

DO YOU LOVE GOD?

By Bobby Key

Unrequited love is the story of man. It is heartbreaking to love someone dearly and not be loved in return, but the theme of unrequited love is a tragedy that runs through man's history upon the earth. Many of this world's most popular songs have dealt with the theme of unfaithful or unrequited love.

God has always loved His people. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.) "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (1 John 4:10; Romans 8:37.)

The history of God's dealing with man has been a one way street. The love of God which has been poured out

without measure has not been returned to any great degree. God has given us life upon the earth. He has showered us with many blessings. He has provided us with food, clothes, homes and friends. And most of all the Son of God loved man enough to die for him. Man was without God and without hope. Christ died that man might have his sins forgiven - that man might find a home in heaven. But man hardly said "thank you" for the salvation that Christ brought.

The story of unrequited love is the most disappointing story in the history of the world.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another . . . We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:11,19.) We show that we love God when we love each other. We prove our love for Him by keeping His

commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3.)

God loves you.

Do you love God?

"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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge." (Romans 8:38,39; Ephesians 3:17-19.)

A GODLY EXAMPLE

By Hershel Dyer

The city of Joppa, now a section of Tel Aviv and called Jaffa, has been a seaport from ancient times. The prophet Jonah took passage on a boat from Joppa to go to Tarshish. It was here that the great Israelite liberator, Judas Maccabeus, set fire to a fleet of enemy ships in the 2nd century, B.C., avenging the deaths of some 200 Jews. As a port of incoming and outgoing merchandise, one can readily imagine the morally debauched persons who were attracted to it.

In this city, during the early days of the church, there lived a woman by the name of Dorcas. She was a disciple of Christ and is described as a woman "full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." (Acts 9:36.) Since clothing was made by hand in those days, she must have spent much time and labor in making garments for the poor.

Outside the circle of the church in Joppa and the widows with their children whom she clothed, the world might never have known about Dorcas. Her notoriety came after she had become sick and had died. Some of

the brethren rushed away to the nearby city of Lydda and brought the apostle Peter back to Joppa. Her subsequent resurrection became widely known so that "many believed on the Lord." (Acts 9:42.)

Here was a woman who sought no fame or glory for herself. She just went about, day by day, rendering needed services for those who could not help themselves.

No doubt the tears of joy in the eyes of poor widows, the sweet smiles on the faces of their innocent children, were all the reward in this world that she desired. If there had been newspapers, we doubt that the deeds of Dorcas would have been noticed.

This godly woman just brightened the little corner where she was and God did not forget what she did. Her good and godly example lives on.

"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." (Hebrews 6:10.)

— DECEASED

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:9, 10.)

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

THE BIBLE TOWERS ABOVE ALL BOOKS

By Milton Smith

One of the primary things that demonstrates the superiority of the Bible over other religious books is the amazing quality of its teachings. A few examples follow. The so-called "holy books" of Hinduism teach everything from evil gods to strange ideas about reincarnation. Buddhism's religious books actually contain teachings and ideas that are atheistic. Shintoism teaches nature worship, ancestor worship, and emperor worship. Zoroastrianism promotes such ideas as polytheism, dualism, and often even appears to dignify hatred. Confucianism, like Shintoism, elevates ancestor worship, and much like Buddhism, promotes certain atheistic concepts. Islam's main religious book (the Koran) promotes such disturbing ideas as fatalism, hatred, the degradation of women, and aggressive violence. Such violent actions have dominated much of the news for many years now.

Compare the ideas and concepts above to the main doctrines taught in the Bible. Only the Bible presents God as a Being who is holy, kind, gracious, and very interested in the well-being of mankind. The bible promotes universal brotherhood and the indescribable worth of all human beings. Mankind is dignified and presented as possessing immense value. Man's origin, purpose, and eternal destiny are all clearly presented within the pages of the sacred Scriptures. The concept of love dominates the pages of the Bible - the love the Father has for mankind, the love Jesus displayed when He went to the cross, and the love that God demands from us, His creation. Matter of fact, Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to love God and the second greatest is that we should love one another.

But nothing separates the Bible from other religious books more than the amazing story of the One who came to offer eternal life through His own blood. The Bible alone portrays Christ as being so loving that he left his home in heaven, became incarnate in human flesh, and died vicariously for the sins of lowly mankind. In a way, all religions present human beings as helpless creatures. But only one - Christianity - tells the story of the loving Savior who came to redeem us. And because of the central story of this Book of Books (i.e. the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), its final pages end with a glimpse of an abundant, eternal life in a world yet to come.

The Bible towers above all other religious books for one, simple reason: its author is God!

— Tulsa, OK

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12.)

SIN IS COMMITTED, NOT INHERITED

By Mark Lindley

The old doctrine of Original Sin is still alive. Every now and then, one might hear a preacher state that we all have "Adam's nature," and that we are "born in sin." The doctrine is referred to as Original Sin or Total Hereditary Depravity. Many denominations of our day believe it.

The doctrine suggests that after Adam sinned in the Garden, he passed on his "sin nature" to all people. Every baby is born "defiled in body and spirit," and is "totally depraved," not because the baby has sinned but because Adam sinned.

Some believe that Psalm 58 teaches this doctrine: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stops her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord." (verses 3-6.) Based on this passage some have said that "babies speak lies" because they have inherited "Adam's nature."

Let me assure you that babies are pure, innocent, and are not born in sin! Further, babies have never inherited a "sinful nature" from Adam! This is an ugly, false doctrine that should be opposed by all who respect God's Word.

Well, what about Psalm 58? I affirm that Psalm 58 does not teach Original Sin as seen by the following: 1) The passage is describing David's enemies, not innocent babies; 2) The passage says that the ones under consideration "go" astray, not that they "are born" astray; 3) Newborn babies cannot talk, much less "speak lies"; 4) The ones David describes have "teeth," but babies do not have teeth; 5) Neither Adam nor Adam's "nature" is mentioned in this passage; 6) This passage is an inspired exaggeration, designed to show the wickedness of David's enemies who were also God's enemies. Obviously, the language is not to be taken literally. Babies do not "literally" go astray "as soon" as they are born; rather, wicked men make wicked choices early in life and go astray. That is all the text teaches. No passage teaches that babies are born sinners!

Adam did not have a "sinful nature." God created him pure and sinless. But Adam chose sin. This is precisely how people become sinners today. We choose sin and therefore commit sin. "Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4.) Sin is committed, not inherited.

— Ripley, MS

WHY DID JESUS CRY?

By Richard Dent

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35.) What do we remember about this verse? Let’s see . . . oh yes, it is the shortest verse of the Bible. But why did Jesus cry? Let us explore this a bit further. Jesus loved people. He loved the poor, the sick, those afflicted by age, children, and even sinners (not the sin, but the persons). He performed miracle after miracle to prove his love for people. Jesus was even willing to go the cross for us. But he especially loved a man named Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. (John 11:5.)

He had spent some time in their home no doubt. Remember that He had no house of his own. He once said that foxes have holes and birds have nests but the son of man has not a place to lay his head. (Matthew 8:20.) Maybe He had been given some rest at Mary’s house. Yes, Jesus loved that family.

We remember that Lazarus got sick and word was sent to Jesus about that sad fact. Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus was asleep (John 11:11) and that He needed to go to him to awaken him. His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” (vs 12.) Then Jesus told them that Lazarus was dead and the he was glad for their sakes. (vs. 14-15.) Why?? Because Jesus knew what He was going to do.

As they came closer to the home of Mary and Martha they saw many people trying to comfort them at the loss of Lazarus. Martha said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (vs. 21.) Just a little later, Mary came to Jesus and said the same thing. (vs 32.) Jesus was caught up in the emotional expression of pain and anguish on the faces of Mary and Martha and the people surrounding them. Scripture states that Jesus “groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” (vs. 33.)

We know how the story ends. Lazarus was brought forth from the burial tomb. He lived to laugh and love his friends again. That would include Jesus.

Does Jesus shed tears over you and me today? Perhaps, when He sees our weaknesses, knows our sins, or knows when we lose a loved one. Would Jesus shed tears for you or me? I remember the words of that old gospel hymn, “When the road is rough and the ways is dim, Jesus knows, Jesus cares.” In my mind I can still imagine the tears Jesus shed over Jerusalem. (Matthew 23:37-39.)

Yes, John 11:35 is a special scripture that shows our Lord loves us, just like He loved Lazarus and his sisters. Let us remember that God so loved the world that He gave Jesus to be our Savior so that we might have eternal life. (John 3:16.)

— Liberal, KS

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

(EDITOR’S NOTE: This issue of OLD PATHS completes 45 years of continuous publication. I was just 19 years old when the paper began. How time flies! To those of you who have made this work possible through your ongoing and generous support, thank you! Your help with this little paper has made all the difference in keeping us afloat. I realize that many of you choose either year’s end or a new year’s beginning to contribute as you are able, so allow me say in advance and once more: Thank you! Your assistance is very much appreciated!)

FROM VICTIMHOOD TO VICTORY!

By Dalton Key

Even though Paul’s life was anything but easy, he never portrayed himself as a victim, but rather as a victor because of Christ living in him.

Following his conversion to Christ, the apostle’s life was fraught with countless examples of opposition, affliction and painful persecution. He wrote the Corinthian brethren recounting several examples: “. . . in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in hunger and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28.)

A lesser man might have complained of his fate and given up the fight. But Paul was made of sterner stuff. While imprisoned in Rome, his words to the Philippians ring forth with amazing faith and faith-based optimism. “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus . . . Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice!” (Philippians 1:21; 3:13,14; 4:4.) The zenith of the apostle’s positivity is revealed in the powerful words of Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

This powerful perspective runs counter to the message put forth by today’s modern, convention wisdom. Paul’s attitude appears unthinkable naive to the insulated intellectuals dominating our airwaves presently. Did Paul not realize - could he not own - his victimhood? Was he unaware of just how unjustly he was being treated? We can imagine today’s talk show hosts sobbing over Paul’s pitiable story while insisting he “open up” and “vent his rage.”

Paul’s view of things may have been unusual and may still be out of the ordinary, but his mind-set squarely agrees with heaven’s will. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.)

We would all do well to follow Paul’s example! May 2022 see us, in faith, moving from victimhood to victory!



A CENTURY AFTER JONAH

By Joe Slater

Most who read this remember from childhood about Jonah being swallowed by the great fish. The reluctant prophet finally preached repentance to Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire. The Ninevites repented, and the city was spared from destruction.

Unfortunately, people seldom heed the word of God for very long. The Assyrians returned to their wicked ways, so the Lord announced their doom through His prophet, Nahum, about a century after Jonah’s time.

The Lord warned the arrogant Assyrians of another city He had destroyed due to its sin. “Are you better than No-Amon that was situated by the river, that had the waters around her, whose rampart was the sea, whose wall was the sea?” (Nahum 3:8.)

No-Amon was the Egyptian city of Thebes and had only recently been destroyed. Despite having allies to protect her, she perished because God brought her down.

Assyria couldn’t rely on the past better behavior of her ancestors. Her current conduct condemned her! “Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. It’s victim never departs . . . There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses – they stumble over the corpses – The mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries.” (3:3-4.)

Why did God wait a century? “The Lord is slow to anger.” (Nahum 1:3.) He gave them more than enough time to repent. Let us thank Him for His longsuffering, but never presume

upon it, for “the day of the Lord will come!” (2 Peter 10.) Our ancestors’ faithfulness will not save us either. We will be judged according to our own works. (Revelation 20:12-13.)

— Justin, TX

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8,9.)

CHOICES

By Danny Tunnell

Songwriter Harlan Howard said this about country music, “It’s three chords and the truth.” There certainly is a ring of truth to some country music songs.

A country music fan told me about a song written by George Jones that had really resonated with her. The song, “Choices,” begins with these words: “I’ve had choices since the day I was born. There were voices that told me right from wrong. If I had listened, no I wouldn’t be here today, living and dying with the choices I’ve made.”

God has given us free will so we can make good choices. The truth is, if we make wise decisions now, we will have a better future.

The freedom God has given us doesn’t mean we can do whatever we want, whenever we want, with no negative consequences. The truth is, we reap what we sow. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Galatians 6:6,7.)

Many want instant gratification, with little thought about what is best in the long term. Stop and think: “If I do this now, what will it mean for me later on?”

Remember that every choice you make is a seed you sow, and every seed comes with some kind of harvest or consequence. Every seed sown produces after its own kind. (Genesis 1:11.)

A lot of times a man’s future is what he’s done in the past. He sowed the seed and then blames someone else for the harvest!

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9.) As we watch people, many seldom get weary in bad doing! In well doing it is easy to say, “I could spend my time more wisely doing something else.” God would not have said, “Don’t get weary in well doing,” if He didn’t know it’s easy to get tired of doing what is right. It is easy to get worn down and think, “There is not use in doing this.”

In conclusion, we are much better off tomorrow if we pay the price for discipline today. Let’s face reality

- some poor choices people make can lead to devastating results, even destroying their lives.

— Miami, OK

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