

GOD CANNOT LIE

By Ron Stough

Because we have become so accustomed to dishonesty and half-truths expressed by men and women of much renown, many tend to read the Bible with the same attitude with which they listen to these voices.

Too often we think God didn't really mean what He said, or else He will change His mind when the final moment comes.

Titus 1:2 promises, however, that God cannot lie. Thus, everything that He has told us in His word is true. The Bible is a dependable book, even in a world of undependable men.

In the 50th chapter of Jeremiah, God promised his people that their captor, Babylon, would one day be desolate, barren land. At the time the promise was made, Babylon was almost an invincible city with walls

85 feet thick, 100 gates, and 250 towers.

Later, though, an army did come down and conquer Babylon, causing it to become a wasteland.

Time after time God promised things in His word that man thought impossible. Each time, however, man was the one who was wrong; God's promises were always fulfilled.

The Bible is the book to live by because its author is dependable. It is our only source of man's beginning, his purpose, and his destiny.

— Duncan, OK

"For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He

swore by Himself, saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.' And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end to all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast . . ." (Hebrews 6:13-19.)

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN READ ONLY THE BIBLE?

By Danny Tunnell

The Bible indicates that every Christian should be reading the Scriptures. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2.) "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 furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17.) "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105.)

Every Christian should attempt to master the Bible . . . spending hours, days, and years trying. He should meditate on God's word. "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law does he meditate day and night." (Psalm 1:2.) "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then you shall make your

way prosperous, and then you shall have good success." (Joshua 1:8.)

Some have suggested after the Bible the next most valuable book for the Christian is a good hymnal. There is no question that many of the great hymns also teach fine theology.

Unfortunately, it is possible to live a long time and not learn much. Some have observed that by the age of twenty-five most people have formed their habits and even lost their sense of wonder! Whether that is true or not, I don't know, but it is something to consider.

Without a proper amount of good reading we really limit ourselves. We deny ourselves of other people's observations, and that loss can be enormous.

The big problem in much of the world today is learning how to read. In some places it is finding something to read. In our culture we are overwhelmed with printed material, so we have to be selective.

We must decide what not to read.

The Bible is different from all other books. It is God's word. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit Who resides within every believer. "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16.) "Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19.)

We need to pray, as did the Psalmist, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." (Psalm 119:18.)

What we read enters into our hearts and our minds and our souls. It is very important that we read the best and nothing but the best. We must practice sharp discipline in our reading habits. We can read other things, but the Bible should be our first choice.

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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*"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)***ARE YOU A LEGALIST?**

By Joe Slater

Words like legalist, legalism, and legalistic are not used in Scripture. Therefore, calling someone a legalist amounts to little more than name-calling unless you define the term. What is a legalist, anyway? What does it mean to be a legalist?

The Pharisees of New Testament days are often called legalists. They elevated human tradition to the status of divine law. For instance, they condemned Jesus' disciples because they did not perform a ritual washing of their hands before eating. (Matthew 15:2.) This had nothing to do with hygiene. It involved very little water and was intended only to remove ceremonial uncleanness. God's law for the Jews said nothing about it. The tradition itself was harmless, but making it mandatory and condemning others for not observing it was legalism. Legislating where God has not legislated is sinful!

Sometimes the Pharisees' traditions even contradicted God's word. For example, they invented a tradition by which they evaded their obligation to honor their aged parents with material support. Jesus rebuked them, saying, "You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." (Matthew 15:6.) That is legalism.

Legalism in the New Testament also included the belief that one could earn or merit God's favor by law-keeping. The parable of the Pharisee praying in the temple illustrates that error. (Luke 18:10-14.) He proudly recited a list of good things he had done. Surely he deserved God's approval, right? Wrong! While all of us ought to strive to obey God, let us never forget that even our best efforts fall short. We always need God's mercy and grace.

I have been called a legalist for insisting on careful study and application of God's word. For example, I pointed out to a friend that "a bishop must be . . . the husband of one wife." (1 Timothy 3:2.) In my friend's church, bishops are required to be celibate. When I pointed out the difference, he said I was being legalistic! Yet it is the tradition of his church that has made the word of God of no effect!

If careful study and application of the Scriptures makes one a legalist, then I plead guilty as charged. I guess I would rather be a legalist than an "illegalist!" In the final analysis, though, searching the Scriptures and following them closely, while relying on the grace of God and the blood of Jesus to wash our sins away, simply is not legalism.

— Justin, TX

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

By Dalton Key

God seeks rule over more than just the body of man; He desires the heart as well.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1,2.) We offer to God our bodies as living sacrifices, conjoined with, or perhaps more accurately, resulting from the renewing of our minds.

This inward affection for God is referred to by Christ as "the first and greatest commandment." (Matthew 22:38.)

Heaven's message has ever sought to operate on the heart of man. Peter's inspired message on Pentecost "cut to the heart" of those who heard it. (Acts 2:37.) The word of God, "sharper than any two-edged sword," pierces "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.) "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." (Psalm 19:7.)

Without a sincere change of heart, outward expressions of obedience are both hollow and ineffective. We are "set free from sin" and become "servants of righteousness" after obeying God's teaching "from the heart." (Romans 6:17,18.)

A new birth results in a new life, but the new birth itself concerns the spirit. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) We "have purified our souls in obeying the truth." (1 Peter 1:22.)

Conversion, to be genuine, must include the whole man. While our behavior must manifest fruits of repentance, while we must live right and do right, we must first freely offer to the Lord our hearts and souls and minds. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15.)

Ours is more than merely a regimented religion of doing; it is one of being and becoming. "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." (Matthew 23:23.)

The only way God makes a Christian is from the inside out.

BODY AND SOUL

By Bobby Key

Today my heart beat 103,369 times. My blood travelled 12,000 miles. I breathed 23,040 times. I inhaled 438 cubic feet of air, ate over five pounds of food and drank nearly one-half gallon of water.

I perspired 1.43 pints. I produced 2400 watts of energy. I spoke at least 4800 words and moved 750 major muscles. My nails grew .00046 inches, my hair grew .01714 inches, and I exercised millions and millions of brain cells.

My, am I tired!

Is it any wonder that David said, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well." (Psalm 139:14.)

Modern medicine, with its wonder drugs and organ transplants, has in many cases provided additional years to life, but death still remains an unavoidable fact. The brevity of life and the natural decay of the body cannot be arrested. Man must die! The body will eventually go back to the earth. "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19.)

In death there will be the separation of our body from our soul. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26.)

Jesus warned, "But I will show you whom you should fear; Fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes I say to you, fear him!" (Luke 12:5.) The soul is of more value than the body. The soul of man will outlive the body.

The soul will never die!

This being true, don't you feel that we should give more thought to the soul? Is it well with your soul?

Why not obey the gospel now?

— Miami, OK

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens . . . So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-8.)

Editorial . . .

SAVED BY WHAT?

By Dalton Key

Imagine for a moment a man struggling to stay afloat as he is seen flailing against the strong under-currents of a roiling river. He desperately needs help. As he fights for his life, another man appears on the river's bank holding a life preserver connected to an ample length of rope. The man on the bank throws out the life preserver and shouts instructions about taking hold of the rope and hanging on. The man in the water does just that. He makes use of the preserver and is pulled safely to shore. He has been saved from a death by drowning.

Now consider this question: what saved the man from drowning? Could you say he was saved by any one thing alone? In a sense, he was saved by the kindness of the man on the river bank. Yet had this man not demonstrated his kindness the victim would still have been lost. Did the instructions given save him? Yes, to the extent they were followed. What about the life preserver and the rope? Did these save the man? Yes, but not by themselves alone. The drowning man must have required some measure of faith in the reliability of his savior or he wouldn't have followed the man's instructions. He was thus saved by faith. The man on the bank pulled him in, so the act of pulling saved him. Further, it could be said that the man saved himself in that he did what he was told to do. In short, the drowning man's salvation was the result of a combination of many things, none of which ALONE saved him.

Man is lost and drowning, as it were, in a sea of sin. God, in His grace, has provided His own Son, that through Jesus we might be saved. Yet we must follow certain God-given instructions. Our salvation from sin, like the physical salvation of the man mentioned above, is the result of a great many things, none of which will save us ALONE and apart from the others.

Scripture attributes our salvation from sin to grace (Ephesians 2:5), mercy (Titus 3:5), love (John 3:16), Jesus (Acts 4:12), blood (Revelation 1:5), the death of Jesus Christ

(1 Corinthians 15:3), the Holy Spirit (John 3:5), the Bible (James 1:21), preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21), our selves (Acts 2:40), faith (Romans 5:1), repentance (Acts 2:38), confession (Romans 10:9,10), and baptism (1 Peter 3:21.) Does the Bible contradict itself in assigning so many different prerequisites to our salvation? No. Salvation is the result of the combination of all these elements working together on our behalf. To attribute salvation to any one of these, excluding the others, would simply not get the job done. Such would be a violation of common sense as well as biblical interpretation.

May we ever believe, obey and preach "the whole council of God." (Acts 20:27.)



RACISM, PREJUDICE, AND THE BIBLE

By Mark Lindley

Most Americans are somewhat familiar with the Declaration of Independence. Perhaps the lines we remember best are the following: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

In view of recent, tragic killings in our nation - all the killings - one might wonder if some have forgotten that "all are created equal." We need to be reminded.

God's word teaches that we all have common origins. The first man was Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45); the first woman was named Eve because she would be the "mother of all living." (Genesis 3:20.) All people have descended from the first man and woman. Paul stated that God made of "one blood" all nations of men to dwell on the earth. (Acts 17:26.) That we are all of "one blood" indicates

that we have common origins.

It was not until the time of Genesis chapter 11 that different languages and nationalities developed. (Genesis 11:1-9.) God caused the people of that day to be scattered upon the earth, and He confused their language. However, it was never God's intention for men to begin discriminating against one another. Rather, God commanded his people to love their neighbors as themselves. (Leviticus 19:18.)

Not only does the Bible teach that we have common origins, but also that we have a common fall. Scripture reveals that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23.) Red, yellow, black or white, all have sinned and need the forgiveness of God.

The Bible makes it clear that God loves all and sent His Son to die for all. (John 3:16.) Therefore, there is equal opportunity for all to be saved. Paul wrote: "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ

Jesus . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28.) This text shows what is taught throughout the Bible: that God is no respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34-35.) Since God does not show partiality, neither should we.

Racism and prejudice are ugly and sinful before God. James set the record straight when he wrote, "But if you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors." (James 2:9.) Yes, prejudice is a "sin!"

Let us resolve to love and respect all people everywhere, recognizing that each has been created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26-27.) Further, God's people everywhere should pray for our country that we might turn to God before it is too late.

— Ripley, MS

HOPE BEYOND THE GRAVE

By Milton Smith

In the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed the wonderful victory over death that Jesus Christ has provided for His own. Here, the inspired apostle writes those immortal words, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" But what is the source of our victory over death? Paul quickly adds, "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Nothing brings more comfort to mankind than to know that Jesus Christ has conquered death. The Hebrew writer tells us that Jesus came to "destroy the one (Satan) who had the power of death . . ." (Hebrews 2:14.)

Mahatma Gandhi, the famous Hindu nationalist and reformer of the early 20th century, seemed to have such a control over his life that he appeared to fear nothing. He once boasted that Hinduism "entirely

satisfies my soul and fills my whole being." Having studied the Christian religion, he claimed that he found more solace in the philosophic writings of the Hindu religion (the Upanishads) than in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But shortly before his death, Gandhi wrote these sad words: "My days are numbered. I am not likely to live very long - perhaps a year or a little more. For the first time in fifty years, I find myself in the slough of despond. All about me is darkness; I am praying for light." Gandhi - perhaps the most famous Hindu leader who ever lived - saw his confidence failing him as he began to face the inevitability of death.

Death is a dark specter that haunts the lives of many people. But for the child of God, death is not viewed as an end, but as a glorious new beginning of something much better. As Paul faced his own inevitable death, he wrote: "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 those who love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8.)

Gandhi desired, but could not find that special light that would give him hope. Paul had found that light; it was hope beyond the grave that is only to be found in Jesus Christ.

— Tulsa, OK

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