

For Or Against?

By Joe Slater

My friend and fellow-preacher Larry Scarth made this insightful statement: “The Christian is the greatest argument either for or against Christianity.” We have not the slightest doubt of the importance of the Bible. We fully appreciate the evidence for Christ from history. The fact remains that few people read and study the Bible regularly, and fewer still acquire accurate information about Jesus from history. Multitudes, however, observe the behavior of people professing to be Christians. The saying is true: you are the first Bible many people will read.

Most often we focus on the negative possibilities. Can a misbehaving Christian distract and discourage non-believers from studying the Scriptures and considering Christianity? Certainly so! Worldly folks may or may not appreciate it when Christians live by

God’s standards, but they expect it; and they notice when we don’t. God hasn’t called us to conform to the world, but to be transformed. (Romans 12:2.)

Christians can be a powerful reason for unbelievers to give Jesus and His gospel a fair hearing. Peter urged his readers to “(have) your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12.) That is, in the day God visits them with the gospel, see Acts 15:14. Peter appealed to Christian wives to follow this same course with their unbelieving husbands: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of

their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” (1 Peter 3:1-2.)

A godly example surpasses nagging every time!

Is your life an argument for or against Christianity?

— Justin, TX

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16.)

THE REALITY OF HELL

By Mark Lindley

Many who profess to be Christians no longer believe in hell. There was a time when preachers warned about the horrors of hell, but pulpits in our day are silent on the subject. In our permissive and tolerant culture, one dare not speak about the reality of hell. Anyone who does might be considered ignorant and judgmental. Hell is considered to be nothing more than a myth believed by uninformed people of the past. It seems no one of our day needs to repent of sin; no one is lost, and not one is in danger of going to hell.

However, Jesus was not too “sophisticated” to warn about hell. Consider this warning: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28.) The Lord also warned, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed,

rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched.” (Mark 9:43.) According to Jesus, hell is real and it is a place of eternal punishment.

Not only did Jesus warn about the reality of hell, but he also made it clear that many will go there. “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.) Please notice that “many” follow the broad way which leads to “destruction,” while “few” travel the narrow way that leads to “life.” It is not difficult to understand Jesus’ point: many people will be lost in hell.

Such teaching is not pleasant to hear, but ignoring it will not make it go away. In fact, the very concept of hell is intertwined with God’s plan to

save sinners. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10.) But why come to save the lost? One thing that is terrible about being lost is the danger of going to hell. If there were no hell to avoid, there would be no purpose for the cross. Jesus died to save sinners! (1 Timothy 1:15.) One cannot remove the concept of hell from the Bible without destroying God’s plan to save sinners.

Many choose to believe in heaven, but refuse to believe in hell. However, the same Bible that teaches the reality of heaven is the Bible that teaches the reality of hell. Consistency is a rare jewel to those who believe in heaven, while rejecting hell. In warning of the judgment to come, Jesus spoke about heaven and hell: “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46.) Please think about it!

— Ripley, MS

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

JUST ONE!

By Flavil Nichols

During the War Between the States a young woman learned the truth and obeyed the gospel. Her sweetheart, J. H. Halbrook, was a confederate soldier. He was captured by the Union Army and kept a prisoner in Michigan until the war was over. He was then given a ticket to Nashville and \$2.50. From there he returned to Centerville, Tennessee, found what was left of his home and family, and was reunited with his girlfriend. Then, they were married.

Mr. Halbrook’s new wife studied the Bible with him and he soon became a Christian. He thought the truth was so good and so simple that he began to teach and baptize many of his friends and neighbors. Then he began to preach, but he recognized his need for more training, so he enrolled in Mars Hill Bible School and was taught and trained by T. B. Larimore.

Upon completing his studies at Mars Hill, Mr. Halbrook and his wife chose to move farther south rather than going back to Tennessee, and they went into the counties of Walker, Marion, Fayette and Lamar counties in Alabama. Among his many converts were Charley Alexander Wheeler and his wife. Mr. Wheeler, after obeying the gospel, soon began preaching to others. He started more than 100 congregations and baptized more than 6000 people.

But wait! The story does not end there! One of those 6000 baptisms was my father, the late Gus Nichols. And under my father’s preaching 12,000 people were converted to Christ! And how many of those 12,000 began to preach “the glorious gospel of Christ?” No one can know the exact number, but I personally know several who did.

I am one whom he baptized and encouraged to preach. And under my preaching about 3000 have been baptized. Among that number a few have gone on to preach the gospel.

Only eternity will reveal the total results of the teaching of that one girl over 150 years ago. But at least 21,000 people have already become Christians through this single thread in the fabric of her influence.

“Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37), for you are important! Just one can be very influential.

IT ALL STARTS WITH A SEED THAT IS SOWN

By Danny Tunnell

God could have taken us on to heaven at the moment we were saved. But he left us on this earth for a purpose. We are to be salt and light and we are to tell others about Him.

When farmers sow seeds they know a crop will be produced. When Christians plant seeds, they, too, will produce a crop. Many times we are just watering a seed that someone else has planted. Paul said, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” (2 Corinthians 9:6.)

The analogy Paul used works in any area of life. If you are a student, studying is sowing. Don’t expect to reap a good grade if you don’t sow, if you don’t study. In whatever job you do, don’t expect to get a promotion or a raise if you are not a hard worker. That’s sowing and reaping. If you are married, don’t expect to have a good marriage if you are not kind, humble, forgiving, and willing to work through situations.

Many Christians would love to win souls. “He who wins souls is wise.” (Proverbs 11:30.) Winning souls is the reaping part, but you won’t reap anything if you fail to sow something, or if you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully you will also reap bountifully.

There are some simple laws about sowing and reaping. Number one, you reap what you sow. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7.) Every farmer knows if you sow corn you will reap corn, not wheat or some other crop. If you plant the gospel, you are going to reap souls. You reap what you sow. If you sow kindness you are likely to reap kindness. If you sow forgiveness you are likely to reap forgiveness. The principle works in all areas of life.

Point number two, you reap after you sow. Can you imagine a farmer waiting for a crop to come up without having planted any seeds? You have to plant before you harvest. Nearly every Christian wants to win people to Christ, but many never plant anything. We won’t reap a harvest if we don’t plant anything.

Let me ask you a question straight out: How much do you plant? Is everyone you meet a potential member of God’s kingdom?

Number three, you reap more than you sow. If you plant an apple seed, you don’t get back an apple seed. You get a tree that produces many apples. You always get back more than you sow.

Our job is to plant the seed and water it, but God gives the increase. People have a free will and they can reject Christ or accept Him. If we plant the seed, share the gospel, that’s all we can do. God does the rest.

We really don’t know how many people will be saved down the road when we plant one seed. That person may become a Christian and influence someone else to become a Christian who wins thousands to the Lord. But it all starts with one seed that is sown.

— Miami, OK

YES, YOU CAN REMEMBER THE BIBLE!

By Dalton Key

When asked what learning was the most necessary, Antisthenes replied, "Not to unlearn what you have learned."

The Greek philosopher had a point. Remembering what we have already learned, what we should already know, is imperative. But it can also be frustrating. In the words of one wit, "A man's memory is what he forgets with."

Consider the Bible. Many of us have heard and read and studied the Bible for years. It has been a regular and important source of our instruction. Yet how much of this marvelous book do we remember? How many of the great events of the Old Testament can we recall? How many rich, New Testament texts can we locate? Can we show someone the plan of salvation as laid out in Scripture?

Paul writes of the gospel, "by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:2.) The King James uses the words, "If you keep in memory what I preached unto you." How well do we "keep in memory" the sacred truths of God's word.

You say you can't remember the Bible? Don't blame your brain. Researchers have calculated the brain's storage capacity to be in the range somewhere between 10 terabytes and 2.5 petabytes. One terabyte is equal to 1000 gigabytes; one petabyte is equal to 1000 terabytes. Without getting into matters of higher mathematics, let's just say that the brain has plenty of space for whatever Bible knowledge you'd like to store there.

Yet you still say you can't remember the Bible?

I wonder? could it be that we remember what we have a deep and intense interest in? Don't we tend to remember best what we love most and spend the most time with?

The Psalmist wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Psalm 119:11.) God's word was not merely in his home, or on his shelf. It was in his heart. And how was this possible? "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97.) The Psalmist remembered what he loved!

Shouldn't the same be true for us?

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

BOOK OF BOOKS

By Dalton Key

Many of history's most celebrated personalities have been lavish in their praise for the Bible:

"The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known to the world." - Charles Dickens

"It is impossible to govern the world without the Bible." - George Washington

"The Bible is worth all other books which have ever been printed." - Patrick Henry

"I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this book upon reason that you can find and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man." - Abraham Lincoln

"There is no other book with which the Bible can be compared, and no other reading that means so much to the human race. It is the support of the strong and the consolation of the weak; the dependence of organized government and the foundation of religion." - Calvin Coolidge

"There is no other book so varied as the Bible nor one so full of concentrated wisdom . . . As a nation we are indebted to the Book of Books for our national ideals and representative institutions." - Herbert Hoover

"Within the covers of the Bible are the answers for all the problems men face." - Ronald Reagan

Jesus referred to God's word as truth. (John 17:17.) The Hebrew writer affirmed the Bible's power. (Hebrews 4:12.) Peter declared the writers of Scripture as having been "moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21.)

And who would dare argue with the Bible's clear assessment of itself: "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.)

Are you a regular Bible reader?

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word . . . 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 119:11-16, 97,105.)



A GENUINE DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND

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.

"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 13:14-16.)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6.)

"CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS"

By Milton Smith

In discussing the duties of children to parents, the apostle Paul writes in Colossians 3:20, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." The Greek word for "children" in this passage is a very general word for offspring. It is a word for anybody, of any age, who is still under parental guidance. It applies to the teenager as much as to the 5-year-old. The Biblical use of the word tells us that a person stops being a "child" when he establishes his own independence separate and apart from the ruling hand of his parents.

As long as a child is under the care and oversight of the parents, he is to "obey" them "in all things."

Today, the phrase "parental authority" is almost anathematized. In some educational circles parents are being told that children should be given plenty of freedom to develop their own lives by making decisions independent of their parents, especially when they reach teenage years. While we might concede some truth to this, the Bible still plainly teaches that any child who is still under parental

authority is to obey his parents. Of course, such obedience is always limited to that which does not violate God's standards. Obviously, Paul knew his readers would understand this. If a parent steps between the child and God, the parent has usurped God's authority and the child must obey God.

Still, the inspired hand of the apostle leaves no room for doubt that children who obey their parents (while still under their oversight) are children who are "well pleasing to the Lord." This is the way God has set it up; it is His "divine standard" for the home.

When I was a young boy in school, I recall certain classmates who were often rebellious against teachers. I figured that they were probably this way with their parents as well. In later years, some of those rebellious children ran afoul of the law. I'm left to wonder how much different their lives might have turned out had they learned at an earlier age to respect authority. God knows what is best, and He has clearly stated that the child who respects and obeys his parents is "well pleasing" to Him.

Inspiration should never be ignored.

— Tulsa, OK

"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck." (Proverbs 1:8,9.)

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