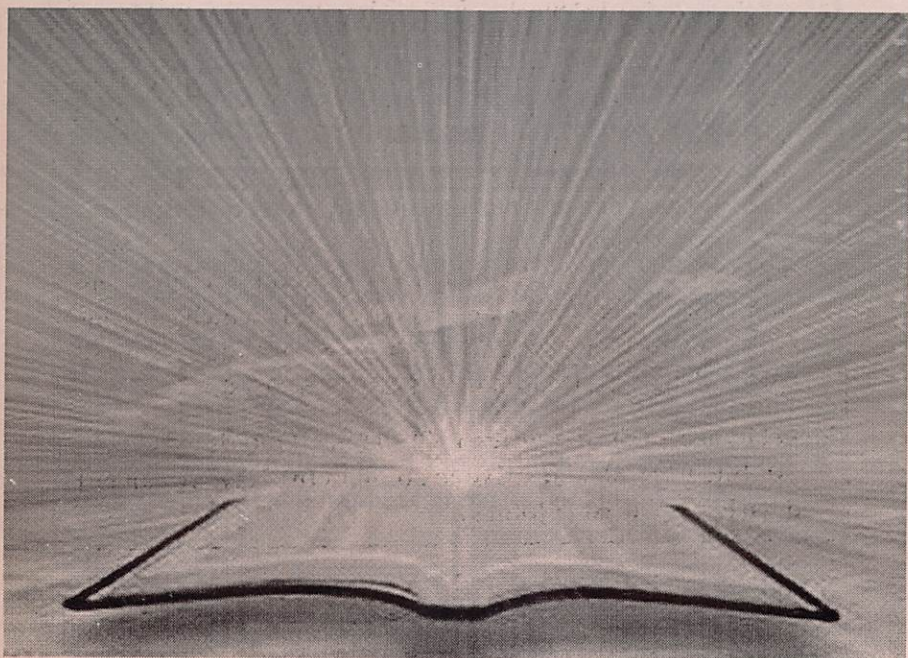


Monthly

September 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

September 2021

No. 5

Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

There Are Some Who Want To Pervert The Gospel Of Christ



ONE OF THE COMMON beliefs among all denominational churches regarding salvation is: "Salvation is achieved by faith alone." It is believed, first comes the salvation through faith, and later as a consequence, not as a prerequisite, comes the baptism, as a sign of death of the old self and the new life in Jesus and a public proclamation of faith. This is entirely different than what the Bible teaches. Here is what the Bible teaches one must do to be saved:

When Christ sent His disciples in the beginning to preach the gospel to every creature, as we read in Mark 16:15-16, He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Did you notice what the Savior Himself said? According to Christ, baptism comes before salvation and not after. When the first gospel sermon was preached by the apostles in the city of Jerusalem in about 33 AD, as we read in Acts chapter 2, the listeners asked the apostles, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" Listen to the answer they had received from them, "Then Peter said to them, "Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS."" (Acts 2:37, 38). They were to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. What comes first, remission of sins or baptism? Verse 41 says about three thousand were baptized that day as they were commanded. Why were they baptized? To show

that they were already saved when they had believed? Certainly not. They were baptized for the remission of sins or to receive the forgiveness of their sins. Can somebody be saved without receiving the forgiveness of sins? That shows some are reading and interpreting the Bible wrong. The Bible very clearly teaches that to be saved one must believe in Christ, and repent of sins, and be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of sins. Baptism is a prerequisite to salvation. No one is saved before baptism. The belief that people are saved without baptism, by only believing in Christ or accepting Him as the "personal savior" is perverting the gospel of Christ.

Some are indeed preaching a different gospel and leading souls to eternal damnation. Such men also existed during the time of the apostles, and Paul had to rebuke them. He said, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again," said the apostle, "if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6-9).

The apostle's marveling was genuine, because Christ had authorized only one gospel to be preached. There is only one way to be saved. But the Galatians were turning to a different gospel. Christ, in the beginning had sent His disciples into all the world to preach the gospel. Not gospels, (plural), as some erroneously refer today to the first four books of the New Testament as "Gospels" (plural). These books are not "four gospels" but contain the one message of the Gospel of Christ, in which are four accounts of the same Gospel written. Christ has authorized only one formula for the people of the whole world to be saved from sin. And that is, through obeying a "form" of the Gospel (Romans 6: 16-17). What is the Gospel? It is, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). One is saved when one obeys the form of the gospel. Not by mentally believing that Christ died for me. Even Christ had to obey God to be perfected as we read in Hebrews 5:8,9, which says, "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Notice, Christ is the Savior

of all who obey Him. That is through obeying the form of His gospel— picturing the death of Christ in our repentance from all sin and wrong; picturing the burial of Christ in our burial in water of baptism; and picturing the resurrection of Christ in our coming out of that watery grave of baptism. Thus, baptism is re-enactment of the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By repenting one dies to sin and old life, and then is buried in the tomb of water like a dead person, and comes out of the watery tomb to show the resurrection to a new life. Listen to the apostle Paul, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3, 4). When does the newness of life come? Before or after baptism? Friends, do not believe what men teach. Believe Christ the Savior, Who said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”

“I LOVE GOD”

J.C. Choate

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE you said: “I love God”? No doubt you have uttered such hundreds and even thousands of times. But the question is: Do you love God? Now you may think that you love him and you may even convince others that you love him, but do you? It is one thing to say “I love God” and it is another thing to express your love. You may love God as far as you are concerned but do you love him when it comes to the Lord’s understanding of love?

If you love God ask yourself these questions: Have I obeyed God? Am I a member of the Lord’s church? Do I worship God each first day of the week? Am I living the Christian life? If your answer is in the negative, then in God’s sight you do not love him. On the other hand, if you can answer in the affirmative you can not only tell the world that you love God, but you have done more than that, you have proven it.

The average person will tell you readily that he loves God, but in reality he doesn’t. It matters not how much one may say that he loves the Lord; if he refuses to obey Christ’s will that is proof enough that he doesn’t love God. Bible love expresses itself in obedience.



As a matter of fact, the Lord tests man's love through this medium. In light of this, there aren't too many who are able to pass such a test.

Now the Lord speaks on this subject in this manner: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 14:23,24). Again Jesus said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15). The Lord makes it very plain that if a person loves him he will obey his commands, and yet, if a soul does not love him he will not obey his word. Another way of putting it: A Person will obey the Lord if he truly loves him, but the individual who fails to submit himself to the Lord's will is the person who does not love God.

To love the Lord is to keep his commandments just like if one loves his parents, he is going to obey them. If true love is involved in these matters there won't be any problem when it comes to the matters of obedience. Scriptural love will lead one to do many things, as was the case with God in relation to his Son. We are told that: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:16,17). As God looked down upon man in his sinful condition, he was moved with compassion. Hence, he decided to send his own Son into the world for the purpose of saving man from eternal ruin. In purposing this he promised man that such would become a reality. But get this: God didn't just talk about his love for man without doing something about it. He not only expressed his love for man in words but proved that love with the sending of his Son into this low land of sin and sorrow to die on the cross. Yes, God proved his love for man.

He not only proved his love in the giving of his Son but he has proven it in many other ways as well. At the same time, the Lord would have us to prove our love for him—not just talk about it—but actually prove it by obedience and devotion to his cause.

Now in view of the things that have been said, do you still think you love God? Do you love God in keeping with what the Lord has said on this subject? I hope you can truthfully say that you love him, but if not, it is my prayer that you will bow yourself before God and express your love for him in simple obedience. Don't be hypocritical about the matter. Don't tell everyone that you love God but at the

same time refuse to obey him. Don't tell God that you love him and rebel before him. If you want to prove your love for God then put it into action, for after all, as the old saying goes, "action speaks louder than words." Remember: Your love for God is based on your actions, more than on what you say.

Idolatry, Ancient and Modern

Ronald Bryant

IT IS FRIGHTENING TO consider, but each human heart is potentially an idol factory!

An idol is an internal spiritual configuration. Idolatry, both ancient and modern, consists in turning away from God and embracing something as a substitute for Him. Interestingly, most idols are not even thought of as "supernatural". For that matter, they are not even thought of as "idols". It is observed that some continue to order their lives according to the idolatry of astrological charts and horoscopes. Intriguingly, a large number of people have made an idol out of their physical bodies. This is manifest in the longing for perpetual youth, along with a denial of the process of aging that typically feeds this kind of idolatry. However, money, power, and pleasure are the most popular idols of this present age.

Why do people choose idols over God? The most obvious reason is the desire to do away with the fact of accountability to God. We cannot meet God on our own terms, but we can meet an idol on our own terms! Because an idol is our creation, it is completely under our control, and it can be set aside or removed altogether when we so desire. Idols are adaptable, God is not! The prophet Jeremiah described idols as "*scarecrows in a cucumber field*" (Jeremiah 10:5). They do not threaten, nor can they benefit us. Yet, idols are the perfect device for those who desire to remain at the center of their own existence — the autonomous architects of their own destiny. Idols are used to avoid coming face to face with the truth — with God and His will. They that serve idols need face only themselves, and that is the basic appeal of idolatry.

However, idolatry has consequences. Those who serve idols become as dead as the idols they have embraced. Imagining they have obtained great vision, they do not know they are blind. Having dismissed God, they are not able to measure the depth of their own depravity, even when they do experience a troubled conscience. On their part, guilt is denied and every effort is made to drive it

below the level of consciousness. Their guilt is not removed, nor abated. Sooner or later that guilt will begin to manifest itself in obsessions that are often not only evil and disruptive, but violent and destructive.

Idolatry is not some innocent escapade or diversion. In all of its forms it is as a manifestation of hostility toward God — it is a rejection of God. This is the reason that worldliness is so often blatantly idolatrous, and it is the reason why the biblical warning is so strong: *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4).

FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLY OF OURSELVES TOGETHER

Wayne Barrier

A KEY PASSAGE OF Scripture that addresses the issue of attendance at called assemblies of the church is Hebrews 10:25. The passage states, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”*. In spite of the very direct call of this passage for brethren to faithfully attend all assemblies of the church, we rarely see congregations with the same attendance at all gatherings. Sunday evening and mid-week Bible Study assemblies usually have 40-75% of the Sunday morning worship attendance. Sunday evening worship assemblies usually number 50-80% of Sunday morning worship. There are some exceptions, but very few. Why does this occur? I believe brethren fail to understand the serious consequences of forsaking called assemblies.

First, verse 24 says, *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works”*. Brethren who attend faithfully are *“provoked”* unto love and good works. Some may believe themselves adequately provoked without meeting with their brethren. Maybe so, but attendance is also needed to provoke *“one another”*. This also teaches that attendance results in encouragement and strengthening of one another. Those forsaking the assembly are selfishly neglecting to encourage their brothers and sisters. We are all needed at every assembly.

Verse 26 reads, *“For if we sin willfully after that we have received*

the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ". The Hebrew writer (verse 29) says one has *"trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing... "* The next verses (30-31) warn us that God will judge His people and take vengeance on the unfaithful. Verse 31 states, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"*. These verses are strong warnings that those who forsake the assembly are willfully sinning against God and their brethren and will be considered to have "walked on Jesus" in disrespect and disregard for the sacrifice He made for us.

To neglect assembly attendance is a sin resulting in one's fall from grace, condemnation, and eternal punishment (Vs. 27,28). This matter is very serious and must be better taught and understood.

Is It Possible to Preach ANYTHING, and Not Bother SOMEBODY?

Max Patterson

NO MAN WHO HAS preached for any length of time has escaped hearing something similar to this: **"Why don't you just preach the truth and leave people alone?"** Is that possible? Is it possible to preach so as not to bother *anybody*?

Could I preach that we should abstain from worldliness, and leave others alone? No, because there are so many who love to indulge themselves in worldliness, and never mind that the Bible says *"Abstain from every form of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:22 cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

Could I leave others alone and preach not to forsake the assembly? No, because there are many, many people who forsake the assembly, despite the fact that we are told *"not to forsake"* (Hebrews 10:25).

Could I leave others alone and preach that we should hear and believe in Jesus Christ only? No, for there are those who, like Peter, want to erect three tabernacles. God said, however, *"hear ye him (Christ)"* (Matthew 17:5),

Could I leave others alone and preach one baptism? No, because there are several baptisms advocated by religious folks.

Never mind that the Scriptures teach one (Ephesians 4:5,) and that it is for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Could I leave others alone and preach about the church?

No, because many do not feel the church is important. And this, despite the fact that the Lord died on the cross for it (Acts 20:28).

Of course, I might preach myself—my experiences, feelings, opinions, think-sos. After all, the tendency is to please men, but I can't do that. If I please men, I can't please God (Galatians 1:10); I would simply have to quit preaching. But I cannot do that either. Like Paul, *"woe is to me if I preach not the Gospel."*

So, I'll tell you what I am going to do. I am going to do what I decided to do many years ago. **I am going to preach the Gospel—the truth—and if people get mad at that truth, that is something they will have to take up with God.** If not in this lifetime, then at the judgment. We will (whether we would get mad about it or not) face God in the day of judgment.

"AND MY PEOPLE LOVE IT SO!"

Mike Mays

JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE FOR Judah was one the church needs to hear today: *"An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so!"* (Jeremiah 5:31). The responsibility was laid at the feet of the leadership, but the people also shared the blame; they wanted it that way.

Like the prophets of Jeremiah's day, some preachers today proclaim messages that originate in the minds of men, not in the mind of God. Like the priests, there are elders in our day who have abandoned the authority of the Bible in exchange for their own authority or the authority of other men. If you do not believe that is true, consider the following.

Some in churches of Christ advocate the idea that devoted people who have not been baptized are saved, brothers in Christ, and members of the church. One brother in Christ maintains that salvation is a process rather than an event, and the unimmersed, who have changed their way of life, ought to be included in the grace of God. Is that true, or is it true that **we are baptized into Christ, into His death, into His church, and into salvation, as the Scriptures teach** (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; 2 Timothy 2:10)?

Some congregations are including instrumental music in their worship. Their contention is that Jesus did not die over instrumental music. Doesn't the case of Nadab and Abihu reveal how our unchanging God feels about unauthorized worship (Leviticus 10:1,2)? Does the command that we have the Lord's authority for our religious faith and practice no longer apply (Colossians 3:17)? Where is the authorization from God's Word for including drama or women preachers in our worship assemblies, or for observing the Lord's Supper on other days besides Sunday? The answer? There is none in Scripture.

The demand for more "exciting" worship is a call to abandon true worship. Is worship about doing what we want or what God wants? If the focus of worship is us and not God, it becomes no more than an emotional encounter with ourselves. True worship must be directed to God, governed by His will, and come from the heart of the worshiper (John 4:24; Matthew 15:8,9). If there are no regulations for worship, it would be impossible to do it wrong.

Jeremiah closes verse 31 with a question about what the Jews would do in the end. While God alone will be the final judge, His Word does not forecast a pleasant end for those who reject His will (John 12:48). It is an appalling thing when the leadership in the Lord's church prefers self-made religion to attract the unchurched, and equally sad when God's people "love it so".

ASTROLOGY

Evan Adair

MAN HAS BEEN SEARCHING for answers since time began. Many have looked at the stars and the study of astrology to answer their questions. Astrology and the study thereof is not new. It has been around at least since the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs (see Exodus 7:11).

Astrology was made a science as we know it today by the Chaldeans who developed the Zodiac theory. History records that Tiberius and Nero resorted to astrology to decide the affairs of the Roman Empire. Again many a person, "famous and infamous", has looked to astrology to answer his questions.

What does the Bible say about this? "*Ye shall not use enchantment nor observe times*" (Leviticus 19:26). Again, "*Let now the astrologers, the strangers, the monthly prognosticators stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.*"

Behold they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame ...” (Isaiah 47:13). Hence, here we have God’s command concerning what we should do with the practice of astrology.

First, astrology does not answer our questions to solve our problems and, second, the Lord shall burn up those works. Need there be more said? Jeremiah 10:2 also warns, *“Thus saith the Lord, ‘Learn not the way of the heathen and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the heathen are dismayed at them.’”*

In the New Testament when the Apostle Paul was at Ephesus, many Greeks and Jews who believed on the Lord, but who once practiced magical or curious arts, brought their books — valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver — to be burned (Acts 19:17-20). Much more could be said about the practice of astrology/magical arts, however the above quotes should suffice.

The answers to our questions and problems must come from the greatest peacemaker of all, that being the Lord Jesus Christ. *“... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63).

The Valley of Decision

Clarence DeLoach

MAN MUST CHOOSE TO serve God. It is an active, deliberate purpose of the mind and will. That principle is beautifully illustrated in the book of Joshua. God brought His people to the Jordan River, where He miraculously provided their crossing. However, immediately there was an obstacle. Jericho stood in their way. God said, *“I have given Jericho into your hands.”* God gave it to them by a miracle, yet they complied with His instructions, and by faith the walls fell.

Then came Ai, a small city. However, because sin was in the camp, the army of Israel was defeated. Achan had defied God in taking of the spoils of Jericho. Israel had sinned through pride and overconfidence.

In Joshua 8:30-35, Joshua brought the people to the valley of Shechem. There he built an altar to God and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. The Law of God was there. The Ark of the Covenant was there.

Joshua caused six of the tribes to take their place on the barren, rocky cliffs of Mount Ebal. The other six tribes took their place on

Mt. Gerizim, a mountain of green grass and trees.

It was to be an object lesson that hopefully Israel would never forget. In this setting, which formed a natural amphitheater, Joshua read the words of the law, in particular the blessings and cursings. All things were done according to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

So, Israel was called upon to decide! Would it be misery, cursing, defeat, and death as represented by Mt. Ebal, or would it be mercy, blessing, and life as represented by Mt. Gerizim?

We are still called to decide. In the presence of God and His Word, we decide whether it will be obedience and blessing, or disobedience and cursing. If you are in the valley of decision, choose today life and blessing!

ARE WE LEGALISTIC?

Frank Van Dyke

THOSE OF US WHO contend for strict adherence to God's commandments, both in becoming Christians and in Christian worship, are sometimes accused of being legalistic. The charge is that we, like the Pharisees, believe in "ceremonial righteousness:" that justification comes through mere observance of ritual.

Some think that Christ, in His bitter denunciation of the Pharisees, took all of the merit away from strict adherence to a code of observances. They argue that the spirit of the performer is the only thing that matters, not the acts performed. To say that we must obey certain formal commandments is to revert to the legalism that Christ condemned in the Pharisees.

This is a failure to recognize what Christ condemned in the Pharisees. Christ never rebuked anyone for observing what the law required. He did tell the Pharisees that other things of which they were guilty made their strict adherence to ceremony useless. But this was far from saying that it was unnecessary to observe the rites prescribed in the law. When speaking of two things, to say the first is of no value without the second certainly does not mean that the first is unimportant.

Origin of the Pharisees

An understanding of how the Pharisees originated may help us in distinguishing exactly what Christ condemned in His attacks upon this sect. When Alexander the Great and his conquering hordes

swept through Palestine in 332 B.C., Greek culture was brought into direct contact with conservatism of Jewish thought for the first time. The impact of Greek ideas upon Jewish life—politically, economically and religiously—was terrific. Fascinated by Greek art and literature, many of the Jews became indifferent toward everything that was distinctive in Israel. They began to manifest broader and more liberal views toward their laws.

Without restraint and proper direction, the human mind knows no limit in its efforts to satisfy an insatiable thirst for human wisdom. Some of the Jews were not immune to this weakness; and as the Greek influences increased, they came to look upon their law less and less as a system to be revered and observed with strictness. Speaking to this effect, G.M. Grant, in his book, *Between the Testaments*, says: "The effect of this inflow of cultured heathenism was, on the whole and without doubt, disastrous to the higher life of Israel; and had it not been counteracted, must have been fatal."

But counteracting forces were instantly set in motion. Some devout Jews arose to defend their religion against the encroachments of the new philosophy. They rejected all compromise with everything that was not purely Hebrew. With them the law was of divine origin; it expressed God's authority; its demands were to be observed relentlessly. To magnify the law and make it honorable was their one great work. Only by this means, to observe the law and remain separated, could God's purposes in them be worked out.

Thus were sown the seeds from which two schools of thought grew, and this division finally crystallized into two opposing sects—the Pharisees and the Sadducees. According to present-day distinction (although the separation was broader at the time of Christ), the Pharisees, in their formative period, were the conservatives; the Sadducees, liberals. The Pharisees were the fundamentalists; the Sadducees, the modernists.

Although gross extremes and abuses were later countenanced by the Pharisees, our concern here is: "Were the Pharisees right or wrong in their original and basic attitude toward the law? Is this what Christ condemned in them?" We shall see.

God's Requirements in the Law

Did God intend for the Jews to give strict obedience to the law? Let Moses answer: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2 KJV). Add nothing and subtract nothing. That

sounds like strict observance, does it not? Again: "Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it" (6:1). The "commandments, the statutes, and the judgments" embrace all the institutions of the Mosaic system. The Jews were to do all of these (v. 2). And they were to do them diligently (v. 17).

So the Pharisees, when contending for strict obedience to the law in their early days before they drifted into hypocrisy and formalism, were advocating just what God demanded in that law.

Christ's Attitude Toward the Law

Instead of teaching, as some claim, that there is no merit in strict observance of ritual—ritual that is divinely authorized—Christ taught the very opposite. Speaking of the law of Moses, He said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). Christ had just said that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it and that no part of the law would pass until all should be fulfilled and pass away. He was teaching the people to obey the law faithfully as long as it was in force or until it should pass away. Christ taught the people of His time to adhere strictly to the rites and ceremonies then prescribed by divine authority.

Christ certainly did not reprove the Pharisees for doing what He said should be done. So, although he did bring many scathing rebukes against the Pharisees, it is a settled fact that Christ was not teaching them to be indifferent toward doing the acts (the ritual or ceremony) which God commanded.

So what did Christ condemn? It remains to be seen just what was wrong with the Pharisees. Here is what Christ condemned in them: self-righteousness (Luke 18:10-14); hypocrisy—outward show with inward corruption (Matthew 23:27-28); laying aside God's commandments (Mark 7:8-9); teaching commandments of men (Matthew 15:1, 9); the desire to be seen of men (23:2, 5-7); and formal obedience -not from the heart (Mark 7:1,6).

Christ did not want them to lay aside God's commandments; neither did He want them to teach what God had not authorized—the commandments of men. Rather strict, it seems! And yet it is argued that Christ was not concerned about the act performed, whether it was commanded or not.

Self-righteousness, hypocrisy, desire to display self, seeking the

praise of men, insincerity—these have always nullified one's obedience although one does the very acts required by God. Such was the plight of the Pharisees, aside from doing many things not commanded. Christ condemned them for their sin and taught that observance of ceremony, although necessary when it is what God demands, cannot justify without the proper spirit, character and motive to accompany it.

A False Charge

Legalistic righteousness, then, would be justification through mere performance of ceremony, irrespective of the character, spirit and motive of the performer. No true gospel preacher, however much he may contend for strict obedience to positive commandments, has ever preached justification on such terms. The acts required in the New Testament to be observed strictly must be done in sincerity, humility and love in order to be acceptable. It is untrue and unfair, therefore, to charge us with what the Pharisees sought; for we, like Christ, renounce such cold, insincere, heartless formalism.

Beware of two extremes. The Pharisees were guilty of one when they put all emphasis on ceremony. Religionists today are guilty of the other when they put all stress upon the spirit, saying that the thing done is inconsequential. Christ struck the happy medium when He taught that the right thing must be done in the right spirit. We choose to follow Christ, and that is neither legalistic nor ceremonial righteousness.

A Sad Phrase In The Bible

Ron Thomas

I DO NOT KNOW if there can be such a thing as the "saddest phrase in the Bible." If there is, I think it might be these words: "Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord'" (2 Chronicles 34:15 NKJV). Let us set the context of this particular verse and then give some thoughts to what is a most unfortunate occurrence in Scripture.

Because of sin, the Lord split the nation of Israel into two lesser nations, a northern camp (Israel) and a southern camp (Judah). Both camps had set a course of governing that challenged the Lord's authority; they did so at the expense of their existence. Because

they chose to live without the Lord, He brought His judgment against them. As you read the historical record, one cannot help being impressed with the Lord's mercy toward both nations. Israel was allowed to exist as a nation for more than 200 years. Judah, on the other hand, was confused concerning the course of life they were going to travel. Many of her kings wanted to do what was right (and they did), while many others did not. Historically, the southern nation lasted just a few more than 100 years longer (as a nation) than Israel. However, they too experienced the judgment of the Lord. It is in the context of Judah that we find what could be considered one of the saddest statements in the Bible.

Before the Lord's judgment against Judah, a rather young man was reigning over the nation. When Josiah became king, Judah was on the verge of experiencing the Lord's judgment. But the Lord looked upon Judah's new king and was very pleased with Josiah. As king, still in his teenage years, he diligently sought after the Lord with all of his heart. Later, in his continued zeal, he removed many of the obstacles that stood in the way of faithful worship to Almighty God. It was during his 26th year (2 Chronicles 34:1, 8) that Josiah heard words that would ring out, not only in Judah, but also with all Godfearing people since his time.

The words of Hilkiah were not lost on King Josiah; when the words found his ear, he listened.

What We Can Learn

Is it not a tragedy that the Law of God was lost? This reflects poorly on the Lord's people and religious leaders. Although the Law may have been lost in "scroll form," the greater tragedy was that the law did not find a home in many of the residents of Judah. For this reason the Lord brought judgment against Judah.

Jeremiah spoke against the prophets because they failed their responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God to the people. The Scripture says they stole the words of God from the people and substituted their own words (Jeremiah 23:30ff). What makes this occurrence doubly unfortunate is that Judah had some vestige of faithfulness to the Lord's way. In Jerusalem, the temple was standing and sacrifices were still offered, but this was not enough. Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord said: 'Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men. Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder;

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden. Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord, And their works are in the dark; they say, "Who sees us?" and, "Who knows us?" "" (29:13-15 NKJV).

What kind of application can New Testament Christians make? First, the scroll of the law would never have been lost (physically) if the people of God had not let it slip from their grasp. Keepers of the scroll should have considered the law of God precious and cared for it accordingly. Because they did not, the wisdom of God departed from their hearts. The Scriptures teach that we must "give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27 *ESV*). When we do, we encourage a replacement agenda. All the devil needs is an opportunity. Once he has that opportunity, he then begins to replace Almighty God with something else.

Second, the Law of God would not have been lost from the heart if there had been daily meditations upon His holy Word. The value of daily meditation is tremendous. The psalmist writes, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You" (119:11 NKJV). If the people had followed the psalmist's example, think how Israel's history might have appeared. Peter encourages the Christians to apply the Lord's words to their respective lives. If we do, we will never stumble (2 Peter 1:5-11).

Third, if we have lost the Law of our Lord from within our hearts, then we need to cleanse our "temples." Why do Christians allow so many things to clutter their heart's devotion? Satan greatly encourages us to live in dirty homes. Our homes become dirty because we have not protected our hearts (cf. Proverbs 4:23). In our attempts to negotiate through all the clutter we have accumulated, we stumble and fall. Clean the house! Rather than getting frustrated and resigning ourselves to living in a cluttered home, clean it! We need not have such low expectations. Consider those who have gone on before us: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Fourth, take note of what King Josiah did. When he heard the judgment that was to come from the Lord, he asked the Lord for guidance. The Lord is very interested in His penitent children. The

Lord said, "For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist... But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). The Lord looked upon Josiah's heart and was pleased. The unfortunate thing for the people of Judah was that the Lord was not pleased with them; they had passed the point of no return. The Lord brought His judgment against them. Shortly after these words were spoken, the Babylonian armies overthrew Judah. It was too late for the nation.

What a truly sad phrase in the Bible.

Speak The Truth In Love

Robert James

"LOVE ONE ANOTHER" is more than a cute phrase and a good sound bite in a sermon. We have heard it as long as we have been going to church. It is easy to say, but where does it rank in our priorities? Where should it rank in our priorities?

If keeping the commandments of our Savior is important, then we should put it at the top of our list (John 13:34, 15:12, 17). If we believe God loves us, then we ought to love one another (1 John 4:11). We are told that God is love and that in order to know God we should love one another (vv. 7-8).

It has been said that to love one another is the mark of a Christian. Our Lord said that by our love for one another, all men will know we are His disciples (John 13:35). In our society of caustic disagreement and harsh words, Christians should be obvious to everyone around them. When Christians interact with one another, they should be like a light in the darkness.

Our adherence to the "love one another" principle should be nowhere more apparent than in our differences and disputes. People of the world treat each other nicely when differences are nonexistent. Even those who seemingly have no moral standard can do that. The time to try our hardest to love one another is when we have differences with fellow Christians. Even when we are in disagreement with a fellow Christian, we should practice loving one another.

To love one another does not mean not to stand for what is right. It does not mean to compromise the commandments of God; it is rather the fulfillment of them (Romans 13:8). A dispute with a fellow Christian should not be about who is right; it should be about what is right according to God's Word.

Perhaps if we used 1 Corinthians 13 as our guide for disputes, we could win others for Christ even in disagreement. Patience and kindness are musts when pleading your convictions. Being cruel or in a hurry will not win an argument nor do such attitudes set a good example to the world. Remember, the one who disagrees is a close family member because you are God's family.

- Do not be rude or puffed up. You will lose the respect and the connection you have with your fellow Christians, as well as any chance to influence anyone who witnesses you.
- Do not insist on your own way; be willing to accept differences in matters of opinion. Know what is important. Do not require others to be like you, but to strive to be like Jesus.
- Do not rejoice in wrong but in right. Do not be happy when you catch others in wrongdoing, but be happy and encouraging every time someone's actions are pleasing to God.

To be in disagreement with fellow Christians may mean that we endure unpleasant emotions and that our heart bears uncomfortable feelings, but our actions and words must always convey love for one another.

To hope for all things means to hope for all good things—that is, all things the way God wants them. God wants unity in the church to be revealed as we share His love with others and make disciples of all nations. How can we hope to please God if we do not show love to one another?

Practically everything that distinguishes differences in people of the world exists in the church—race, economic status, political parties, social status and educational levels. What distinguishes Christians from the world should be that the love of God is so present in our lives that harsh disputes cannot survive. Differences exist and disputes happen, but love should win out.

When a dispute arises about an interpretation of Scripture or about carrying out God's will, we should hold steadfast to the truth while being loving in our actions and words (Ephesians 4:2-3). Our words should never become harsh or our arguments personal. Our words should edify (v. 29). This does not mean we must accept error, especially from those among us. The purpose of confrontation is to gain a brother (Matthew 18:15).

Elders discipline members of their congregation—but always with love. We may choose not to have fellowship with those we believe are in error, but we must do so out of love because God disciplines us so that we may share in His holiness. Confront others

for the same reason (Hebrews 12:10).

We must act out of love for God and His commandments and also out of love for those in error. We must never become bitter (Ephesians 4:31). Hold fast to the truth. Always defend the truth. Be diligent in speaking the truth, but do so in love (v. 15).

Striving For The Faith Of The Gospel

Clem Thurman

“ONLY LET YOUR MANNER of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ: that, whether I come and see you or be absent, I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). When the apostle Paul and his company of fellow-workers for the Lord came to the city of Philippi, they found a remarkable city. Philippi was a “Roman City,” built up to be a special garrison by the Romans to enhance the Roman Empire. The city thus had a diverse population—Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, slave and free, people of various nationalities.

Paul had just left the province of Asia, in what is now Turkey, and entered for the first time into the continent of Europe. Philippi was his first stop in Europe. But the church which he planted here had special place in Paul’s heart. *“I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now”* (Phil. 1:3-5). In this same letter, the apostle later told these Christians, *“So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure”* (Phil. 2:12-13).

In Phil. 1:27, Paul gives five things that make up the ingredients of a successful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us look at them.

“Let Your Manner of Life Be Worthy”

The Lord Jesus constantly warns us to watch our speech and life. He warns us, *“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”* (Matt. 12:34). Our speech reveals both who and what we are, and also whose we are! As Paul wrote, *“Let no corrupt*

speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear" (Eph. 4:29). The apostle Peter also warns, "*Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings*" (1 Pet. 2:1). Christians are to speak in such a way as to edify (build up) those who hear. Corrupt speech and evil speaking will not only corrupt us, it will degrade the church.

But our entire "*manner of life*" must show that we belong to Christ. To become children of God we had to "*crucify the body of sin,*" be "*buried with Christ in baptism*" and then be "*raised to walk in newness of life*" (Rom. 6:3-6). Then let us live this new life as befits Him who died for us. "*Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him*" (Col. 3:9-10). If we have been baptized "*into Christ*" (Rom. 6:3), then we are "*new creatures in Christ*" (2 Cor. 5:17), and we must live like it.

"That Ye Stand Fast"

To "*stand fast*" implies the determination to "*stand against the wiles of the devil*" (Eph. 6:11). As the apostle wrote, "*That we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ*" (Eph. 4:14-15). Instead of acting with the capricious attitude of a child, we should be "*stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 15:58). Stand fast.

Noah was given a big job: build a huge "ark" of about 500 feet in length, and preach to the folk of his generation about God's impending punishment (Gen. 6; 2 Pet. 2:5). But Noah, "*by faith,*" stood fast and did his job. Moses had the seemingly impossible job of leading a slave people out of Egypt and molding them into a great nation of people for God (Ex. 3 & 4). But Moses "*stood fast*" and did the job. The apostle Paul wrote: "*As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and builded up in him . . . Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong*" (Col. 2:6-7; 1 Cor. 16:13). To be a strong church, we must "*stand fast.*"

"In One Spirit, with One Soul"

The Lord has always wanted His people to be united. Real unity. Notice His prayer, "*Neither for these [the apostles] only do I pray,*

but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me” (John 17:20-21). If we are to succeed as the Lord’s people in His work, we must have the unity which He desires. As Paul wrote, *“Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all”* (Eph. 4:3-6). Look at the church in Jerusalem: *“They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers . . . And all that believed were together . . . And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved . . . And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul”* (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32). That is the kind of unity for which the Lord wants us all to strive.

Many people today will argue that all of the denominations that exist are good, and even are necessary, so that each can have “the church of his choice.” But that idea is diametrically opposed to the prayer and the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ! Notice what the word of God says about denominations in 1 Cor. 1:10-13, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos: and, I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?”* The Lord wants all believers to be of *“one spirit, one soul.”* To divide into denominations was wrong in Corinth 2000 years ago. It is still wrong today!

“Striving Together”

The word, *“strive,”* means “fight, or contend.” As Christians, we are in a battle—a spiritual battle. *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, hut mighty before God to the casting down of*

strongholds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The apostle Paul exhorts us to "war the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18) as we "resist the devil" (James 4:7). The "armor of God" (Eph. 6:10-17) is both our defense and our offense in this battle.

But the real emphasis in Paul's statement is found in the word, "together." Our striving is much more effective as we work in fellowship with each other. The Bible speaks of our being united in effort as it describes the church as the "body of Christ" and each of us as members of His body (Rom. 12:4-5). Again, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. . . And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now they are many members, but one body. . . There should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof" (1 Cor. 12:12, 19-20, 25-27). Members of the body of Christ have different abilities which are used in different kinds of jobs, but all work toward one goal in Christ.

"For the Faith of the Gospel"

We need always to remember to strive for the right thing. We must not contend for our own way or strive for our preferences. Instead, we are told, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). We would like to think that everyone is honest and sincere, and that there are no false teachers in the world. But that just isn't true.

God gives us warning after warning: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. . . Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God. . . But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed" (1 John 4:1; 2 John 9; Gal. 1:8).

Jesus told the apostles, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15-16). The apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). That is what we must "strive together" for—the gospel of Christ.

Early Christians certainly knew that. When persecution came, and the disciples had to flee the city of Jerusalem, *"They therefore that were scattered abroad, went about preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). The Christians of whom we read in the Bible heard the gospel, they believed the gospel, they obeyed the gospel, they lived the gospel and they preached the gospel.

If we would be the church which Christ wants us to be, we must heed the admonition as the church at Philippi did: *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ: that, whether I come and see you or be absent, I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel"* (Phil. 1:27).

BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

Owen D. Olbricht

ALMOST ALL WHO HAVE studied the Bible and believe its teaching will agree that those *in Christ* are those who are privileged to receive the blessings that are *in Christ*. No one *out of Christ* will receive these blessings, Paul wrote that people who are *in Christ* are the ones who are blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Paul also wrote concerning those *out of Christ*, *"that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ"* (Ephesians 2:12,13).

Importance of Being In

Being "inside" instead of "outside" is important, because those "outside" cannot receive the benefits that those who are "inside" can receive. This was true of Noah and his family. Peter wrote concerning the ark, *"in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water"* (1 Peter 3:20). In order to be saved from the destruction of the ancient world, Noah's family had to remain in the ark. Those outside the ark were destroyed.

Importance of Being in Christ

All spiritual blessings are *in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3). Those *outside Christ* cannot receive these blessings while those within can receive them. The only way to enter Jesus to receive these blessings is to be baptized. *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized*

into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3) **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"** (Galatians 3:27). If a person can receive them outside of Christ, thus without baptism, he can receive them being far off from God and without the following, for those outside Christ do not have these promises . **"that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ"** (Ephesians 2:12,13):

The blessings we attain by being in Christ:

- Christ.
- Benefit of what is included in God's covenants and promises.
- Hope.
- God.
- The blood of Jesus, which brings us near to God.

There are other blessings of Jesus' blood that a person outside of Christ, a person who has not been baptized, will miss:

- Redemption through Jesus' blood, the forgiveness of sins. **"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"** (Ephesians 1:7).
- Being a spiritually new person, with the old life passed away. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"** (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Salvation. **"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"** (2 Timothy 2:10).
- Eternal life. **"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son"** (1 John 5:11).

Our Hope

If we are not in Christ, thus without baptism, we are without hope. This is why those who heard the Gospel as recorded in the book of Acts, responded as soon as they learned that baptism was necessary (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 35-38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:15, 16:33,34; 19:5).

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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 September 2021

Total No. of pages 28

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