

2003

**West Virginia Christian
Lectures**

October 12 - 15, 2003

Christianity

The Hope Of The World

Published by

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

"Christianity: The Hope Of The World"

Hear The Saving Gospel – Romans 1:16-17, 10:17

Believe That Jesus Is The Christ – John 8:24; Acts 8:37

Repent Of Sin – Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9

Confess Jesus As Christ – Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

Be Baptized (Immersed) Into Christ For The Remission Of Sins

Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-38; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 3:20-21

Arise And Walk In Newness Of Life In Worship and Service

Romans 6:3-5; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 2:10

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September 5, 2003

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Lectureship Schedule

Sunday, October 12

9:30 AM	Johnny Ramsey
10:30	Mack Lyon
7:00 PM	Johnny Ramsey
8:00	Mack Lyon

Monday, October 13

1:00 PM	Christianity vs. Denominationalism	Terry Jones
2:00	Blessings Of Being A Christian	Albert Farley
3:00	Christ – The Focus Of Christianity	Frank Higginbotham
4:00	Christian Homes	Roger Rush
5:00	Dinner – Served by Pennsboro Ladies	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	What Must I Do To Be A Christian?	Johnny Ramsey
8:00	Almost Persuaded To Be A Christian	Mack Lyon

Tuesday, October 14

1:00 PM	Christianity vs. Islam	Charles Pugh III
2:00	Consequences Of Not Being A Christian	Denver Cooper
3:00	Heaven – The Hope Of Christianity	Frank Higginbotham
4:00	Christian Living	Will Montgomery
5:00	Dinner – Served by Pennsboro Ladies	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	Preaching Christianity	Johnny Ramsey
8:00	Are There Christians In All Churches?	Neal Pollard

Wednesday, October 15

1:00 PM	Christianity vs. Atheism	Charles Pugh III
2:00	If Any Man Suffer As A Christian	Glenn Hawkins
3:00	The Bible – The Handbook of Christianity	Frank Higginbotham
4:00	Christian Worship	W. Terry Varner
5:00	Dinner – Served by Pennsboro Ladies	
6:30	Singing	
7:00	Are You A Christian?	Johnny Ramsey
8:00	Procrastination	Phil Grear

Director's Statement

The 2003 West Virginia Christian Lectures has finally arrived. We have anxiously planned, prepared, and prayed for this event for quite some time. Those of us who make up the Lord's family in Pennsboro are overjoyed with the privilege of hosting this wonderful event.

We thank the God of heaven who has abundantly blessed us with the ability to host these lectures. It goes without saying that there is a great deal of cost and labor that goes into such an endeavor. But the Lord has blessed this congregation with many generous givers and loving laborers who have come together to help make this dream a reality. It is our prayer that this effort will be a blessing in the lives of many.

A word of gratitude and commendation goes to those four godly men who make up the eldership that very capably oversees the Lord's church in this community: Steve Hayhurst, Francis Sellers, Pete Taylor, and Lynn Wells. They have been unwavering in their enthusiasm and effort since the idea was presented to them almost three years ago. Their humble, yet courageous, leadership continues to produce fruitful endeavors that bring glory to God.

We are indebted to those churches that have preceded us in hosting this lecture program. Their efforts have paved the way and set the stage for any degree of success that might be attained by this Fourth Annual Lectureship.

Many thanks to brother Albert Farley, without whom the idea of this lectureship would never have been conceived. Additionally, we are indebted to him for the countless hours that he has invested in editing manuscripts and printing the book. Were it not for his hard work and helpful wisdom you would not likely have this volume in your possession.

We must say a word of appreciation for the men who serve as the speakers on this lectureship. Only after lengthy consideration were these men invited to be on the program. They were chosen because of their years of sound, solid proclamation of the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ. If the world is ever going to be convinced that Christianity is the hope of the world, then men are needed who believe that with all of their heart and will passionately preach it until their dying day. We believe that to be exactly the caliber of those thirteen men who make up this program. We appreciate the long hours of study and preparation that they put into the manuscripts for this book, the articles for the October issue of West Virginia Christian, and for their oral presentations.

We humbly commend this volume to you with the prayer that God will bless it and this lecture program. We pray that through this effort many who are lost will be justified, many who are saved will be edified, and the God of heaven will be glorified.

Terry G. Jones
Lectureship Director

Preface

It is with a great sense of joy and a personal sense of humility that we offer this edition of the 2003 West Virginia Christian Lectureship book – "Christianity: The Hope Of The World."

Terry Jones, Luke Weekley, the elders and deacons, and the entire Pennsboro church of Christ are to be highly commended for their willingness to accept the responsibility of planning, preparing, and conducting the lectures this year. It is an honor for *West Virginia Christian* to be associated with this faithful congregation in this good work and we thank God for this privilege. Terry has done an outstanding job of coordinating the selection of the theme, the subjects, and the speakers.

The speakers have cooperated in a timely way in supplying their manuscripts for this book. Their lessons are well prepared and have been submitted in excellent format for printing.

The theme is high and holy. It lies at the heart of the love of God, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the worship and service of the church in the teaching and preaching of the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world.

This is our fourth lectureship book:

1. Mannington Church of Christ: "*Thus Saith The Lord*" (2000)
2. Martinsburg Church of Christ: "*A Plea For The Fundamentals*" (2001)
3. Martinsburg Church of Christ: "*Give Me The Bible*" (2002)
4. Pennsboro Church of Christ: "*Christianity: The Hope Of The World*" (2003)

As in the past, we desire to provide free copies of this book to all families who attend the lectures. We do so with the earnest prayer that God will be glorified, the church will be edified, and the lost will be saved.

May the Lord richly bless everyone who has helped in every way for the success of this lectureship. Again, we owe a large debt of gratitude to my wife, Nancy, who proofread every article of the book for grammatical purposes.

- Albert E. Farley, editor

CHRISTIANITY VERSUS DENOMINATIONALISM

Terry G. Jones

From the above title it is immediately observed that two things are set in opposition to one another. It would come as a shock to many that Christianity and denominationalism would be opposed to one another. Most would use the terms synonymously. Those who are members of a denominational church also claim to be Christians. Sadly, those claims are false and made by folks who have been deceived.

The fact of the matter is that Christianity and denominationalism are diametrically opposed to one another. There are extreme differences between the two. Time and space would not allow us to examine all of those differences, but we will endeavor to point out a few of them, and hopefully, in so doing, we will also demonstrate that denominationalism is sinful and is an abomination to the God of Heaven.

First, it is the Difference Between One Church and Many Churches.

Denominationalism boasts of how wonderful that it is that so many different churches exist and would have us to believe that all of them are accepted by God. However, that in no way reflects the teaching of the Scriptures on the matter.

Listen to the words of Jesus. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). It is obvious here that Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that He intended to build one church. In the New Testament we never read about any denominations because they did not exist, but we do read about the one church that Jesus died for and purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The apostles persuaded people to obey the gospel and become a member of Christ’s one true church. “... And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he declared, “There is one body ...” (4:4). He had earlier identified that body as the church. “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (1:22-23). The Bible clearly states that there is one church, but denominationalism boasts that there are many. Billy Graham has been noted as saying, “Choosing a church is like choosing a hat – What fits you might not fit me, so we all pick the one that we like the best.” That may sound good to many and has clearly tickled a lot of ears, but folks, there is absolutely no Bible authority to back it up. Nowhere do we find the apostles telling people to pick a church and then let God know what they decided.

Second, it is the Difference Between Unity and Division.

Jesus' dying prayer was for unity among His disciples. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:20-21). Webster defines *denominationalism* as, "division into denominations." By definition, denominationalism promotes division while Jesus demands unity! Add to that the fact that the Bible condemns division. "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Denominational churches fellowship one another by tolerating their differences and claim that they are practicing unity. But Bible unity demands "speaking the same thing," "being perfectly joined together," being "in the same mind" and "in the same judgment."

In his tract, "*What Is Wrong With Denominationalism?*," Marshall Flowers stated the case clearly with this observation.

"Denominationalism, to the contrary, glories in its divisions, exalts its different names, defends its many churches, and claims that there are many faiths and one is as good as another. Denominationalism thrives on division and then tries to make out like this division is according to the will of God."

Christianity is a religion of unity, but denominationalism fosters division.

Third, it is the Difference Between Clarity and Confusion.

Denominationalism has turned this country into one of the most religiously confused societies in the history of this world. There are hundreds, or perhaps, thousands, of different churches, each having a different name, teaching its own distinct doctrines and exercising its unique practices. At the same time, they all claim to be right and serving the same God. Scores of innocent folks, sincerely looking for the truth, get lost in all of the religious confusion and just give up. Now we see the importance of Jesus' prayer for unity. "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, *that the world may believe* [E.M.] that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:21). Jesus said that unity among His disciples would cause the world to believe. That being the case, then the opposite must also be true. That is, that religious division will cause the world to disbelieve.

God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Christianity is simple enough for all sincere people to follow, but many continue to be led astray by Satan's wicked workers. "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"

(2 Cor. 11:3). Since denominationalism is a system of confusion then it must be a tool of Satan because God is not the author of such.

Fourth, it is the Difference Between the Doctrine of Christ and the Commandments of Men.

Christianity is a religion governed by the New Testament. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Lord’s church follows the Bible without adding to, subtracting from or altering its divine precepts in any way (Rev. 22:18-19). It adheres to the simple New Testament plan of salvation, worship, and Christian living. It reveres the Bible as its only standard of authority. It upholds the doctrine of Christ and rejects the opinions of men. Jesus condemned those who would do otherwise. “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:8-9). The Apostle John warned, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 Jn. 9). We must teach the “doctrine of Christ,” nothing more, nothing less, nothing else!

Fifth, it is the Difference Between Salvation and Condemnation.

In the great commission, Jesus commanded, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk. 16:15-16). The gospel plan of salvation requires believers to be baptized to be saved. It is interesting that the denominational world is vehemently opposed to the Lord’s plan. Denominational preachers reject any notion that baptism has anything to do with the salvation of one’s soul. They choose, rather, to mislead people into accepting a system of salvation by “faith only,” despising any thought of requiring one to perform any act of obedience, especially if that act is baptism. Instead, those denominational preachers say, “invite the Lord into your heart,” “say the sinner’s prayer,” “accept Jesus as your personal savior,” and a host of other things for which they can find not one whit of Bible authority!

Dear reader, please consider carefully that in answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” the Bible says ...

1. Hear (Rom. 10:17).
2. Believe (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 8:24).
3. Repent (Acts 2:38; Lk. 13:3).
4. Confess (Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33).
5. Be Baptized (Mk. 16:16; Acts 22:16).
6. Live Faithfully (Rev. 2:10).

This is a plan that you can have confidence in because you can read it in your Bible. Denominationalism is sinful because it despises and repudiates the Lord's plan of salvation!

Denominationalism is a cancer upon our society that is leading multitudes of precious souls down the broad way that leads to eternal destruction (Matt. 7:13). Oddly enough, New Testament Christianity is the only cure. Christianity is not practiced in any denomination! True Christianity reveals denominationalism as the result of the inventions of men, a tool of Satan, and an abomination to God.

BLESSINGS OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

Albert E. Farley

About 590 years before Christ was born, God's prophet, Ezekiel, spoke of the returning of God's children from Babylonian captivity and, ultimately, of the gathering of God's people (Christians) into the Lord's church. He said,

And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. - Ezekiel 34:26

Truly, the blessings of being a Christian are great and many – they come down in showers from on high! All other ways of life are inferior to the Christian life, there is no real or lasting happiness and joy apart from Christ. When Jesus described his mission to earth in John 10:10, he described these blessings. "... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

The word, "life," is characteristic of the writings of John. Life is "in" Christ – the Word (Logos). John 1:4. The Word created all physical life in the beginning. Genesis 1-2. Later, when the fullness of the time had come, the Word was made flesh that we might have spiritual life that will last throughout eternity. The word *abundantly* actually means "superabundant; superior (in quality); beyond measure." (*Strongs*)

To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Christ. A disciple is "a learner; a pupil." Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. Acts 11:26. This is the life promised to disciples: life that is free, life that is abundant, and life that is graced with showers of blessings!

Our heart's desire and prayer to God for all men is that they might be saved and might enjoy the great blessings of being a Christian! Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life – and no man cometh unto the Father but by him. John 14:6. There is salvation in none other. Acts 4:12.

The blessings of being a Christian are revealed in God's Holy Word, the Bible. They involve all of life. Therefore, they naturally divide themselves into every aspect of life: spiritual, physical, mental, social, domestic (family), economic, and eternal. It will be our purpose, in this lesson, to present these blessings in a brief manner that is faithful with the scriptures and with the prayer they will encourage every one who may be listening or who may, later, read these lessons, to come to the One who is the author and finisher of our faith, the captain of our salvation – the one who has the words of life – the Good Shepherd of the sheep, and to abide in him unto the end.

Spiritual Blessings

Paul wrote, in Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The spiritual blessings in Christ can be further categorized into several groups of blessings. In Christ we have salvation – the forgiveness of sins. Luke 1:76-70. Having our many sins washed away in the blood of Christ, we have peace with God – a peace that passes all understanding. Romans 5:1. Being reconciled to God, we have fellowship with God, with Christ, with the Holy Spirit, and with the holy angels in heaven!

In Christ, we are members of His body, the church. Acts 2:36-47. Membership in Christ's church gives us fellowship with the most wonderful people on earth – fellow Christians – fellow saints. This fellowship allows us the privilege to come together with the redeemed every first day of the week (and on many other occasions) for sweet hours of worship and service to God. Acts 2:41-47. This fellowship expands our spiritual families. Jesus asked, in Matthew 12:48-50, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The spiritual blessings of the Christian are experienced in the providential care that God has promised to his faithful children. He will hear and answer our prayers according to his good will. If we, as Christians, confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive them. 1 John 1:9. He is also faithful in not allowing any temptation to be more than we can bear – and will, with every temptation, make a way of escape that we may be able to bear it. - 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Physical Blessings

The blessings of being a Christian are physical as well as spiritual. Paul said, in 1 Timothy 4:8, "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

A definite connection between godliness and physical longevity is found in Ephesians 6:1-3, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

When we present our bodies as living sacrifices unto the Lord (Romans 12:1-2), we put away every harmful habit of the body. As Christians, we know that our bodies belong to God, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20,

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

In our desire to bring glory to God in our body, we avoid habits that are harmful to the body. We will not become alcoholics or drug addicts. If we are these, we will repent and reform our lives. We will not take tobacco into our bodies. We will follow diets and exercise that, generally, will be healthy for our bodies and, therefore, give us valuable physical benefits and blessings.

Also, when we put our trust in the Man who stilled the waters and who calmed the sea, we will avoid the worry and anxiety that often lead to illnesses such as high blood pressure, strokes, and heart attacks. There has been some recent research that suggests that there may be some cancers that have a correlation with worry and anxiety. Jesus teaches his disciples,

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

– Matthew 6:25-34

Mental Blessings

There is a mental calmness that characterizes every faithful Christian. Paul wrote, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Romans 8:6. When we are led by the Spirit through the teachings of God's Holy Word, we seek to walk in the Spirit, to sow to the Spirit, and to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Paul lists these fruits in Galatians 5:22-26:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And

they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

These fruit of the Spirit cultivate a heart that is at rest with God, with our fellowman, and with ourselves. These result in a transcending peace that the world cannot give – neither can it receive. John 14:27. It is, as Paul said, a peace that "passeth all understanding" and is able to keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:7.

The mental peace of Christians is rooted in the belief that all men are of equal value in the sight of God - made in His own image (Genesis 1:26) - and that God so loved them that He gave His only begotten Son to die for them upon the cross at Calvary (John 3:16). This high regard for mankind leads Christians to love their enemies, to do good to them that hate them, and to pray for them that despitefully use them and persecute them (Matthew 5:44).

Christians are optimistic in the face of great evil and spiritual darkness. Their trust in the living God casts out and makes them free from the many phobias (fears) of life. While the world worries about being killed, robbed, forsaken, abandoned, starved, losing jobs, superstitions, old age, retirement, etc., Christians casts all of their care on the Lord who cares for them! 1 Peter 5:7.

Are you a Christian? Are you letting the peace of God rule in your heart, to the which also ye are called by the gospel in one body, the church? Colossians 3:15.

Social Blessings

The Christian is the most loyal, obedient, valuable citizen in any society – in every town, community, city, state, or nation in the world – baring none! This is a great blessing for the Christian, but it is also a great blessing for society. In Romans 13:1-4, Paul wrote,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

How could any nation not be blessed with citizens who submit to these divinely ordained controls of government? However, I am afraid there are some who claim to be Christians who are not abiding by these commandments – and, therefore, are not reaping the blessings of them.

In 1 Peter 2:11-17, Peter elaborated on this matter:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

As I study history and humbly consider the great accomplishments of our nation in comparison with - and in contrast to - the many other nations of the world, I ask myself, "Is there - and has there ever been - any other nation like America?" I ask myself, "Would this nation - founded upon 'Christian' principles - have achieved her greatness if she had been founded upon the principles of other world religions and beliefs: Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Atheism, or Catholicism?" No, I answer to myself, it is the principles set forth in the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ - fear of God, justice, equality of all men, freedom, liberty, human dignity, the worth of the individual, honesty, industry, charity, etc. - that have made America great. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." - Proverbs 14:34.

Yes, America has her share of problems. Our people are not as righteous as they once were. We need to pray for our nation. We need to pray for our president and other political leaders. But, mostly, we need to live the Christian life. We need to teach the gospel to our friends and neighbors. We need to labor in building up the high and holy cause of Christ and His church. The hope of America and of the world is New Testament Christianity!

Domestic/Family Blessings

Christianity is concerned with marriage, the family, and the home. There is no home without problems. Problems - troubles - are a part of life. However, God has blessed us, in the New Testament, with a pattern for the home to handle these problems in a way that will insure the happiness, joy, and success of every member of that home. When God's pattern is followed in any home, that home becomes a Christian home.

What a joy to see a man, through love, leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they become one flesh in the holy bonds of matrimony! Matthew 19:1-6. What a joy to see a husband who accepts, with love, his rightful place as the head of his wife! What a joy to see a wife who, with love, submits

herself to her own husband as unto the Lord! Ephesians 5:22-23. What a joy to see parents who, with love, teach, discipline, and provide for their children's spiritual and physical needs! What a joy to see children who, through love, obey their parents in the Lord, for this is right! Ephesians 6:1-4. This is God's picture of marriage. Do we wish for our families to be happy and blessed? They CAN be - within the teachings and practices of New Testament Christianity.

Marriage and the home face many great challenges today. The divorce rate in the United States – and the world – continues to be very high. The only factor in keeping it from climbing even higher is the escalating number of people who are living together in fornication – outside of the marriage bond. Many homes that are not broken by divorce are unhappy and miserable. Another very serious threat to the home is homosexuality. Divinely ordained marriage is not between two men or between two women! That is an abomination - regardless of what any or many may say to the contrary! Do we seek homes where happiness, peace, love, and hope dwell? The answer is Christianity. May we always remember: the church is the number one force in the world that is preserving the divinely ordained, holy estate of marriage.

Economic Blessings

Christ did not come so that we might become rich in material wealth. Christianity is not given to the world as the means to economic growth. Gain is NOT godliness. Paul wrote:

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. – 1 Timothy 6:3-12.

No, we do not preach the gospel of "health and wealth." This being said, however, it is also true that the Christian way of life is the most efficient and economical way of life in the world. We can say with confidence, generally speaking, if the principles of Christ are practiced, positive economic blessings will

be received. Christianity promotes honest debts and payment of all of these debts (Romans 13:8). The Christian will be hard-working and industrious (Ephesians 4:28). Members of the church will make the best employers and employees (Ephesians 6:5, 9; Colossians 3:22-24; 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; Titus 2:9,10). They will be dependable, trustworthy, and faithful to every stewardship and responsibility. They will be frugal and careful in the use of all things. Above all, they will be content with such things as they have (Hebrews 13:5, 6).

David, in Psalm 37:25, said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." In the New Testament, Paul said, 2 Corinthians 9:8-10,

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

Eternal Blessings

We have discussed many blessings that are associated with the Christian life. We believe the blessings we have discussed thus far are worthy of our attention and our faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ. They pale, however, when we consider the greatest blessings of all in being a Christian – those that await us after this life is over - in the resurrection and in eternity.

It may be that we have forgiveness of sins and hope in this life but, as Paul said to the church at Corinth,

... if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. - 1 Corinthians 15:13-19.

Our hope is laid up for us in heaven. Colossians 1:5. It may be that, in spite of faithful obedience to our Lord, we may NOT have good physical health. In spite of our own present faithfulness, our families may NOT be what God would have them to be. Our own families may even turn against us because of our faith. Our spouse may, in fact, become unfaithful to God and, even, to us. Our children, themselves, may very well leave the church. Socially, we may be outcasts in our own communities because of our obedience to the gospel. Our

own brethren in the church may turn against us. We may, indeed, lose our jobs and property because we are Christians. Paul said,

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. - 2 Timothy 3:10-12; See Philippians 3:7-10.

In fact, this is one of the precious blessings we have as Christians. Jesus said,

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Matthew 5:10-12.

When Jesus reassured his disciples that their following of Him would be greatly rewarded, he included persecutions with the listed blessings.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. Mark 10:29-30.

Yes, if we have faithfully lived the Christian life, in the world to come we shall have eternal life! This will be the fruition of God's wonderful grace and of our faithful obedience. As Peter said, in 1 Peter 4:13, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

*This world is not my home,
I'm just a' passing thru.
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home
In this world any more.*

Oh, what blessings there are in being a Christian! We have sought to bring these blessings to the attention of our minds and hearts in this lesson. These blessings bring us joy that is unspeakable and full of glory – they bring us hope

that is an anchor of the soul - that is both sure and steadfast, and that enters through the veil into heaven, itself! Hebrews 6:19; 1 Peter 1:8.

As Paul spoke of these things in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8, he said,

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (16-19)

Today, we wait – with earnest expectation – for the manifestation of the glory which shall someday be revealed in us as the children, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. But as we wait, we wait amidst the great shower of blessings that daily fall upon us – the blessings of being a Christian.

And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing;
and I will cause the shower to come down in his season;
there shall be showers of blessing. - Ezekiel 34:26

CHRIST – THE FOCUS OF CHRISTIANITY

Frank Higginbotham

To speak of Christianity is to speak of Christ. The two cannot be separated. God planned the scheme of redemption in eternity. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:" (Eph 3:10-11). Christ stood at the center of that plan. If we were to remove the part that Christ had in that plan, Christianity would not even exist. Thus, the heart of Christianity is the Son of God. The book of John begins with a reference to the Godhead. Christ is identified as deity that existed before the world began. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). The person referred to as the Word is clearly made known to be the Christ that came into the world. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14). The case for Christianity rests on the deity of Christ. If He is not divine, Christianity is a fraud and in reality does nothing but harm to mankind. When the Lord asked His disciples in regard to His identity, they attributed to Him an equality to some very great men. John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah and others of the prophets were really good men. However, they were not divine.

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:13-14).

These answers did not cover the truth about Jesus. The disciples were then asked who they thought He was.

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-17).

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus stated that the church would be built on Him. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18). Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 3:11 that there could be no other foundation than Christ. There is indisputable evidence in the book of John that Jesus is the Son of God. John states that his purpose in writing his book was to give the evidence needed to make the readers know that Jesus is the Christ.

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31).

In John 5 the evidence is summarized. Proof of His divinity is seen in His claims, the claims of His Father, the works that He did, the testimony of John the Baptist, the Word of God, and the witness of Moses. These all testified to the fact that He is God's Son. Christianity is built around and focuses on Jesus, the Son of God.

The prophets of the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Christ and spoke about it hundreds of years before the event. They knew about Christ because their words were given to them by inspiration. The late Fred E. Dennis used to say that men write history after it happens, but God writes history before it happens. It is stated that there are more than 300 direct references in the Old Testament to the coming Christ. Those prophecies began as early as Genesis 3:15. They continue through out the Old Testament. Isaiah is not known as the "Messianic Prophet" by accident. He described in great detail the facts about Christ. No picture of the rejection, the trial, and the final crucifixion of Christ could have been clearer than the one given by Isaiah.

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand." (Isa. 53:7-10).

One of the strongest arguments for the inspiration of the Bible is the argument of fulfilled prophecy. If detailed prophecies, made hundreds of years before the event, occurred, then it must be explained how this could happen. Man without the help of God could not do this. Peter states that the prophets were given the words they spoke. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet 1:20-21). New Testament writers also focused on the coming Christ. Angels announced His coming. Mary was told, "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35). The central theme of all Bible prophecy is Christ and Christianity.

Christ is also the focus of Christianity when we think about the way that salvation is obtained. Salvation is clearly described in the book of Acts. No book in the Bible gives greater detail about what man must do to take advantage of obtaining the salvation which is in Christ. On the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 the central theme of the sermon delivered was Christ. Peter stood up with the other apostles and explained that Christ is the fulfillment of the writings of the prophets. Peter concluded,

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:" (Acts 2:22-23).

Those present were then accused of being guilty of killing God's Son. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36). The sermon preached on that day can be outlined in three points. Peter spoke of the death, burial, and the resurrection of Christ. When the people were convicted of their sin, they asked what they needed to do about the sin of killing God's Son. They were told, "... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38). The Lord added to the church those people who obeyed God's instructions. Christ was also the central theme of the preaching done by Phillip in Samaria. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." (Acts 8:5). Later Phillip was led by God to meet the Eunuch as he was returning home from being in Jerusalem for worship. The Eunuch was reading from one of the prophecies of Isaiah. When he was asked if he understood what he was reading, his reply was that he needed some one to guide him. Phillip used the passage to explain to him about Christ and the need for his baptism. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." (Acts 8:35). When water was available the Eunuch requested to be baptized. "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." (Acts 8:38). The salvation of the Eunuch was a result of the preaching about Christ. There can be no salvation separate from Christ. He is the focus of Christianity. Paul was committed to this fact.

It also needs to be noted that Christ is the focus of the life that the Christian lives. When Paul wrote his letter to the church at Corinth he made it clear to them that he had made a commitment to only preach Christ to them. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:1-:2). We surely understand that Paul spoke of more than just the fact that Jesus lived and died. Many aspects of Christian living are covered by this expression. Many today use

this statement to justify themselves in trying to limit the words spoken by preachers. They encourage the preacher to just "preach the gospel and let everyone alone." They do not want to hear sermons regarding pure living, regarding a dedicated life, or anything spoken that condemns the religious error that is being taught. This was not even in the thoughts of Paul. A look at the things that he wrote in the book of 1 Corinthians forever dispels this view. Paul spoke plainly as he condemned the division that was present at Corinth. He spoke out about the immoral practice that had involved the whole congregation. A man had taken his father's wife and the church had not taken any action to correct this situation. Paul made known the fact that brethren should suffer being defrauded rather than going to law with brethren. This reflected on the church before unbelievers. Preaching Christ included speaking about the misuse of the Lord's Supper. The errors concerning the resurrection were condemned. The statement, "preach Christ and let everyone alone" is not sound Biblically.

When Christ is taught, He becomes the center of the thoughts and conduct of the Christian. The Apostle Paul expressed this thought in his own life. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20). When people observed his life they did not see Paul but the effect that Christ had on his life. Lives are transformed when people let Christ be the focus of their lives. Peter and John had healed a man at the gate called Beautiful. When called before the Council, they were given orders not to preach in the name of Christ anymore. They were bold in rejecting this warning and made it clear that they would obey God in spite of what the Council said. In the course of this situation, they made this observation. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13). This should be true of Christians today. If we have been with Jesus, it should be obvious to those around us. The teachings of Christ should permeate our lives and dictate our conduct. Christ lives in us. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; " (Eph 3:17). The thinking of Christ becomes the standard for the conduct of the Christian.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:" (Phil 2:5). Humility is a quality of the life of Christ that is translated into the life of a Christian. Arrogance is not compatible with the teachings of Christ. Christ humbled himself when He came into the world.

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6-8).

After reminding the church at Rome of the grace that God had shown to both Jew and Gentile, Paul exhorts Christians to have a right attitude toward their own lives.

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Rom. 12:3).

Peter encouraged the child of God to be humble. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:" (1 Pet. 5:6).

Another quality of Christ that is seen in the lives of Christians is that He was forgiving. It is hard to realize that Christ was able to speak words of forgiveness to those who were guilty of putting Him to death. While he was hanging on the cross, He asked His Father to forgive them for they knew not what they were doing. The average person would have been speaking words of anger and vengeance but this was not the case with Jesus. He came to save the world, not to bring vengeance upon mankind. He provided, by His death on the cross, the way for men to obtain forgiveness. A basic part of the teaching He did was forgiveness. When Peter asked the Lord about forgiveness, he wanted to know if he was required to forgive seven times. The Lord replied in this way,

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." (Mt. 18:22).

The number of times to forgive others is limitless. Our forgiveness from God depends on whether we have this same forgiveness for our fellowmen. When Christ is the center of Christianity, forgiveness is a characteristic that is seen in our lives.

Christ lives in us when we show genuine love for our fellowmen. We know that God loves us because we can see this love in the giving of His Son. We are sure of Christ's love by His willingness to suffer and die for us. People can tell of Christ being in us when we show love for others. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35). It would be impossible to speak of Christianity without speaking of love. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:" (1 Pet. 1:22).

Another quality of Christianity that is seen in the life of Christ is His obedience to the will of His Father. God had a plan in eternity that would bring salvation to mankind. This plan included the death of Christ on the cross. Our Lord did not refuse to obey His Father even though it included His death.

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;" (Heb. 5:9).

Christians recognize Christ as the Lord and do not hesitate to obey His will. He is Lord and Christ. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36). Our attitude should be, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth."

Christ is indeed the focus of Christianity. Becoming a Christian means that we focus on Christ. Living the Christian life means that we are examples of Christ living in us.

CHRISTIAN HOMES

Roger A. Rush

I am thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this lectureship, and especially grateful for the privilege of speaking on the subject of "Christian Homes." There is a direct correlation between the home and church, and the home and society. Solid homes make for strong churches and strong communities. Many societal problems can be directly traced to the breakdown of the home.

It is important to note, before we proceed, that the family has always been under assault. Any careful Bible student will readily acknowledge the truthfulness of this assertion. The first home was marred by jealousy and murder (Genesis 4). Abraham had to deal with strife in his extended family (Genesis 13) and his immediate family (Genesis 21). Isaac, Jacob, Eli, Samuel, and David all encountered serious problems at home. This list is by no means exhaustive. Given what we discover in the biblical narrative, it is not surprising that homes are still under attack.

The breakdown of the home is one of the most serious problems we face. There was a time in our history when family ties were close and solid, but that is often no longer true. What has brought about the modern disintegration of the American family? I would suggest at least seven factors are at work.

- 1) Marriages are now easily dissolved. No fault divorce is common place. Marriage is no longer viewed as a lifelong commitment.
- 2) The acceptance of alternate lifestyles has contributed to the disintegration of the home. Homosexuality is not only viewed as acceptable, but in some circles it is glorified.
- 3) Sexual immorality is endemic. The stigma of illegitimacy no longer exists.
- 4) Life, especially that of the unborn, is no longer precious. Children are often viewed as burdens, not blessings.
- 5) The mobility of our society (the average family moves once every five years) has lessened the bonds of home and family.
- 6) Materialism with its emphasis on things rather than people has pulled more and more young mothers out of the home and into the workforce at a time which children are most vulnerable. Obviously, there are times when young mothers have no choice but to work outside the home. However, when the choice is purely one in which a more affluent

lifestyle is the motivating factor, the cost is far greater than the rewards. Years lost can never be regained.

- 7) We have seen a breakdown of traditional religious values. Home and family no longer receive the emphasis they once did.

The only solution to the turmoil now engulfing families is a return to a biblical framework for marriage and the home. The home was the first institution ordained by God, and it was meant to be lasting. It should be the center of spiritual, emotional, social, and physical development. It is the place where love is nurtured and cultivated. It is the heart of society. The ties that bind us to home and family should be strong and lasting. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "And where we love is home, home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts. The chain may lengthen, but it never parts." We now turn our attention to those elements necessary to building Christian homes.

A Christian home requires a commitment to the permanency and stability of marriage. God intended one man and one woman to unite their lives in the bonds of holy wedlock for life (Genesis 2:18-24). Marriage was clearly intended to be an "until death doth us part" proposition (Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:39). Jesus reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage in the course of His ministry (Matthew 19:1-9). Divorce is entirely too easy, and is almost never the solution to marital difficulties. As one author put it, "Divorce is about as illogical as a seasick man changing ships to cure his seasickness."

Christian homes can only come about when there is a proper recognition of the purpose of the home. That understanding must come from the Bible.

The home should be the place where moral, ethical and religious values are instilled. Religious instruction is, first and foremost, relegated to the home (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 6:4). The church and Christian education can never replace the home. Both may support the efforts on the home front, but neither can serve as a substitute for the home in teaching the word of God to our children.

It is in the home that values are instilled. It is here that lessons concerning right and wrong are first taught. Such things as honesty, integrity, and truth must be conveyed by word and example. It's not that we fail to tell children the difference between right and wrong. The failure comes in not living what is taught. Children are perceptive. They see through the hypocrisy. How can a father possibly teach his son about the evils of alcohol when every time the youngster goes to the refrigerator for milk he must reach around his father's beer? How can a mother punish her daughter for smoking the cigarette butt she discarded? We cannot teach it if we do not live it!

The home is where respect for others is taught. It begins with respect for one's parents. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with

promise” (Ephesians 6:4). See a child who has a proper respect for parents, and you will see a child who will respect teachers, laws, and God. See a child without respect for parents, and you will see a child without respect for anyone or anything.

There will be no respect where there is no discipline (Hebrews 12:9). Therefore, the home is the place where discipline must first be exercised. By discipline is meant “correction and instruction.” A home without discipline is a home without love (Hebrews 12:5-8). Some of the tragic stories which were alluded to earlier can be directly traced to a failure to discipline. Eli’s sons were wicked and vile, in part, because “he restrained them not” (1 Samuel 3:13). And David’s son, Adonijah, was unwilling to bow to the wishes of his father because his father had never interfered with him by asking, “Why do you behave as you do?” (1 Kings 1:6). Samuel’s sons walked not in the ways of their father (1 Samuel 8:3). Could it be that Samuel was so busy doing the Lord’s work that he neglected one of the most important works any man of God is called to do? Samuel failed to discipline his son!

No book of the Bible gives more emphasis to the importance of discipline in child rearing than Proverbs (13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15). None of these passages can be construed to justify child abuse, but I am quick to point out that the greatest child abuse today is NEGLECT!

The home is the place where life’s priorities are set. Too many people go through life without purpose. Gordon Dahl has written, in *Work, Play and Worship in a Leisure-Oriented Society*,

“Most middle class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair, and their life-styles resemble a class of characters in search of a plot.”

Young people raised in a Christian home will not struggle to find meaning and purpose in life. For them life’s priorities have been determined by God and underscored from birth (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; Matthew 6:33; Colossians 1:18).

How can we make our homes all that God desires them to be? That’s a question worth our consideration. There are a number of steps that can be taken in an effort to build a solid home.

Provide an atmosphere of love and harmony in the home. Make home a refuge from the world, a place of love, warmth and safety from the wicked world around us. It is not an accident that the Bible places so much emphasis on husbands and wives loving each other (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Titus 2:4). It has been said that the greatest gift a man can give his children is to love their mother. Let your children know that two people who love each other can still disagree. Love is the

cement of marriage (1 Corinthians 13:1-8). Even when disagreements arise, and they do in every marriage, love will keep the home fires burning.

Make Christ a vital part of your home. In a Christian home there should never be any doubt where the family will be on the Lord's Day (morning and evening). The same should be true Wednesday evening. Worship together. Pray at meals. Sing and pray together as a family. If begun when children are infants, these activities will become habits for a lifetime. If neglected when children are young, it is very difficult to instill them when they are older. It is never too early to begin teaching youngsters the great truths of God's word.

Communicate! I often ask, "What is the most important element of communication?" Most answer, "Talking!" That's not true. The most important aspect of communication is learning to listen (James 1:19). Listen to your children and respond to their questions with openness and honesty.

Set a good example at all times (1 Timothy 4:12). Children tend to grow up to be like their parents. They are far more likely to imitate our example than heed our warnings. Success demands living what we teach.

Be firm, but fair in your discipline. Children need limits. They must know that choices have consequences. Break the rules and there are consequences, but the punishment must fit the crime. Too many parents make minor infractions into capital offenses.

Be generous with your time. Building a home is labor intensive. Building a house takes months. Building a home requires the investment of a lifetime. It's an investment in the lives of the people we love most (Ephesians 5:15, 16).

Encourage; don't always be critical.

Say "I love you" a lot. Say it with words, but more importantly, say it with deeds (1 John 3:17, 18).

WHAT MUST I DO?

Johnny Ramsey

Years ago, I was handed a written record of a radio sermon by a famous preacher. The subject was: “The Process of Salvation!” The last paragraph was indeed shocking: “If you are not saved, God pity you, for there is nothing you can do. God must do it all.” What a terrible perversion of Scripture!

The book of Acts, the record of conversions in the first century, certainly teaches otherwise.

When people on Pentecost were convicted of sin and cried out for salvation (Acts 2:37), they were certainly not told that there was nothing they could do! God told them, by the mouth of Peter,

“Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins ... They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls” (v. 38,41).

They wanted to know what to DO, and when they were told, they DID it.

When the Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul asked, “What shall I do Lord?” and Jesus replied, “Enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 22:10; 9:6). Saul knew there was something he had to do, and so did the Lord! The Lord Jesus sent Ananias to Saul to tell him, “Now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16).

In every account of redemption, man was active and not passive. Remember the words of Jesus, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Let us analyze each of the words in this biblical question, “What must I do to be saved?” (from Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10).

What proves there is action on our part, as there is something necessary for sinners to do to be saved.

Must shows the essentiality of the action. It does not say *may*, *can*, *shall*, *ought*, or *might* do. It is an imperative.

I proves that it is personal, and not inherited, or done by proxy by someone else on our behalf.

Do states clearly that God, with all He has done for our salvation, requires an active response on our part.

To Be Saved teaches clearly that the actual cleansing emanates from God (1 John 4:14; 1 Timothy 2:4), and a “feeling down deep in my heart” is not the source of salvation. When we do what God commands, the salvation comes from Him, not from some ‘warm, fuzzy feeling inside man.’”

What We Must Do to Be Saved

Be Lost and Know It: “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But some are lost and do not know it. The elder brother in Luke 15, for instance, and the self-righteous Pharisee in Luke 18 were lost, but refused to recognize it.

Desire to Be Saved: Some are lost and do not really want to be saved, due to worldliness, apathy, or materialism. Felix and Agrippa match this category, as well as the rich young ruler of Mark 10. When men are “lovers of pleasure” (2 Timothy 3:4), it is hard to get their attention (2 Timothy 3:4).

Be Humble Enough to Obey: Some folk would rather argue with the Bible than to obey its commands. Remember Naaman, the leper, in 2 Kings 5? He argued with God’s plan for his cleansing, and he remained a leper until he humbly did what God told him. Christ will save only those who obey (Hebrews 5:9).

Persevere: It is not enough just to be baptized into Jesus Christ, thus becoming a child of God (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4). The Christian then must also “continue steadfastly” (Acts 2:42) in the things of the Lord thereafter.

ALMOST PERSUADED

Acts 26:27-29

Mack Lyon

Why even consider becoming a Christian? What is a Christian? What is so great about being a Christian? Why should anyone want to be a Christian? Why should anyone be “almost” persuaded to be a Christian? Why should anyone NOT want to be a Christian? These are some of the questions we’ll answer in our study.

The Name “Christian”

Christianity was born on the first Jewish day of Pentecost following the victorious resurrection of Christ from the dead and His ascension to the Father’s right hand in Heaven. Its beginning is recorded for us by the Holy Spirit in the second chapter of Acts. The Lord’s plan for the gospel was that it first be preached in Jerusalem, but it was to be a universal faith, moving throughout all Judea, then to Samaria, and finally to “the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

At first the followers of Christ were called “the church” (Acts 2:47; 8:1, etc.), “the disciples” (Acts 6:1), and “the Way” (Acts 9:2). And in Acts 11:26 they were given a new name. There it is said that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

That is the climax of a great story which actually began back in the eighth chapter where it is written that “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” What follows in chapter eight is how, according to the plan, the gospel was taken to the Samaritans, including an influential religious leader in Samaria, named Simon. Chapter nine is devoted to the conversion of a man named Saul of the city of Tarsus and a violent persecutor of “the Way.” This appears to be an interruption in Luke’s story of the spread of Christianity according to the divine plan. But it really isn’t, because Saul was chosen of the Lord to become His apostle to bear the name of Christ to the Gentile world (Acts 9:15; 26:8-20; Eph. 3:1-8).

Chapter 10 is the story of our Lord’s preparation for the acceptance of the Gentiles into the church. You see, there was great antagonism, a very strong prejudice and enmity between Jews and Gentiles which, without a powerful demonstration from God of His approval, would have absolutely prevented any acceptance of Gentiles into the new family of God. That is the purpose of the insertion of chapter ten of Luke’s inspired history. That set the stage for what is written in Acts 11. Having accomplished that purpose, Luke then continues his story from Acts 8:1:

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but to the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found Him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the Disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Acts 11:19-26

Was the name “Christian” given the followers of Christ by (1) their enemies in derision, (2) coined voluntarily by themselves, or (3) divinely given them by the Lord? You are probably aware that that question has been a matter of long debate. Although the answer you give it will not likely be the reason you would give for being only “almost persuaded” to becoming a Christian, it might have been the reason Agrippa was said he was so. And it certainly will greatly affect our understanding of Agrippa’s response to Paul’s appeal.

First, it isn’t likely to be a self-assumed name. It would be contrary to the spirit and the teaching of Him they claimed to be their Teacher. You see, James speaks of it as the “noble name by which you are called” (Jas. 2:7). The King James says “worthy name.”

It is also highly improbable it was a name given the disciples in derision because the enemies of Jesus would have found nothing in it dishonorable. To be a friend or a follower of the Messiah (Christ) was not a matter of reproach among them; they were friends of the Messiah themselves. They just didn’t believe Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. When they wanted to speak contemptuously of the disciples, they used such terms as “Galileans.” “Are not all these Galileans?” (Acts 2:7) or “Nazarenes.” They said of Paul that he was a “leader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

So, I am saying the name “Christian” is divinely given. Almost seven long centuries before the events of Acts 11, Isaiah wrote of the coming Messianic reign. And God said,

The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.”

- Isaiah 62:2

Before the events of Acts (chapters 10 and 11) the gospel had been preached to the Jews only, but, at the house of Cornelius, God demonstrated by three amazing miracles that salvation had also been granted to the Gentiles. First, there was the appearance of the angel to Cornelius with the message to send men to Joppa to get Peter who would tell him words by which he could be saved. Next, there was Peter's vision while he was on the house top to convince him he should go to the house of a Gentile. The third miracle was the coming of the Holy Spirit on the house of Cornelius to convince people even till this day that God had granted repentance and salvation to Gentiles, too.

With this, then, the men who came from Cyprus and Cyrene to Antioch were the first to go to the Gentiles. It was in Antioch that the Gentiles saw the righteousness of God, which heretofore had been preached only to the Jews. It was here in the church at Antioch that Jews and Gentiles sat down together at the table of the Lord for the first time. And it was here that the new name, promised by the Lord was heard for the first time. Indeed, Isaiah 62:2 was fulfilled.

Almost Persuaded to be a Christian

Paul, who, as we noted earlier, was called of Christ to be His apostle to the Gentile world (Rom. 1:1) had before his call, been a violent persecutor of the disciples. His vigorous efforts to silence them took him to places as far removed from Jerusalem as Damascus, Syria. It was on that journey for that purpose that he both saw the resurrected Savior and heard Him speak. He was immediately convinced he had been wrong about Jesus; he repented and was baptized to wash away his sins and promptly began preaching Jesus as the resurrected Messiah (Christ).

Such a radical change in his life so greatly antagonized his Jewish brethren that they sought to kill him (Acts 9). They stayed in hot and persistent pursuit of him from city to city and place to place, which eventually brought him before king Agrippa where in Acts 26 he is permitted to make his defense. He spoke of his earlier life in the Jew's religion as a zealous persecutor of the saints. He related to him in a very graphic way his Damascus Road experience and how he had become a Christian.

His speech was powerful and convincing, and, while governor Festus seemed not to be much impressed, king Agrippa was moved to say to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." Why would Agrippa say a thing like that? Let's consider some possible reasons:

1. Agrippa was familiar with Hebrew history and prophecy. He was also familiar with events surrounding the life and death of Jesus. He had to have been impressed with Paul, a devout Hebrew, who had become such a devout Christian. Paul's description of the Damascus Road encounter with

the living Christ was convincing. Saul's conversion is perhaps one of the most powerful evidences we have of the deity of Christ.

2. The name "Christian" was an honorable and noble one. It bore testimony to the character, the doctrines, the hopes, and joys of the people who wore it. They were reputable and dependable people.
3. The name "Christian" connects men of every nation, tribe and tongue in all the world.
4. It also brings together in ONE the extremes of society and unites them in one family on a common level.
5. The name "Christian" will be remembered when the names of kings and queens and presidents and prime ministers shall cease to amuse or dazzle the world.
6. The name "Christian" associates the bearer with Jesus Christ in whose name alone there is salvation from sin and life in the world to come (Acts 4:12).

Why, then, would a person like king Agrippa be ALMOST persuaded to be a Christian? It seems he and others like him would be eager and prompt in becoming so. What are the negatives?

1. It demands a change in lifestyle for him. J.W. McGarvey wrote of this verse:

The heart that beats beneath the royal robe is too deeply absorbed in worldly cares to often or seriously entertain the claims of the religion of Jesus. A corrupted Christianity, which shifts its demands to suit the rank of its hearers, has been acceptable to the great men of the nations, because it helps to soothe an aching conscience, and it is often useful in controlling the ignorant masses, but men of rank and power are seldom willing to become altogether as the apostle Paul. They turn away from the close pressure of truth.

2. It might (indeed it would) incur persecution. The Scripture says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). And the apostle Peter wrote, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter (name)" (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

There's little doubt but that Agrippa, like many others before him or since, wrestled with that decision. If he remained as he was, there's no doubt but that he has regretted the one inferred.

How will it be with you, my friend? There's a song we used to sing. We don't sing it any more. It might offend someone. It says,

Almost persuaded now to believe,
Almost persuaded Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way
Some more convenient day
On Thee I'll call.

CHRISTIANITY VERSUS ISLAM

Charles C. Pugh III

During a recent six-year period in the United States, the religion of Islam increased three hundred percent. A study titled *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait*, released April 26, 2001, by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, reported that more than two million Muslims were attending 1,209 mosques in America (Reymond Pt 1, 1). One writer has described this amazing increase of Muslims in one American city in the following:

There are an estimated 300,000 Muslims in metropolitan Detroit. Walking through sections of Dearborn, a suburb of the city, you might think you were in the Middle East. The signs on the local shops are in Arabic, the Mosques are as plentiful as churches, and even McDonalds has on its menu “hallal,” meaning lawful chicken nuggets, prepared according to the dietary codes of the Muslim religion (Centerville 4).

... [I]t spread like a wild prairie fire over all of the Middle East, on over the oceans to Europe, Asia and all of the far east, and now into the United States of America. Millions of Mohammedans live in our land, and there are more Mohammedan mosques (places of Moslim worship) on American soil than there are churches of Christ in all of the Arab world. It is indeed a sobering thought that they are converting us at an infinitely faster rate than we are them! (61).

Presently, it is doubtful that there is any religion in the world that presents a greater challenge to Christianity, with the opportunity for a significant intellectual confrontation, than Islam. Paul wrote,

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, CASTING DOWN ARGUMENTS and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, BRINGING EVERY THOUGHT INTO CAPTIVITY TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST ...” (2 Cor. 10:4-5, emp. added).

Arguments (logismos), in verse 5, means “... the ability to draw A LOGICAL CONCLUSION. The concept implies an activity of the reason which, starting with ascertainable facts, draws a conclusion ... Plato uses it for thought unaffected by the emotions, which seeks to grasp objective facts and apply them” (Brown 3 823, emp. added). Christianity honors the law of rationality by setting forth a positive, sound argument that results in the conclusion: Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Christianity is the one true religion (cf. Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; Acts 17:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:21). It also involves answering the unsound arguments of all false religions and false philosophies (1 John 4:1; 1 Pet. 3:15).

“CHRISTIANITY VERSUS ISLAM” refers to the religion of Jesus Christ as revealed in the 66 books of the Bible *IN CONTRAST* (Webster 1301) to Islam, the religion of the prophet Muhammad (A.D. 570-A.D. 632) as set forth in the Qur’an the holy book of Islam. In this study I will address the theme - “CHRISTIANITY VERSUS ISLAM” - by examining the sharp contrast that exists between Christianity and Islam in (1) *authority*, (2) *morality* and (3) *Christology*. This contrast manifests (1) the superiority of Christianity to Islam and (2) the evidence that Christianity is the one true religion. I will attempt to discuss the above within the framework of the following argument:

1. If the religion of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the sixty-six books of the Bible, possesses characteristics that make it superior to the religion of Islam as presented in the Qur’an, and if these characteristics are of such a nature that make it necessary that the religion of Jesus Christ is divine (i.e. from God), then the religion of Jesus Christ is the one true religion.
2. The religion of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the sixty-six books of the Bible, possesses characteristics that make it superior to the religion of Islam as presented in the Qur’an, and these characteristics are of such a nature that make it necessary that the religion of Jesus Christ is divine (i.e. from God).
3. Therefore, the religion of Jesus Christ is the one true religion.

If the premises (1 and 2) of the above argument are true then the conclusion (3) must be true. The first premise quite obviously is true. Therefore, the only point at issue is the question: Is the second premise true? As evidence that the second premise is true, and therefore, the conclusion (i.e. the religion of Jesus Christ is the one true religion) is true, I now proceed to examine the sharp contrast that exists between Christianity and Islam.

A Contrast in Authority

The contrast in authority between Christianity and Islam is the contrast between the Bible and the Qur’an. True Christianity is the religion of biblical authority (John 5:39; 10:35; 1 Cor. 4:6; 14:37; Eph. 3:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:16-21; Rev. 22:18-19, et al). The basis for Islam is the Qur’an. The Qur’an is about four-fifths the length of the New Testament and is divided into 114 surahs (chapters). As Boa states, “The Koran is the authoritative scripture of Islam” (52). Islam claims that *it* recognizes other revelations: The *Torat* (of Moses), the *Suhuf* (the prophets), *Zabur* (psalms of David), and the *Injil* (gospel of Jesus). However, make no mistake about it---in Islam, the Qur’an supercedes all other revelations and, according to Muslims, is the *only* uncorrupted revelation.

There is a sharp contrast between the Bible and the Qur’an in the argument for inspiration. There really is no argument for the inspiration of the Qur’an, and

neither can one be formulated. The Qur'an does not set forth any theory of inspiration. A debate rages among Islamic scholars regarding whether the Qur'an is inspired by letter, word, or thought. However, in contrast, the Bible contains numerous statements that affirm the inspiration of its contents, even to the very words that its writers used (cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; Isa. 2:1; Jer. 1:1-4; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; Matt. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 2:9-14; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Luke 10:7; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 3:15-16, et al).

Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an has *no external* evidences for inspiration. There are no evidences from the Old Testament, New Testament, science, or archaeology that serve to confirm its purported authority. Unlike the Bible (cf. Gen. 1:1; 15:5; 17:12; Lev. 12-14; 17:11; Job 38-39; Ps. 8:8; Eccl. 1:7; Isa. 40:22; Acts 17:26; 1 Cor. 15:39, et al), the Qur'an contains no treatment of science that transcends human invention. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an contains no scientific accuracy questions (cf. Job 38-39). There is no fulfillment of predictive prophecy from either the Old or New Testaments in the Qur'an (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:1-3; 49:10; Num. 24:17; Deut. 18:15ff; 28:15-68; Job 19:25-26; Ps. 2:6-8; 16:8-11; 22:1ff; 69:21; 110:1-4; Ezra 1:1; Isa. 2:1-3; 45:1ff; 7:14; 9:6; 53:1-12; Jer. 31:31-34; Dan. 2:44; Joel 2:28; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9; 13:1; Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6). There is nothing in the Qur'an, by way of types and shadows, that serves as evidence of its divine origin, whereas the Bible contains large sections of typology (even entire books - cf. The Epistle to the Hebrews) that prove its divine origin.

The Qur'an has no *abiding, eternal relevance*, because it does not transcend time and culture as does the Bible. Schaff cited the Scottish essayist, Thomas Carlyle who called the Qur'an, "... [T]he confused ferment of a great rude human soul; rude, untutored, that cannot even read, but fervent, earnest struggling vehemently to utter itself in words" (83). Carlyle confessed that reading the Qur'an is "as toilsome a task" as he ever undertook. He said, "A wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; insupportable stupidity, in short, nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran" (83). Philip Schaff, himself, gave the Qur'an the following description: "... [M]ixed with absurdities, bombast, unmeaning images, low sensuality. It abounds in repetitions and contradictions, which are not removed by the convenient theory of abrogation. It alternately attracts and repels, and is a most wearisome book to read" (83).

The Qur'an does not transcend time and culture as the Bible, because it is really only intended for Arabic people in the Arabic language. The Qur'an states: "Had We revealed the Koran in a foreign tongue they would have said: 'If only its verses were expounded! Why in a foreign tongue, and he an Arabian?'" (41:43). George W. Williard, in his *Comparative Study of the Dominant Religions of the World*, wrote:

A careful comparison of the Koran with the Christian Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, will convince any one of the flagrant plagiarism of Mohammed, notwithstanding his emphatic denial, when he says: "The

unbelievers say, This Koran is not other than a forgery, which he hath contrived; but they utter an unjust thing and a falsehood.” The fact is, the Koran is so largely indebted to the Bible for what it contains, that if all the doctrines, facts and incidents taken from it were eliminated, the greater portion left would consist of nothing more than extravagant stories, and puerilities gathered from traditions and apocryphal writings (170).

Again, the historian Schaff concurs with this assessment when he says:

Whatever is true in the Koran is borrowed from the Bible; what is original, is false or frivolous. The Bible is historical and embodies the noblest aspirations of the human race in all ages to the final consummation; the Koran begins and stops with Mohammed. The Bible combines endless variety with unity, universal applicability with local adaptation; the Koran is uniform and monotonous, confined to one country, one state of society, and one class of minds. The Bible is the book of the world, and is constantly traveling to the ends of the earth, carrying spiritual food to all races and to all classes of society. . . Even the poetry of the Koran never rises to the grandeur and sublimity of Job or Isaiah, the lyric beauty of the Psalms, the sweetness and loveliness of the Song of Solomon, the sententious wisdom of the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (84).

A Contrast in Morality

The moral code of Islam, as manifested in the Qur’an, is inferior to Christianity. The Qur’an claims that it “will give guidance to that which is most upright” (17:9). And what is “most upright?” With regard to male and female, the Qur’an says, “Men have authority over women because GOD HAS MADE THE ONE (i.e. man) SUPERIOR TO THE OTHER (i.e. woman)” (4:34, emp. added). In contrast, Christianity affirms, “[T]here is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The religion of Jesus Christ identifies woman as the physically “weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7), but not an *inferior* one. Wherever *true* Christianity has gone, women have been honored. Where Islam reigns, women are degraded and abused. If women are disobedient the Qur’an says, “[F]orsake them in beds apart, and BEAT THEM” (4:34, emp. added). In sharp contrast, Christianity says, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to the husband” (1 Cor. 7:3). Instead of the pathetic abuse that the Qur’an sanctions, the Bible states: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it ... So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies ...” (Eph. 5:25, 28).

The Qur’an tells a Muslim male that he “may marry other women who seem good to you: two, three, or four of them” (4:3). However, not even this was enough for Muhammed as Woods explains:

... He was wholly wanting in moral principle and; when it served his purpose, did not hesitate to abandon his own standards, conveniently receiving a “revelation” to justify his desires.

When he wanted another wife, he announced a “revelation” authorizing it. When, as was occasionally the case, an earlier revelation was in conflict with his current wishes, he advanced his doctrine of “abrogation,” thus setting aside the earlier “revelation” for the later one. When he decided he wanted the wife of his own adopted son, though such a union was regarded by the Arabs as shameful, Mohammed received a “revelation” authorizing his son to divorce his wife so that Mohammed might marry her. His holy book forbade a follower to have more than four wives, but he announced that he was not amenable to this restriction, and while their laws allowed, indeed urged, widows to remarry, as death approached he forbade his wives to do so and ordered them into perpetual bereavement (61-62).

To Muhammed, the Qur’an stated: “Prophet (i.e. Muhammed), We have made lawful for you ... ANY BELIEVING WOMAN who gives herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet wishes to take in marriage. THIS PRIVILEGE IS YOUR ALONE, being GRANTED TO NO OTHER BELIEVER” (33:50, emp. added).

The moral system of Islam is cruel, harsh, and vindictive. Williard has summarized:

It (i.e. Islam) knows nothing in its teaching of the fatherhood of God, or the brotherhood of the race. Its history in every land and country has been one of oppression and bloodshed. . . Mohammed himself, although at first mild and forbearing, became exceedingly intolerant and bitter towards all those who would not embrace his religion. . . and infused his spirit so thoroughly into the Moslem faith, that it has become an integral part of it, so that it now, as it always has, engenders such hatred and bitterness, that it is even ready to reek its vengeance upon all who stand in opposition to it, whenever the occasion offers. How different. . . from Christianity, which does not only forbid the use of the sword, but enjoins a spirit of forbearance and forgiveness upon its votaries, and commands them to pray for their enemies, and not persecute or despitefully use them (174).

Al Bukhari (a collection of the sayings of Muhammed) volume I:25, asks, “What is the best deed for the Muslim next to believing in Allah and his Apostle? The answer: To participate in Jihad (i.e. holy war) in Allah’s cause” (qtd. in Reymond 2). As Reymond wisely suggests: “The reader should compare this ‘second Muslim concern’ with Jesus’ declaration that the second commandment, after the first that requires loving God with all one’s heart, is to love one’s neighbor as one loves himself” (2).

A Contrast in Christology

Although there are many areas in which the superiority of Christianity over Islam is manifestly clear, it is my conclusion that no area is more foundational, and thus more crucial, than that of Christology (i.e. the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ). Concerning Jesus, the Qur'an says, "The Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than a Messenger before whom many Messengers have passed away" (5:75). One noted Muslim scholar has written the following concerning this Qur'anic teaching:

In these few words the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ is repudiated. The nature of the Messiah is clear from the indications given here: HE WAS MERELY A HUMAN BEING ... How could any reasonable person believe that such a being was either God or a partner or associate of God in His godhead? But the Christians continue to insist on the divinity of the Messiah ... They have woven a Messiah out of their imagination and have deified that imaginary being (Mawdudi II 180-81, emp. added).

And so, the Qur'an and Muslims deny the very foundational doctrine of New Testament Christianity - the Sonship (i.e. deity, divinity) of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Matt. 16:13-18; John 20:30-31; Rom. 1:1-4; Col. 1:12-19). This is the heart of the Christian faith. A messiah who is human, and not divine, is no Messiah! The implication of numerous Old Testament messianic prophecies is that the Messiah would be divine (i.e. God; the Son of God) as well as human (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Ps. 110:1; cf. Matt. 22:41-46; Micah 5:2; Zech. 13:7, et al).

Not only is it the case that Islam denies the foundation of the Christian faith (i.e. the deity of Jesus Christ), but it also denies the basic historical facts of the gospel of Christ. Paul wrote,

"I declare to you the gospel which I preached ... which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins ... was buried, and ... rose again ..." (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

When the gospel was preached in its fullness for the first time on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know - Him,, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have CRUCIFIED, AND PUT TO DEATH; WHOM GOD RAISED UP. . . (Acts 2:22-24, emp. added).

The Qur'an (i.e. Muhammed) denies the above fundamental biblical statements with the following: "They declared: 'We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the apostle of God.' THEY DID NOT KILL HIM, NOR DID THEY CRUCIFY HIM, but they thought they did" (4:157, emp. added).

According to Muslim tradition the Jews crucified a man who resembled Jesus, perhaps Judas. The Qur'an claims Jesus was taken directly to heaven: "... [T]hey did not slay him for certain. God lifted him up to Him" (4:158; cf. 3:55). With these denials Muhammed attacked Christianity's central doctrinal teaching of Jesus' vicarious death and resurrection. Two of the best attested facts of history are dismissed by the Qur'an in a few words *without any evidence*. Contrast this with the case Christianity presents based upon the strongest evidence that can be presented in any court of law (i.e. eyewitness testimony) (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 2:22, 32; 10:39-41; 1 Cor. 15:5-8; 2 Pet. 1:16-18; 1 John 1:1-4). The Qur'an is big on claims but is short on adequate evidence to justify its claims. In contrast, Christianity validates its claims with sufficient evidence. In fact, Christianity is the only religion that honors the law of rationality.

The basic doctrine of Islam concerning Jesus Christ is incompatible with historic New Testament Christianity. There are more than 6,000 verses in the Qur'an. Jesus is mentioned in only 28 verses in the Qur'an! What a contrast with the New Testament in which there is a sense that Jesus is virtually on every page, and with the Sacred Scriptures (both Old and New) as a whole which are able to make one "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Truly, as John wrote: "... [T]he testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10).

Conclusion

The religion of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the sixty-six books of the Bible, possesses characteristics that make it superior to the religion of Islam. These characteristics are of such a nature that make it necessary that the religion of Jesus Christ is divine (i.e. from God). Therefore, the religion of Jesus Christ is the one true religion, and thus all men ought to believe in, love, and obey Jesus Christ (i.e. become, and remain, Christians) and reject all other religions (including Islam).

In the late 19th century, H. W. Everest authored a book, *The Divine Demonstration: A Text-Book of Christian Evidence*. In it he wrote one of the finest summations that I have read concerning the superiority of Christianity. He stated:

Christianity purifies the heart and corrects the life. It destroys domestic and social tyranny. It elevates woman and secures the education of children. It undermines and destroys all social evils. It promotes science, and brings all nations into commercial harmony. It cares for the imbecile, the deaf and dumb, the blind and the poor, as no other religion does. He

who does not accept this statement is ignorant of the facts. It differs from all other systems in its fitness to become universal. It is founded on man's common religious nature. It meets the wants of all men, those which are deepest and most pressing. It has nothing in it partial and merely ethnic. It is suited to all ages and states of civilization, as well as to all zones. The missionary zeal and effort produced by Christianity are peculiar. It is propagated by the power of truth and love, not by the sword; by the self-sacrifice of its missionaries, not by despotic power. It is flooding the world with Bibles, and sending the living heralds of the cross into all lands. What other religion can compare with it? ... *Christianity is the only religion that can endure in the light of reason and science, the only one that scientific and civilized man can accept and propagate ... No other religion can produce one hundredth part of the evidence in its support. No other religion presents so clear, so full, and so faultless a revelation of God ...* Christianity is unlike all other religions in having a divine founder and savior. It is superior in that Christ is admitted to be superior to all other religious teachers ... Christianity comes with a divine sanction. It brought life and immortality *to light*. It gives us not a mere hope and a theory concerning the life to come, but a grand *fact* ... The statement is not true that Christianity is just like all other religions ... Christianity is *superhuman*: its account of Creation; its unity; its prophecies; its sublime morality; its profound religious principles; its stupendous plan, comprehending time and eternity; its Jesus, a perfect man and a perfect manifestation of God, sinless, faultless, and divine; its triumph over the combined opposition of the Jewish nation and of the Roman Empire; the impossibility, on the supposition that Jesus was not what He claimed to be and hence in no sense the Author of Christianity, that any one of His disciples could have devised such a grand scheme and made it successful - all concur in demonstrating the supernatural character of this religion. There are not insuperable objections. The author of such a system must have been divine ... What stronger evidence could be demanded? What stronger evidence is possible? (239-41, 358).

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CONSEQUENCES OF NOT BEING A CHRISTIAN

Denver Cooper

The impact of Christianity upon the world can only fully be known by us when eternity has unfolded to us. Everything we do in this life has consequences or results. It may be that the results of doing or not doing will end in something good or something bad. One may or may not be responsible for the outcome of the act or deed.

Bible students understand that one becomes a Christian by obeying the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 1:16) Even when one becomes a Christian, the loss of friends, family or job, and social standing may occur. (Mt. 10: 35 - 39) However, many are the advantages of being a Christian, the lack of which become bad consequences for a non-Christian.

No Spiritual Blessings

The apostle Paul in Eph. 1:3 states, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." While it is true that God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust, (Mt. 5:45) the advantages are temporal and not eternal. On the Christian, providence is a special promise of God. (Mt. 6:33) The Christian may lay up treasures in heaven, but the non-Christian does not have that benefit. All temporal blessings perish with the using.

Father Is Satan

The spiritual father of every non-Christian is Satan. Jews of Jesus' day proudly held to Abraham as their father. (John 8:39) Though they argued, "We be not born of fornication, we have one Father, even God, Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me." (John 8:41) In verse 44 Jesus makes it perfectly clear that,

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Oh, what a terrible thing to come to the knowledge that every time one (even a good moral person) bows his head and bends his knee thinking he is speaking to the God of the universe, he is really addressing the devil! Like millions today those Jews "believed on" Jesus, but did not love him. Faithful Christians have a very intimate relationship with the heavenly Father and the elder brother, Jesus.

We must be reminded of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as recorded in Daniel 3. Commanded by the king to serve his gods and worship the golden image which he had set up to be worshiped by all, they refused because of their very intimate relationship with the LIVING GOD. They said, when reminded of the forthcoming punishment for rebellion toward the king,

“If it be so, our God WHOM WE SERVE, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he WILL deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we WILL NOT serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou has set up.”

Along side these men was Daniel who refused to stop what he was wont to do, though the king commanded otherwise. Taking time out from the hour of prayer simply was not in line with Daniel’s relationship with the living God. Of course, though thrown to the lions, God spared him. How much we need men and women of all ages with such strong faith in God today who will not “be conformed to this world” being seduced by the sweet talk of Satan. “Faith alone” cannot and will not justify even the good moral person. The Jews made such a plea. Christ rejected it. Paul, in 1 Cor. 13, placed love above faith. Why? Simply, if men love the Lord they will obey him. I, as many of you, have heard many a good person declare his or her faith in Christ, who in the very next breath say, “I’ll never be immersed!” One lady told me, “If I knew I’d go to hell for not doing so, I would never be immersed.” Her disobedience to God really expressed the absence of love for God and His Son. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous.” (1 Jn. 5:3) Hatred of Christ and his word is inherent in the very nature of Satan’s many children on earth today. How thankful Christians ought to be that we may speak to a heavenly Father who is able to talk to us, listen to us, and has the power to care for our needs abundantly, whether spiritual or temporal.

Failure

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13) are the words of Paul after he has told us of his sufferings and hardships. To the Christian, even those matters that are common to life are often blessing in disguise. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) It is often difficult for us to see the “silver lining in the cloud” but is the rightful hope of every Christian. As we look around and see the vile, wicked Godlessness of many, we often wonder why it is, like Job, that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Yet, we must be content to accept the “thorn in the flesh” assured that better times are coming. We are assured, “there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” The non-Christian tries to escape his torment by swallowing pills, drowning his troubles in alcohol or by giving himself over to the inordinate affections of the flesh. It won’t work! When

he has done it all, the only solution is, "Come to the Saviour." Timothy was to warn men that some were

"... proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." (1 Tim. 6: 4,5)

Though sometimes difficult to learn, "godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:6)

Lost Freedom

Can you imagine what it would mean to no longer be able to act as a free person upon this earth? Everybody loves freedom. However, many mistake license for liberty. The Roman Christians had once been the "servants of sin unto death." (Rom. 6:16) I heard brother Kenneth Adams say, "Real freedom does not consist of freedom from old restraints." How true it is! The prodigal son of Luke 15 was free from the rule of home when he "went into a far country." He may have said, "I just can't wait to be out from under the rule of dad and mom. Everybody is wanting to tell me what to do. I just want to have a good time and do my own thing." Does that sound about right? Many believe that having a good time is doing as one pleases. The prodigal wanted to be with the "in" crowd and show he could keep up with them in whatever they did to find pleasure. Young folks today often mistakenly serve drugs and lusts of the flesh, believing they have made friends with the finest things of life and the best people on earth. They disregard Paul's admonition, "Be not deceived: evil communications (companions) corrupt good manners (morals)." (1 Cor. 15:13) Just as God's people of long ago were reminded, "be sure your sin will find you out," (Num 32:23) so will one's sin today catch up with him or her. Hebrews 4:13 tells us, "neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." A cheating heart or life may be hidden from a companion, but not from God. Nor can one free himself from sin. (Jer. 10:23) Jesus tells us, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

You will notice that the father did not compel his son to remain at home. God, who is represented by this father, does not force anyone to stay by his side or return to him when he has departed for the "far country." Sin isn't very far away. The reply of the prodigal to any admonition would probably have been, "I'm having such a good time, I'll stay where I am. I'm not going to be told by anyone what I must do. I can stay out as late as I wish, be with anyone I choose and spend my money however I want. " Have you ever heard that song? Can't you hear the silly laughter as he sat on the barstool with his silly girlfriend or buddy, lapping up the booze and spending his father's inheritance on all who would flatter him with their worldly praise? Oh, his friends have all disappeared. What is he going to do? The consequence to some is, "I'll go

some other place and get a fresh start.” No man paid any attention to the prodigal, and, as he hungrily fed the hogs, he kept thinking of the plenty of his father's house. That which had been drudgery and unpleasant now appears appealing to him. He came to his senses. “I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” He humbled himself! He repented! He arose! He went! The father received him with open arms. That is freedom! No non-Christian has that sort of freedom.

Paul reminds us, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1) True, Paul’s admonition was such as to prevent the Jews being bound by the Law of Moses. However, the principle holds true for all today. Don’t be bound by laws not applicable to you. Don’t bind opinion or speculation. Some Galatians had been bound by one or more of the fifteen evils listed in verses 19 and 20. Perhaps you could make a list today of the characteristic wickedness of modern culture. Indeed, the world is slave to wickedness. Only the blood of Christ will cleanse and free from sin. (1 Jn. 1)

Under Condemnation

Paul states in Rom. 8:1, “there is therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” Clearly, Paul has reference to those who had been under the law. All under the law were condemned to death. Obedience to the gospel of Christ for those who walk after the Spirit, are not condemned for past, present, or future sins, unless they go unrepented. In the event of unrepented sins at death there is condemnation. Romans 8 does not teach the impossibility of those once saved being lost.

Social Attitudes Will Be Blunted

Often non-Christians are devoid of good relationships in the family. Roles of husbands and wives are changed. Husbands have abdicated headship of the home. Wives seek to be over their husbands. Children are left on their own or to be raised by the day care center. Often they render no filial respect or regard for their parents. Rather than obedience to parents (Eph. 6:1 - 4) it is “I’ll do my own thing” or “I want to find myself,” Genuine Christians build their homes by the direction of God. Psalm 127:1 advises us, “Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it.” As usual God’s plan is best.

Fear Of Death

“And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment. (Heb. 9:27) Death is often described as an enemy; but can only be victorious over those who are not in Christ. The Christian, though entering the unseen world, is at peace with God. He is able to say, as he faces death, “May God’s will be done.”

He has done God's commandments to the best of his ability and looks forward to enjoying life without harmful, hurtful and disappointing encumbrances. Not so of him who has never obeyed the gospel, for he shall experience the second death. (Rev.21:8)

Hell Will Be His Home Forever

Some have suggested, when I told them my subject for this lectureship, "just get up and say all non-Christians are going to Hell and sit down." I once knew an elderly preacher who said, "You have to make them mad before you can teach them." One method he used was to tell them where they were going. However, it will be such a terrible thing that it bears serious thought and speech for a few minutes.

There is nothing good about Hell. Most don't even like to use the word except when they want to tell someone off. Preachers use the term infrequently, I fear. It is the abode of Satan and his angels. (Mt. 25:41) Death and hell will be there. (Rev. 20:14) All whose names do not appear in the book of life will be there. (Rev. 20:15) It will be a place of outer darkness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Eternally one will be punished. There will be no breaks for refreshments, not even a drop of water. Do you know of anything good that can be said about Hell? All will be separated from God (1 Thess. 1:9), from their loved ones, and all who have been righteous. What a sad day it will be for the LOST! The worst of all consequences. **SECOND DEATH!**

There is time to make your peace with God and avoid all the evil consequences of being out of Christ. Won't you do that today?

HEAVEN - THE HOPE OF CHRISTIANITY

Frank Higginbotham

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Mt. 5:12). Jesus reminded some disciples that even though they would endure persecution in this life, there is a far greater reward in store for them. The reward is well worth the sacrifice. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18). Heaven is held forth as the ultimate goal of those who serve the Lord while they live. There are only two eternal destinies for mankind. One is a place of torment and punishment. The other is a place of joy and happiness.

As you observe the conduct of people today, it is apparent that most people expect to receive the blessings of Heaven when this life is over. The judgment scene that is pictured in Matthew, chapter twenty-five, is concluded by pointing out the two destinies. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Mt. 25:46). Men do not reach Heaven just by living and dying. Jesus said,

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Mt. 7:21-23).

What a sad awakening some will have when they realize that a home in Heaven is not an automatic. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. What we will hear in Judgment will depend on what we have done here on the earth. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10). No words ever uttered will sound as sweet as the precious words spoken in that day when the Lord will say, "Well done." There are a number of things that we need to observe about Heaven, the goal of Christianity.

Let it be observed that Heaven is the goal of Christians today, but it has always been the goal of God's people. Consider God's great servant named Abraham. We stand in amazement as we view the faith of this man of God. When he was instructed to leave his land and kinsmen, Abraham went out. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (Heb. 11:8). It is one thing to leave your country and relatives and still another to leave not knowing where you are going. Abraham stood the test of faith and obeyed God. No doubt it took great faith on the part of Sarah to likewise submit to God's

instructions. This, however, was not the only test of faith that Abraham was given. He was instructed to offer his son of promise in sacrifice to God. Even though he was aware of the fact that Isaac was the "promised seed" he set off to obey God in the sacrifice of his son.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." (Heb. 11:17-19).

Not knowing how God would work things out, Abraham faithfully obeyed the voice of his God. What was behind this great demonstration of faith? What did Abraham hope to accomplish? The answer is made clear in Hebrews eleven. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb 11:10). We do not know how clear a view Abraham had at this time of God's revelation in regard to Heaven, but it is clear that reaching Heaven was his goal. This is also seen in the life of the Apostle Paul. He always had Heaven in his sights. Think of this great servant of God who endured afflictions far greater than you and I have ever been called upon to endure.

A careful reading of 2 Corinthians eleven gives us a picture of the many terrible things that Paul endured for the cause of Christ. Did he have Heaven as his goal?

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. (Phil.1:20-24).

He was clearly planning on Heaven when He died. Shortly before his death he made this statement. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim.4:6-8). The goal of Heaven is a goal we share with all of God's people in the past and in the future.

The hope of going to Heaven is a realistic hope. There are times that people speak of hope in a very unrealistic way. They speak about how they hope for riches far beyond that which is reasonable. Our hope for Heaven is not comparable to this. There is every reason for us to expect Heaven to be our home. If a little child promises to give riches, we consider the ability of the child to keep that promise. It was God who promised Heaven for the faithful.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

The "lively hope" Peter speaks about is the hope of Heaven. The Lord promised that the obedient will enter into the city. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Rev. 22:14). Does God have the ability to keep His promise? Is He like the little child that promises great things but is unable to carry through with his word? The answer is very clear. God never lies.

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;" (Heb 6:17-19).

This passage helps us to realize that God will not back out on His word. He cannot lie! Thus, if God promised Heaven to the faithful, it will happen as He said. Note again that God is able to deliver on His promises. He is the one that spoke the universe into existence. Could anyone question if He has the power to keep His word? He created man in His likeness. "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female," (Mt. 19:4). If God could make us, could He not make an eternal home for us? There is no question about God being able to keep His promise. The hope of Heaven is realistic.

Going to Heaven does not mean that we will be able to enjoy the grandeur of life with God for only a short period of time. We do not go to Heaven for just a month, a year or 10 years. Heaven will last eternally. It is hard to realize what the word *eternal* means. The reason for this is the fact that the things we know about and deal with here are all temporary. The world had a beginning and will have an ending. Life had a beginning and will have an ending. Eternity never ends. The duration of life eternal and the duration of eternal destruction are exactly the same. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Mt.25:46). The same Greek word is used in this verse to describe the duration of both.

In speaking of the rewards of life here Paul speaks of both the wages of sin and also the wages of righteousness. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23). If we have served Satan here we can expect to receive pay from him. If we have served God, He will

be the one who rewards us. Sometimes we hear people saying, "Life is too short to be unhappy." When they follow this philosophy, they usually live a life of sin in a very open way. They are thinking of the duration of the wrong thing. How long will a home in Heaven last? Enjoying a short time in sin is not worth losing the opportunity to be with God forever. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;" (Heb.11:24-25). The treasures of Egypt were not even a worthy comparison to the joys of Heaven. Moses rejected the reasoning that causes people to look at the length of time in this life and forget about the length of eternity. Hell is too terrible to endure it in eternity and Heaven is too wonderful for us to miss it.

How could anyone come up with a description of Heaven that would be adequate? Because of our limitations, we have trouble appreciating the descriptions that we have of Heaven. We have not been there, and we have not been anywhere that is even worthy of comparison. Thus, when we read the Bible accounts, we must realize that Heaven is far better than anything we can imagine.

To tell us what Heaven is like is similar to the man telling another about the ocean. The man who was listening had never seen the ocean. He was told that the ocean is like the Ohio River. The man had seen that and thus had some starting point. While we realize the vast difference in the ocean and the Ohio River, we can see why this was used in the comparison. To tell of a street of gold staggers the imagination but we needed some starting place. Notice the characteristics that are used in the book of Revelation.

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:4).

The promise that God will be our God and we shall be His people is repeated throughout the Bible. We should really appreciate the fact that God will allow us to be His people. We are unworthy, but God is merciful. He will wipe all tears from our eyes. This simply implies that the many things that have brought tears to our eyes here will not be present there. We cry over physical hurt, disappointments, death and discouragements here, but these will not be a factor that we will have to deal with in eternity. The promise that there will be no more death is very meaningful to all of us.

Death came into the world as a consequence of the sin of Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" (Rom. 5:12). Think of the pain caused by the loss of a father and mother. Observe the deep pain when a person loses his

or her companion for life. Think of the feelings of parents as they bury their beloved children. Watch as each of us views the time of our own death. Death brings untold sorrow during this life.

In Heaven there will be no more death. Sorrow and crying will pass away. There will be no reason for such characteristics because Heaven is a place of joy. To state that there will be no more pain enhances the desirability of Heaven to many. Look at the people around you who spend each day trying to get some relief from the pain that invades their bodies. Think of the money and effort spent in trying to get just a little relief from pain. Does the fact that there will be no pain in Heaven make it just a little dearer? When it is stated that former things will pass away, this is simply telling us that the things that make us suffer and be unhappy in this life will not be present in Heaven. Though we may have trouble in this life understanding what Heaven is like, this description should be more than enough to cause us to desire it above all things. No wonder that Paul stated that he had the desire to depart and be with Christ.

The occupants of Heaven enhance its beauty for us. There will be many people in Heaven that we have not had any occasion to know about or to recognize in any way. However, there are some that we will have some knowledge of from Bible accounts or from personal acquaintance in this life. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives a list of outstanding examples of faith that encourage us by the great lives they lived. Think what it will be like to be in the presence of greats like Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Moses. Note this statement that describes some of the inhabitants of Heaven.

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." (Heb. 11: 32-38).

Would it be great to be in the presence of such great people? Heaven would be wonderful because of the wonderful people who worked so faithfully for God making up the inhabitants of that city.

The reward for the faithful is described in the words of the Lord in this way. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead

which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13). The death of all people is not considered blessed, but the death of His saints is. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." (Ps. 116:15). The reason that the saints' death is so precious is the fact that Heaven awaits their arrival. This pronouncement is made in the closing words of the Book of God.

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Rev. 22:14).

What a great reward for the faithful. Do you want to have this pleasure?

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Will Montgomery

Introduction:

Titus 2:11-12

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”

1. The Christian is to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.
2. The Christian is to live soberly, righteously and godly.
3. The living is to be done in this present world.
4. We come around only one time, and we must get it right.
5. We can get it right by following the word of God.

The following poem expresses the importance of using the time we have now to do good to those around us:

“I shall pass through this world but once.
If therefore there be any kindness I can show
or any good thing I can do.
Let me do it now.
For I shall not pass this way again.”
- Etienne de Grellet

Discussion

1. The Christian life begins the moment we come from the waters of baptism. Rom 6:3-4 - “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
2. Rom 6:16-18 tells us that the moment we are baptized we are changed from servants of sin to servants of righteousness. At that very moment our new life as a Christian begins: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

3. The Bible says we become new creatures. II Cor 5:17 - Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are past away: behold, all things are become new.
4. In order to become a new creature we must PUT ON Christ by following the steps outlined in the New Testament: Gal 3:27 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
 1. We must HEAR the word of God. Rom 10:17 “So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
 2. We must BELIEVE. Hebrews 11:6 “But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”
 3. We must REPENT. Luke 13:3 “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”
 4. We must CONFESS. Acts 8:37 “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”
 5. We must BE BAPTIZED. Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

We MUST do these five things listed above to be IN Christ, there is NO other way. There is one more thing that is required of us after we become a Christian and that is to be faithful unto death.

Rev 2:10 “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

5. We must seek first the kingdom of God. Matt 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
 1. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Heb 12:1-2 “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
 2. We must put on the whole armour of God. Eph 6:10-18 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against

spiritual wickedness in high [places]. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

3. Our bodies and minds must be given to God. Rom 12:1-2 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
6. We must do what I Thess. 5:21-22 teaches. Prove all things. Hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.
7. To live the Christian life we cannot have a friendship with the world. James 4:4 “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

I John 2:15-17 is plain and easy to understand on this matter. “Love not the world, neither the things [that are] in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

8. The Christian will not go after the works of the flesh, but rather will practice the fruits of the spirit. Gal 5:19-21 ; Gal 5:22-23.
9. Life demands that we make choices, we decide if they are good or bad. Moses gives us a good example in making the right choice: Heb 11:24-25 “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;”

In order to be pleasing to God, we must refuse that which is wrong and choose that which is right. We must be knowledgeable in the scriptures to know which choice is right.

10. As Christians we must know that we will face persecution. The moment that we are baptized the devil begins his work in trying to get us to go back

into the beggarly elements of the world. And not only that, but, persecution, trials, and tribulations are a part of life that we must deal with. II Tim 3:12 “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” I Peter 4:16 “Yet if [any man suffer] as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

11. Sometimes this persecution is from without and sometimes it may come from within your own family. Matt 10:34-38 “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes [shall be] they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”
12. What about the early Christians spoken of in Acts 8:4? “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”
13. What would you have done? Look at the apostles’ reaction to persecution in Acts 5:26-29. “Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set [them] before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”
14. Again, what would you have done: Look at the example of Acts 5:40-42. “And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten [them], they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”
15. To gain strength and to prepare your reaction to persecution read the following scriptures. What more comfort could be gained than this thought that nothing can separate us from the love of God as long as we are faithful. Rom 8:31-39 “What shall we then say to these things? If God [be] for us, who [can be] against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? [It is] God that justifieth. Who [is] he that condemneth? [It is] Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [shall] tribulation, or distress,

or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- A. What will separate you from the love Christ?
- B. What will you do as a Christian when persecution comes?
- C. Do not be deceived. It will come!
- D. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
- E. If you were faithful in the big things of life as well as the small, there would be.
- F. We need to live DAILY for Christ.

Luke 9:23 And he said to [them] all, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

16. In order to live the Christian life we MUST set a good example, and we MUST let the light of Christ shine through our lives. To some people we may be the only Bible they will read.

The poet has said:

You write a gospel
A Chapter a day
By the deeds you do
And the things you say
Men will read what you write
However faithless and true
Say, what is the gospel
According to you?

- A. Matthew explains our role as an example in this way: Matt 5:13-16 “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”
17. We have been given very specific instructions as to what we are to do to show our faithfulness to God and to others. As mentioned above, we must be salt and light. We also must be:

- A. Faithful in attendance. Heb 10:25 “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.”
- B. Faithful in the way we worship. John 4:24 “God [is] a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [him] in spirit and in truth.”
- C. A servant. Matt 23:11 “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”
- D. One who seeks first the kingdom of God. Matt 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
- E. One who feels the challenge and the urgency of the great commission. Mk 16:15-16 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
- F. One who restores the fallen. Gal. 6:1-2 “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”
- G. Be like those of Acts 2:42. Acts 2:42 “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Jesus said in Mark 13:13 “And ye shall be hated of all [men] for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” We MUST run the race to the end. It is only those who finish the race who have the chance to win.

- 18. To live the Christian life we have to wholeheartedly love God. Without true devotion we are just going through the motions, and He knows that. We are warned against having a pretended love. Mk 12:30-31 “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this [is] the first commandment. And the second [is] like, [namely] this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.
- 19. We must learn forgiveness. Mt 6:14-15 “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”
- 20. As a Christian we need to study God’s word. II Tim 2:15 “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

21. Living the Christian life involves helping others to become a Christian, in order to teach others we need to know what the scriptures say. We need the zeal to want to go out to teach, but we need knowledge of what we are to teach. Rom 10:1-3 “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

A. Zeal without knowledge will allow us to be carried about by every wind of doctrine.

B. In Hosea 4:6 we are told, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

C. Knowledge without zeal will die.

22. A Christian needs faith that is linked with works. James 2:17-26 “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent [them] out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

A. We must work the works of God. John 6:28-29 “Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”

23. As I live the Christian life I will practice pure religion. James 1:27 “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

A. Sometimes we think we have to do some great big thing.

B. But actually it is the little things we do in this life that count.

The Little Things

It's all the little things that count
To make a life complete
Common things Simple things
Life's struggles to defeat
A word of hope
A note of cheer
A kiss to tender sorrow
A thoughtful deed.
A smile of warmth
A hand of help to borrow
A faith in God
A love for man
A trust for joy or sorrow
It's all these little things that count
Today and through tomorrow
Author Unknown

24. Jesus is our supreme example of living the Christian life, and in Acts 10:38 it was said of Him that he went about doing good. May we always do the same as we live the Christian life.

GLAD TIDINGS

Johnny Ramsey

GOSPEL: “Good news, or glad tidings.” (Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

The glorious message of salvation is the richest declaration of all time. We are privileged to participate in heaven’s work of redemption. The gospel story is a vivid reminder of the love of God for sinful mankind. The grand old story of a gracious God sending His precious Son to die on the Cross of Calvary emblazons in our minds the wondrous compassion of a caring Creator. Isaiah 52:7 firmly declares:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”

The joy and contentment such provisions bring into our earthly journey are beyond our comprehension. In describing the unfathomed love of the Lord, the writer of the song, “Wonderful Love of Jesus,” admitted that he had never been able to fully grasp the wonderful grace of the heavenly Father toward shamefully sinful mankind. That hymn recalls the message of 1 Corinthians 2:9 regarding the intriguing message of the Bible: “Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him.”

The plan of salvation is so powerful and clear and simple that anyone can understand it and obey it if his attitude is humble. The words of Jesus are clear and simple: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). The words of the Lord in Acts 2:38 are also exceedingly clear: “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

The “good news” of the kingdom of Christ must be passed on to others. We dare not be selfish or indifferent concerning its proclamation. The commission of Matthew 28:19 demands it of us, as do Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, “Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

Those of us who have been blessed by the splendor and beauty of Christianity must never be content with letting lost men remain lost due to our indifference. Since the word of God, in all of its power, shall stand forever (Isaiah 40:8), we certainly must tell others about its message of joy and gladness - “glad tidings.”

If we fail in this noble endeavor, this Scripture should haunt us forever:

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? even as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:14-15).

We can tell what the love of Jesus has done for us, and we can share that with some lost soul. As one said: “If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way.”

ARE THERE CHRISTIANS IN ALL CHURCHES?

Neal Pollard

Devout, religious people are nothing new to our time. Paul found the Athenians engaged in worshipping their "devotions" (objects of worship), and he complimented them as being "very religious" (NAS) (Acts 17:23-24). Two chapters later, Paul finds the twelve Ephesian disciples of John doing the best they could with what they knew (19:1-6). Earlier in Acts, the Gentile Cornelius is praised for being a devout, God-fearing, generous, prayerful man (10:1-4). These individuals in Acts had at least two things in common - (1) They were religious people; (2) They were not Christians.

Some find the status of sincere, devout people "of faith" to be somewhat enigmatic. Especially is it difficult for them when those people profess faith in Christ and believe themselves to be Christians. Finding out the answer to who a Christian is and where Christians are to be found carries eternal implications since being a Christian is essentially, intrinsically tied to salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). How can we determine whether or not there are Christians in all churches?

**This can be determined from scripture
by learning how many churches there are.**

The Bible says there is one body (Ephesians 4:4). What is that body? It is the church (Ephesians 1:23). The body and church are spoken of synonymously (cf. Colossians 1:18,24). Christ purchased the church with His blood, thus only one belongs to Him and is His bride (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:9-10).

If there is only one church that belongs to Christ, then the status of any person not in the one church must be grim and dire. It is possible for one to obey the gospel and thus be added to the church who in turn aligns and adheres himself or herself to a church other than that one church. Such a person is condemned, having rejected or missed the church for which Jesus died. As God's blessings were located in Noah's day (Genesis 7:1; Hebrews 11:7), Joshua's day (Joshua 6:2,21), Naaman's day (2 Kings 5:10), and Peter's day (Acts 2:47), so they are today! Salvation is reserved for those in the church built by Christ (Matthew 16:18), the church paid for with the same blood that redeems one from iniquity (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Almost sixty years ago Leroy Brownlow first released a book that has been reprinted at least fifty times, entitled *Why I Am A Member Of The Church Of Christ*. In that book he mentions twenty-five unique, biblically-based characteristics that distinguish the New Testament church from the denominational world and the even larger religious world. The Lord's church has a scriptural builder, foundation, founding place, founding time, name, organization, creed, view of

inspiration, view of Bible authority, approach to missions, view of the kingdom, and view on a myriad of other important, basic Bible fundamentals.¹ One may be baptized for the remission of sins and added by God to His church (Acts 2:47), but ultimately it does no good if the one thus converted remains in a church which does not meet the criteria of that about which we read in the New Testament. One cannot be saved who transgresses God's law (cf. 1 John 3:4), and persistent disobedience of God's will for worship (John 4:24) or other doctrinal matters (Revelation 22:17-18; Galatian 1:6ff) will condemn the soul (Hebrews 10:26ff).

**This can be determined from scripture
by examining how one becomes a Christian.**

Taking the three cases from Acts already mentioned, we find out what one does to become a Christian. With regard to the Athenians, Paul's sermon produced faith (Acts 17:34; cf. Romans 10:17), demanded repentance (Acts 17:30-31), and, it is implied, preached the necessity of baptism.² Regarding the disciples of John in Acts 19, they already regarded belief and repentance as essential (4). Their faith response was to be baptized (5). Cornelius' situation was similar. Peter preached to him the essentiality of faith (Acts 10:43). Repentance was also part of the plan (Acts 11:18). Baptism was an absolute, something which should not be forbidden and something commanded by apostolic authority (Acts 10:48-49).

One cannot be a Christian without faith, repentance, and baptism. A further study of *all* conversions confirms this. An aggregate study of the New Testament's teaching on faith, repentance, and baptism as acts that together are done *unto* or *for* forgiveness of sins does likewise.³ Within the religious landscape today, it is almost completely unheard of that a church will call for a sinner to do anything beyond verbalizing or praying a mental assent to the fact that Jesus is God's Son. Repentance is encouraged as part of the "new life." Baptism may or may not be urged, and if it is, it is usually done as part of identifying oneself with that particular religious body "after the 'fact'" of sins having been forgiven that one.

¹ A fresh study of this book by all members of the church would be profitable. The characteristics listed in the sentence here footnoted are all derived from Brownlow's book.

² Look at Acts 17:34 again ("Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."). Immediately after leaving Athens, Paul ventured the forty miles west from the pagan Aeropagus to the synagogue in Corinth of Achaia. Keeping in mind that the same inspired writer, Luke, comments on the response of the few in 17:34 and says they "believed" (*episteusan*), he writes in 18:8 that Crispus and many of the Corinthians "believed" (*episteusan; episteuon*). Belief, for the Corinthians, included submission to baptism. In fact, their belief was tied to their baptism, just as Jesus had commissioned His disciples to preach the way to salvation (Mark 16:16).

³ Belief (Mark 16:16; John 8:24; Romans 1:17; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 John 3:23; etc.); Repentance (Luke 13:3; 24:47; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9; etc.); Baptism (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.).

**This can be determined from scripture
by knowing God's law of exclusion.**

God has been very specific and simplistic in explaining how to become a Christian. The natural implication of this is that one cannot bypass or substitute God's commandments with another plan. This returns one to Ephesians four and a study of the seven ones. As earlier noticed, there is but one body. That body is the church, and to be the one body of Christ it must be in agreement with the head. Any body whose teaching is not harmonious with the dictates of the head is another body besides the one. There is one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. This excludes any rival, be it the animism of African or Oriental religions, the apparitions of occults, or any other spirit being of religion. There is one hope of salvation, brought on by the resurrection (1:18ff) and the special covenant relationship with Christ (2:12). No other religion offers the doctrine of resurrection or covenant with One like Christ. There is one Lord. Hare Krishna, Mohammed, Benny Hinn, Billy Graham, the pope, or any other religious figure who might be followed are excluded from the unique Lordship and authority of Jesus (cf. Colossians 3:17). There is one faith, one system of belief whereby we come into a saving knowledge and personal relationship with Christ. Any other doctrine or teaching is an accursed, condemning writ (Galatians 1:6-9). There is one baptism. That baptism is explicitly taught (Matthew 28:19) and demonstrated (Acts 8:38-39). A baptism administered because of a salvation already received, a claimed (though falsely so) baptism in the Holy Spirit, a sprinkling or pouring (cf. Colossians 2:12), or infant baptism (cf. Mark 16:16--"He that *believeth...*") does not meet the qualification of the one baptism, water baptism (Acts 8:36). There is one God and Father of all. The gods and heads of competing religions, be it Allah, man as he moves into *nirvana*, human beings in humanism, the deities of polytheistic religions, are not the One God of Deuteronomy six nor the Father so claimed through Jesus (John 14:6; 1 John 3:1).

Reading back through these seven ones and all that is implicitly tied to them, the denominational churches, existing in abundance today, fail in various ways to find inclusion in them. None of them are the one body, for they fail to follow the head. None of them are following the direction of the Holy Spirit, for they disobey and inaccurately handle the teaching He inspired men to disclose. None of them are entitled to the one hope, for they have built upon the sand of man-devised teaching. None of them have made Jesus Lord, for Jesus says, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). None of them are following the one faith, for it, once delivered (Jude 3), unites in Christ (4:13) and grounds one in truth (Colossians 1:23) rather than the dogmas and doctrines of men.⁴ None of them are following the one baptism, with the possible exception of some "conservative" Christian churches and the ever-disappearing "hard-shell

⁴ Examples of denominational doctrine that are peculiar to any given denomination prove false (i.e., premillennialism, faith only, grace only, direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion, sacraments, impossibility of apostasy, clergy/laity, etc.).

Baptists." None of them are serving the one Father, for He has made the way to Him exclusive (John 14:6).

God has always operated by the law of exclusion. There was one way to escape the devastation of the flood - the ark (Genesis 6:14; cf. 1 Peter 3:18-21). There was one way to escape the death of the firstborn (Exodus 12:12-13; cf. Hebrews 11:28). There was one way to escape the death of the serpents - the brazen snake (Numbers 21; cf. John 3:14ff). These three historical, Old Testament events prefigure the atoning work of Christ and the purchased church. In the same way God still operates through the law of exclusion. There is no other way to enter heaven than His way (Matthew 7:13-14). All other plans, approaches, and systems are nullified as unacceptable. Thus, any person, however sincere, operating within a church other than that covered with the blood of the Lamb is operating outside of grace.

**This can be determined from scripture
by comprehending the nature of division.**

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 reads,

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by 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 perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every 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 in the name of Paul?"

The problem in Corinth stemmed from individuals within that one church aligning themselves with individuals. Members of Chloe's household documented it. Paul accepted it as factual, and the Holy Spirit preserved his presumption, further validating the reality of the division there. If unchecked, Corinth could have split into factions following some man other than Christ. Therefore, Paul teaches the possibility of such divisions arising.

A casual study of church history shows that what Paul warned - elders drawing men after themselves (Acts 20:30), a man of sin and son of perdition being revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3), erecting man-made laws contrary to Christ's (1 Timothy 4:1-3) - did occur through the advent of what became known as Roman Catholicism. Various doctrines established by the Catholic church served to undermine and contradict New Testament teaching on church organization, church function, church authority, and church doctrine. This persisted for over a thousand years until the Reformation period of the sixteenth century. In a matter of zeal without knowledge, religious men seeking to correct the many corruptions originating with Catholicism sought to reform it rather than go back to the original, New Testament pattern (cf. Romans 6:17). The result of this was that

division further occurred, forming many more religious groups that together are recognized collectively as protestant denominationalism. All of them were founded upon the teachings of some man, whether John Calvin, Samuel Rogers, John or Charles Wesley, Ulric Zwingli, John Smyth, or dozens of other reformation leaders.⁵ Through the efforts of individuals such as James O'Kelley, Rice Haggard, "Raccoon" John Smith, Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and many both contemporaries of and men influenced by them, a movement arose, almost simultaneously in Scotland and the fledging United States, to get back to the Bible.⁶ Their desire was to get all religious groups claiming belief in Christ to come together in a harmony dictated by scripture. People in churches other than the church revealed in the New Testament and possessed by Christ are supporting and contributing to the very division Jesus prayed would not occur (John 17) and through inspired writers like Paul in 1 Corinthians, chapter one, condemns.

Consider the conclusion drawn by the late Bobby Duncan on the first annual Cold Harbor Road lectures: "Can we have unity? ... When people in religion reach the point that they really want unity and they want it *enough* that they would be willing to give up long-held traditions, names in religion, doctrines, practices, churches that cause division, and unite upon that which everybody agrees is perfectly in harmony with the will of God, that's when we can have unity."⁷ As such, anyone belonging to a church clinging to such divisive teaching is fighting against Christ Himself (cf. Matthew 12:30).

In considering whether or not there are Christians in all those churches not meeting the criteria meted out by the New Testament standard, four basic tests have been applied. One cannot be a Christian who obeys a different plan of salvation. Furthermore, one cannot be in a saved state who is a member of a church not passing divine criteria for being the New Testament church, not included under God's plan of grace, and not pursuing in the biblical way God's pattern for unity. Those latter three considerations directly determine whether or not one is saved or lost. If one obeys God's plan of salvation, yet "joins" a different church than the one built and sanctioned by Christ (thus being excluded from the place where relationship with God is enjoyed and is, therefore, of necessity striving against biblical unity) it ultimately does not matter whether or

⁵ Arley E. Moore, in 1981, self-published a comprehensive work entitled, *A Divided House: The Cause, Curse, and Cure of Religious Division*. In it, he has a good chronicle of the Reformation Movement (pp. 127-144). It should be noted that the reformers served some useful purposes, seeking to expose the corruptions of Catholicism, getting the Bible back into the hands of the commoner, and attracting people to ask questions about the religion they had accepted implicitly without investigation. Yet, as Arley writes, "The movements begun by these men attracted followers who became attached to them, accepted their doctrine, espoused their respective causes and sought to promote and perpetuate them" (p. 216). What a concise manner of showing the peril of sectarianism!

⁶ No man since the restoration has done a more thorough job of chronicling this important history than Earl Irvin West. His *The Search For The Ancient Order, Vol. 1: A History of the Restoration Movement*, in immaculate detail, unfolds the impetus behind the movement and biblical principles that survive within faithful churches of Christ until this day and time. The reader is encouraged to read all five volumes of West's work.

⁷ Lecture, "Unity Is Not Found In Ecumenism", delivered 11/05/1997, Mechanicsville, VA (audio tape). Brother Duncan's entire chapter in the 1997 lectureship book, *The Bible Doctrine of Unity*, found on pp. 188-206, is masterful!

not he or she has done what it takes to initially receive the benefits of God's grace. Grace does not cover worship done vainly and in error, doctrines originating with men, nor any departures from what He authorizes. To be an alien sinner or a lost Christian is eternally the same. The need is to wed the teaching of a biblical plan of salvation with all the Bible teaches the Christian to practice and teach.

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CHRISTIANITY VERSUS ATHEISM

Charles C. Pugh III

The following significant statement appears in the article on “God” in *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon Of Great Books Of The Western World*:

“MORE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOUGHT AND ACTION FOLLOW FROM THE AFFIRMATION OR DENIAL OF GOD THAN FROM ANSWERING ANY OTHER BASIC QUESTION IN LIFE” (Adler 543, emp. added).

There is no more basic issue concerning human life than that of the existence of God. An affirmation, or a denial, of God molds life and action. If it is the case that God *does not* exist, then there is a sense in which *nothing really matters*. However, if it is the case that God *does* exist, then there is a sense in which *nothing else really matters*.

For several years, American society in particular has been experiencing a shift away from theism and a move toward philosophies of life that not only deny the existence of God but also deny such crucial matters as the rationality of man, the existence of absolute, objective truth, and the existence of an objective standard of morality. According to the Associated Press, the number of American adults identifying themselves as atheists has more than doubled from 14.3 million in 1990 to 29.4 million in 2001 (Centerville 4).

True Christianity will always be in a battle with any philosophy that denies the existence of God, because if God does not exist, then the Bible is not the word of God. If the Bible is not the word of God, then Jesus of Nazareth is not the Son of God. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Son of God, then Christianity is not the one true religion. Therefore, a denial of God’s existence is a denial that the Christian religion is true and exclusive. Knowledge of God’s existence is foundational to faith. The Bible says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God, **MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS** (i.e. exists). . .” (Heb. 11:6, emp. added). Many years ago, the late James D. Bales summarized the crucial nature of the battle between Christianity and atheism when he wrote the following:

If faith in God is destroyed, man is but an animal and the Bible is a book of lies. If the Bible and Christ are destroyed, there is no revelation from God enabling us to know the mind of God and there is no redemption from sin with the promise of eternal life ... THE FUNDAMENTAL CONFLICT which faces us TODAY IS the conflict BETWEEN FAITH IN GOD AND HIS WORD AND THE VARIOUS FAITHS WHICH MEN HAVE ACCEPTED as the foundations for their lives” (Jackson, Introduction, emp. added).

The Propositions

The *theistic* proposition is the affirmation of Christianity concerning the existence of God. It says, "I KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS." This affirmation implies that there is sufficient evidence available to warrant the conclusion that God does exist. The proposition affirmed by the *atheist* is "I KNOW THAT GOD DOES NOT EXIST." This affirmation holds that there is sufficient evidence available to man to warrant the conclusion that God does not exist.

We need to carefully discern the difference between the nature of the theistic and atheistic propositions. The proposition, "*I know that God does not exist,*" is a **universal negative**. In order to prove this proposition one would have to *be everywhere*. In the place where he is not, there just might be the evidence that proves God exists. Furthermore, an atheist, in order to prove his proposition, must *know everything*, because what he does not know just may be the evidence that proves God exists. In other words, there is a sense in which, in order to prove his proposition, an atheist must become God (i.e. be everywhere and know everything). However, the atheist cannot be everywhere, or know everything. Therefore, the atheistic proposition cannot be proved. It is little wonder that the Bible says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1).

In 1976, on the campus of North Texas State University, the late Dr. Thomas B. Warren met Dr. Antony Flew in a four-night debate on the existence of God. Professor Flew has been recognized by his colleagues in philosophy as "the most prominent atheist in contemporary philosophy"(Moreland and Nielsen 319). [NOTE: The Warren-Flew Debate is now available on 4 DVD's through World Video Bible School, Maxwell, Texas. An additional DVD is also available that contains a significant interview with brother Warren on the 20th anniversary (1996) of this debate.] Soon following his debate with Dr. Flew, Warren, in a radio interview, discussed the Flew debate and summed up the basic difference between the theistic and atheistic propositions. He stated:

I think what was demonstrated here is that atheism simply cannot stand. It's not the fault of the man, because I don't believe they can find a more able man to take on the task of proving the proposition that I know that God does not exist. Now when you start doing that you in effect are setting out to prove a universal negative. It's something like when a man says, "Two men are on a ship and are shipwrecked and land on a shore. And here's an island that's two hundred miles long and a hundred miles wide. One says, 'there's not a mouse on this island and there never has been.' The other one says, 'Yes, there has been at least one mouse.'" And so what's the task of the first one? He not only has to see that whole island (and suppose it's covered with a jungle), he not only has to see it all at once, but he must see under every tree, under every leaf, every limb, in every hole on the island. Not only at that time, but he must know all past time. While the other one has only to see one mouse track. If he's expert enough to see a mouse track when he sees it! Or even one hair of a mouse,

then he has proof that a mouse was there. You see, there's a great deal of difference in signing a proposition, "I know that God does exist", because I have only to find one evidence. And I find that in myself, and every other person can. But when a man says, "I know that God doesn't exist," he's taking on a universal negative. Now, the fact that we find Dr. Flew not actually formulating a single, precisely stated proposition or argument in favor of that, to me, was as significant as anything could be (Script #259, *Insight*).

The proposition affirmed by the atheist is false. It is unprovable. Those who affirm it fail in their defense. Why? Not necessarily because of any fault in themselves, but because of the weakness of the proposition affirmed by atheism.

A word also needs said about the impossibility of *agnosticism*. The agnostic claims to **know** that there is not sufficient evidence anywhere, which warrants either the conclusion that God does exist, or that He does not exist. He claims to know that not only does he not know whether God does, or does not, exist, but he also is affirming that no one else can know. Let every person see the utter folly of this position! In order to know that no one can know whether God does, or does not, exist, the agnostic has to know everything, and be everywhere. **What** he does not know just may be the evidence, which warrants the conclusion that God does exist. **Where** he is not, just may be the place where the evidence is available, which warrants the conclusion that God does exist. Therefore, as is the case with atheism, so it is with agnosticism - both positions are unprovable and thus false. Both claim to know that which they cannot know. Therefore, both are false.

If atheism is false (and it is) and if agnosticism is false (and it is), then theism is true. This is not mere probability, but a matter of knowledge. The basic affirmation of theism is: I **KNOW** THAT GOD DOES EXIST. This can be proved. In other words, sufficient evidence is available that enables one to **know** (not merely "believe," wish, etc.) that God does exist.

The Proof

The traditional theistic view, in harmony with historic Christianity, is that the existence of God is a matter that can be proved. Likewise, traditional atheism affirms that the non-existence of God involves a proposition that is subject to proof. Kai Nielsen, of whom it has been said that, "Next to Antony Flew, he is probably the most well-known atheist in contemporary philosophy" (Moreland and Nielsen 29), observed that "the standard view at present, among at least philosophers and a large number of theologians ... is that you can't prove that God does exist and you can't prove that He doesn't exist" (48-49). However, Nielsen rightly rejects this view and claims that it is "a rather modern invention" (49). He affirms that "the grand tradition of natural theology" along the line of such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas is that theists thought they could prove God exists and argued "that it is irrational to be an atheist or an agnostic" (49).

I affirm that it can be **proved** that God exists. However, I am not affirming that such is done through sense perception. The existence of God is not proved in the same way that one can prove a book weighs three pounds, or that a certain car is blue. However, such does not mean that the existence of God is incapable of being proved. It is possible to **know** that numerous things exist, which are unseen, or have not been verified through sense perception. One may have never been to Paris, or New York City, and yet he can be certain of their existence. None of us has ever empirically verified the existence of his brain, and yet most of us are reasonably certain that we have a brain! There is a proof known as *inferential proof* that involves the gathering of relevant evidence and making logical deductions based on that evidence. It is a valid form of logical proof that is accepted in the common affairs of everyday life as well as in such significant areas as historical research and jurisprudence.

The law of rationality states that we ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence [NOTE: For a more detailed explanation and validation of the law of rationality the reader is referred to my book, *Things Most Surely Believed - Evidence Essays*, 2002, chapters 2 and 3.] Adequate evidence demands certain conclusions. These are not assumptions, guesses, or speculations. A conclusion that is demanded by the evidence at hand is a matter of **knowledge**. Such is *knowledge* as much as are the conclusions resulting from sense perception. It is this kind of knowledge that is the result of a consideration of such facts as: there can be no design without a designer, no law without a lawgiver, no effect without an adequate cause, and no thought without a thinker.

The Bible implies that the existence of God can be proved. Although the Bible does not **explicitly** set forth a precise argument that has as its conclusion, "Therefore, God exists," the Bible does **imply** the procedure that can be followed to formulate, set forth, and explicate such an argument. Paul wrote, "Prove all things ..." (1 Thess. 5:21). A proper consideration of the following biblical passages will convince every Bible student of the soundness of the claim that the existence of God can be proved: Ps. 19:1-5; 139:14; Prov. 20:12; Acts 14:12-17; Rom. 1:18-21; Heb. 3:4, et al. It is unfortunate that even religious people are sometimes guilty of falling into the old trap of skeptical philosophers who claim we cannot *prove* the existence of God.

The Practical Consequences

As cited earlier, it is the case that "more consequences ... follow from an affirmation or a denial of God than from answering any other basic question" (Adler 543). Atheism's negation of God results in a negation of (1) *character*, (2) *conduct*, and (3) *compassion* as evidenced in the following biblical passage:

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt; They have done abominable works; There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who

understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside; They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, no not one. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord? (Ps. 14:1-4).

The text says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt; They have done abominable works” (Ps. 14:1). Note the connection between the affirmation of “no God” and a character that is corrupt. If there is no God - if man is not the result of the Creator and everything springs ultimately from natural causes - then there is no objective basis for the development of character. In fact, *character* would be a meaningless term. If atheism is true, everything is meaningless. If human beings are the result of some cosmic accident, blind non-purposive forces, then life is devoid of any true purpose or meaning.

Professor George Romanes was a bright young scientist who lived during the nineteenth century. He was a personal friend and colleague of Charles Darwin, and a professor at Oxford University. Romanes, as a young professor, lost his faith in God because of the influence of Darwin’s evolutionary theories. However, the young professor regained his faith in the Creator, and, prior to his death in 1894, he wrote

The negative evidence is furnished by the nature of man without God ... I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures; but am also well aware that even when all are taken together and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation, means and social position, &c., the whole concoction is but as high confectionery to a starving man. He may cheat himself for a time - especially if he is a strong man - into the belief that he is nourishing himself by denying his natural appetite; but soon finds he was made for some altogether different kind of food, even though of much less tastefulness as far as the palate is concerned ... There is no finality to rest in, while disease and death are always standing in the background. Custom may even blind men to their own misery, so far as not to make them realize what is wanting; yet the want is there. I take it then as unquestionably true that this whole negative side of the subject proves a vacuum in the soul of man, which nothing can fill save faith in God (150-152).

Closely linked to the preceding point (i.e. atheism negates the character of man with regard to meaningful and purposeful endeavor) is the fact that atheism has a negative effect on moral conduct. Observe the logical connection between the negation of God and immoral conduct as described by the Psalmist. He stated, “The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside. They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, no not one” (Ps. 14:2-3). Unbelief has no ultimate, objective standard of moral/ethical truth, and thus

everything is permitted. “There is none who does good, no not one” is the result of not retaining God in one’s knowledge (Rom. 1:28). This being the case, no one can ever logically suggest that someone else’s conduct is wrong, or that a person “ought” or “ought not” do thus and so. French existential philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre stated:

The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that “the good” exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are not upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky once wrote, “If God did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse ... Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior (485).

If man does not owe his origin to God, then value is nothing more than a function of the human mind. If value is nothing more than a function of the human mind, then no conduct is better than any other. What are the practical results of such a philosophical viewpoint? Richard Dawkins, a well-known British evolutionist who has described himself as “a fairly militant atheist, with a fair degree of hostility toward religion” (qtd. in Thompson 74) has acknowledged:

I am not advocating a morality based on evolution. I am saying how things have evolved. I am not saying how we humans morally ought to behave ... My own feeling is that a human society based simply on the genes law of universal ruthless selfishness would be a very nasty society in which to live. But unfortunately, however much we may deplore something, it does not stop it being true (3).

“A very nasty society in which to live.” Think about it! Dawkins is accurate in his conclusion. A society based simply on a philosophical viewpoint, which negates God, will be **“a very nasty society,”** because it has no objective reference point for ethics and morality. Any, and all, conduct, no matter how reprehensible, could logically be defended because, without God, it is impossible to argue for any objectivity with regard to “right” and “wrong.” “Right” and “wrong” conduct is meaningless terminology without God. The only way there can be any objectivity to so-called “right and wrong conduct” is for there to exist some objective point of reference (God) Who is infinite in goodness and holiness, and thus, He correctly identifies what is really right and wrong conduct.

The Psalmist further described the situation without God when he stated “... all the workers of iniquity (have) no knowledge who eat up my people as they eat

bread” (Ps. 14:4). Here is disrespect for human life. But, again, it is the logical consequence of atheism. Carried to the logical consequence, if atheism provides the true explanation of the origin of man, then why should any human being expect things to be different for him than for any animal? Weak horses are shot and put out of their misery, so why not weak human beings whether it be the fetus in the womb, the aged in the nursing home, or the retarded in the asylum? If atheism is true, then abortion, euthanasia, or any other kind of murder is not wrong. As Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris roamed Columbine High School, they approached seventeen year old Cassie Bernall. She was asked by one of the gunmen if she believed in God. She said yes. She was then asked why and “... they just blew her away” (Bernall 13). Someone had convinced those two young men that God does not exist, and their actions are the horrifying, but logical, consequences of life without God. If atheism is true, then there is no difference between killing a cockroach or a human being.

When man refuses to allow the evidence to convince him that God exists, and that the only rational explanation of the origin of the world and man is the creative power of God, then the next step is the *negation* of (1) **character**, (2) **conduct**, and (3) **compassion**. When man does not “see fit to acknowledge God” (Rom. 1:28, NASV) in his thinking, then his life will be devoid of character and meaning, filled with immoral and unethical conduct, and robbed of compassion for other human beings (cf. Rom. 1:18-32).

Ultimately, there is the greatest consequence of any false philosophy, i.e. the loss of one’s soul eternally. Atheism causes people to be lost, because it produces unbelief “and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Heb. 11:6, NASV). Herein is the most far-reaching consequence of atheism that will tragically, and ultimately, be realized, “... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God” (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

Conclusion

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was one of the most famous and militant 20th century atheistic philosophers. He wrote against Christianity with persistence and passion. Many of his writings were anti-Christian. In her book, *My Father Bertrand Russell*, Katherine Tait, Russell’s only daughter, answers the question: “What was it like, having Bertrand Russell for a father?” (xi). She wrote:

I believe myself that his whole life was a search for God ... Somewhere at the back of my father’s mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it (184-85).

Bertrand Russell discovered what every man ultimately will discover if he is anti-God, i.e. there is an “empty space,” and there will never be found “anything

else [but God] to put in it.” Augustine (A.D. 354-430) said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee” (45). God made man for the purpose “... that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him ...” (Acts 17:27). And the good news is that “HE IS NOT FAR FROM EACH ONE OF US; FOR IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING ...” (Acts 17:27b-28, emp. added). **GOD CAN BE FOUND!** Yes, there is an **epistemic distance** between God and man (Warren, *Have Atheists Proved* 45). The revelation of God is not so overwhelming that man is not really free. Yet, there is not such a “gap” that, in order to have faith in Him, we must take a leap into the darkness of uncertainty and the unprovable.

Ultimately, the greatest evidence there is for God is Jesus Christ - God’s **personal, complete, and final**, revelation of Himself. Jesus came that we might *know* “the only true God” (John 17:3). The **Christological** argument for the existence of God provides a **special** revelation of God not found in the arguments of **general** revelation (i.e. cosmological, teleological, moral). General revelation is sufficient to prove the existence of God (cf. Rom. 1:20). However, it is limited. In the Person and Work of Jesus Christ there is the most awesome revelation of God available! Peter wrote, “[T]hrough Him [you] believe in God, Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Pet. 1:21).

As Christianity versus Atheism, may those of us who are Christians never lose sight of the fact that, in this great battle, as we seek to cast “down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,” our ultimate purpose is to bring “every thought into captivity to the OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST” (2 Cor. 10:5, emp added). Christ is our **proclamation** (Philip. 1:15-18), our **purpose** (Philip. 1:21), and our **power** (Philip. 4:13). Truly, He brings us to God (1 Pet. 3:18). May God help us to militantly confront our unbelieving world with this **Good News!**

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IF ANY MAN SUFFER AS A CHRISTIAN

Glenn Hawkins

Introduction

I want to express my thanks and appreciation to brother Terry Jones and to the church here at Pennsboro for the invitation to come and speak on this lectureship. It is indeed an honor to be here and to share this platform with other preachers of the gospel, many of whom are good friends. The theme of this lectureship is surely a timely, as well as necessary, one: Christianity – The Hope for the World.

The subject assigned to me for this hour is *IF ANY MAN SUFFER AS A CHRISTIAN*. The text I want to use is found in 1 Pet 4:12-16 –

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: {13} But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. {14} If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. {15} But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. {16} Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

Not only here, but in several other places in this first epistle of Peter, are passages relating to suffering for being a Christian. Notice the following passages: 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2 Peter 2:11-12; 1 Peter 2:20-21; 1 Peter 3:14-17. First Peter was written to give those brethren living in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia encouragement to face the trials, sufferings, persecutions, and ordeals to which they were being subjected by the enemies of Christianity.

As we look at the specific text from 1 Peter 4:12-16, there are a number of points worthy of our consideration.

I. SUFFERING FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN IS NOT A STRANGE THING – 1 Peter 4:12

- A. Word *strange* comes from Greek word *xenos*, meaning foreign, alien, or unusual. The English Standard Version uses the word "surprised." Why should Christians think it strange or unusual, or why should we be surprised, if we have to suffer for being a Christian?
 1. Perhaps a better question would be, Why not?

2. Jesus Himself suffered – Isaiah 53:1-3; Luke 18:31-33
 3. Jesus told us that we would also suffer for His sake – Matthew 5:10-11; John 15:20-21
- B. What is the fiery trial that was among them?
1. It was a term describing the intense persecution and subsequent suffering which those Christians would experience. Word *fiery* literally means burning. And we know that being “burned at the stake” was one way some Christians met death at the hands of the Romans.
- C. What was the purpose of this fiery trial?
1. To prove or test the Christian.
 2. The figure here is like a metal put into a furnace of fire to burn away the dross and the impurities, so persecution proves or tests the moral stamina and faith of a Christian.
 3. Being a Christian does not eliminate persecution or suffering, but often precipitates it.
 - a. 2 Timothy 3:12
 - b. Acts 14:22

II. TO PARTICIPATE IN CHRIST’S SUFFERING MEANS WE WILL REJOICE WHEN HE COMES, KNOWING THAT OUR SUFFERINGS ARE OVER – 1 Peter 4:13

- A. To participate in Christ’s sufferings means to be a sharer in His sufferings.
1. Romans 5:1-5
 2. James 1:2-4
 3. William Barclay wrote: “When a man has to suffer and sacrifice for his Christianity, he is walking the way his Master walked, and sharing the cross his Master carried.”
- B. The reward for so sharing in these sufferings is simply stated.
1. “That, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.”
 2. When Jesus comes again, this will be cause for rejoicing among the saints because it will signal that sufferings and persecutions are at an end.
 3. Jesus said in Matthew 5:12, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

III. THERE IS ALSO COMFORT FOR THE SUFFERER NOW – 1 Peter 4:14

- A. The particle “if” does not denote doubt, but certainty. It could be translated “when.”
- B. Word *reproached* means to revile, slander, blaspheme, speak evil of another.
 - 1. In other words, persecution may take the form of name calling, false accusations, etc., simply because you are a Christian. When that happens, is there any comfort for us at all?
 - 2. Yes, there is comfort. Peter says that we are blessed because the spirit of glory rests upon us. While on their part Christ may be evil spoken of, on your part He is glorified.
 - 3. The word *blessed* here means fortunate or happy.
 - 4. It is blessed to be reproached for Christ’s sake because we are identifying ourselves with Him, as belonging to the Lord and as living a life pleasing to the Lord.
 - 5. We also have the promise that the “spirit of glory resteth upon you.” The Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God are the same and refer to the Holy Spirit.
 - 6. Since the Holy Spirit is promised to believers, His presence is a token of the blessedness of those who suffer for righteousness’ sake.

IV. CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT SUFFER BECAUSE THEY DO EVIL – 1 Peter 4:15

- A. No Christian should suffer as a:
 - 1. murderer – punishment by the state would be just and right.
 - 2. thief – word translated here is *kleptes*, from which we get our word *kleptomaniac*. It refers to one who takes what belongs to another. Again, punishment by the state would be just and right.
 - 3. evildoer – word signifies one who breaks the law and, again, punishment by the state would be just and right.
 - 4. busybody in other men’s affairs – one who sticks his nose in other people’s business, who fails to respect the privacy of others. All of us need to be careful here.

V. CHRISTIANS WILL SUFFER BECAUSE THEY ARE CHRISTIANS – 1 Peter 4:16

- A. What happens if we suffer as a Christian?
1. To suffer as a Christian means to suffer persecution for simply being a Christian.
 2. The name *Christian* is used only three times in the New Testament – Acts 11:26, 26:28, and here in 1 Peter 4:16. It is a name of divine origin and honors Christ and Christianity.
 3. When we suffer persecution as a Christian, we are not to be ashamed – or dishonored. We should never wish that we were not a Christian and feel shame when we suffer as a Christian.
 4. Rather, we should glorify God – much like Peter and John did in Acts 5:41. See also 2 Timothy 1:8, 12, 16 in the life of Paul.

Conclusion

Being a Christian will bring persecution and suffering of some kind, whether physical, mental, or emotional. Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:12 – “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” A genuine Christian has nothing to fear from suffering persecution. We are not alone. God will stand by us, and even if we must die for our faith, we know that we will receive a crown of life. To our suffering and persecuted brethren in the first century, John wrote,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

THE BIBLE - THE HANDBOOK OF CHRISTIANITY

Frank Higginbotham

All religious groups have some book that serves as their handbook. Sectarian groups have creed books which set forth the beliefs that are peculiar to that religious group. Those who subscribe to these groups are obligated to hold to these views. This is the main factor in the proliferation of religious division. The very existence of creed books puts them in opposition to the things that are written in the Bible. There is division because people differ in the handbooks to which they subscribe. Christianity is different because it is the only religious group that does not depend on mere men for authority. The authority behind Christianity is not some human creed but it has as its handbook, the Word of God. The purpose of a handbook is to give instruction as it relates to membership, conduct and relationship to others. God knows best about all these matters.

We need to take a careful look at the characteristics of the handbook of Christianity. The Bible is not a book that men thought of and wrote for our direction. It came to us by revelation. The Bible is "God-breathed." The only insight we have into the mind of God is by this God given book. Some claim they know what God thinks separate from the Bible. How would they know? Paul explains this matter as he tells us of the inspiration of the Bible.

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:9-14).

In speaking of the revelation of God's scheme of redemption Paul explains that it is beyond the concept of man. He is not speaking of Heaven which has not been seen or conceived of by man, but he is explaining in context that God's plan for redemption is beyond anything that man could devise. The only picture we have of God's thinking is in the things He revealed by His Spirit. No man knows what another thinks unless the man chooses to make that known by telling what he thinks. Paul uses this fact to show us that we only know of God's thinking by what He has revealed. The Holy Spirit used words given by God to tell us what

God thinks. The Bible is verbally inspired. No human creed can make this claim without having it proven to be wrong. One proof of the inspiration of the Bible is seen in the fact that men were able to tell of future events hundreds of years before they came to pass. Men cannot do this. It is stated that the Old Testament contains over 300 prophecies in regard to Christ that find fulfillment in the New Testament. These are not vague, broad statements that could have many fulfillments but are pointed and detailed statements that could only have one fulfillment and that in the life of Christ. The birth of Christ, the life of Christ, His death and His resurrection were all detailed in prophecy. Peter explained the work of the prophets in these words.

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

This passage does not refer to how we read and understand the Bible but tells us how the Bible was given. It does not contain the thoughts and ideas of men. John did not write his own interpretation, nor did Peter or Paul, but they wrote what God said. Not only is our handbook true in all that it says but it is also a book that does not need additions from men. If the Bible claims to be complete and then is not, it is a false claim and casts reflection on the truthfulness of the Bible. There are many claims in the Bible about its completeness. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:” (2 Pet. 1:3). Warnings are also given about adding to or taking away from the Word of God.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Rev. 22:18-19).

The handbook of Christianity is the Bible which is inspired of God and can be trusted without addition or subtraction.

Our handbook gives us proper direction for our lives. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps. 119:105). Also, the writer of Psalms stated this: “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” (Ps. 119:130). In explaining the completeness of the Bible, Paul says that it is the proper guide for Christians in four areas.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The scriptures guide us in doctrine. The word *doctrine* merely means teachings. We must continue in the doctrine of Christ.

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (2 John 9-11).

We have both God and Christ if we abide in the doctrine. If we transgress and do not abide in the Lord’s doctrine, we do not have God or Christ. We are warned to take heed to the doctrine. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (1 Tim. 4:16). The Scriptures guide us in reproof. Our responsibility in living right sometimes is overlooked. Through the guidance of the Word of God we can learn when we are wrong and make the needed corrections.

The Bible also guides us in correction. It serves as the mirror for the soul.

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” (James 1:22-25).

When we look into a mirror, it is for the purpose of making the changes we deem necessary. When we look into the Word of God, we do so for the purpose of correcting our life. Instruction in righteousness also comes from the Bible. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16-17).

Our handbook gives us the rules for conduct. God’s word is unchangeable “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.” (Ps. 119:89). Many warnings are given by God concerning transgression.

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience

received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;" (Heb. 2:1-3).

These rules are not subject to the whims of men. They are not changed at the desire of men. "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;" (John 10:35). Men have put forth a relentless effort to get God to back down on the things He has said. We have seen this to be true with God's answer to the problem of sin. In very plain words, the Son of God laid down the conditions required to obtain salvation. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16).

There were two requirements laid down for the forgiveness of sins. First, a man must be a believer in Christ. This is made possible because of the evidence that is offered in the Bible. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John give us the biography of Jesus Christ. In this is evidence that Jesus is more than just a man but that he is deity that came to the earth. John explains that the reason for the writing of his book is to provide evidence that Jesus is the Christ. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31). Clearly, the evidence is given to make us believers. Most people do not argue with this requirement.

The second requirement however, does not find the same amount of acceptability. When it comes to being baptized, there is a long-standing effort to obtain salvation without it. We constantly hear that baptism is not necessary. Those who affirm this should not include the passage we have under consideration. It is too clear and the force of it is too strong for the enemies of truth to refute it. The effort then turns to trying to get the rule changed. We are often asked if we really believe that God will reject people who have not been baptized. We could not change God's word even if we wanted to. It is settled in Heaven!

A similar effort is made in reference to the Lord's teaching concerning marriage and divorce. Marriage has the sanction of God. It is declared to be honorable in all. (Heb. 13:4). God hates putting away. (Malachi 2:16). Jesus gave this rule in the New Testament: "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." (Matthew 19:9). Many today, perhaps moved by compassion, are trying to find ways to get around this plain teaching. It may be hard for us to apply but there is no question but that God's rule is settled in Heaven. One man or all the men on earth cannot break God's law. The Bible is our rule book.

The Bible, our handbook, is also the book that gives us the encouragement we need to remain faithful to our Lord. Each of us is encouraged to be faithful by the promise of a home in Heaven. We are saved by hope. (Rom. 8:24). It is that hope that serves as an anchor for the soul. (Heb. 6:19). Satan uses discouragement as a means of stopping us in our effort to please God. Our handbook tells us of the importance of receiving the encouragement that comes from God, our brethren, and from the public assembly. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." (Ps. 122:1). Note this statement regarding the need for our assemblies.

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised; And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 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." (Heb. 10:23-25).

Our brethren provoke or encourage us to love and good works. We exhort each other in the work of the Lord.

Our handbook gives us passages that encourage us in overcoming our temptations. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13). All men are subject to similar temptations. We do not bear these temptations alone, but we have the help that comes by realizing that God has helped us in making a way to escape. Jesus overcame temptation by using the words, "It is written."

A knowledge of the Word of God helps us to resist Satan. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (Ps. 119:11). Another help or way of escape is seen in the power of prayer in our lives. The night before the Lord was crucified, he spent a great deal of time in talking to His Father. The Hebrew writer refers to this in Hebrews 5:7. When His flesh was reluctant he received strength through prayer. We likewise are stronger if we use the blessings God provided.

Our handbook tells us of Heaven and how we can attain to that state. It is not hard to see the contrast in the final rewards that are ahead.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Mt. 7:21-23).

If we do the will of God, we have the hope of being with the Lord eternally. Matthew 25 gives us a picture of the events that will take place when the Day of Judgment comes. The righteous will have Heaven because they responded in the right way during life. The wicked were rejected because of their failure to do God's will. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Mt. 25:46).

Our handbook encourages us to prepare for a home in Heaven when life here is over. The rich man of Luke 16 had a good life in regard to material things. The poor man named Lazarus begged the crumbs that fell from the table of the rich man. However, after death things were different. The rich man was buried, but nothing is stated concerning the body of the poor man. One lifted up his eyes being in torment while the other was comforted in Abraham's bosom. The choice for eternity is in our own hands. God has not predetermined our final state without giving us a choice. Our handbook gives us the direction we must take in life to have the joys of Heaven. Joshua encouraged the children of Israel to make the choice that would please God.

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;" (Joshua 24:16).

The Bible is the handbook of Christianity. It is a God-given book that is our guide for life as we please God. It is our rule book that tells us about the things that God requires of us. It is also the book that gives us the encouragement we must have to make Heaven our home.

WORSHIP

W. Terry Varner

Introduction

Worship of God has existed since man was created (Genesis 1-2). The matter of worship, and all of its attendant elements, is of great importance to God and likewise to man. Inspiration stresses the importance of proper worship when it affirms that Abel offered righteously his sacrifices and gifts to God (Hebrews 11:4). The second biblical controversy between God and man was over the matter of worship when Cain offered improper sacrifices and gifts to God (Genesis 4: 1ff). Worship has been and will continue to be controversial as long as man disregards biblical instructions and resorts to his own desires and dictates in his attempt to worship God.

Worship Has Definitions

Definitions clarify and are essential in all aspects of life. They are all important in studying biblical subjects. To understand what God wants and expects of us in worship, it is necessary to understand inspiration's meaning behind the English word – "worship." This study will be confined to worship as set forth in the New Testament. The mere fact that we have changes in the covenant from the Old to the New implies there will be changes in worship.

There are ten Greek terms translated "worship" in the New Testament. The two terms used most often are *proskuneo* (59 times) and *latreuo* (18 times). The first term, *proskuneo*, is defined as:

"kiss [the hand or the ground] toward," hence often in the oriental fashion bowing prostrate upon the ground ... It is rendered (16 t) to Jesus as a beneficent superior; at least (24 t) to God or to Jesus as God ... It is always translated "worship", "Worship," (Crannell, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, V:3 110).

The custom of prostrating oneself before a person and kissing his feet, the hem of his garment, the ground, etc. The Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or something Holy; *(fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully* (Ardnt and Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 723).

The second term, *latreuo*, is defined in its primary use as "to serve" (Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 126) or as Thayer states: "in the N.T. to render religious service or homage, to worship" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 372). It is also defined as "serve, in our lit. only of carrying out of

relig. duties, esp. of cultic nature, by human beings” (Strathmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV:60).

A summary of the definitions shows that *proskuneo* refers to the attitude of the worshipper; whereas, *latreuo* refers to the external acts of service. Jesus, in quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, used both words in responding to the devil: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship [*proskuneo*] the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve [*latreuo*]” (Matthew 4:10). Note the sequence: “worship and serve.” Biblically, the two words go together in the life of the Christian.

Worship Has Its Object

Who is the object of worship set forth in the Bible? To whom do we bow our minds and hearts in worship and serve throughout life? Who is the object of our loyalty, devotion, and affection? The answer is God.

Innate within man is the desire to worship God. When God created man, He created man with a spirit that seeks and yearns to commune with “the Father of Spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). Through the centuries man has always had the desire to seek and worship something greater than self. The Greek philosophers referred to this as the “First Cause,” which they looked upon for answers to man’s existence, nature, and destiny.

Heinrich Greeven makes the following observation on “worship” (*proskuneo*): “When the NT uses *proskuneo*, the object is always something - truly or supposedly - divine” (VI:763). An angel refused the worship of John and directed John to “worship God” (Revelation 19:10). Peter refused worship by Cornelius showing that no man is to be worshipped (Acts 10:24-25). Idols and graven images are forbidden to be worshiped (Leviticus 26:1; I John 5:21; Revelation 9:20). We ask *WHY?* The answer is clear: angels are “fellow servants” with us (Revelation 19:20). Man is the creation of God (Genesis 1:26-27); therefore, he is to worship God (Matthew 4:10; Romans 1:18-32). Idols are dead (Psalm 115:4-8). Our God is alive from whom both our mortal and spiritual existence is derived. We do not worship a dead God, but “the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

The English word *worship* is from *worth* or *worth-ship* (Hedley, *Christian Worship*, 1). In the Greek language *worship* is both a noun and a verb. As a verb it is active and indicates participation and not passiveness. Worship “is not something done to us or for us, but by us” (Webber, *Worship is a Verb*, 2). Jesus stated that we are to worship God. It is the case that there are many reasons *why* we must make God the object of our worship.

First, our worship honors God’s superiority, sovereignty, and absoluteness. Worship is not pleasing self but pleasing God because, in a very special sense, God alone is worthy of worship. The first of the Ten Commandments states: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). The Lord God is

entitled to the unique honor of being worshipped. He is to be shared with no one and nothing else, as He is a "jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). Man is to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). Our chief responsibility is to honor God above all others and all things (Matthew 6:33).

Second, our worship recognizes God's eternity; i.e. "from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psalm 90:2). God has always existed and will always exist. Life is vacillating and transitory (James 4:14). The world and the things therein will perish (II Peter 3). However, with God there are no time zones, calendars, aging, or end. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Third, our worship recognizes God's wisdom. God possesses infinite wisdom and knowledge. He is also the Revealer of divine wisdom and knowledge to man. Jeremiah 10:23, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Contrast the light of God's wisdom with the constant economic upheavals, the dysfunction of society, and the constant turmoil and conflict between nations. How true is the statement: "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (I Corinthians 1:25). We need to "be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10). Inspiration also states, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (I Corinthians 1:30-31).

Fourth, our worship recognizes God's omnipresence. God's attribute of omnipresence (being everywhere always) shows that God is not confinable to the earth. J. W. Alexander wrote: "All that God is in one place he is in all places. All there is of God is in every place. Indeed, his presence has no dependence upon space or matter" (Psalms, 109). We have to be filled with awe and wonder as we realize God transcends all time and space, and yet He indwells them without bounds.

Fifth, our worship recognizes God's love. John states, "God is love" (I John 4:8, 16). The love God manifests to man is *agape* love. God's *agape* love "has to do with the mind ... it is the principle by which we deliberately live ... has supremely to do with the will" of man (Barclay, *More New Testament Words*, 15); therefore *agape* love seeks nothing but man's highest good. Our worship is in response to God's love. The Bible sets forth a harmony between God as Love and God as Just by demonstrating that God's love is filled great mercy, but also demands obedience from His people and the human race. Paul writes: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened [made alive] us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5-6). Our redemption, through our obedience to God's mercy [grace], enables us to recognize God's love.

Sixth, our worship expresses the feelings of our souls. We express our joy, sadness, and affection to God and for sacred things. Likewise, in our worship we plead the restoration of our souls as we confess our sins through penitent prayer seeking God's forgiveness. In worship, we express our gratitude for a loving, merciful, and omni-beneficent God, much like the Samaritan leper expressed praise and gratitude after he was healed of leprosy (Luke 17:16). Simultaneously, we anchor our soul more deeply in our faith because of His "great and precious promises" (II Peter 1:4). We "thirst for God, the living God" (Psalm 42:2). The renewal of the soul is a common thread through the Psalms. (cf. Psalm 23:3; 51:10; 73:23-25). The solace and inner peace that overwhelm our soul in worship are both unique and mysterious because they come from the One whom we worship in "spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Seventh, our worship enables us to express praise to God Almighty. Inherent in each act of public worship, is praise to Him who makes all things possible. *By praise* we mean *adoration of to laud the glory of and to extol*. Praise should be an integral part of everyday life; i.e. parents with children, employers with employees and vice versa. On an entirely different level, Jehovah God calls us to praise Him in worship; i.e. to recognize His superiority and true greatness. We find such praise, at times, beyond our power of expression because of our awe and being overwhelmed by His majesty and glory. God is more than able and willing to receive our praise, adoration, and worship, and He grants us blessings in return. (cf Psalm 92, 100, 103, 117, and 136).

Eighth, our worship enables us to partake of the divine nature of God. God is a Spirit being (John 4:24). We are commanded to worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). In our worship of God, a Spirit, our spirit comes into fellowship with God. The worship "in spirit" refers to the spiritual nature and of worship and the communion that takes place when our spirit joins with God according to His will. "We worship; God is worshiped" (Jividen, *More Than A Feeling*, 76). Consequently, our worship "in spirit" expresses our inner self, or spirit, to God who is Spirit. "Truth" refers to those God authorized acts as set forth in the Bible. Jividen states: "Worship takes place in the realm of the spirit, although these are external forms that reflect this reality. The God-authorized forms make this possible" (77).

Additional thoughts could be set forth in this section showing *why* we worship God. Our list is not intended to be either exhaustive or in order of importance, but is intended to set forth some of the important concepts that worshippers possess and are involved in when they worship the Almighty God!

Worship and Life

Confusion exists among brethren as to whether everything we do in life is worship; some argue that all of life is worship. However, the Bible sets forth a distinction between *worship* and *service*; therefore we argue that not everything

we do in life is worship. The source of the confusion is based (1) on various Bible translations of Romans 12:1 and (2) from Greek lexicons of the meaning of *latreia* in Romans 12:1.

In regard to the Bible translations of the phrase “which is your reasonable service (*latreia*)” (Romans 12:1, KJV), *latreia* is translated: (1) “service” in the KJV, NKJV, ABUV, ASV, *The Literal Translation* (Green), *TransLine New Testament* (Magill). (2) “worship” in RSV, NASB, NIV, Phillips, Concordant, Knox, and (3) “service and spiritual worship” (Amplified).

The Greek lexicons define *latreia* as: “to perform sacred services ... univ. of any worship of God” (Thayer, 372); “In relig. Usage service or worship (of God)” (Ardnt and Gingrich, 468); “Rom. xii.1 of a spiritual sacrifice” (Parkhurst, *A Greek-English Lexicon To The New Testament*, 354); “To serve ... In N.T. spoken in respect to God, to serve, to worship” (Robinson, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*, 474); “Service-worship” (Donnegan, *A New Greek And English Lexicon*, 796); “Those who are rendering divine service” (Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance To The English and Greek New Testament*, 903); “Service, servitude: esp. the service of gods, worship” (Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* [Abridged], 407); “Religious service or worship” (Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, II:706); “In Biblical Greek always refers to the service or worship of the true God or the heathen divinities” (Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 371); “To perform religious rites as a part of worship ... to worship, to venerate, worship” (Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, I:533).

With the above diversity among the various translations and lexicons, **how** are we to understand the meaning of *latreia* in Romans 12:1? Does the word *latreia* mean all of life is worship? The author answers in the negative. The author affirms that all of life - acts, words and thoughts - should be holy and consecrated to God as “a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). It is the author’s teaching of this troubling verse for the following reasons:

First, the word *latreia* is used only five times in the Greek New Testament and, in the KJV, is translated “service” four times (John 16:2; Romans 9:4; 12:1; and Hebrews 9:6) and is translated “divine service” (Hebrews 9:1) once. It is never rendered by the word “worship” in any of its uses, though it could be understood as “worship” in Hebrews 9:1, 6, as both times it refers to the *acts of worship* by the priest in the tabernacle. It certainly does not refer to all the life of the people as worship. These facts create untold hermeneutical difficulties for those translating the word *latreia* as “worship.” *Lateria* (noun) and *latreuo* (verb) refer to service in general, and not worship in particular.

Second, the word *latreia* is derived from *latron* and means “hire ... to serve for hire” (Trench, 125); thus, to work or serve for wages or reward.

Third, in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) *latreia* always refers to the service of people of Israel in general; whereas, *leitourgeo* refers only to the priests.

Fourth, when we consider the remote context of the entire Epistle to the Romans, chapter 12 is the conclusion based on the great doctrinal argument from chapters 1-11:

- (1) The Perfect Gospel (1:1-7);
- (2) The Condemnation of the Gentiles and Jews (1:18-3:3 1);
- (3) The Doctrine of Justification (4-5);
- (4) The Doctrine of Sanctification (6-7);
- (5) The Doctrine of Glorification (8); and
- (6) Warnings (9-11).

The conclusion is, "therefore (*oun*) by the mercies of God" based upon these great biblical doctrines, that Christians are to "present your [their] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." These great Biblical doctrines motivate us to serve God daily "which is your [our] reasonable service;" *i.e.* **this is the life expected of us!** The Christian life - words, thoughts, deeds - is to be wholly, and holy, presented to God (Matthew 22:37)! Gifford writes that the phrase means, "the self-dedication is an act of the mind or reason (*logos*), and in this sense 'a reasonable service.'" ("Romans." *The Bible Commentary*, F. C. Cook (ed.), IX:205).

Again, serious hermeneutical problems arise if we fail to make the biblical distinctions between the acts of worship and daily living or piety. Jividen distinguishes well between the meaning of the two:

There is a general way in which we offer *latreuo* to God in acts of daily piety. The Scriptures employ worship words and sacrificial language to describe this ... We cannot substitute acts of pious service for spiritual "fruit of the lips" sacrifice. Neither can we substitute words of worshipful praise for pious acts of sharing service. Like faith and works, they are both necessary, but different. One is literal; the other is analogous. One focuses on external acts of pious living; the other focuses on inner, awesome devotion and praise before the high and holy God. Failing to distinguish between a life of piety and acts of worship presents serious logical problems (48).

Romans 12:2 suggests the interpretation that the phrase in (12:1) is to be understood as the Christian's daily life. We are admonished to (1) "not be conformed to this world" and to (2) "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." This refers to our daily living in which our outward man perishes and our inner man is renewed (II Corinthians 4:16). The first phrase "refers to the external conformity" (Rogers and Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key To The New Testament*, 339), and the latter phrase refers to our being "transformed in your [our] inner most nature" (Sanday and Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 353). As we renew our

minds, we “prove the will of God as (1) that which is good (incapable of being mistaken about), (2) “acceptable (something loved, endorsed, cherished), and (3) “perfect” (Achieves in our life the will of God). When Romans 12:1 is interpreted within its immediate context (Romans 12:2), the argument that *lateria* is referencing our daily piety makes sense; whereas, the argument that all of life is worship pales as a possible interpretation.

Conclusion

Biblical worship demands an understanding of (1) its *definitions*, (2) the *object* to be worshiped, and (3) the clear biblical relationship *between* daily life and worship.

Let us worship God in deep appreciation of His Majesty and Sovereignty. Let our worship of God and our daily life proceed from the fact that we are recipients of vast undeserved spiritual riches. Worship God!

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THE SURRENDERED LIFE

Johnny Ramsey

Jesus made it very clear that sacrifice and surrender would be component parts of living for God. We must deny self and exalt the will of Heaven if success would abound in our pursuit of righteousness. Strange as it may sound, however, in Christianity we surrender and win! We are more than conquerors through the One Who died that we might live (Romans 8:31-39). The road to glory involves sacrificial conduct and deep commitment to a cause of monumental and eternal consequences. Such serious matters demand loyalty beyond the normal standards of mankind. Christians are challenged to sacrificially give our whole being into absolute commitment to the Redeemer: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”* (Romans 12:1). When worshipping in song, we sing:

*Thou art the Way: to Thee alone
From sin and death we flee;
And he who would the Father seek,
Must seek Him, Lord, by Thee.*

We live in an age of disregard, rebellion and laziness. Dependability is a forgotten virtue and indifference toward responsibility is the order of the day. The concept of subjugating our will to God’s way is mocked on every hand. As a result of such shallowness, our world is filled with soft and spoiled people who run from zealous endeavor. Putting spiritual matters first is far from the hearts of millions who inherit a chaotic world of their own making. We can be happy only when we love a cause so deeply that we are willing to sacrifice for it! Young people find *it* difficult, if not impossible, to follow a way of life that is proper if parents or those older ones never show them the way. A little boy, while talking to his Bible teacher, asked a profound question: *“Why do you constantly say that the Bible teaches so many times that the children of Israel did this and that? Did the grownups ever do anything?”*

It has been well stated that when it comes to helping others, some people stop at nothing! In Acts 9:16 Saul was informed that as a Christian he would suffer many things for the sake of Jesus. Persecution attended the surrendered life of disciples of Jesus (Acts 14:22). Few in our day have such dedication and fervor. Not many heroes can be found in the arena of faith. Some will sacrifice luxury to lose a few pounds, but never sacrifice at all to win a few souls. Our priorities are surely unbalanced and our views perverted. Divine emphasis is foreign to millions who run greedily after mundane benefits, as did Esau, Demas, and the prodigal boy. To sacrifice for Jesus may be difficult, but it is certainly worth it as Luke 6:22 informs us: *“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you, and cast out your*

name as evil, for the Son of man's sake." Christ laid down His life for us at Golgotha. We must be willing to present ourselves as living sacrifices for Him. It is an honor to walk hand in hand with Jesus. Such effort is well worth it.

When we walk with the Lord we have to say farewell to worldly friends and sensual habits that never were good for us in the first place. I read the story recently of a drunk talking to his open can of beer. He said: "*You have cost me my wife, my home and my job. Now, I am going to give you one more chance.*" Our pleasure-mad society is reeling on the brink of ruin but seems to love to have it so (Jeremiah 5:31). When will we come to our senses and seek Divine counsel? Those who vainly hope for help from friends of shallow disposition need to realize they search without hope from such people who cannot even guide themselves. When we honestly and thoroughly surrender our lives to Christ, the hilltops of glory rise above the petty values of carnality and beckon us home to a city of gold. When we sing the song Hand in Hand with Jesus, we sing:

*From the strait and narrow way,
Praise the Lord, I must not stray
For I am walking every day
Hand in hand with Jesus.*

The Christian must live the surrendered life. Any sacrifice a Christian makes for the cause of the Lord will be as nothing when we get to the end of the way.

PROCRASTINATION

Phil Grear

Without a doubt, tomorrow is the busiest day of any week. It is the day we are going to start our diet, clean out the garage, write that letter, and quit that bad habit. Tomorrow we are going to get caught up on all those things we have been meaning to do, but just have not got around to doing. We are going to visit that sick person in the nursing home, send a “thinking-of-you” card, and make that phone call. We are also going to mow the yard, paint that room, and wash the car. We will be all right if tomorrow is a forty-eight hour day.

It is not hard to figure out why tomorrow will be so busy - we have been putting everything off until then. We have mastered the art of procrastination. “Procrastination” comes from the Latin words *“pro”* (meaning “forward”) and *“cras”* (meaning “tomorrow”), so to procrastinate is “to put forward until tomorrow.” Although the Bible never uses the word, it does strongly warn us against this dangerous practice.

An old saying tells us, “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” We all agree that such is excellent advice, but we also have to admit that we are not very good at keeping it. We all have a lengthy list of things we fully intend to accomplish tomorrow.

Some things can be put off without serious consequences. Usually it does not matter if the lawn does not get mowed until the day after tomorrow, but there are some things that we dare not procrastinate too long. If you delay filing your income tax forms until April 16, it can be costly. If you delay renewing your driver’s license, there will be consequences. You can put off going to the doctor until the situation is untreatable, and disastrous results can follow. But when it comes to the field of religion, procrastination can be deadly in the worst possible way. Some, who strongly oppose gambling in any form, daily risk losing the most precious possession they have - their souls. They continually and consistently postpone their decision to get right with God. Let us notice one who made that mistake.

Example of Felix

The Roman governor Felix wanted to hear what Paul had to say about Christ, so he ordered him brought from prison.

“And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” (Acts 24:24-25)

Felix and his wife, Drusilla, wanted to hear Paul “concerning the faith in Christ.” We can only speculate as to what sparked their interest. Drusilla was Jewish, and her family had had considerable contact with Christ and Christianity over the years. She was the daughter of King Herod who had killed the Apostle James. (Acts 12:1-2) Maybe it was her idea to hear from Paul. Felix had been governor of Judea for several years, and so, undoubtedly, knew something about the way of Christ. Felix’s request to hear “concerning the faith in Christ” was valid, but his interest was not sufficient to change his life.

If you had been given the opportunity that Paul had to preach to Felix, what would you have chosen as your sermon topic? Felix had the power of life, death, and freedom over Paul. Many would have cautioned Paul to “go easy.” “Paul, don’t antagonize him. You have a golden opportunity to break down some prejudice toward the church on the part of the Roman authorities. Stay away from controversy. Don’t get too personal. Remember, Paul, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” But Paul was not primarily concerned about making things easier for himself. He was concerned about Felix and Drusilla, and their eternal destinies. So, he preached to them what they needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear. He practiced that which he later instructed Timothy, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” (2 Timothy 4:1-2) He hit Felix and Drusilla right where they were with what they needed most.

He reasoned with them concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Righteousness is right living that conforms to the standards and laws of God. Felix knew nothing of any of this. He had arranged the murder of the High Priest. He had seduced sixteen-year-old Drusilla to leave her husband and marry him. She was only twenty when she sat at Felix’s side listening to Paul. Felix kept Paul in prison for another two years, awaiting a bribe. (Acts 24:26) Righteousness was certainly foreign to the thinking of this corrupt man.

Paul preached to them of “self-control.” One has to wonder if Felix had ever learned to even spell this word. Nothing about his life was “temperate” or self-controlled. History describes him as cruel, vicious, and selfish in the highest degree.

Finally, Paul talked with them about “judgment to come.” Not just judgment, but, as the original says, “*the* judgment to come.” It is the judgment that will come on God’s appointed day. (Acts 17:30-31) Paul had earlier written that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10) He knew this included Felix and Drusilla, and he wanted to do everything he could to persuade them to prepare for that fateful and final day.

Paul brought Felix face-to-face with himself, and Felix didn't like what he saw. He had reached a crossroads in his life. Paul's preaching pierced his heart and troubled him to the point the King James Version says he "trembled." He then made a fatal mistake - he procrastinated. "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Felix Has His Followers Today

We are not talking about those who are ignorant of the coming judgment. We are talking about those who, like Felix, know the judgment is coming, but ignore it. They have convinced themselves to put it off and think about it later. They are not saying it will never happen, just not soon. They are like those of Amos' day who "put far away the evil day." (Amos 6:3) They are procrastinating, (putting forward until tomorrow), thinking about this vitally important subject.

What would it take to constitute a "convenient season"? What would have been such for Felix? Was he waiting for a time when it was "politically correct" to be a Christian? Was he delaying until he could become a child of God and it not cost him anything? If so, he was waiting for a day that would never come.

What would be a convenient season for you to obey the Gospel? Would that be a time when your family and friends all understand and support your decision? Are you waiting for a time when becoming a Christian is the popular thing to do? Perhaps you are waiting for that elusive time when your schedule slows down, and you do not have so much on your mind. Maybe you are delaying until living as a Christian is socially acceptable, so that you will not have to be different from the world. Rest assured, Satan will see to it that such a "convenient season" will never come.

What Felix literally said was, "When I find an opportunity, I will call for you." So many people have used that excuse! "When I get around to it..." "When I get the chance ..." The word for "convenient season" means "a time marked by suitable circumstances." When will circumstances be suitable for you to obey God? What would make a suitable circumstance? Satan will do all he can to keep such a time from ever coming. Meanwhile, you are neglecting the most important thing in your life - your soul. You do not have to reject salvation to lose it, you merely have to neglect it. "How shall we escape, if we *neglect* so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." (Hebrews 2:3, emphasis mine, PLG) You can go to hell simply by failing to get around to going to heaven.

Why is procrastination so dangerous?

First, there is the danger of facing God unprepared. While putting off your obedience, you could die or Christ could return, and either way, you will be caught unready. There is no way of knowing when either of these will occur. You

may convince yourself you have plenty of time, but you really do not know that. The newspapers daily are filled with obituaries of those who died unexpectedly. You have no guarantee of tomorrow. “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” (Proverbs 27:1) “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” (James 4:14)

Secondly, procrastination is dangerous because of the evil influence you may have on others. Your family and friends know if you have obeyed God or not. They know if you claim to believe in God, but have never obeyed. It is interesting that Luke says nothing of Drusilla’s response. Would she have been more willing to obey if her husband had? Obviously, we do not, and cannot, know the answer to that. But we do know that we can discourage others from obedience by our own inaction. Will your children grow up without the influence of a godly parent because you have chosen to ignore God? Are you discouraging your mate’s interest in spiritual things by your own negligence? Do you really want to explain that to God someday?

Thirdly, procrastination is dangerous because of the potential of developing a hardened heart. Every time you say “No” to the gospel, it becomes easier the next time. You can convince yourself that since nothing happened this time, obviously there must be more time. Eventually your heart can be so callused that the gospel can no longer penetrate. You can reach the state where your conscience is seared over with a hot iron. (1 Timothy 4:2) Truthfully, you may be as close to obeying God right now as you will ever be again. At some point you may have said “No” one too many times.

Fourthly, procrastination is dangerous because of the wasted years of service that could have been given to God. I have known many that have obeyed the gospel in the later years of life, but I have never known any who said they were glad they waited. Without exception they talk about how much they regret all those years they could have given service to Christ. We have a limited amount of time on this earth, and the Bible instructs us to use it wisely. We are to “redeem the time.” (Colossians 4:5)

Tragically, “later” can become “never.” History says that neither Felix nor Drusilla ever obeyed Jesus. Felix was called back to Rome two years later to answer charges of misconduct while in office as governor of Judea. He was barely able to avoid execution. Drusilla died in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in Pompeii in A.D. 79. Neither ever obeyed the truth. It is so easy to let time slide by. Days become weeks. Weeks become months. Months become years. All the while, you are telling yourself you are going to become a Christian “someday.” Someday the preacher is going to be called to conduct your funeral. Will he be able to comfort your family, or will you have put off your obedience until it was too late?

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” (Jeremiah 8:20) It would be tragic to pass the summer of life, come face-to-face with the

spiritual harvest time, and not be saved. Someday you will face “the judgment to come.” Will it be a time of joy or time when you call for the rocks to fall on you and the mountains to hide you? What will you say to the Christ who died for you? How will you explain your gross negligence in taking advantage of what he did? How will you explain why you never got around to obeying him?

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)

“For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2)

