

IN DEFENSE OF 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 cannot 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.

— Deceased

"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 the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12.)

WITH AND WITHOUT FAITH

By Milton Smith

Among the more interesting passages found in the Bible is a simple statement in Hebrews 11:6 which tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him (God) . . ." All one has to do to grasp the importance of faith is to simply read this passage and faith's critical nature becomes immediately obvious: without it (faith), it is "impossible" to please God! This means that no act of worship, no service in God's name, not even any outward manifestation of praise and adoration directed towards the Creator will suffice unless accompanied by sincere faith. The Hebrew writer defines faith as being "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1.) We also learn from Romans 10:17 that faith is produced by hearing the word of God.

But faith in what? The Bible makes it very clear that this faith is a belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God

and the Savior of the world. (cf. John 4:39-42; 8:24; Acts 2:21; Romans 3:22; Colossians 1:4.)

But just like obedience without faith is empty, so faith without obedience is equally invalid. Faith and obedience must work together in order to please God. Throughout the Bible, the faith that saves is always the faith that obeys. (Hebrews 11:4-40.) In James 2:17-20, the inspired writer contrasts a living, obedient faith with a dead faith void of obedience. The result of this obedient faith is salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and redemption through His blood. (Luke 7:30; Ephesians 1:7.)

How sad and tragic it is to see so many people in the world who lack proper faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone who fails to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior by proper obedience to Him will someday stand before God without hope. Jesus is not "a" way to

Heaven, He is the only way to heaven. (John 14:6.) Sadly, many in our country have turned away from Jesus' offer of salvation by refusing to acknowledge Him as their Savior.

There is indeed a sad day coming for those who choose to remain spiritually blind by refusing to accept God's free gift of salvation.

— Tulsa, OK

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.)

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

PRAYING FOR ALL MEN

By Joe Dale Wilson

1 Timothy 2:1-2: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

Christians are to pray for all of those who have some type of preeminence in their world. The purpose is so that a Christian can live his life without any outside disturbances and may have peace or tranquility within his own heart and life. God wants Christians to pray for those in government who rule over us so that we can have a peaceful existence.

I once bought forty-two bred heifers at half price because the young veterinarian who ran the blood test for brucellosis and pregnancy, in checking them, stirred them up so badly that the titers in their blood elevated. This made them fail the brucellosis test. One had to be disposed of, and the others were quarantined for a hundred and twenty days before they could be tested by a state veterinarian. Calmness and peaceful behavior would have had a beneficial effect on the cows, but the opposite produced the opposite.

This is true for Christians living in a sinful world. It is also true for the church, a family, in the workplace, at school or in a cow lot.

Meanness, bullying, cruelty and malice obstruct peace and serenity. For this reason we are to pray for "all men" and "all that are in high places," that we can have an undisturbed life serving God. How long has it been since you prayed for the school board, teachers, city officials, county officials, judicial officials, state and federal officials, congress, and the president?

— Vernon, TX

Harbored, hateful unforgiveness,
Seeming harmless at the start,
Soon becomes malignant business,
Like a cancer in the heart.

Words of cutting, caustic mien,
Sailing swiftly from the tongue,
Inflict a suffering rarely seen,
And maiming more than just the one. (DK)

TRUSTING GOD AS WE PRAY

By Wayne Robbins

When things are going well we don't have any trouble trusting God with our prayers. However, when things are not going so well, and our situation continues for a long period of time, and especially if suffering is involved, we have the tendency to think God does not care. After all, if we were God we would have taken care of our problem long before now. But we are not God. What we must do is trust God implicitly - no matter what. Here are a few reasons why:

God has promised that He will be ever present to help us. He will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5.) He is not very far from any of us. (Acts 17:27.) He is ever present when we need His help. (Psalm 46:1.) We must trust that He will be there for us.

God wants to help us. God knows what we need before we ask Him. (Matthew 6:8.) Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. (James 1:17.) God wants to give us good things. (Matthew 7:11.) If we ask according to His will, He hears us and gives us our petitions. (1 John 5:14,15.) He asks us to cast all our cares upon Him for He cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7.) God really does want to help us.

God knows the best way to help us. God knows all things. (Psalm 147:5.) God is all-powerful. (Genesis 17:1.) He knows absolutely the right things to do with our prayers. This may not be to our liking because most of the time we want instant action and relief. But God is not limited by our human emotions and shallow thinking. Every prayer is answered with God's unlimited wisdom and on His timetable. When we pray, we are limited in our scope of vision. But God is not limited and sees the big picture that our prayers involve.

We must trust God implicitly. He will answer our prayers in the best possible way, even though it may not be to our liking or timetable (and, yes, sometimes He says, "no).

We are not God! God is God! We must trust Him.

— Arkansas City, KS

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:26-28.)

YOUR UNRELIABLE HEART

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 tripe. 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 work out if only conventional wisdom is cast aside, along with any accompanying moral or legal restrictions, and the character's heart is followed. After all, "the heart wants what the heart wants!"

Yes, I know. That is Hollywood, a magical place where anything is possible; where inconveniences like reality and consequences can be altogether ignored.

More disturbing is how this cavalier attitude toward truth has 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 passe and out of touch with the needs of today's hearer. Sincerity, tolerance, acceptance - these 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" is what really matters.

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.)

In the event you've missed the point to this point, here it is in a nutshell: unlike the Bible, a lamp to your feet and a light to your path, your heart is not at all reliable as a guide to life or behavior. (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 3:5,6.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

LONGING FOR HEAVEN

By Dalton Key

The question of death and its aftermath has puzzled the minds of the world's greatest thinkers throughout the ages. The Bible has always contained all we need to know on the subject.

James informs us that "the body without the spirit is dead." (James 2:26.) Death may thus be defined as the condition resulting from the separation of body and spirit. At death, the body begins its process of returning to the elements of earth, in keeping with what God intended from the beginning. "Dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19.) The spirit, though, lives on. Unlike the body, which returns to the earth, the spirit returns to the spiritual realm, "to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7.)

The body's life is measured by the inexorable passing of days, weeks, months and years. "The days of our years are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10.)

But what of the spirit? It can be neither measured nor circumscribed by time. Though life in the flesh is "cut off," we nonetheless "fly away." Albert Brumley hit the nail on the head and blessed us all in writing his much-loved song, "I'll Fly Away," the gist of which comes directly from the Psalmist's words.

Man's common attitude concerning death has, more often than not, been one of dread and fear. Louis XV, King of France, feared death so intensely that he decreed the word never to be spoken in his presence. Without God and the hope He offers, what is left but to view death with horror and trepidation?

Compare Louis XV's attitude toward death with that of the Apostle Paul, who wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." (Philippians 1:21, 23.) Again he wrote, "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 5:6-8.)

Paul understood that his body was not designed for heaven, nor was his spirit designed, ultimately, for this world. As a faithful child of God, he envisioned death as a victorious homecoming, a time for receiving "the crown of righteousness." (2 Timothy 4:8.) "Our citizenship," he wrote, "is in heaven." (Philippians 3:20.)

The more love we have for this world, the more dread and fear we will have in leaving it. The more love we have for heaven, the more longing we will have to go there.

**Lifted Up**

By Joe Slater

Israel experienced hardships along the way; nevertheless, their unbelief was all too typical. "So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died." (vs. 6.)

Exact justice would have let all the Israelites bitten by the serpents die. God was under no obligation to aid them. But He did! At His command, Moses made a bronze serpent on a pole. When the afflicted people looked upon it, God mercifully healed them. The mere presence of the bronze serpent brought no cure. Only when the people trusted and obeyed the Lord by looking upon it were their lives spared.

Strict justice would let all of us die in our sins and be lost eternally. But, in

His mercy, God sent Jesus to die on the cross at Calvary to atone for our sins. As Moses lifted up the bronze serpent, so Jesus was lifted up on the cross. But the mere fact of His sacrificial death does not save us. We, like Israel, must trust and obey.

— Justin, TX

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying by what death He would die." (John 12:31-33.)

THE TYRANNY OF THINGS

By Jimmie Keas

I remember my mother's older brother, my Uncle Duard. He was a prospector in Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. I remember all he could talk about was the gold and uranium mines he had prospected and was mining. He lived to make the almighty dollar! An extremely good looking man, I remember a picture taken of him on his 50th birthday. In his hand was a silver dollar.

The time would come some twenty-one to twenty-two years later that I would preach his funeral. As I peered down into the casket I remembered that picture and looked closely; his hands were folded, empty! No silver dollar! But even if that silver dollar had been there, he still would not have taken it with him!

Well did the scripture say, "We brought nothing in this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." (1 Timothy 6:7.)

I also remember what Jesus said in Luke 12:15: "Take heed and beware

of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Basically, Jesus was saying, "Life is not things." Jesus then told the parable of the rich man. (Luke 12:16-21.) The last question asked that rich man was, "This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"

Don't be trapped in the tyranny of things.

Let us all be careful to not allow our possessions or even the desire for possessions to possess us!

— Oklahoma City, OK

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one

and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. . . But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:19-21, 24, 33.)

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