

ETERNAL LIFE

By Milton Smith

Logic would seem to tell us that the title of this article should express the desire of virtually every human being on earth. Amazingly, polls show that many people admit that they spend very little time thinking about eternal life, much less “seeking after it.” Many will express the attitude that if there really is life after death, then they will “find that fact out” after they die and leave this world. In other words, such people do not truly and actually seek “seek after” eternal life.

Every person born into this world enters with a soul that is free from any sin. The concept that we inherit the guilt of sin from our ancestors is not taught in the Word of God. In fact, the Bible clearly teaches us that “the soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.” (Ezekiel 18:20.)

To enjoy the bliss of Heaven after we leave this world we must “seek after” eternal life while living our earthly lives. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from the condemning guilt of sin, and Hebrews 5:9 tells us that Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto “all those who obey Him.” Paul lists several things that will cause a person to lose his soul and fail to inherit eternal life in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. John teaches the same thing in Revelation 21:7-8. If one does not seek after the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse him of his sins, those sins will indeed keep him out of Heaven.

Jesus has provided a way for the faithful to inherit everlasting life. It is our duty to seek after this precious gift by obeying Him. How sad it is that many do not necessarily deny this fact as much as they choose to simply ignore it! Solomon summed

up man’s duty to God in clear and unmistakable fashion: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.)

Eternal life is real. It is the wise person who will fervently seek after it.

— Tulsa, OK

SOUND ASLEEP!

By Joe Slater

No, this article isn’t about sleeping in church! Actually, it’s about sleeping in prison – the night before you are to be executed.

Herod Agrippa I (not to be confused with his son, Herod Agrippa II, before whom Paul gave his defense) had already “killed James the brother of John with the sword.” (Acts 12:2.) It made the Jews so happy that “he proceeded further to seize Peter also.” (v. 3.) Herod planned not to kill Peter, though, until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. No need to distract from the holiday with a nasty execution!

If you were in Peter’s shoes, what would you do? It is night, and Herod plans to kill you tomorrow. How about making a run for it? That would be challenging, since you are in prison, chained between two soldiers, with two more soldiers guarding the door.

Maybe you would feel like pacing the floor. The soldiers

between whom you are chained would probably veto that idea. Praying would be appropriate – you could do that while stationary, and silent prayer wouldn’t even disturb the soldiers.

Could you do what Peter did? I marvel that, within hours of his scheduled execution, “Peter was sleeping.” (v. 6.) Since you and I know the rest of the story – how Peter was rescued by an angel of God, escaped from prison, and lived to preach the gospel many more years – we can relax. But Peter didn’t know this would happen; in fact, when it did happen, Peter thought at first that it wasn’t real, that he was just having a vision. (v. 9.) How, then, could he simply sleep? What does this show us about Peter?

First, he obviously was at peace both with himself and with God. Previously, he had suffered imprisonment and beating for Jesus and for the gospel’s sake. He knew

Stephen had been stoned by the Jews, and that Herod had already murdered James. Peter appears not to have been worried; severe anxiety usually makes sleep impossible. Execution would only let him be with Jesus again a little earlier than he otherwise expected.

Second, Peter was a far different man from just a decade earlier. Herod Agrippa I came to power in AD 44. Back in AD 33, a panicked Peter had denied three times that he even knew Jesus. Now he calmly confronted what was, from a human perspective, certain and imminent death.

May each of us grow, as Peter did, so that we face the trials of life, and even death, with calm assurance.

— Justin, TX

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

RESPECT FOR GOD’S NAME

By Dalton Key

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him.” (Psalm 89:7.)

Our God is no myth. He is not the product of fiction. The God of heaven is not dead as some cynics have mockingly taunted. He is not even sick!

And God is certainly no “good buddy” to joke with or about. He is not some sort of tottering, grandfatherly Santa Clause to be snickered at or ridiculed as the object of profane humor. His name deserves to be held in reverence.

Though God is not visible to the eye, as flesh cannot see spirit, He exists nonetheless, permeating the very universe which we call home, and which He Himself created. (Genesis 1:1.)

Such a God should not be taken lightly. His name deserves better than to be bandied about as conversational filler or vulgar exclamation. The God of all things both deserves and demands better; He is due our profound reverence. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7.) “Profane My holy name no more.” (Ezekiel 20:39.)

God is both known and unknown, knowable and yet unknowable. Every person with ability to read or reason can know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in His creation, in the Sacred Scriptures, and in His Son, Jesus Christ. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3.) The boundless power, infinite love, and eternal nature of God can be realized as they have been revealed. Yet to completely comprehend, to fully fathom, the awesome might and majesty, the goodness and grace of God, is far more than our finite, mortal minds can begin to grasp, much less fully comprehend. God is above us, beyond us and altogether Sovereign. “Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.” (Psalm 115:3.)

No one will rise high, no one will truly be a success, while jeering at sacred things. He who makes light of God, profaning His name by using it in a vulgar or flippant manner, reveals less about God than about his own obvious moral and spiritual bankruptcy. May we all, both in mind and manners, give God the reverence He alone is due. “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.” (Psalm 33:8.)

AMERICA’S GREATEST DEFENSE

By Bobby Dockery

The Bible insists that there is a connection between the moral vigor of a nation and the survivability of a nation. The strength of any nation lies in the goodness of its people.

“Blessed is the nation, whose God is the Lord.” (Psalm 33:12.)

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34; Goodspeed’s Translation has: “But sin is a people’s ruin.”)

History is full of examples of nations which fell because they forgot God and failed to walk in His ways. Because of their national iniquity, God allowed Israel to fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. The wickedness of Assyria, in turn, led to their fall to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. The nation of Judah fell to these same Babylonians in 586 B.C., and, once again, God said it was because of sin. Mighty Babylon became so steeped in corruption that God overthrew it in 539 B.C. Eventually Rome, the mightiest empire the world had known, collapsed when its burden of wickedness became too great to bear.

And America????

Righteousness is America’s greatest defense; sin is our window of ultimate vulnerability.

Do you love your country? Do you want to do something good for it? Then do all you can to help turn America’s heart back to God!

— Fayetteville, AR

(As Alexis de Tocqueville once famously observed: “America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”)

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider.’ Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. (Isaiah 1:2-4.)

YES, WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE !

By Bobby Key

If the Bible is completely beyond man's grasp, how could one expect to know God and be saved eternally? Doesn't it stand to reason that the God who gave us the revelation by which one is drawn to Him (John 6:44,45), and by which He will one day judge us (John 12:48), enable us all to understand that revelation?

Otherwise, where is the hope of salvation for ordinary people like you and me?

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4.) Only through study can one "present himself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15.)

Much of the failure to understand lies in our unwillingness to understand. There is that failure to see which comes from a refusal to see. A man can deliberately shut his mind to truth which he does not wish to see; he can be deliberately dense toward teaching which he does not wish to accept. Nicodemus was like that. (John 3.)

If a man does not wish to be changed, he will deliberately shut his eyes and his mind and his heart to the power which can change him. When the invitation is offered by the Lord, some of us could say if we were honest, "No thank you; I am quite satisfied with myself as I am, and I don't want to be changed."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6.) This is God's promise to all men everywhere. The common people still hear Him gladly. (Mark 12:37.)

Yes, we *can* all understand God's message. But we must have a genuine desire to understand.

— Miami, OK

"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull, Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." (Matthew 13:4-16.)

Editorial . . .

SALVATION AND THE WHOLE COUNCIL OF GOD

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 drowning death.

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 they save the man? Yes, but not alone. And 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 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 too many different prerequisites to our salvation? No. Salvation is the result of the combination of all these spiritual ingredients working together on our behalf. To attribute salvation to one of these, and one ONLY, excluding the others, would not get the job done. Such is 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.)

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Men, make plans now to attend the Old Paths Men's Retreat, September 14-16, on the site of Flint Hills Christian Camp, just outside Sedan, Kansas!)



THE ABILITY TO DO

By Danny Tunnell

Many Christians are familiar with the Greek word "dunamis" which is often translated "power" in the Bible. The word "dunamis" is used 120 times in the New Testament.

Jesus told his disciples to wait in the city of Jerusalem, until they would be endued with *power* from on high. (Luke 24:49.) We read in Acts 1:8 that they received *power* when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

The gospel has this power as well. Paul declared in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the *power* of God unto salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

A definition of the word "dunamis" which is translated "power" so many times is simply, "the ability to do." It is the Greek word from which our English word "dynamite" comes. So it is not

unusual to hear preachers and Bible teachers say, "This is explosive power, like dynamite!" But that may be looking at things upside down. Let me explain.

Dynamite was named after the Greek word, but the Holy Spirit and the power of God were not named after dynamite. Dynamite was discovered about 200 years ago, but this Greek word which we often translate as "power" goes back to the time of Christ. It means "ability to do" - that is all, just the "ability to do."

It could be illustrated this way. A man picks up a violin. He gets nothing but squeaks out of the instrument. Another man picks up the same violin and plays sweet and beautiful music. Another illustration: one man steps into a boxing ring and can't even lift his hands. Another fellow walks into the ring and has the

power to do. So he wins the fight.

It is the man with the ability to do who plays beautiful music or wins the fight.

The word "power" spoken about in the three passages we cited is the "ability to do." It is the ability God has given the Christian to be victorious.

Understandably, many Christians read the word "power" in the Bible and associate that power with dynamite. They are looking for explosive power! They believe they have that power by talking loudly or cranking up the microphone! Often they look for the sensational or the spectacular. They overlook the simple definition of the word, the "ability to do."

By looking at the word "power" as the ability to do, it is easier for us to trust God for that power.

— Miami, OK

WHICH YOKE DO YOU WEAR?

By Danny Boggs

"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30.)

We don't have to suffer under sin's wearisome load anymore! Jesus gives rest.

But what is a yoke doing in the middle of an invitation to rest? A yoke pairs two beasts of burden. It fastens around their necks so they can plow together. A yoke usually symbolizes submission and bondage. A yoke doesn't typically suggest rest.

The truth is, every one of us is locked in a yoke before we come to Jesus. Jeremiah wept in behalf of his people: "My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by His hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; He caused my strength to fail." (Lamentations

1:14.) Everyone is either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. (Romans 6:16.) When we are yoked to sin, the yoke is iron, and sin does not pull its share of the load.

Trudging through life without Christ is the worst of burdens.

As we keep working toward the end of life's row, the choice is not whether to be yoked, but which yoke to wear. We can stay yoked to sin and its dead weight, or we can be joined to Jesus. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He is a workhorse!

Drawing on His power for the work, and enjoying His gentle and humble company until the work is finished, we can rest in that yoke.

— Neosho, MO

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and do for His good pleasure.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:12-15.)

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