind you, one cannot repent into salvation or repent into Christ ; neither can one confess into salvation or confess into Christ. But by believing unto salvation, repenting unto salvation, confessing unto salvation, one may scripturally be baptized into salvation. That is, through scripturally believing, repenting, and confessing one may be baptized into Christ, but not until.

Then there is always someone ready to say: "Well, I am saved but I have never been baptized." Is that so? friend, if you are saved, and yet you have never been baptized, then you are saved apart from Christ: for the word of God says that one must be baptized in order to enter Christ. Now look at the mess you are in. Somebody is mistaken about the matter, and I rather suspect you, inasmuch as the Bible contradicts that which you are saying—I'll take the word of God any day over what puny man has said. My friend, you had better leave the Devil's doctrine and get back to the truth.

We have learned, then, that all spiritual blessings are in Christ and that the only way to enter him is through the act of baptism. It might also be pointed out that the same act which puts one into Christ, puts one into his body. (1 Cor. 12:13). But what does it mean to be in Christ where all spiritual blessings are? It means that one is saved, that he may pray, that he has the gift of the Holy Spirit, and above all, may look to a better world with hope through Christ. Yes, it means all this and much, much more.

Friend, if you are not in Christ then enter him today through the act of baptism and the Lord will surely bless you for it. Remember, you cannot be saved until you put on Christ by baptism.

"I May Be Old-Fashioned, But..."

Clem Thurman

WE SOMETIMES HEAR PEOPLE talk about "the good old days," but each one has his own ideas about what those days were all about! I well remember going out to pump water for the household, and taking baths in an old wash-tub in the kitchen. Our family rode in a wagon to the "big meeting" under the brush arbor each Summer,

and I either walked or rode a horse to basketball practice in high school. But a fine, air-conditioned automobile is admittedly much more comfortable, and turning on a faucet is so much better than the old pump on a cold winter morning. No, we don't really want to go back to those "good old days."

But as I look at our society today, I must admit that I long for the "good old days" in the realm of morality and society in general. With rising crime rates, riots, violence, the breakdown of the home and dozens of other such ills of our "modern world," we should realize that not everything modern is good. Sure, we can get good television reception, but what is there to see that really benefits our lives!? I may be old-fashioned, but some of the "old" things are worth keeping. Let's look at some of these "old-fashioned" things of value.

We Need The Old-Fashioned Faith

In a time when many folk claim that faith is "better caught than taught" and "better felt than told," we need to return to the faith that "comes by hearing the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The reality of this old-fashioned faith is not to be found in one's mind nor in one's own experiences. This faith comes from God, through the avenue of His word. The Bible speaks of "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and Peter told the Jewish Christians, "God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7). If faith were subjective (that is, from within or by one's own experience), there could be no "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13). Yet Paul declares that there is "one faith" (Eph. 4:5).

Some cry, "You are worshipping the Bible instead of the Lord. The Bible is just one way to know Jesus." But, friend, make no mistake, the ONLY way you can know Jesus as the Christ, God's Son, the Savior of the world is through the Scriptures which He authored. He said of these Scriptures, "They bear witness of me" (John 5:39). And what John wrote of the miracles of the Lord Jesus could apply to all of the gospel: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). And if one believes in Christ, surely he will believe what He tells us! It may be old-fashioned, but we need more of that faith that says, "I believe it because God said it."

We Need the Old-Fashioned Obedience

The old-fashioned faith should naturally lead to the old-fashioned obedience. When a person really believes what God says, he will DO what God says. Look at the response of faith as it is recorded

in Heb. 11. *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous ... By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death ... By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house ... By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed ... By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac"* (vs. 4,5,7,8,17).

Why did Abel bring a blood-offering? It was *"by faith"* - that is, he did what God told him. Why did Noah build an ark? Because he believed God. Why did Abraham obey, even to the offering of his son, Isaac? Because God said so. Isn't that simple? They believed God, so they did what He told them to do. Doing just what God says is precisely what faith leads one to do.

We need that kind of obedience today. *"Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth"* (1 Sam. 3:10) should be our way of life. When folk have that kind of faith, they will also have that kind of obedience. People who believed the Lord did not argue with what He told them - they just did it.

We Need the Old-Fashioned Salvation

In this "modern age" many are claiming that salvation will result from simply believing in Jesus Christ. "Just put your hand on the radio, and send in your ten dollars!" has become the modern televangelist's battle cry. But friend, that was never taught in the Scriptures. There is not one example in Scripture of a person being saved by faith only. In fact, the Bible says, *"You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone"* (James 2:24). As noted above, we are saved by faith. But it must be a *"faith which works by love"* (Gal. 5:6).

Jesus told the apostles, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:15-16). That was simple enough that people could understand it, and obey it. It is still that simple. When the apostle Peter preached Christ on Pentecost, people asked what to do; God's reply, by Peter's mouth, was: *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins"* (Acts 2:38). When the Lord Jesus sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus to tell him what to do, it was exactly what those above did: *"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name"* (Acts 22:16). People believed, they repented and they were baptized *"unto remission of sins."*

Many claim to have been "born again" who have no concept of

the means of that new birth. Look at what Jesus said: *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!"* (John 3:5). When one believes, he is *"begotten of God"* (1 John 5:1). That faith then leads him to be baptized (Mark 16:16). There is the new birth! Let the Scriptures explain it: *"For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life ... Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 3:23-24; 5:10; 6:3-4). That is the means of being *"born again"* and thus becoming a *"new creature in Christ"* (2 Cor. 5:17). Friend, that is exactly the way all people were saved 2000 years ago. And God has not changed His mind!

We Need the Old-Fashioned Church

On Pentecost, when told what they were to do, the people responded: *"They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls"* (Acts 2:41). But to what were they added? Six verses later is our answer: *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* We need THAT church today, the one of which Jesus spoke in Matt. 16:18, *"I will build my church."* The Bible says, *"The husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body ... 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. 5:23,31-32).

With all of the new-fangled gadgetry today, it was inevitable that some would try to "up-date" the church. But the world needs that church of which we read in the Scriptures. That church didn't need an orchestra to praise God, they did it by *"singing and making melody with heart to the Lord"* (Eph. 5:19). They didn't need to "turn out the lights and hold hands" to be close to God, for *"He is not far from each of us, for in him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:27-28). Without all of the physical trappings of artificial spirituality, that church of nearly 2000 years ago worshiped God *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24) and glorified Him (Eph. 3:21).

In this age when one "can't tell the preacher from a politician

without a program," we need the purpose of that old-fashioned church taught again. The Lord established the kind of church the world needs today: a church that preaches a saving gospel instead of politics, that seeks to be conformed to the Savior and not the world, that cares more for souls than socials. There is a desperate need in the world today for that church.

We Need Old-Fashioned Righteousness

In an age when people without moral anchors are crying, "What's in it for me?" or, "I am going to look out for number one," we need emphasis on the righteousness which God reveals. The purpose of man is clearly revealed: "*Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*" (Eccle. 12:13). Then the answer to the question, "Why do right?" is thus revealed. Children are told, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right*" (Eph. 6:1). Why do what God says? "*For this is right.*" No other reason is necessary. Do right, simply because it is the right thing to do.

The inclination today is, "If you don't like the situation, just get out." So, marriages break up, friendships are severed, partnerships are destroyed. A married couple, for instance, rather than "*do what is right,*" and work out their difficulties, just bail out. We are told the old moral values are outdated—lying is now acceptable, cheating the government is okay, virginity before marriage is unrealistic, etc. But, friend, God's morality has not changed. Hear Him: "*Speak the truth, and lie not*" (Eph. 4:25), "*Abstain from every form of evil*" (1 Thes. 5:22), "*Keep thyself pure*" (1 Tim. 5:22). We need those moral values in our lives today.

How can we keep ourselves pure? The answer to that is simple: "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*" (Phil. 4:8). If we fill our physical bodies with garbage, our health will suffer. And when we fill our minds with garbage, our spiritual condition also deteriorates! If we fill our minds with what is pure, virtuous, etc., we will prosper spiritually.

How badly the world needs the old-fashioned "*Love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Mark 12:31), and "*Consider one another*" (Heb. 10:24). Lending a hand, speaking a word of encouragement, standing firm against the lusts of the world - these may seem old-fashioned, but they are what God wants for our lifestyle.

Long ago the prophet cried, "*Thus saith Jehovah, Stand ye in*

the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). Attitudes haven't really changed much, have they? Our problem is not in knowing what is right, but in building the determination within ourselves to do what is right. To "*walk in the old paths.*" The churches of Christ have nothing new to offer today, just those "old-fashioned" things of nearly 2000 years ago. But we plead with all to accept that old faith, render that old obedience, be saved in that old-fashioned way, glorify God in that old-fashioned church and live that old-fashioned righteousness.

A Simple Sermon For The Multitudes

Wayne Barrier

"GREAT MULTITUDES FOLLOWED HIM— from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to him" (Matthew 4:25-5:1).

Jesus stopped His journey and taught the multitudes who followed Him through the countryside on numerous occasions and often revealed some of the most basic and fundamental new concepts of His teaching in these settings. Consider Matthew 4:25 and Matthew 5:1 where the Bible says, "*Great multitudes followed him — from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:*

'Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in

heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven."

This teaching is contrary to the thinking of most people. The way to glorify our Father in heaven is illuminated by the good works of the persecuted, the peacemakers, the pure in heart, the merciful, those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the meek, those who mourn, the poor in spirit. What about the powerful, prominent, and self-sufficient? Jesus' teaching often contradicted prominent teaching and man's wisdom. We need to be especially careful today, lest we mistakenly believe that the greatest and most beneficial teaching is from the teacher with credentials, determined by the world's measures of strength, value, and success.

Acts 16:30-33

Kevin L. Moore

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..."?

WHEN THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER asked what he needed to do to be saved, he was simply told, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts 16:30,31). Why were repentance, confession, and baptism not included in this salvation formula?

Although there is only one gospel plan of salvation (cf. Ephesians 4:4-6), we find that different people were told to do different things *depending on where they were in the salvation process*. Bear in mind that the jailer at Philippi was a pagan who did not believe in Jesus and in all probability had never even heard of Jesus. Without the initial step of simple faith he could not go any further in the process of salvation. Thus Paul and Silas *"spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house"* (v. 32). After this family had heard the gospel and obviously believed, what was the next step they needed to take? Having exhibited repentance by washing the wounds of his prisoners, *"immediately [the jailer]*

and all his family were baptized" (v. 33). It was not necessary for Paul and Silas to give more information in v. 31 until this man and his family had heard and believed the gospel.

In Acts 2:37,38, when the Jews had asked the apostles the same question, they were given a different answer—not because there was a different formula they were to follow but because they had already heard about and believed in Jesus. In other words, they were further along in the salvation process than the Philippian jailer initially was, and so they were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. In the end, they all followed the same pattern: **hearing, believing, repentance, and baptism**. To be saved, what must *unbelievers* do? They must *hear the gospel* and *believe it* (Acts 16:31). Once they become believers, what must they do? They must *repent* (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Once they are *penitent believers*, what must they do? They must **confess Jesus and be baptized** (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 35-39; 22:16). And once they are penitent baptized believers, what must they do? They must continue in the faith (Acts 2:42; 14:22).

It is interesting to note that in Acts 2:44 the disciples are simply described as "*all who believed*", even though they had just been baptized (v. 41). The Philippian jailer is merely described as one "*having believed in God with all his household*" (Acts 16:34), even though he and his household had just been baptized (v. 33). Obviously it is not necessary for the all the words, "belief," "repentance," "confession," and "baptism", to be mentioned in every verse that talks about salvation since the overall context of Scripture clearly includes each step in the process.

But, Is It For ME?

Stan Mitchell

He was a righteous man, and a priest. No doubt, he had read many times the story of the aged Abraham, and God's promise of a son. He must have thrilled at the angel's question, "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" (Genesis 18:14). He may have wept silently at the ancient account of Isaac's birth, for he understood only too well Abraham's deepest longing.

Abraham had wanted a son more than life itself, and the God of heaven, who loves His people and keeps His promises, gave him a son.

No doubt, the priest had also read the story of Hannah's prayer

for a son. She had cried the tears of the desperately lonely, and had promised that, if given a son, she would dedicate him to God. He may have smiled when he read that Eli had told her, *"Go in peace; the God of Israel grant you the petition you have made to him"* (1 Samuel 1:17).

Of course Hannah's prayer was granted, for God is a God who kept His promises, and loves His children. In those long ago days He led and loved and blessed His people.

But perhaps the priest wondered: Does God guide and love His people still? Does He still answer prayer? Might the Lord of heaven, even on that day, answer His deepest longing for a son?

"Do not be afraid," the angel had said, *"Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John"* (Luke 1:13).

Zechariah believed that God had answered Abraham's prayer, and Hannah's, too. *But he just could not believe that God wished to bless him with a child.* Could God's blessings be for him, too?

Zechariah had nine months to think the matter over. God struck him dumb for his lack of faith. Which brings up an important question. If every Christian who failed to believe God's promises today were struck dumb...how many of us could say "hello" this morning?

The God Of All Comfort

David Deffenbaugh

"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 1:3-14).

Who has not felt the need for comfort from God? Heartache... pain...death...illness...disappointment...the list goes on. It is of utmost importance to realize that God is the source of comfort. It is also important to realize how God provides that comfort. Unfortunately, many people live under the impression that if God does something, He must do it by extraordinary means. To the contrary, Scripture teaches that God's work, more often than not, is done by very "ordinary" means.

The remainder of the first chapter of 2 Corinthians gives us several insights into ways God is able to provide comfort.

The afflictions of others. *"But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort..."* (verse 6). There is indeed a comfort to be felt where we know for certain the truthfulness of one who says, "I know just how you feel." No doubt, the affliction of shared persecution was one of the great forces helping to bind the early church together.

The prayers of others. *"And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers"* (verses 10b-11a). Knowing *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much"* (James 5:16), it is indeed comforting to realize that righteous men are offering petitions to God on behalf of one's suffering.

The promises of God. *"For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes"* (verse 20). Jesus is the affirmation, the "Amen," of the promises of God, promises such as that our *"Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Suffering and affliction of the heart, body, and soul are quite real. The realization of the need for comfort is most acute in the midst of suffering. May we remember not only from whom our comfort comes, but the means by which the God of all comfort provides it.

MY GOD IS NOT A GOD OF FAILURE

Clayton Pepper

THE FIRST FEW CHAPTERS of the book of Acts describe the growth of the first congregation of the Church. After some 3,000 converts the first day, there were additions daily (Acts 3:41,47). Soon there were 5,000 men, plus women and children (Acts 4:4). They sowed bountifully and reaped bountifully. *"The word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly"* (Acts 6:7). There is a lot of difference in sowing a few seed on a small plot of ground and much seed on a large acreage. There is a vast difference in the harvest. There is the opportunity for a much larger catch of fish on a trot line with many hooks than a pole with just one hook. The early Church was sowing a lot of seed—they had a lot of hooks out! *"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"* (Acts 5:42).

What God Controls Grows

I like the statement, "what God controls grows"! The life that God controls grows spiritually and becomes a winner of souls (1

Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12). Also the Church that God controls grows numerically! The only exception that I know of to this would be where there are no people around, or communist rule. The question is, is God in control of some congregations? Many congregations have very few converts because there is little or no evangelistic thrust — no adequate leadership in evangelism and no trained soul winners. If God is in control, we must conclude that He is a God of failure. If He is not a God of failure, then we must conclude that He is not in control! Our God cannot fail!

Being sound in doctrine does not permit a congregation to be sound asleep! There is no such thing as being sound doctrinally, alive spiritually and dead evangelistically!

One may conclude that growth is not possible today. This may be true if we rely only on twentieth century traditional methods. In such cases apostolic methods have not failed. They simply have not been tried! My God is not a God of failure! Who is in control of your life and your congregation?

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

John Thiesen

IN ANCIENT TIMES, A PROPHET named Hosea prophesied concerning a future people of God, saying:

"And I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:23).

Who are these who were not of God, but who then became God's people? According to the apostle Paul, they are believers in Jesus Christ, the Son of God:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26,27). All today who come to believe in Jesus and are baptized (immersed) into Him are counted by God as His children, fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea.

These people make up the Lord's church, which is the "house of God" and the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). They have been born into God's family by the rebirth of "water and of the Spirit" (John 3:3-5; Mark 16:15,16). Redeemed by Christ's blood (1 Peter 1:18,19), they have become God's children, "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16,17).

In every age, God's people have possessed at least three distinct characteristics:

The Characteristic of Faith

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

God's people are people of faith. Abel offered sacrifice to God through faith (Hebrews 11:4). By faith Enoch was translated rather than to see death (Hebrews 11:5). Through faith Noah built an ark (Hebrews 11:7). Abraham became a sojourner and offered up his son, Isaac (Hebrews 11:9, 17-19). By faith Moses led God's people out of Egyptian bondage (Hebrews 11:24-29). Christians today believe Jesus died for their sins, was raised again, and is alive at God's right hand in Heaven. Through faith they look for His second coming to raise the dead, judge the world, punish the wicked, and give eternal life to His followers.

Worshipfulness

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all offered sacrifices to God. The Israelites worshiped God at the Temple with sacrifices, tithes, feast days, Sabbaths, and prayer. Christians worship God through the Lord's Supper, singing, prayers, giving, and the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42); Acts 20:7, Ephesians 5:19, 1 Corinthians 16:1,2). The blind man who was healed by Jesus spoke of this trait of acceptance with God when he said, *"Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth"* (John 9:31).

Righteousness

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith..." (Colossians 2:6,7).

Noah was a *"just man"* who *"walked with God"* (Genesis 6:9). Lot was a *"righteous man"* (2 Peter 2:7,8). Moses was *"very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth"* (Numbers 12:3). Christians, forgiven of their past sins, are then instructed to *"cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Friend, are you one of God's people? Are you a child of God? The Lord wants you to become one of His children through the rebirth of the water and of the Spirit. (John 3:3,5) Then walk in faith, in the worship of God, and with a holy conduct befitting his child.

In One Accord

Glenn Colley

I HAVE NEVER BELIEVED that a man must know the Greek or Hebrew language in order to study the Word of God, obey it, and go to heaven. I am fully persuaded that we have reliable translations in English which we can confidently use as our standard for belief and practice.

Nevertheless, a Bible student can surely grow in understanding some impressive details of Scripture by sometimes pursuing a Greek word used in the New Testament. Let's enjoy one such word now.

The English word is "accord." Watch how the Holy Spirit carefully placed the word in these verses in the book of Acts:

*"These all continued **with one accord** in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14). "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all **with one accord** in one place" (Acts 2:1).*

*"And they, continuing daily **with one accord** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46).*

*"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people: and they were all **with one accord** in Solomon's porch" (Acts 5:12).*

*"It seemed good unto us, being assembled **with one accord**, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 15:25).*

The hard-to-pronounce Greek word is "homothumadon," and it is found twelve times in the New Testament. Eleven times it is translated "with one accord," and one time it is translated, "with one mind."

Of this word Strong's Lexicon of the Greek Language says this: "A unique Greek word, used 10 of its 12 New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. Homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to 'rush along' and 'in unison.' The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church."

Listen Christians. The Lord wants us to live and work in sweet harmony, in symphony, in one accord.

Observe that the apostle Paul commands such in Philippians 2:2 when he writes, *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."* To work in unison with my brethren is not, then, a mere matter of preference if I choose to follow Jesus faithfully. I **must** do this.

When the church meets for worship and Bible study during each week, are we in **one accord**? Do I fulfill my duty to be present and ready?

When the elders challenge the church with new programs of service, are we in **one accord**? Do they know they can count on me? *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you"* (Hebrews 13:17).

Do we make a conscious effort to *"weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice"* (Romans 12:15)?

There is a sense of security and hope which comes from working in symphony with other Christians, and it is reciprocal. That is, we derive the joy, while at the same time giving the joy. God made Christians to live in **one accord**.

No Wonder The World Is Confused About Christianity

Maxie B. Boren

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC POPE receives more publicity than any other world figure, except perhaps the President of the United States. For an example, on so-called "Easter" Sunday, there is worldwide TV coverage given to the gathering of tens of thousands of Roman Catholics for "Easter mass" at the Vatican in Rome. These ritualistic proceedings are depicted as the worship of "Christianity" and the news media refers to the throngs gathered there as "Christians" instead of Catholics.

Believe me, "Easter mass" of Catholicism is nothing akin to the worship of New Testament Scripture (see John 4:23,24)! In fact, it has no valid connection whatsoever to true Christianity! But the world doesn't know that! Viewers around the world undoubtedly think that what they see via telecast from Rome is indeed what "Christianity" is all about. What a distortion!

Adding to the confusion is that by satellite TV, the world also sees programs from so-called "Faith Healers" to "Snake Handlers", all cast under the ever-enlarging umbrella of "Christianity". On top of that, thousands of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, ad infinitum go forth as "missionaries" claiming identity with "Christianity". **No wonder the world is perplexed concerning what "Christianity" is all about!**

And worse yet, having heard that America is a "Christian nation," the world through movies and TV programming sees our country portrayed Hollywood-style, glamorizing nudity, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness, gambling, drugs, and cursing. Thus, it equates such sinful behavior with the "moral values" of "Christian America." Obviously, this gives people an absolutely warped and corrupted perception of what "Christianity" is all about!

Multiplied millions, based on these erroneous portrayals, think of "Christian worship" as an admixture of pomp and ceremony on the one hand, and run-away emotionalism on the other. And they perceive the moral ethic of "Christianity" as decadent. What an absolute shame! Satan has done a stupendous job of lying, distorting the truth, deceiving, confusing, and blinding the minds of the vast majority of people living today.

My soul cries out in prayer, "O God, my heart's desire is for all mankind to be able to hear the truth about Jesus Christ and true Christianity, and to be saved from sin and its dreadful consequences!" (Please consider Romans 10:1-3, giving this passage a comprehensive application to include all men everywhere. The apostle wrote in I Timothy 2:4 that God "*would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*"). Paul spoke of the "simplicity" which is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). True Christianity is not "showy" and "glamorous"! It is not ritualistic! It doesn't have a clergy all dressed in "priestly garb" desiring to be seen of men like the Pharisees of old (Matthew 23:1-10) and the Roman hierarchy, calling themselves "Reverend" and "Father".

True Christianity is composed of honest-hearted people who have heard the gospel, believed it, and obeyed it, and are living humbly before God in their walk with Him (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 5:15-17).

The moral teachings of true Christianity are indeed the highest and most noble value-system the world has ever known! Oh that that the world could know the truth!

HOLINESS—The Heart of Worship

Clarence DeLoach

WHILE THERE HAS BEEN great emphasis upon the grace and love of God, somehow we have missed **the holiness of God**. “*Be holy for I am holy*” (1 Peter 1:16). This statement summarizes well the book of Leviticus. A failure to sanctify God in the eyes of Israel led to Nadab’s and Abihu’s disobedience (Leviticus 10:1,2). “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him*” (Psalm 89:7).

Recognizing God’s holiness means that we see Him as flawless, without error, without sin, and fully righteous. This is the heart of true worship. It is much more than singing some pretty songs, feeling good, and thinking positive thoughts. Our response to His holiness leads to a godly, healthy fear. When Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up in His holiness, he was overwhelmed with his own sinfulness (Isaiah 6:1-6).

Any flippant, casual, buddy-buddy approach to God betrays a woeful misunderstanding of the holiness of God. True worship is inspired by a life of brokenness and confession of our sin.

When are we prepared to worship? Hebrews 10:22 gives an insight. “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*” Look at the essentials for “drawing near,” that is, worship to God.

FIRST is sincerity—“*With a true heart.*” Our worship must be with all our hearts. God will not receive a divided heart. Years ago, Stephen Charnock wrote, “Without the heart it is not worship, it is a stage play, an acting; an acting of a part without being that person really—a hypocrite. We may truly be said to worship God—though we lack **perfection**; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack **sincerity**.”

SECOND is fidelity—“*in full assurance of faith.*” We are justified by faith. To the Hebrews this meant letting go of the law, and fully receiving the New Covenant established upon better promises. We, therefore, come in worship, not only with sincerity of heart, but in full assurance of faith in Jesus and the truth revealed in the New Testament.

THIRD is humility—“*having our hearts sprinkled from an evil*

conscience. "We come, not in our own sufficiency, but totally on the merits of the blood of Jesus. This gives us a sense of unworthiness in the presence of God.

FOURTH is purity — "*and our bodies washed with pure water,*" the daily cleansing of the blood of Jesus that comes through daily confession of our sins. Not all of life is worship, but all of life relates to our worship. You cannot live every day for the Devil and worship God acceptably on the Lord's Day or any other day.

Sincerity, fidelity, humility, and purity — these are prerequisites to worship. God is a living, eternal, glorious, and holy being worthy of our worship.

You Can Be An Overcomer!

Adenugba D.A.

"NAY IN ALL THESE THINGS we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Glory be to God for we are more than overcomers through Him who loves and lives in us! Our conquest of the world is not as a result of our own *human* strength, power and wisdom. Our victory is not achieved through the *weapons of war*, for our warfare is not carnal (Ephesians 6:12). However, we are victorious *through faith in Him* who is capable to make us an overcomer.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4,5).

When we turn to God completely through His Son Christ Jesus we are conquerors, but without Him, no one can overcome the world. You become an overcomer when you heartily believe in Christ and obey Him (Romans 10:9,10; 1 John 2:23). As Christians we live by faith (Hebrews 10:38), walk by faith (2 Corinthians:5:7) and stand by faith (2 Corinthians 1:24). Doing this, we are under the full protection of Almighty God. Hence, we do not require the assistance of any juju or charms for anything. We can say boldly with brother Paul that, *"The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Hebrews 13:6).

"Ye are of God, little children," Brother John wrote, *"and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that*

is in the world" (1 John 4:4). For you to be an overcomer, you must be truly a child of God. God must dwell in you, and for God to abide in you, you must be obedient to his commandments: "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous*" (1 John 5:3).

His commandments are that we repent of all sins (Acts 3:9; Luke 13:3,5); confess Christ as the Son of God (Philippians 2:11; Matthew 10:32,33), be baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3,4) and continue to walk in newness of life till the end (Revelation 2:10). These are the steps one must take in order to be saved and to be an overcomer. Partial obedience is no obedience at all. Thus all these steps must be taken in sincere faith.

When we are baptized we automatically put on Christ (Galatians 3:26,27) and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). We are not of the flesh but of the Spirit (Romans 8:9,10; 14). We are a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ dwells in us and we in Him. Consequently, we are conquerors, because He has overcome for us.

No one can be an overcomer by ignoring God's commandments. Neither can anyone be outside Christ and be a conqueror. But when we put on Christ in baptism, God is in us, and who can be against us? (Romans 8:31-34).

Brethren, we are more than conquerors when we *abide in the commandments of God*. We are overcomers when we put on the whole armour of God, that is, the word of God, by studying the Holy writ (Ephesians 6:10-14; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:13). Jesus triumphed over the devil with the words of God (Matthew 4:1-10).

We shall also be victorious if we are prayerful. Through prayers we shall *receive, the door shall be opened* and we shall *find* (Luke 11:9,10; 1 John 5:15).

Surrender all to God through Christ and you are an overcomer in every way. You can be an over-comer of wants because God can supply all your needs (2 Corinthians 9:12; Matthew 6:33,34). Christians are overcomers of errors and sins because we limit ourselves to the word of God and live according to His law. Hence, "*ye are clean through the word*" and holy as the One who has called you is holy (John 15:3; 1 Peter 1:15,16).

May the gracious and merciful God assist us to be overcomers.

The Foundation Of God

Tom Holland

FOUNDATIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR building. Foundations are important for educational institutions. Foundations are essential in one's life.

In an era of rapid and sometimes disruptive change, it is so reassuring to know that *"the foundation of God standeth sure"* (2 Timothy 2:19).

Our brethren in the first century were sometimes troubled by religious error the same as we are. There were preachers/teachers *"who concerning the truth have (had) erred"* (2 Timothy 2:18). The truth was not so vague or relative that it was impossible to ascertain departures from or corruptions of that truth. However, those who erred from the truth did not shake the foundation of God.

The Lord knew and knows those who *"are His"* (2 Timothy 2:19). There are people who know the Lord (2 Timothy 2:19). There are people who are *known by* the Lord, people who are *children of God* because they have been *baptized into Christ* (Galatians 3:26,27). There are faithful people who *"abide in Christ"* (John 15:4), regardless of opposition, rejection, trouble, trials, storms, or success in life.

It is reassuring to realize that the Lord knows His own. It is a consolation to know that God loves His people. It gives us hope to remember that the Lord knows, cares, aids, saves, and blesses His people.

Think how sad some will be in the day of judgment when the Lord would say, *"I never knew you"* (Matthew 7:23). But think how glad we will be when our Lord knows us and claims His own — eternally!

What Could I Preach?

Basil Overton

"FOR THE HUSBAND IS the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

Suppose I should want to preach on some subject pertaining to Christ, but not talk about the church. What could I preach?

If I should preach about the headship of Christ, I would have to tell about that of which He is the head, and that is His church (Colossians 1:18).

If I should preach about Him as our Savior, I would have to tell that He is the Savior of the body, which is His church (Ephesians 1:22,23).

If I should decide to preach about His blood, I would have to tell that His blood was the purchase price of His church (Acts 20:28).

If I should preach about His giving spirit, I would have to tell that He always gave and said *"it is more blessed to give than to receive"*; I would have to tell that He finally gave Himself for the church (Ephesians 5:25).

If I should preach about being subject to Christ, I would have to report that it is the church that is subject unto Christ (Ephesians 5:24).

If I should preach about the love of Jesus, I could not afford to leave out the fact that He loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

If I should tell about His sanctifying and cleansing power, I would have to tell that Christ sanctified and cleansed the church with the washing of water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26).

If I should preach about the care and concern and the sustaining power of Jesus, I would tell that He nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:29).

Obviously, one cannot preach Christ without preaching what the Bible says about His church.

The Crisis Of Bereavement

Hardeman Nichols

SINCE THE PALE OF death pierces every mortal, it is necessary for all of us to learn how to handle bereavement. I have watched with great admiration and respect the courage that has borne many a saint through hours of sorrow. Here is some practical advice I have seen others use in dealing with grief:

Express Your Emotions

It should not be considered a Christian virtue to be unmoved by the loss of a loved one. There is a difference between suppressing one's emotions and losing one's self-control. The Bible does not

say, "Sorrow not"; but it says, "*Sorrow not as others who have no hope*" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Seek the Aid of Your Friends

The very presence of friends is an encouragement. When Paul neared Rome, the brethren came to meet him, and he "*thanked God and took courage*" (Acts 28:15).

Compel Yourself to Be with People

Your inclination may be to retreat into the refuge of privacy, but there is a greater need than one realizes to associate with others. David did (2 Samuel 12:19-23).

Express Your Feelings in Words

Talking about it will help you to accept it. If this is done at the outset of bereavement, one will sooner be able to stabilize his life.

Avail Yourself of Spiritual Resources

Even though you may not have realized the importance of the Scriptures and their comfort, now these can help in building your faith. The power of prayer and the peace of God are very precious possessions.

Don't Brood Over What Might Have Been

Both Mary and Martha said, "*If thou hadst been here my brother had not died*" (John 11:21-32).

Actively Pursue Worthwhile Tasks

Once the initial shock has been dealt with, get busy at other things. Resolve like Paul to "*reach forth unto the things which are before*" (Philippians 3:13).

Make Careful and Thoughtful Decisions

Many an individual jumps hastily into deciding the full scope of the future rather than waiting until he has regained a proper perspective of life. Don't get in a hurry. Make prayerful decisions.

Increase Your Trust in God

Those who have come through their sorrows with a deeper faith can verify that God, who rules over all, truly does make all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).

After the crisis of grief, you can serve more fully and sympathize more completely with people of like passions. With Paul, you too can thank God for the comfort received, knowing that it has now given you the ability to comfort others who are in any trouble (2 Corinthians 1:4).

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Printed and Published by Sunny David on behalf of Church of Christ, Plot No. 1, Market No. 4, Near Police Station, C.R. Park, New Delhi-110019, and Printed at: Guide Offset Printers, D-11, DSIDC Packaging Complex, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi. Editor: Sunny David.

Regd. No. 26921/71

Postal Regn. No.
DL(S)-17/3154/2021-2023
Licence to Post without Prepayment
No. U/SE/25/2021-2023
Posted at Lodi Road HO
on 10-11 May 2021

Total No. of pages 28

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