

“IN THE LORD I TAKE REFUGE”

By Danny Boggs

We're all worn out by the violence. One news account after another of senseless death and destruction hits us before we've worked our way through the last one. Our hearts break for the people experiencing it up close and personal. Our minds puzzle over the people who perpetrate it. Insecurity creeps in. Could someone run over us or our loved ones on purpose with a truck? Could our fun getaway be interrupted by gunfire? Could someone invade our peaceful place of worship with murderous intent?

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? Psalm 11 answers: “In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to your mountain, for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?’ The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in

heaven; His eyes see, His eyelids test the children of man. The Lord tests the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let Him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulphur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold His face.”

David suffered the terror of madmen. He was no coward. Voices of despair urged him to run away, to flee like a bird to a mountain. But he would not shirk his responsibilities, nor would he forsake his trust in the Lord.

Our culture suffers the consequences of a sustained campaign against the value of human life. The glorification of self-absorption has distracted us from the real needs of others. Murder of the most helpless has been sanctioned in the highest reaches of human government. People have mindlessly and even eagerly been

entertained by the bloodshed on the big screen and in the virtual world. It has come home to roost in our society and especially in the minds of deranged men. The one who has been a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44) seems to be having his way.

God is not pulling the strings. People are not puppets. To the core of His being He hates the wicked and the one who loves violence; He will make sure the havoc they wreak revisits them for eternity. Meanwhile, He can use the trials to fine-tune faith. God longs for the upright to behold His face; they will.

Where is God while the foundations are crumbling? The Lord is in His holy temple, on His throne in heaven. The end of the news report is not the end of the story. Take refuge in the Lord.

— Neosho, MO

RARELY MENTIONED

By Danny Tunnell

This may be the most unpopular subject to preach on, yet it is mentioned in the Bible numerous times. We hear the word in conversation regularly. It is used in swearing a lot. Some use it to describe their lives. An alcoholic described his life as “a living hell.” A woman married for only two years said her home was a “hell on earth.”

Those descriptions of life may be quite accurate. You see, hell is a place where God isn't. A life not honoring God and His word may seem like hell. (1 Samuel 2:30.) But if we renew our mind daily with the word of God, life can seem like it's “heaven on earth.” (Romans 12:2.)

Because it has not been preached, few people seem to believe in hell anymore. Since Jesus talked about it, we need to talk about it too.

The New Testament says a lot about hell, and Jesus said the most. He said, “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28.) He talked about some being cursed and cast into everlasting fire,

prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41.) He said, “Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Matthew 5:22.)

Undoubtedly, some are experiencing a “hell” of their own making here on earth. But the Bible speaks of a hell in the future. Jesus called it “everlasting punishment” and “outer darkness,” a place where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. He called it a “furnace of fire.” (Matthew 13:42.) He called it a place “where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” and a “place of torment.” (Mark 9:44; Luke 16:24.) And God doesn't want anyone to go there. (2 Peter 3:9.)

When we depart this life it gets really interesting. For the unbeliever this life is the best it ever gets. But for the believer this life is the worst it ever gets. The next life is far better for the believer. (Philippians 1:23.) From now on it only gets better. But for the unbeliever it only gets worse and worse. (Matthew 25:46.)

God has done everything He can to keep us out of hell. He sent His Son to die for us. (John 3:16.) Unfortunately it's popular to not believe God's report. But when people leave this life, they're going to find out that the Bible is true. Many will be sad because they chose to deny God's word, and treat God like He is a liar. They chose to believe something else, thus robbing them of the greatest things in life and eternity.

By the grace of God we won't do that. We choose to believe the glad tidings and all the good things our good God has given us in Christ.

Jesus' own words underscore the importance that people know there is a heaven to be gained, and a hell to be avoided. He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13,14.)

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

CHRISTIANITY IS SELFLESS

By Mark Lindley

True Christianity is selfless. The term selfless means “having no concern for self; unselfish.” The Scriptures teach that selfishness will prevent one from being a follower of Christ. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24.)

Practicing self-denial is not easy. The general, human tendency is to be more concerned about pleasing ourselves than pleasing the Lord and others. However, Paul exhorts, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.” (Romans 15:1,2.)

Christianity is built upon the sacrifice of our selfless Savior who was more concerned about others than himself. Was it not his selflessness that inspired him to come to this world of sin and suffering and to die on the cross? One old, religious hymn suggests: “He could have called ten-thousand angels, but he died alone for you and me.” The Bible teaches that Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:8.) No greater example of selflessness could be given than the one Jesus gave when he allowed sinful men to nail him to the cross.

Selfishness and Christianity simply do not belong together. Selfishness goes against fundamental principles of Christianity and shows a lack of spiritual maturity. Children have to be taught to share their toys and control themselves when they do not get their way. In other words, children must be taught to develop selflessness. The same is true for children of God, for Christians. Those who desire to follow Christ must work to overcome a self-centered attitude and learn to be more concerned about pleasing the Lord and serving others, rather than pleasing self.

We can demonstrate selflessness by giving to God the time it takes to worship and serve him, instead of claiming we are just “too busy.” Husbands and wives need to be selfless in their marital relationships, always considering the needs and feelings of their mates, instead of thinking only of self. So many problems which arise in the church would be solved if all members would resolve to do what is best for the church instead of what is best for self.

Indeed . . . true Christianity is selfless.

— Ripley, MS

Do You Take The Bible Literally?

By Joe Slater

Many would give a knee-jerk response, “Of course I do!” They suppose that to say otherwise would mean they don't believe the Bible is God's inspired, authoritative, infallible word. But is that really the case?

Jesus admonished, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction.” (Matthew 7:13.) Do you know of anyone who thinks He had reference to literal physical gates and roads? Similarly, Revelation 7:1 refers to “the four corners of the earth.” And yes, there are still a few “flat-earthers” who take that literally; but practically everyone understands it correctly as a figure of speech. That takes nothing whatever away from the inspiration, authority, or infallibility of God's word!

But now, does that mean we should take nothing in the Bible literally? Is everything a figure of speech? Of course not! It isn't all that difficult to distinguish between figures of speech and things to be taken literally. Most of us do it routinely in conversation and with books other than the Bible. A good rule of thumb is: “A passage should be taken literally unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise.” Such a compelling reason might be that it would contradict other passages, or that taking it literally would involve an absurdity.

Far from upholding the inspiration of Scripture, taking the Bible's figures of speech literally would actually detract from inspiration. Scripture does not contradict itself, nor does God present absurdities as though they were reality.

— Justin, TX

“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 of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12.)

“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 Timothy 3:16,17.)

“Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:97,105.)

DO YOU LOVE GOD'S WORD?

By Milton Smith

Bible study is not optional; it is expected of every Christian.

A common phrase found numerous times throughout the Old Testament is the promise that Jehovah God will show mercy unto those who love Him and "keep His commandments." Deuteronomy 30:16 speaks of the duty of His people to "love Jehovah" and desire to "walk in his ways, keeping His commandments, statutes, and judgments." Most all are familiar with Jesus' words in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commandments." But Jesus also said in John 15:10, "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love." It was the aged apostle John who wrote in his first general epistle that all Christians should love God and keep His commandments. (1 John 5:3.)

Clearly, God expects us to keep His commandments! But how can this be done if we choose to remain ignorant of God's Word? This is where good Bible study becomes a must. I'm often asked what things might be helpful to insure profitable Bible study. Whatever my suggestions might be worth, I'm happy to offer them if they might be of any help. To begin with, any study of the Bible must be done reverently. Respecting the Bible as the Word of God is an absolute must. Any irreverent, haphazard attempt to study God's Word will always fall short of what is needful. The student must always have a desire to learn. This means that the reader must approach the Bible with an open mind and a willingness to do what the Book says to do; even if it means giving up previously held ideas that are not found in the Bible - no matter how cherished those ideas might have been.

Prayer should always accompany good Bible study. This does not mean that God will give us a "new" revelation as we study (for such is not promised to us today). But we can pray - as I have often done - that God might provide us with clear minds and pure hearts as we venture into our study. It is always important to consult other scriptures that might relate to a particular subject that the reader is studying. For example, the gospel writers will often give complimentary information regarding certain events in the life of Christ. One should honestly desire to understand what a passage is saying, love the Word of God, respect it for what it teaches, and live by those teachings. After all, Jesus once said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge . . . in the last day." (John 12:48.)

May each of us study our Bible every day and respect it for the great truth that it contains!

—Tulsa, OK

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul . . . More to be desired are they than gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (Psalm 19:7,10.)

EDITORIAL . . .

GOD IS RIGHT, REGARDLESS HOW WE FEEL

By Dalton Key

An ancient passage updated to better suit the whims of today's culture: "Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you continue in following your heart, you are my disciples indeed; and you shall know, from deep within yourself, the path which you should follow, and that path will make you free.'"

I think I'll stick with the original version.

Movies and television shows have been promoting - for decades now - the same, tired trope. When faced with a major decision, a life-changing moral or ethical crossroads, the story's star is encouraged to "look within yourself" and "follow your heart." Everything will magically work out for the best if only conventional wisdom is cast aside (along with any accompanying moral or legal restrictions) and the character merely follows his or her heart. After all, as we so often hear, "the heart wants what the heart wants!"

Yes, I know. That is Hollywood, a place of dreams where anything is possible; where inconveniences like reality and consequences can be altogether ignored. The sad fact, though, is this: Hollywood's fictional fantasy has become accepted by many of us as real-world fact.

This cavalier attitude toward truth has slowly crept into society at large, and more disturbing still, into the Lord's church. While yesteryear's sermons emphasized the absoluteness of truth, the authority of the Scriptures, and the necessity of having a "thus saith the Lord" for all matters of faith and practice, such preaching is now considered antiquated and out of touch with the needs of today's hearer. Sincerity, tolerance, and acceptance are the new coins of the realm. We're told the "what" of the Bible is less important than the "why" which motivates us; that "feeling spiritual" or "finding one's own path" matters more than bending the knee to the biblically-expressed word of God.

Such spiritual narcissism may tickle the itching ears of the self-obsessed, but runs counter to the consecration and self-denial taught by the Lord. (Matthew 16:24.)

The words of Jeremiah, though largely dismissed and forgotten of late, ring true nonetheless. "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." (Jeremiah 10:23.)

This truth may sting but it remains true: our hearts are not at all reliable as a guide to life or behavior. (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 3:5,6.)



NEVER FORGET: THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

by Bobby Key

Several years ago a denominational preacher hurled his Bible across the church building before the eyes of his startled congregation. He then shouted, "If this book is going to keep me from Jesus Christ, there goes my Bible!"

I wondered what this man could have possibly known of Jesus Christ apart from the Bible. Did he have access to a more trustworthy source than the Bible itself? Could the man have looked into his own heart and seen a better Savior revealed there than he could have seen on the pages of the New Testament? Surely this preacher had become vain in his reasonings and his senseless heart had become darkened. He was afraid the Bible would stand in the way of some new revelation of truth.

We can not help but pity such an exhibition and pity any preacher who

could stoop to such cheap theatrics.

The Bible is certainly the word of God, the medium through which the will of God is revealed. By it the man of God is completely furnished to every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15-17.) We can know nothing of the real Jesus outside of what the Bible says about Him. We have no further revelation today. (Jude 3.) The Lord has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3.)

There is not one solitary thing a man needs in religion that he cannot find in the Bible. It is indeed all-sufficient.

It is true that the Bible does not flatter man, but condemns him as a sinner. However, the Bible also reveals a way of escape. Christ came to enable us to escape the servitude of sin and the devil. He came to make us

free. The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. (Ecclesiastes 12:13.)

As I see it, the only thing left for me to do is accept God's sin offering and completely submit myself to the will of God - and all I know about God's will is what I read in the Bible. (1929-2018)

"Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life. The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law." (Psalm 119:49-51.)

STRANGE TIMES INDEED!

By Dalton Key

We live in strange times! The more we learn, the less we seem to know . . . about most everything! Things that used to matter no longer do, while moral and cultural absurdities are now taking center stage!

If Frederic Maitland's age-old observation is correct, if "the essential matter of history is not what happened but what people thought or said about it," we can't but be concerned for those of us living through these days of societal uncertainty. Reliable information is giving way to disinformation, subterfuge, and outright lies.

And all the while, as we struggle to keep our heads above the lashing waves of lies, we find ourselves purposefully distracted from what really matters.

Simply put, life's most serious questions - questions of moral, ethical, and spiritual concern - are not being acknowledged, must less addressed, by those among us who wield the highest levels of influence. While we obsess

over questions of health, safety, and equity; while we concern ourselves with fads, fashions, and the debated fungible nature of genders, we, as a people, are slowly but surely rotting away from the inside out.

Like the self-congratulatory cannibal who thought himself civilized after learning to use a knife and fork, we seem content to live lives of self-delusion. "They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:14.)

The progress of any society depends more on its measure of character than on its economic, academic, political, and military weight all considered together. Any people ignoring or belittling such fundamental tenets as honesty, morality, and a common respect for the rule of law does so to its own peril.

Truth matters. Integrity matters. Biology matters. And the Golden Rule still matters.

That which was true for Solomon's day is no less true for ours: "Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34.)

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