

A LOADED QUESTION

By Luke Yates

Sometimes people ask me, “What does the church of Christ believe?” or “What do the churches of Christ teach?” Honestly, that’s a very loaded question because the church consists of the people of Christ (Acts 11:22; 1 Corinthians 12:27) and people of Christ have all sorts of different beliefs and teachings. When answering the question I try to clarify and say, “The Bible teaches . . .” or “God teaches that . . .” or “I am a Christian and I believe . . . but I cannot speak for every member of the church.”

The church is the pillar and ground of truth. (1 Timothy 3:15.) The church originated out of truth, but the church is certainly not the creator of truth. Because local congregations are autonomous (self-governing), one congregation of God’s people might teach something different than another congregation of God’s people. Sometimes those differences fall within the realm of opinion and God certainly

allows room for opinion on various items. (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8.) Other times those differences fall within the realm of God’s commands. (1 Corinthians 14:33-37.) If there is a difference in teaching on the very commands of God, then that is a problem. God doesn’t want such division and opposition in His church. (1 Corinthians 1:10.)

Regardless of what different local congregations teach, the fact that one congregation teaches one thing while another congregation teaches another thing does not change truth. God’s Word is truth (John 17:17), and God’s Word will always be truth (1 Peter 1:23-25), no matter what man tries to do to it. (2 Peter 3:15,16.)

You want to know what the churches of Christ teach? That’s a good question. Depending on who you ask, you may get some variations to that answer. Because of that possibility, I don’t want to know what the churches

of Christ teach. I want to know what the Christ of the church teaches! He has all authority (Matthew 28:18), not His church. He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28), not the other way around. He is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), not us. May we never get this reversed in our thinking.

Don’t blindly follow what any member of the church says. Test them to make sure what they believe and teach is in accordance with the Word. (1 John 4:1-6;

1 Thessalonians 5:21.) If you really want to know what each individual congregation of the Lord’s church should believe and teach, go back to the source. (Hebrews 5:8,9.) If you want to know what should be practiced in the church today, go see what was practiced in the church of the New Testament. (1 Corinthians 4:17.)

— Neosho, MO

Prayer And Salvation

By Joe Slater

Let us never discourage anyone from praying! By the same token, we must abide by Biblical teaching in regard to prayer, just as we would with any other subject. Unfortunately, extreme and unscriptural ideas persist about prayer.

Well-meaning brethren have affirmed that God will not hear any prayer uttered by one who is outside of Christ. They quote John 9:31, “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” Let’s ask first, “Who said this?” It wasn’t John or Jesus; it was a man Jesus had just healed of blindness. He was defending Jesus against the Pharisees’ charge that He was a “sinner.” What did the Pharisees mean by “sinner?” They didn’t mean “non-Jew,” but someone notoriously wicked, a rebel against God’s law. Jesus was no rebel, and the

formerly-blind man knew it.

Cornelius was outside of Christ, but he was no rebel, and God heard his prayers. (Acts 10:4;10:31.) Let’s be clear: Cornelius’ prayers did not save him! God sent an angel to tell him, “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.” (Acts 11:13-14.)

Saul of Tarsus was outside of Christ, but God heard his prayer. (Acts 9:11.) Here again, even three days of prayer didn’t save Saul. The Lord sent Ananias to tell him to “arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16.)

One false extreme says God doesn’t hear prayers of anyone outside of Christ. The other false extreme says that one becomes a Christian by

praying.

Don’t be an extremist! Stay with Scripture!

— Justin, TX

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:9-13.)

Old Paths

Vol. 44, No. 7 July 2020

“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

FAULTFINDERS AND SPECK-HUNTERS

By Bobby Key

On a near perfect day an enthusiastic young boy remarked to an older gentleman about the fine weather. The man was a chronic critic, an habitual faultfinder. He looked into the sky and tried to find a cloud to complain about. He was unable to find a single thing wrong. Finally, he grouched, “Young man, I’ll have you know this: weather can’t last forever!”

The critic is never living at his best. He is almost never happy. If he is driving on a highway that has pleasant scenery on one side and scenery less so on the other side, he chooses to focus on the unpleasant. If he is in the midst of a conversation in which both good and bad things are being discussed, he hears only the bad. He looks people over carefully, trying his best to find blemishes, warts, moles, scars, etc. And he usually finds exactly what he is looking for!

Jesus had a name for this kind of person: “Hypocrite.”

Yes, endless faultfinding indicates hypocrisy. It indicates that the critic has faults more serious than he discovers in others. He would do well to heed Jesus’ advice relative to this fault: “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:3-5.)

Don’t be a speck-hunter! - Deceased

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:1-8.)

OF SPRINTS AND MARATHONS

By Danny Boggs

A motivational poster says, “Success is not a sprint, it’s a marathon.” God has been telling us the same thing all along! “Run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1, KJV.) Have you ever watched a sprinter run a race patiently? Sprinters run in frantic, short bursts and finish quickly. Distance runners, on the other hand, run patiently and seize the occasional opportunities to gain ground. During the race they can analyze the effort they’ve made so far, plan their next moves, and even take refreshment on the way to the finish line.

Spiritually, do you feel like you’re running a sprint or a marathon? Paul once told the Galatians, “You were running well; what hindered you . . .?” (Galatians 5:7.) Running the Christian race like a sprint rather than a marathon cause us to develop either a loser-mentality or an inordinate pride. We need to set goals but our results may indicate neither success nor failure. We may hope to bring a certain friend to Christ this year. If our friend fails to make the decision this year to follow Him, have we failed? Or have we done well by planting the seed of the gospel?

In reality the race isn’t finished until we die or Jesus returns. Goals are good, so long as they are subservient to the aim or being well-pleasing to God in whatever we do. (2 Corinthians 5:9.) No one wants to run in vain. (Philippians 2:16; Galatians 2:2.) As we endeavor to share God’s will in the world, we must trust Him with the results. (1 Corinthians 3:6.) He is able to accomplish His good purpose through us, even when we may think that we have failed. He is even able to work good in the lives of the lost when our motives for sharing the gospel have become less than godly. (Philippians 1:15-18.)

As we continue in the race, we must determine as the Psalmist, “I will run the way of Thy commandments.” (Psalm 119:32.) Those who are guided by this way of wisdom are promised, “When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble.” (Proverbs 4:12.) Those who “wait upon the Lord . . . shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31.)

Success in Christian life and in the church is not a sprint; it’s a marathon. The ultimate success is dependent on God and not on ourselves. “It does not, therefore, depend on him who desires, neither on him who runs, but on God who shows mercy.” (Romans 9:16.) Let’s make it our goal to be pleasing and faithful to Him throughout life.

— Neosho, MO

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

By Danny Tunnell

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James came to the tomb of the crucified Lord to anoint His body with sweet spices. They were told by an angel, "Fear not, I know you seek Jesus. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said." (Matthew 28:5,6.)

It is imperative that we believe the Bible, that Jesus rose from the dead. Christianity collapses if the resurrection is rejected. Paul stated, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty." (1 Corinthians 15:14.)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential to the gospel message. Paul declared, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the 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 according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:1-4.)

History tells us about an interesting conversation that took place in the 1800's between Auguste Comte, the French philosopher and Thomas Carlyle the Scottish essayist. Comte declared his intention of starting a new religion that he believed would replace the religion of Christ. He said it would have no mysteries, and would be as plain as the multiplication tables. Carlyle replied, "Very good, Mr. Comte. All you will need to do will be to speak as never man spake, and live as never man lived, and be crucified, and rise again the third day, and get the world to believe that you are still alive. Then your religion will have a chance to get on."

We cannot be saved without believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul proclaimed, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9,10.)

A strong belief in the resurrection will help sustain us in our daily Christian walk. David Livingstone lived during the days of Comte and Carlyle. He was a Scottish physician and a strong believer in the resurrection of Jesus. He served as a missionary in Africa and is well known as an explorer. Dr. Livingstone died at the relatively young age of 60, but before his death he was able to address a group of students at Glasgow University.

Dr. Livingstone stood before those students, his body bearing the marks of his struggles in Africa. He had experienced severe illness 30 times, leaving him looking gaunt and haggard. His left arm, crushed by a lion, hung limp at his side. He talked about the hostility he sometimes encountered and the languages he could not understand. After describing some of his trials in Africa, he asked his students, "Would you like me to tell you what supported me all the years I served as a missionary in Africa? It was this, 'Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.' On these words I staked everything, and they never failed."

— Miami, OK

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

SHINE ON!

By Dalton Key

The darkness and decadence of our day reminds us of the sordid conditions, the "perilous times," described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3. Among the apostle's warnings, note these ominous words: "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13.) From all appearances, evil men and imposters are, even now, alive and active and intent upon both deceit and destruction.

We may as well admit the obvious: things are getting morally and spiritually worse nearly everywhere you look, with bigotry and inequity on one hand, anarchy and violence on the other hand, and both hands clenched in fists of fury, one against the other.

As God's children living in a benighted world fraught with ever-increasing levels of depravity, we seem to be sharing an unwanted kinship with Lot, of Abrahamic days, who while living in Sodom, was "oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)." (2 Peter 2:7,8.)

Lot's soul was tormented "from day to day" in "seeing and hearing," and he lived in a time before the internet, social media, and a 24-hour news cycle!

The sin problem is neither new nor novel. There was sin in the Garden of Eden. Grievous and widespread iniquity permeated the world during the days of Noah. Wrongness and wrong-doers have always been around and always will be until time is no more. The world has never been inclined toward God and godly behavior. As Jesus observed, mankind has ever loved darkness rather than light. (John 3:19.)

And yet our challenge involves more than merely calling out the darkness. We are called to shine forth as the "lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15.) If ever the world needed the light of Christ and the light of those wearing His name, that time is now. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21.)

Simply put Christian friend, regardless the darkness, shine on!



PETTING A PORCUPINE

By Dalton Key

another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31,32.)

And again Scripture admonishes, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8,9.)

And still again, "With all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2.)

In short, we are expected to get along with one another; to be kind and forgiving towards one another; to have genuine compassion for one another; to forbear with one another "in love."

Far too many people, and not a few brethren, feel rejected and lonely simply because they have spent a lifetime building walls instead of bridges. And is it any wonder why they find themselves so disconnected from everyone surrounding them?

When was the last time you tried petting a porcupine?

Any healthy relationship will thrive in an atmosphere of understanding and mutual forbearance, but continual, carping criticism does nothing but destroy. Pettiness and selfishness too often drive deadly spikes into the very heart of what would otherwise be a healthy and thriving union.

The Bible instructs, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one

OVERCOMING DEATH

By Milton Smith

Some time back, I was reading about a man by the name of G.B. Hardy. Mr. Hardy was a respected Canadian scientist who told how he was led to consider the question of whether or not it was really possible for a living soul to survive the physical death of the body. His quest led him to begin examining various religions of the world. His honest mission was to try to discover if evidence showed that someone had actually "conquered death." Mr. Hardy also wanted to find out if that someone who might have conquered death had also made a way for others to do the same thing. G.B. Hardy told how his earliest efforts at answering this question led him to examine the tombs of several prominent religious leaders. Unfortunately, he quickly discovered that the evidence showed conclusively that those tombs were still occupied.

When this respected scientist considered the sepulcher of Jesus, however, he quickly found out that this particular tomb had long been empty and that nobody in history had ever been able to produce the physical body

of Jesus that had once occupied the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Upon discovering that Jesus' grave was left empty, Mr. Hardy began to study the life of Jesus and found that Jesus had actually predicted His own resurrection from the dead and thus His victory over the grave. According to Hardy, he was even more impressed because Jesus had once made the promise, "Because I live, you will live, too." (John 14:19.) This honest scientist concluded that there was only one who had truly conquered death and opened the way for others to follow.

It is only Jesus who can reverse the curse of death. It was our Lord who once said, "I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead." (Revelation 1:18.) Jesus once said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25.)

Those who choose to believe and

We get along best when we're less selfish and more selfless; less critical and more understanding; less like the world and more like Christ.

And what is this, but the "golden rule" in practice? (Matthew 7:12.) We would have others show kindness to us. We would have others minimize our weaknesses and instead emphasize and encourage our strengths. Should we not then treat others as we would have them treat us?

It's always the right time to be kind!

respond to this wonderful promise will someday echo the words of the inspired apostle Paul, "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your pain?" (1 Corinthians 15:55.)

Do you believe this promise?

— Tulsa, OK

Old Paths

829 S. Rockford Ave.,
Tulsa, OK. 74120

On a nonprofit basis.
Published monthly and
supported by Churches of Christ
and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor
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