

Are You Really A Believer? Are You Really Saved?

By RICK LIGGIN

It should be noted that God's Word almost never uses the term "faith" (or "belief") in a subjective sense. In the New Testament, believers, if they are considered by God to be faithful, are always people who act like they believe—they behave in a way that is consistent with what they believe and in a way that demonstrates their belief. And not only this, but devoted believers keep on acting like they believe, and if they ever stop acting like they believe, then they lose their salvation!

Now that might seem to be a pretty bold statement—one that you might even consider to be more than a little controversial. But the truth of this statement is supported by many passages of Scripture. Allow me to share with you just one.

In writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said this: "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the faithful word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

Note carefully that Paul tells us that the Corinthians "are saved," but he makes their continuing to be in this saved state a conditional thing. He says: "you are saved," and can keep being saved, "if you hold fast the faithful word." Paul ends the statement by adding, "unless you believed in vain." Their being saved was conditioned upon their holding fast the faithful word. But if they did not hold fast that faithful word, they would have "believed in vain." Their faithful obedience to the word of God would validate their belief, but the opposite is also true: if they failed to obey the word, their faith would be in vain. In other words, one who holds fast the word is a genuine believer; but one who does not hold fast to the word is not a genuine believer—no matter how loudly he claims to be one. You see, genuine believers act like it!

Are you a believer...really? Well, that depends on how careful you are to hold on fast to the faithful word. How well you hold on to and live by the faithful word will determine whether or not you actually are a believer...and whether or not you actually are saved!

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THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Helpless To Save

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Most Americans, as we witnessed via television the devastation and human suffering in some of the gulf states as a result of hurricane Katrina, have experienced a feeling of helplessness. We would like to be of aid, but are virtually helpless to know what to do—other than giving financial assistance.

How helpless we felt to see thousands of people relocated to emergency evacuation centers where they lacked adequate food and water for days. Even worse, some who had not heeded the danger warnings were desperately crying for salvation from their rooftops.

Then there were interviews with medical doctors expressing frustration because they possessed the knowledge and skill to save some people, but were unable to reach the victims, or they lacked electrical power or sterile surroundings necessary for successful surgeries. How helpless they felt!

How appalled we were when the brave rescue workers, who were already risking life and limb to save some, were delayed by lawless men firing bullets.

As I watched the reports on television I remember hoping that no Christians were among those who died. Then I realized that I should be wishing that all who died had been Christians. After all, who better than Christians are prepared for death?

I couldn't help but be reminded by this national disaster to an even greater tragic situation—people are dying spiritually. Just as some may have died in New Orleans due to a lack of food and water, millions more are dying of spiritual malnutrition without the bread and water of life (Lk. 4:4). How-

ever, this is not due to a lack of available "bread" and "water." Jesus is the "bread of life" (Jn. 6:35) and He has assured that He will "give of the fountain of life freely" (Rev. 21:6).

Just as some people were trapped in New Orleans because they didn't heed the warnings that were given, many more have been trapped by sin because they have ignored

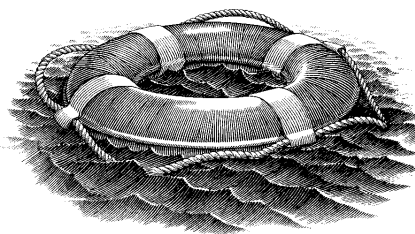
the warnings to "repent or perish" (Lk. 13:3).

Those in need of physical help in the wake of the storm were longing for a little good news. How cruel it was when false hopes of relief were offered by

some. Likewise, how cruel it is when men offer sinners anything other than the pure gospel of Christ to dying sinners. They tell people to "join the church of their choice," or offer a perverted, dehydrated gospel, which is no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6-7). How sad!

The gospel of Christ is fully capable of saving every person lost in sin, but often gospel workers are unable to reach the lost. This is not due to a lack of power (Rom. 1:16). Unlike those in physical peril, most who are lost in sin are not aware of their condition. Therefore, they are not crying out to be saved, and our appeals to them are most often met with apathy.

It is tragic to see such human suffering as we witnessed during and after the hurricane, but it is nothing when compared with the agony that awaits those who neglect so great a salvation as our Lord offers (Heb. 2:3). Are we as concerned for the spiritual welfare of our fellowmen as we are for their physical health and well-being? If so, as helpless as we feel at times, we must not "grow weary while doing good (Gal. 6:9).



‘Opinions’ in Bible Class

By RICK LIGGIN

Are our Bible classes supposed to be times for open discussion where anyone and everyone may state his own “opinion” on what some Bible text or verse of Scripture means? Asked a little differently: are Bible class teachers simply discussion *facilitators* or are they supposed to actually *teach* the class something?

Obviously, teachers are supposed to teach! They are “to give instruction”—since that is what a “teacher” does. And though that may involve engaging his students in some kind of discussion, in the end the teacher is supposed to be leading his class in a definite direction so that real learning takes place. Anyone can stand at the head of a classroom and ask his students for comments—but a teacher must do more than that. He must teach! He must instruct! He must make sure that real learning—learning that is true to the Word—takes place in the minds and hearts of his students.

But not only must he teach; he must do so *with authority*. Paul told Timothy: “These things command and teach” (1 Tim. 4:11). He told Titus: “These things speak...exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Tit. 2:15). A faithful Bible teacher does not hand down his own “opinion” of what the Bible says—an “opinion” that others may take or leave, accept or reject. He teaches the Word of God—an authoritative message that must be accepted and obeyed.

Now, I say these things because I fear that some of us have gotten the wrong idea about our Bible class periods. Some of us seem to think that Bible class is a time for us to all get together and share our “opinions” with one another about some Bible topic or Bible text. But folks, that’s not Bible study! It might be one thing if we were sharing with one another the fruit of our own diligent, honest and careful private Bible study. In fact, if that were the case, I’m sure that some real and significant Bible learning would take place in such a class period. But that most often is not the case!

More often than not, these “opinions” we express are not based on any real, personal Bible study; in fact, they’re often not even based on having previously read the text before coming to class. More often than not, they are the result of whatever might pop into our heads as we read the text for the first time while already in class. I’ll be honest and tell you that, as a Bible class teacher who works hard at preparing to teach Bible classes, I find that insulting. How dare you come to class and challenge a teacher’s conclusions by expressing your “opinion” when you haven’t even taken the time to read the text before coming to class! We’re

not saying that error should not be corrected. If a Bible class teacher teaches something wrong, he should be challenged and corrected—kindly. But how can we do that if we have not studied the text before coming to class?

Bible class is not about sharing “opinions” (especially unstudied opinions) with one another. It’s about helping one another learn *correctly* what God’s Word says, so

that we can use it to change our lives. And it is the teacher’s place to do that—and to do it with authority, so that all feel the need to do what God says. Vision for the future demands that we make our Bible classes periods of real learning—and that requires teachers who are prepared to teach and students who come to class prepared to learn.

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Giving to the Lord ‘As Needed’

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Many Christians struggle with knowing just how much they should give back to the Lord. We might be inclined to think that it would be easier on us if God had prescribed a certain amount or percentage of our income that He expects us to give. Instead, He put us on our honor by instructing that each of us give “as he may prosper” (1 Cor. 16:2).

In this age of great prosperity there are many congregations that receive weekly offerings in excess of their budgetary needs, resulting in ever-increasing treasuries. As this happens, some Christians adjust their giving downward. I have even heard of some who, in moving their membership from one congregation to another, have reduced the amount of their weekly contributions because the need was less.

Granted, if a congregation is not using the treasury to God’s glory, there is little incentive to give. Frankly, I’ll admit that if I were a member of a congregation which continued to build up an already inflated treasury, I would adjust my giving. I wouldn’t *reduce* my giving, but I would adjust *where* I gave it. Of course, first I would try to get the brethren to recognize the need to spread the gospel both locally and in other places.

Congregations large and rich enough to supply their own needs would do well to “lift up your eyes and look at the fields” (Jn. 4:35). There are even small congregations which have managed to pay off their buildings and are blessed to have men who can do the preaching while supporting themselves (may their number increase) who

could, if they would, help to support brethren in more needy places.

There is really no excuse for congregations to “sit on” extremely large treasuries. I understand that the larger a congregation is, and the larger its commitments are, the larger the treasury must be, but I’m afraid that some congregations display a lack of faith in feeling they need a huge treasury “just in case.” When a congregation’s treasury begins to bulge, some are likely to look for ways to spend the money for more conveniences, or other luxuries, rather than real needs.

But, I digress from my original intent for this article—that of basing one’s giving only on need. Though need might motivate some to give “beyond their ability” (2 Cor. 8:3), the fact is that the giving prescribed in the New Testament is to be based on one’s prosperity—not on the needs of the congregation. Therefore, giving only “as needed” is not scriptural giving.

However, to the extent that Christians recognize the great need of the gospel throughout the world, this is a moot point. As long as there are people who need salvation, there will be a need for gospel workers who deserve to “live of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). We’re a long way from supplying the need.

Giving is something which should be done “cheerfully” rather than “of necessity” (2 Cor. 9:7). However, just because we are not to give simply because it’s necessary, doesn’t mean it *isn’t* necessary. This same text indicates that our giving should be as we purpose in our hearts. In our hearts we know there will never be a time on this earth when there is no need.

Giving, as prescribed in the New Testament is to be based on one’s prosperity—not on the needs of the congregation

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

This is a legitimate question deserving of a scriptural answer. After all, salvation from the just consequences of our sins is the theme of God's revelation. Yet many in theological circles believe that the question reflects the misconception that salvation involves the lost needing to do something in order to be saved when, supposedly, salvation is accomplished only by the grace of God, not at all by the lost *doing* something.

Certainly, the lost have no ability to save themselves by themselves apart from the grace of God. Salvation is nothing that can be earned; it is not a merit badge. However, it does not follow that because we cannot earn our salvation, there is nothing for us to do in order to be saved. Salvation is conditional!

God's grace is sufficient to save. His word is powerful. Indeed, the gospel is His power to save (Rom. 1:16). Nonetheless, your personal salvation by God's grace is dependent upon your response to God's grace. What will you do? What must you do?

THIS IS A TEST

By **DAVID DIESTELKAMP**

"For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things" (2 Cor. 2:9). The test was Paul's first letter to the Corinthians—and specifically, whether they would put away from themselves a fornicating brother and keep no company with anyone named a brother who was immoral ("not even to eat with such a person"—1 Cor. 5:9-13).

The Corinthians passed the test, what about us? Brothers and sisters become immoral, unfaithful, and rebellious often with little or no response from the church. *Test grade: F.* Sheep wander from the flock and their pastors don't go looking for them. *Test grade: F.* And when attempts to turn a sinner from the error of his way to save his soul from death (Jas. 5:20) fail, many then think there is no more to be done. *Test grade: F.*

If we are going to be "obedient in all things" we must withdraw ourselves "from every brother who walks disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6). The impenitent worldly brother, the unfaithful sister, the false teacher are to experience a change in relationship with us because of their sin. So, is the congregation where you are a member "obedient in all things" or not? "For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test..." Do you pass or fail?

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God desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3,4). God demonstrated the enormity of His love for the world by His sacrifice of Jesus (Jn. 3:16). Through that sacrifice, God's grace was made available to all, but the benefits of that grace (salvation) are limited to those who believe. Jesus' being lifted up on the cross is compared to the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness (Num. 21:5-9). The bites of the fiery serpents represented sin and its consequences: death. The bronze serpent, which represented God's grace, was made available to anyone and everyone, but only those who would look upon that serpent would be saved.

Although we are told that God desires all to be saved, we are also told that not all will be saved (Lk. 13:22-28; 19:9,10). Indeed, few will be saved (Matt. 7:13,14). There will even be many who call Jesus Lord who will not be saved (Matt. 7:21-23). There is only one conclusion that harmonizes the facts that 1) God desires all to be saved and 2) Most will not be saved: There is something that I must do to be saved. People will not be lost because God has failed to do something; people will be lost because they have failed to do something. Thus, it is logical that people who come to the knowledge that they are sinners, and therefore lost, would ask, "What must I do to be saved?"

"What shall we do" is exactly the question asked by the Jewish crowd on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' crucifixion (Ac. 2:37). Peter had just boldly informed the crowd that God had raised from the dead as Lord and Christ the one they had unjustly murdered. Cut to the heart by this information, they desperately wanted to know what to do.

Now, if indeed there is nothing to do in response to the gospel message, then Peter would have said something like, "Your foolish questions perish with you, because you thought that salvation could be accomplished by doing something. You have neither part nor portion in this matter for your heart is not right in the sight of God."

Indeed, no other question could have given Peter a better opportunity to preach that salvation is entirely and only an action of God and totally devoid of human will or act. However, if there is indeed something one must do to be saved, it was, again, the perfect question. Therefore, Peter's response to their question answers whether or not there is anything to be done to personally obtain salvation. Peter does not rebuke the crowd for their ignorance, but instead instructs them to do something: repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (vs. 38). There is something we must do!

"What must I do?" was also asked in an-

other context by a Gentile jailor (Ac. 16:30-34). Again, if there is nothing for us to do, then Paul should have responded, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be saved by doing something; you have fallen from grace. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you attempt to do anything in order to be saved, Christ will profit you nothing." However, Paul and Silas do not rebuke the jailor for an ignorant question, but instead tell him to do something: believe. What did he do? In the same hour of the night, he was baptized, just as 3,000 were on the day of Pentecost following Peter's instruction (Ac. 2:41).

When we consider what Jesus specifically instructed His apostles to preach everywhere, we should not be surprised that the scriptural answer to "What must I do?" is believe, repent and be baptized (Matt. 28:19,20; Mk. 16:15,16; Lk. 24:47). That is how Peter and Paul answered. That is how we should answer. That is what we must do.

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Wearing Well-Doers

By **DAVID DIESTELKAMP**

The words of Galatians 6:9 are motivation to those trying to do right: "And let us not be weary in well doing..." True well doers do their best not to grow weary, especially since their reward is at stake: "...for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

But what about those whose actions (or lack of them) weary the well doers? What about those who demand action, but never act? What about those who expect others to study, teach, be hospitable, and work without themselves becoming personally involved? What about people who expect others to develop to be elders, deacons, and preachers in difficult places? What about Christians who require constant correction because they want to be like the world?

It is bad enough that some decide not to be well doers and therefore shall reap the reward of the wicked rather than that of the righteous, but they also affect others. Their inactivity, complaining, gossip, and worldliness may cause some well doers to faint. In that case "...it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). Well doer or wearier, which will it be?

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WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN

By FRANK VONDRACEK

We have probably all heard the old story about "When I get to heaven, there will be three surprises awaiting me." The three-fold surprise will be (1) Some I expected to be there, won't be; (2) Some I didn't expect to see there, will be; and the biggest surprise of all (3) I will be there! A preacher recently suggested yet a fourth surprise for each one who enters the eternal heaven of God, (4) Many there will be surprised to see me!!

Usually we have no trouble determining who will not be allowed into God's eternal abode... "But he that believes not shall be condemned" (Mk. 16:16); "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Passages like these help us to learn that the unbelieving and disobedient will not spend eternity with God.

On the other hand, while we know that only those "without spot and blemish" will be taken by Jesus into His Father's house (Eph. 5:27; Jn. 14:1-3), determining just who these will be presents more of a problem. I personally hope that at least every Christian I know will be among those eternally saved. This includes myself, of course.

I guess such a desire is parallel to Paul's for his countrymen, the Jews, when he said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). I think Paul knew deep in his heart that not every Jew would believe and obey the gospel. But his desire was that each one would. When I acknowledge that I sometimes misbehave and sin before God, and what I observe of my brethren sometimes, I realize that even all the Christians I know probably will not be found in heaven when eternity commences for men. This is sad

and scary, but I believe it is the truth of the matter.

There are some religious people who teach that once a person is saved, he will never again be lost. The mind of man has produced this false concept, and not the revelation of God. God says, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them (2 Pet. 2:20-21).

Men who teach "once-saved-always-saved" are wrong! There are some among God's children, it seems, who, though they would never teach such a false concept, appear to believe it by the indifferent and negligent manner in which they live.

So often some walk as near to sin as they can get, apparently hoping not to cross over the line and be condemned. "Can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" (Prov. 6:27-28). These two statements are set in a context of committing fornication. But who will say they do not have a general application to involvement in any sinful activity? To get too close to sin is to invite harm and possibly even total disaster to one's soul. A thoughtful Christian, recognizing the danger, will stay as far away from sin as he can get. If we are arrogant enough to insist on living close to it, sin's effect on us may be to dull our awareness of sin's presence and dangers, and we might be influenced to tolerate sin in our midst (perhaps with our children, brethren and self) more easily.

We must be watchful for sin. We must be

ready to rebuke and restore one another as quickly as possible when sin is found among us (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 4:1). This is not so much to try to determine who will be in heaven, but rather to reduce the number of those we know will not be allowed in. Think about this seriously, brethren. Please!

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THINK ON THESE THINGS

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