

## HARDENED HEARTS

By Danny Boggs

The wise man said, “The way of the transgressor is hard.” (Proverbs 13:15.) It’s still true, though we don’t always believe it. Often we feel more the way the Psalmist did: “Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence.” (Psalm 73:12-13.) People spit in God’s face, get away with it, and even prosper. We try to live right and wonder whether the Lord even notices!

Why do some people live with such neglect of their spiritual natures? The answer is hard hearts. And why do Christians envy the ungodly? Same answer. “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; while it is said, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.’” (Hebrews 3:14-15.) Sin dupes God’s mockers into believing that pleasure is their lot for life. Sin makes Christians think it is better to feel good than to do good.

The most notorious hard heart belonged to the Pharaoh who refused to release God’s people from bondage. The Bible makes twenty references to his calloused condition. It sometimes says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (e.g. Exodus 8:32), while in other cases it tells us that “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. (e.g. Exodus 9:12.) It appears God exacerbated the stubbornness Pharaoh harbored in his heart. It took ten plagues, the last being the near simultaneous death of every firstborn son in Egypt, including Pharaoh’s, before the wicked ruler would bow to the will of the Almighty. One hard-hearted man, blinded by his own arrogance, brought untold suffering on a whole nation that depended on him.

Jesus asked His own disciples more than once whether their hearts were hard. (Mark 6:52; 8:17.) Could a person spending 24 hours a day in the presence of the Lord have a hard heart? Jesus says so.

God will not force us to enjoy Christian life. Rather, He attempts to persuade us with love and truth. When

will we stop ignorantly envying sinful life? Only when we recognize how wonderful life in Christ really is! “This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way . . .” (Ephesians 4:17-20.)

Christianity is no bed of roses, but the hardship it brings is far different from the messes that result from fighting against God. Suffering which results from doing right is educational, limited, and promising. (Romans 5:1-5.) Suffering which results from doing wrong is mere misery when it doesn’t help us see the need to repent. “Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.” (Proverbs 28:14.)

— Neosho, MO

## THE SON OF GOD ON A CROSS?

By Mark Lindley

It is a fact of history that a man named Jesus died on a cross. This fact is supported by the New Testament and by the secular writings of early historians. No one can successfully deny that Jesus of Nazareth lived and that He died by crucifixion.

However, many who believe that Jesus died on the cross do not believe that Jesus was a divine being. Some affirm that it does not make sense that “the Son of God” would die on a cross. The reasoning is that if Jesus possessed divine power, then He could have saved Himself, and thus, according to some, He must not have been the “Son of God.” To them, it just does not make sense that a divine being would die in such a horrible manner.

But such reasoning is flawed and does not consider why it was necessary for Jesus to die for the sins of the world. Because all have sinned and come short of God’s glory, it was necessary

for a “sinless” person to redeem fallen man. (Romans 6:23.) Every person who has sinned needs a Savior; and he who needs a Savior cannot be one.

Does Jesus meet the qualification of “sinless?” Notice what the Scriptures teach: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15.) “For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.” (1 Peter 2:21-22.) Yes, Jesus, and He alone could qualify to be the Savior because only Jesus was without sin.

It is true that Jesus possessed supernatural power, and that He demonstrated such power by healing the sick, enabling the blind to see, calming storms, and by raising the

dead. Yet He freely chose to lay down His life for all. Jesus said, “Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” (John 10:17-18.) The all-powerful Christ chose not to exercise His power to save His life.

It may never make sense to some that it was necessary for Jesus to die for us. Some did not understand in the first century: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” (1 Corinthians 1:23.) Nevertheless, His death was absolutely necessary. Only by trusting and obeying Him can we be saved. Jesus is the way!

— Ripley, MS

# Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

## THE LESSON OF AHAB

By Dalton Key

“But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.” (1 Kings 21:25.)

King Ahab was far from perfect. He wasn’t the best of men and certainly wasn’t the best of kings. During his time atop Israel’s throne, Ahab’s crimes ranged from idolatry, lying, and defiance of God, to the unspeakable act of murder itself. Yet the Bible asserts that Ahab was not alone in shouldering the blame for these misdeeds. He shared blame with his wife, Jezebel. The biblical account levels no accusation of evil against Ahab before his marriage to this Phoenician princess. Scripture says she stirred him up.

The case of Ahab is not unique. Consider the stirred up mob who cried out those infamous words so long ago concerning our Lord. “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” they shouted. (Luke 23:21.) Here was a crowd of otherwise good people who had, in just a few days’ time, been twisted into a frenzied fit of hate and violence. What happened between the time, less than a week before, when they had cried out “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21:9), and now, near the time of the cross, as they scream, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”?

They had allowed themselves to be stirred up.

People have always been willing to do and say things when stirred up by others that they would never imagine doing ordinarily. From the legendary lynch mobs of the old west to the out-of-control protests dominating so much of our more-recent news cycles, it is evident that, as Paul Harvey was fond of saying, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” People are still, as ever, easily stirred up.

Even God’s children can be stirred up. The wonderful, blood-bought body of Christ is comprised of the best people the world has to offer. The Lord’s church is made up of disciples, men and women, who are striving day by day to become more and more like the Master they serve. They shine as lights in a world of ever-increasing darkness. Taken as a whole, the family of God on earth is a varied collection of good, well-meaning people trying to do right and be right in a world gone wrong. But these same people (you and I!) can easily lose our moral and ethical moorings as we find ourselves “stirred up” by friends, family, and brethren; by complete strangers on social media; or even by agenda-driven politicians and fast-talking news pundits.

A cause considered right and righteous never justifies wrongdoing. Kindness must never be sacrificed on the alter of truth. Brotherly love and compassion must never be forsaken in the name of moral or religious zealotry. Bullying, name-calling, cutting, hurtful sarcasm - whether face to face or over the internet - are beneath us, and should ever stay beneath us, as we strive to be like Christ. Let’s learn the lesson of Ahab.

—I need not agree with your view of things, friend;

Your choices may differ from mine.

I don’t have to break, I don’t have to bend,

But I do always need to be kind. - (Dalton Key)

## OUR WORDS

By Joe Slater

Jesus and the inspired New Testament writers had far more to say about our speech (words, tongue) than about baptism or the Lord’s Supper. That takes nothing away from the importance of immersion or communion. It simply exposes the need to pay heed to what we say.

Is this a salvation issue? Listen to Jesus: “*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*” (Matthew 12:36-37.) “Idle” literally means “without work.” We speak idle words when we’re too lazy to do the work of thinking first. We carelessly “shoot from the lip!”

We would do well to “start brain before engaging mouth.”

It’s hard work to control our speech. James observed that “*no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*” (James 3:8.) Though we can’t tame it, we must control that terrible tongue! “*If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.*” (James 1:26.)

Paul exhorted, “*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*” (Ephesians 4:29.)

Apply that to your keyboard too! Take a second look before you send that post on social media. Are you glorifying God when you post vulgar words? Surely your vocabulary isn’t so limited that you can’t make your point without using crude language!

“*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*” (Colossians 4:6.)

— Justin, TX

“For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:43-45.)

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. . . If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” (James 1:19,20,26.)

**JUST PASSING THROUGH**

By Milton Smith

Albert Bromley wrote a hymn some years ago entitled, *This World Is Not My Home*. This beloved and popular hymn begins with the words, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through."

Truer words were never written!

In reference to those faithful saints of old, the Hebrew writer tells us, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13.)

We are all strangers in this world! Both Paul and Peter described our physical bodies as nothing more than earthly "tabernacles"; in other words, temporary, earthly dwelling places for our eternal spirits.

Because earth is filled with such unpleasant things like sorrow, sickness, pain, aging, and death, this world is not suited as our eternal home. Even earthly joys and pleasures are transient. This world is unable to provide us with that eternal bliss that the human spirit longs for. Job did not desire to always live in this world. (Job 7:16.) David spoke of someday "flying away." (Psalms 55:6.) Paul desired to depart this world to be with Christ. (Philippians 1:23.) Peter looked to the day when he would "cast off" his earthly tabernacle. (2 Peter 1:14.)

Jesus, Himself, has gone to prepare an eternal abode for the faithful. (John 14:2-3.) What a wonderful thought to know that this eternal home will be free of those things that bring so much suffering to us in this life. Sorrow, pain, darkness, and death will be left outside the gates of our new home. Matter of fact, nothing will be permitted to enter into our future abode the might corrupt it. (Revelation 21:27.) Peter describes our heavenly home as "an inheritance in corruptible, and unfilled, that fades not away." (1 Peter 1:4.)

It is in this future home that the redeemed of all ages will live and eternal life will be possessed. The next time this world might get you a little down, just remember the beloved words of that old hymn:

"This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through."

— Tulsa, OK

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." (Philippians 3:20,21.)

## EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

**IF WE'RE NOT BEING READ, WE'RE NOT TRULY READING**

By Dalton Key

As lovers of Scripture, we must do more than merely read the Bible; we must allow the Bible to read us.

We emphasize regular, systematic Bible reading. And well we should. But this should never be seen as the end of it all but rather as just the beginning! Anyone can mechanically read the bare words of the Bible text - after all, the Bible is written on a third-grade reading level and has its average word consisting of fewer than five letters - but of what use are these God-breathed words if we are not changed and made better by them?

David spoke of his ardent affection for the Holy Scriptures, describing them as more desirable than fine gold, and then added these important words: "In keeping them there is great reward." (Psalm 19:10,11.) Israel's sweet singer was not content with merely reading or knowing what God had said; he saw the benefits in applying God's word to his own life.

As we peer through the portal of this book into the very mind of the Almighty, we see ourselves as well, as in a mirror. As we compare our reflection with God's perfect will, we see the true self, both as it is and as it is intended of heaven to be. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25.) Whether we apply God's word or not, one thing is certain; as we honestly read it, we are being read by it, just as our faces are seen by a mirror.

The Hebrew writer makes a similar observation. "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. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12,13.)

May we never become guilty of seeing the Bible as little more than a reference book, a philosophical tome, or yet another dry description of human history. This book must be allowed to pierce us, to read us, to discern us, and ultimately to transform us. It is, after all, God's book.

Never forget: if we are not being read, we're not truly reading.

**EVERY MEMBER IS NEEDED!**

By Richard Dent

room where Jesus was preaching.

In the gospel account of Mark, we read about a man who was a paralytic. (Mark 2:3-12.) This man was unable to come to Jesus by himself so he required assistance from others. Fortunately, he had some friends who were able to help him. The Bible attests to this man's faith and determination to see Jesus. His friends picked up the bed on which he was lying and carried him to the house. Not just one or two men could have brought the paralytic to Jesus. It took all four friends carrying their corner to get the job done.

But wait! The story becomes even more intriguing as we find that there were so many people in the house that the four men could not get their stricken friend inside. In Mark 2:4, we find that his friends lifted the paralytic, bed and all, to the top of the roof of the house and then lowered him into the

Jesus was impressed with the men's faith and said to the paralytic, "Sons, your sins are forgiven you." (Mark 2:5.) What a great story of faith and persistence! The man immediately arose and took up his bed as Jesus directed him to do and went out from the presence of them all. Then they glorified God saying, "We never saw anything like this before." (Mark 2:11-12.)

Friend, do you know that there are many in any given community who will never find the truth or hear the words of Jesus about salvation without our help? If any of those four friends had dropped his corner of the bed, the paralytic man could not have found Jesus. As a Christian, have you dropped your corner or are you carrying it to the best of your ability to

serve in the vineyard of our Lord?

Every member is need to shoulder the responsibility for helping the Lord's work progress as it should. We need Bible School teachers. We need parents that set a faithful example for their children to follow. We need men who will dependably serve in a number of ways such as leading public prayers or leading songs in worship. We need men who will aspire to serve as elders and deacons in the Lord's work. Let us all do our best to carry our corner.

— Liberal, KS

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58.) "Whatever your hands finds to do, do it with your might." (Ecclesiastes 9:10.)

**THE ONLY WAY**

By Danny Tunnell

When we "tolerate" something we are allowing its existence.

Religious freedom in America allows many different beliefs to exist. Certainly Christians should be civil and gracious toward non-Christians, but that does not mean we should affirm their false beliefs about salvation. We should speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15.)

Jesus is the only source of salvation. Jesus didn't say, "I am a way." He didn't say, "I am one of the ways." (John 14:6.) Peter said, "There is no other name." (Acts 4:12.)

What Jesus said and what Peter said may seem too exclusive for some folks. True Christianity is not exclusive, it is inclusive. Notice the number of times the word "whoever" is used in regard to salvation. (John 3:16; 6:40; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:8,9; Revelation 22:17.)

Missionaries for centuries have gone to countries where the people worshipped many different gods. As they talked about the need to obey and follow Christ, they had to make it clear to their listeners that they would need to turn from all other gods and turn

to the true and living God revealed in the scriptures. It appears that in our modern day, pluralistic society in America, where so many are mistaking affirmation for tolerance, we need to be doing the same thing.

Preachers, Bible teachers, personal workers, we must not assume that everyone in the community, Bible study, or even in the congregation, believes what we believe about Jesus being the only way to salvation.

— Miami, OK

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