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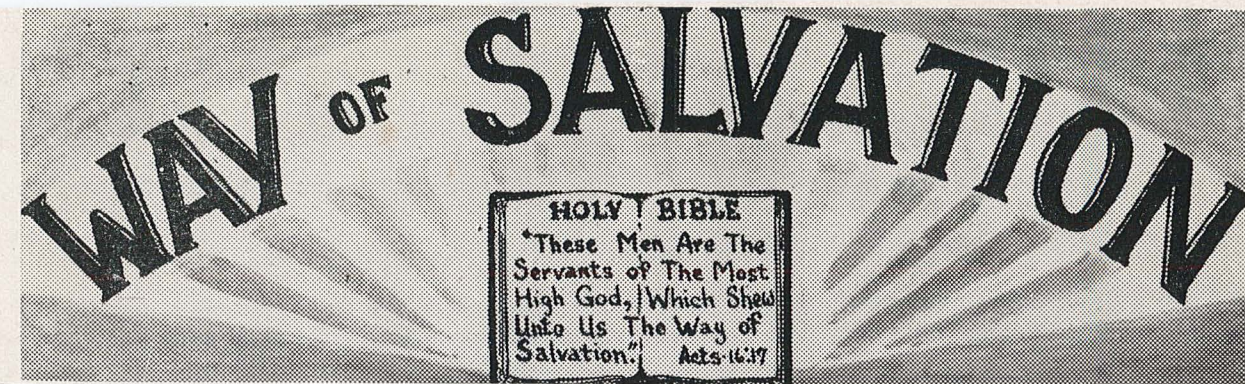
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Vol. 4

PENSACOLA, FLORIDA — OCTOBER, 1956

No. 4

# The Church-A Teaching Body

By E. V. SRYGLEY, Jr.

## What Is The Church?

It is possible to define the church from the standpoint of content; from the standpoint of organization; and with a view to the church's capacity to teach.

From the standpoint of content, the church is a body of people, Acts 2:47. Hence, the church cannot be, except figuratively, a brick building.

When its organization is considered, the church is either a local assembly or the universal body of all the saved. (See local assemblies referred to in Rev. 1:4.) On the other hand, the church universal is referred to in such passages as Eph. 1:22, 23.

Therefore, New Testament church organization reveals nothing similar to a denomination: an organization larger than a local assembly and smaller than the whole church.

When its teaching ability is reviewed, the church is found to have only one teaching unit: the local assembly. That is, the church universal can do nothing. Or, the church universal cannot, with Bible approval, function through a separate Missionary Society; church board, etc.

## Who Is To Teach?

The Bible reveals a teaching program of the individual and of the local congregation. The work of the individual is seen in such passage as II Tim. 2:2; and Acts 8:4. The work of the local church is seen in II Cor. 11:8; and Phil. 4:15, 16.

Observe again that the local church is the largest teaching unit revealed in the New Testament. That is, in Paul's day no Missionary Society directed the preaching programs of several or many local churches.

It is difficult sometimes to persuade individual members of churches of Christ that the individual has a teaching work to do. Many Christians seem to think that they have "hired a preacher" to do all their praying; all their visiting; and all their Bible study.

## What Is To Be Taught?

In Matt. 28:18-20 and other accounts of the Great Commission it is made clear that the Gospel of Christ is the material of the church's teaching. This Gospel must be the fundamental Gospel; not the so-called Gospel of Modernism. Modernism is nothing in the world but religious atheism. For instance, one Modernist in a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary said recently that Jesus did not actually feed 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes. The Modernist affirmed that Jesus probably backed up to the mouth of a cave and secretly received bread from someone inside the cave.

## Where Are We To Preach?

Jesus tells us that we may take the Gospel into all the world, Matt. 28:18-20. Of course, we are commanded to carry the Gospel to all parts of the earth, but I am simply pointing out here that no church has a monopoly on preaching territory.

## How Are We To Preach?

According to passages already noticed, we are to preach either as individual Christians or as local churches. We cannot, as a body universal, allow our teaching to be done by a controlling Society. This affirmation is not made because of the wastefulness of the Society, etc. The affirmation is given simply because there is no divine precedent for a universal work that is locally controlled.

## TRACT PRINTED

The material in the June issue on **HOW TO FIND THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH** has been printed in tract form. This tract could be used effectively in personal work. It is written primarily to instruct the average person, who knows little or nothing about the Church of Christ. This booklet contains 24 pages. Its overall size 3½ inches by 6 inches. The price \$5.00 per 100.

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## Knowledge of God's Word

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:32). God has made provisions for all succeeding generations to hear and learn His will. This was true in former ages as well as in this Christian age or dispensation. God's plan to make known his will to man included the sending of his Son through whom He now speaks to man. (Heb. 1:1; Jn. 3:2; Mt. 17:5; Acts 3:22-23). Before going back to the Father, Christ chose apostles to be with him and taught them for about three and one-half years, giving them God's Word (Jn. 17:8, 14). He commissioned them to go teach God's word (Mt. 28:19-; Mk. 16:15-), then promised them the Holy Spirit to guide them "into all truth" and bring to their remembrance all he had taught them. (Jn. 14:26; 16:13. On the first Pentecost following the Lord's ascension the apostles received the promised Holy Spirit and spoke as He gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit inspired men to not only speak God's word, but to write it as well. (1 Cor. 14:37). The writings of those inspired men are the commandments of the Lord.



PERVIE NICHOLS

We cannot hear those inspired men in person, but we can hear God and Christ speak through the writings of those men. To hear them is to hear Christ (Lk. 10:16; 1 Jn. 4:6). Those inspired men wrote the New Testament which is the Will and Testament of Christ (Lk. 10:16; 1 Jn. 4:6). Those inspired men wrote the New Testament which is the will and Testament of Christ, and our rule of faith and practice in matters religious. Since we have access to God's written word, there is no excuse for ignorance concerning our duty to God.

Some people learn a great deal, but do not have a knowledge of the Bible. They are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Tim. 3:7). The Ephesian Christians had "learned Christ" (Eph. 4:20, 21) for Paul preached nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (1 Cor. 2:2). Preaching Christ involved teaching all the commands of God, as well as His

warnings and promises; to preach Christ is to preach the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27). Timothy had known the holy scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). In addition, he was instructed to "study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15). Some in Berea were complimented because "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so". (Acts 17:11).

Since God has made it possible for all to hear and learn His Word, and has made it plain enough to be understood, He expects all to learn His will. ((Jer. 22:29). It is noble to try to learn God's word, but it is ignoble and downright sinful to neglect or refuse to learn Bible truth. Knowledge involves three elements: teaching, studying, and learning. In addition, man is required to obey, and obedience is based upon his knowledge of God's Word. It matters not what we may know, we cannot become children of God without knowledge of God's plan of salvation. We cannot remain Christians without growth "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. :18; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). Babes in Christ are to desire the word of God, which will produce spiritual growth. (2 Pet. 2:2). Christianity is a life of faith which is produced by a knowledge of the truth.

It is important that we learn God's will concerning our duty. Separate and apart from His revealed will there can be no salvation. 1. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). 2. It produces faith, without which no one can be saved (Rom. 10:17). 3. In the new birth people are begotten by the truth (Jas. 1:18). 4. Souls are purified by the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). 5. The new birth is by the truth (1 Pet. 1:23). 6. It is able to save (Jas. 1:21). 7. It makes one free, when believed and obeyed. (Jn. 8:2). 8. Saints are built up by the truth (Acts 20:32; 7 Pet. 2:2-R.V.).

It is true that we must learn the truth concerning our duty to God, however, we may learn the truth then be lost. We must not only learn God's will, we must obey the truth. (2 Thes. 1:7-9); Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38). Some knew what to do, but denied the Lord in their works (1 Thes. 1:16). Others had knowledge, but sinned wilfully (Heb. 10:26). King Agrippa was familiar with God's requirements, was almost persuaded to be a Christian, but failed to obey (Acts 26:26-2).

Man is rejected when he rejects God's will; he is lost if he fails to do according to the knowledge he possesses. (Ezek. 33:31; Hosea 4:6). "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:21).

## Book-a-Month Club

Here is a plan whereby you may secure a book each month with very little effort. All you have to do is to compile a list of books you desire and send it to this paper, stating when you wish the first copy to be mailed, and you will be sent a copy each month (more often if desired) until your list has been exhausted. You may pay within ten days following receipt of each book. Why not sit down right now and make a list of the books you would like to get and mail it to us soon.

## Possibility of Apostasy

By HORACE E. HUGGINS

A doctrine espoused by some religious people is "The Impossibility of Apostasy," which simply means a Christian, a regenerated, saved child of God, can not so sin as to be eternally lost in hell. I hasten to aver that the very opposite idea is amply expressed in the Bible. I confidently believe, if you will give me your undivided attention for the next few paragraphs, I will adequately prove to you, such to be the case.

### A Gross Misconception

First of all, let me relieve you of a misconception you might have regarding John 3:36; John 5:24. I quote respectively: "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."—"Varily, varily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment." Does a child of God have eternal life (present tense)? Yes. How? In prospect and promise. For instance, God said to Joshua, "I have given into thine hand Jericho." (Joshua 6:2.) But it is obvious to a student of the Bible that Jericho had not been taken and destroyed at the time God spoke of Joshua in Joshua 6:2. Consequently, we conclude, God had given Jericho to Joshua in promise. The same is true regarding "eternal life." To be sure, observe the following: "And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal." (1 John 2:25.) From this verse we learn that eternal life is a promise; this promise is conditioned on our holding fast to that which we heard from the beginning. "If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father." (Vs. 24.) It follows, therefore, that eternal life is not a present possession, but a promise, a promise conditional and dependent on our remaining faithful.

Notice another verse, "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal." (Titus 1:2.) Then another, "that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus :7.) Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sister, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark 10:29,0.)

The Bible abundantly teaches that eternal life is promised to those who abide faithful, and the child of God will not come in actual possession of eternal life until the last great day, or in the world to come. "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." (Matt. 25:46.) When is that? When the Son of God shall come and sit upon the throne of his glory; when all nations shall be gathered before him, and he shall separate them as the shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, and says to them on the left hand, "Depart from me ye cursed," but to the others, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world." (Matt. 25:31-46.)

## Prophecies Of Apostasy

Paul, speaking to the elders of Ephesus in Miletus, said, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30). Then again, "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron." (1 Tim. 4:1, 2.) Once more, "But there arose false teachers, who shall privily bring in destrictive heresies, denying even the Master that brought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." (II Pet. 2:1.) If the preceding prophecies of apostasy and similar ones have not been fulfilled, then the Bible is a lie. Who would dare to make such a jesture? Who would thus cast reflection upon God, who is the originator of the Bible, and His Son, who came to make known, and did make known, His Father's will? Fellow pilgrim from time to eternity, would you be numbered among those who would thus bring reflection upon God and His Son?

### The Bible Teaches

1. That a child of God can faint and reap not. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Gal. 6:9.) Paul says, "We shall reap in due season, if" . . . If what? Paul said "We" (including himself) shall reap, "if we faint not." Paul realized that his reaping was conditioned upon "fainting not." Thus he said, "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: least by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected." (I Cor. 9:27.)

2. That a child of God can become entangled in the defilements of the world and be overcome. (II Pet. 2:20-22.)

3. That a child of God can fall and not enter into eternal rest. (Heb. 4:11; 1 Cor. 10:12).

4. That a child of God can fall away from the living God. (Heb. 3:12).

5. That a child of God is saved by faith (Eph. 2:8) but his faith can be overthrown. (II Tim. 2:18.)

6. That a child of God is saved by Grace (Eph. 2:8) but can fall away from grace. (Gal. 5:4.)

7. That a Child of God is saved by the blood of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 13:12) but may " . . . count the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace." (Heb. 10:29.)

This issue of the WAY OF SALVATION could not contain the scripture that could be given to sustain the true fact that a child of God can so sin as to be finally lost. But I believe a sufficient amount has been given to prove to any honest seeker for truth that a child of God can so sin as to be eternally lost.

## SAVING FAITH

By BILL CREWS

The Bible defines faith as "the assurance (or substance) of things hoped for, a conviction (or evidence) of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). From this it can be seen that faith, as God requires it on man's part, must be composed of conviction and trust. All faith is built upon testimony. The faith that God requires must be built upon hearing the word of God (Romans 10:14,17; Acts 15:7). Surely it is evident from the Bible that to come to and to please God (Hebrews 11:6), to be justified (Galatians 3:24), to become God's child (Galatians 3:26), to have access to God's grace (Romans 5:2), to be saved (Mark 16:16), to have the heart purified (Acts 15:7) faith in God, Christ and His word is essential. It would be in order then to ask: "What is the faith that God requires of man?" or "What is the faith that saves?"

It is possible for men to have "weak faith" (Romans 14:1), "little faith" (Matthew 8:26), "dead faith" (James 2:17,26), "barren faith" (James 2:20), "great faith" (Matt. 8:10), "unfeigned faith" (1 Timothy 1:5), "right faith" (James 2:5), "fulness of faith" (Hebrews 10:22) or "perfect faith" (James 2:22). Can a man be saved through a faith that is weak, little, barren or dead? Surely not, and yet the very wide-spread and popular doctrine of salvation by "faith alone" is built upon such faith. Surely many of those who embrace it do not realize its implications. The Bible very plainly denies that justification is by faith only in James 2:24. In the New Testament we read of some who believed on Christ, but whose faith was not strong enough to lead them to openly confess Him and follow Him (John 12:42-4). Some who had some conviction, but no trust were referred to by Christ as sons of Satan (John 8:31,44). Even the demons believe and tremble (James 2:19).

Faith, friends, as God requires it, is a rule of action. We are to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7); faith is to work through love (Gal. 5:6); we are to live by faith (Romans 1:17) and show our faith by our works of obedience to God's commands (James 2:18,21-22). Read Hebrews 11. No, we are not saved by merit—by doing the works of the Law of Moses or the works of our own righteousness—nor by simply doing the commands of God without faith. Salvation is neither by faith only nor by works only, but "by faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). When our faith is strong enough to lead us to obey God, our faith is made perfect (James 2:21-22). Thus, the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. When one believes in Christ to the extent that he repents of his sins, confesses his faith in Christ and is buried with Christ in baptism, he becomes God's child. Read Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-38; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 10:10; 6:17-18.

## SERMON OUTLINE

Subject: Love

By CLIFFORD DIXON

I. We translate "love" for two main Greek words in the New testament.

A. "Agapaow"—to love with the reason, esteem. This word translated love 115 times.

B. "Phileo"—to love with the feelings, warm instinctive affection. This word is translated love 18 times.

II. God's Love.

A. To His Son.

1. Given all things into His hand, John 3:35; 10:17; John 15:9.

B. To Man. John 3:16; Eph. 2:4.

1. Nothing can separate us from love of God Rom. 8:9.

2. He loved us enough to send son to be propitiation for our sins. I John 4:10.

III. Christ's love to Man.

A. Gave self for us. Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2; Rev. 1:5,6.

B. Loved church and gave himself for it, Eph. 5:25; Acts 20:28.

1. We are reconciled to God therein. Eph. 2:16; 1:22,23.

C. Whom He loves He rebukes, Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:20.

IV. How Man Should Love God.

A. With all of heart, soul, mind and strength, Mat. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Rom. 12:1,2.

B. If love Him we will keep His Commandments, I John 5:1-3; John 14:15,23.

1. He commands us to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized for remission of sins. Afterwards to worship, live righteously or be faithful.

V. Man's Duty To Love Others.

A. Neighbor as self, Mat. 22:39; Mk. 12:31,33; Rom. 13:9; Heb. 13:2.

B. Brother in Christ, John 13:34; 15:17; Rom. 13:8; I Thes. 4:9; I Pet. 1:22; I John 4.

C. Enemy, Rom. 12:20; Mat. 5:44,45.

D. Husbands and wives, Eph. 5:25; 28,33.

VI. Things Not To Love.

A. World. I John 2:15, 16; 2 Tim. 4:10.

B. Family more than Lord, Mat. 10:37.

C. Pre-eminence, 3 John 9; Mat. 6:5; 23:6; Lk. 20:46.

VII. Results of Proper Love.

A. All things will work together for good, Rom. 8:28.

B. Love God and we will be known of Him, I Cor. 8:3.

C. Grace will be with us, Eph. 6:24. (Favor).

D. He that loveth is born of God, I John 4:7.

## WHAT IS SIN?

No. 2

By CURTIS E. FLATT

In a previous article dealing with the above question it was learned that sin is that which separates man from God, and is neglect of duty. A further study of the question should prove beneficial to all.—Editor.)

### Transgression of the Law

The Apostle John gives us another definition of sin. He says that sin is the transgression of the law. In 1 John 3:4, John says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law." The American Standard Version renders that last phrase in these words, "Sin is lawlessness." I am told that the literal meaning of the word sin as translated from the Greek means "to miss the mark." And John says that sin is transgression, which is to say that sin is missing the mark, or sin is the turning away from that which is right. Sin is the turning away from truth. Sin is the transgression of the law. This is a positive definition of sin. The form that sin takes according to this definition is that which we often speak of as commission. That literally means to do what God said not to do, that is to transgress. The works of the flesh in Galatians 5 afford good examples of this. After giving that long catalogue of sins he said, "That which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." To do anything when God said, "Thou shalt not," is to sin.

This definition of sin also includes the form of sin we speak of as sin of presumption and sin of addition. These two are close kin and often used to mean the same thing. To presume that we can add anything to God's system which is not authorized is sin. This same apostle said in II John 9, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." Whatever we do by adding to the word of God is sin. I challenge all of us to ask ourselves this question. Are we right sure that in all our work and in all our worship and in all our service that we are doing what we are authorized to do. To go beyond that which is authorized in God's word is to sin.

The words of the pioneering David Lipscomb are

fitting. I read, "Whatever we do religiously that is based on opinion and not on faith in sin. No man can perform any service or introduce any order into the service of God by faith unless it is ordained of God. To introduce anything is to act on human wisdom and opinion and not on faith in God. Hence it is sinful. The idea that man can act on his opinion in the service of God is the root of all erroneous practices in the religious world. Man is required to act on faith in religion, not on opinion." Listen again to I John 3:4, "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law."

Then there is another statement in the New Testament about sin which we should consider. In Romans 14:23, Paul says, "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." In the passages we have considered thus far it appears that the apostles have been making a deliberate attempt to define sin. But in this passage, it is apparent that the apostle is not trying to define sin at all. As most of you know, that statement comes at the conclusion of a chapter which discusses one of those difficult and delicate questions about the eating of meat which might cause a brother to stumble. And at the close of his admonition concerning these things he makes a statement that whatsoever is not of faith is sin. By that he means a brother should not do anything at all concerning these things unless he has a strong conviction that the thing is right—unless he is completely convinced that it is right—unless he has faith that it is right. Hence the statement comes: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

### Something Conceived and Born

WHAT IS SIN? We may also define sin by taking notice of its various characteristics. First of all, sin is something which is conceived and then born. It is something which comes into existence. Sin is not something which is inherited. It is not something which is handed down from generation unto generation. It is conceived and born. In James 1:12-15, I read, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The *Twentieth Century New Testament* renders that 15th verse this way, "Then passion conceives and gives birth to sin and sin, on reaching maturity brings forth death." That characteristic of sin defines sin to a certain extent. It tells us what sin is and for sure it tells us that sin is not what some say it is.

# Looking In The Mirror

By TOM W. BUTTERFIELD

Everyone knows the purpose of a mirror. It would be hard to imagine a home without one. Like the word of God, the purpose of a mirror is to tell the truth. James reminds us of this fact. "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Some truths revealed by a mirror are hard to forget. But, good or bad, it is the duty of the mirror to tell the truth. In fact, it cannot do otherwise. The thing revealed may cause us great joy, but truth must be reflected.

The woman seeing the first wrinkles on her face may not like the sight. The man may not appreciate the first signs of grey at his temples. The sick person may not like that telltale palor that divulges the presence of a cancer. On the other hand the same mirror may reflect in another person youth, vigor, beauty and smiles instead of fears and frowns. But the mirror can only express that which stands in front of it.

The Bible tells the truth! It cannot be otherwise. Our attitude toward the Bible should be the same as that which we have toward the mirror in our home. We should consider it our friend. It reveals to us just what we need to know. If it portrays us as sinful and in need of some spiritual adjustment, it is only reflecting what we really happen to be. When we see a frowning face in the mirror, we see only what we were personally responsible for. When we see ourselves condemned by the word of God, it is only because we "have sinned and come short of the glory of God." There's no need to get mad at the mirror. It was only telling the truth. There's no need getting peeved at the word of God—it is truth. It is just advising us to make some adjustments while there is still time. It would be folly to smash the glass just because it revealed facts. It is folly to discredit the Bible just because we do not always like what we see there. A mirror reveals many good things too, you know. It may be necessary for it to reflect another person in order to show those good things, but that isn't the mirror's fault. That is your fault! The Bible has proved itself profitable to countless millions of people. If it hasn't helped you, it may be because you saw yourself there and then "walked away and forgot what manner of person" you were.

Neither will it help the situation for you to argue with the glass. It's all right. It's you that needs a little changing. There isn't anything wrong with the Bible, either. It just "reproves, rebukes and exhorts" as is necessary for each individual case. It depends upon what stands before it. Talking back won't help matters. You will stand as before until

you make some alterations. And it won't help a particle for you to go and buy a new mirror. They all tell the same tale. The hobbyist loves to get another version or two and see if he can't make it come out his way, but he still has his problem child. The stickler for a pet theory drags out all the commentaries he can find that remotely hint that he might have a point, but he still has to deal with revealed truth when he opens his Bible again. We try so hard some times to make the Bible look like it doesn't mean exactly what it says.

The proper attitude toward any mirror is to trust it to tell the truth, give heed to what we see revealed and make necessary corrections before we forget to do so.

The Bible is a perfect mirror. It needs no resilvering. It will last forever just as it came from the hands of its designer. It treats all men fairly. It warns us of dangers ahead. It reveals the joys and smiles of the Christian. It is an impartial friend. We need only to "look into this perfect law of liberty, and continue therein, being not a forgetful hearer, but doer of the work" to be blessed in the deed.

—Apostolic Times



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# The Mother of The Lord

By BILL CREWS

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." (John 1:1-2) "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." (Hebrews 2:14) "Out of thee (Bethlehem) shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." "And God said, Let US make man in our image, after our Likeness." (Genesis 1:1,26) "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law." (Galatians 4:4) The son of God, being divine, existed in the beginning with God; therefore, before he became flesh, being born of a woman after a miraculous conception. This woman we know to be Mary who became the wife of Joseph.

Surely this Mary had found favor with God. Indeed she was highly favored. What a single honor among women was bestowed upon her in that she bore Jesus of Nazareth who was God's son come in the flesh. Filled with the spirit Elizabeth said, "Blessed art thou among women." Mary Herself said, "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Today, wherever the gospel story is read or proclaimed by those who believe and love the truth these facts are kindled in the heart and Mary's own statement fulfilled.

But how tragic when today we see observed and hear proclaimed untold numbers of traditions about this gracious woman of long ago. These have arisen outside of the divine record and stand opposed thereto. Should she walk the earth again today, Mary herself would be among the first to denounce these traditions of men which are revered as though they were sacred Scripture. According to the Bible Mary and Joseph lived together as husband and wife after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:25). According to tradition she remained a virgin throughout life. According to the Bible Jesus had both brothers and sisters in the flesh (Matthew 12:46-50; 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; 7:3,5,10; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians

9:5; Galatians 1:19). According to tradition he had none. The last mention of Mary in the Scripture is Acts 1:14, before the church began. The only other reference to her is in Galatians 4:4 as "a woman." We see in the divine record of the church at work no prayers said to Mary, no Rosaries, no Immaculate Conception, no Bodily Assumption, no miracles ascribed to her power. (Early Christians prayed for one another and asked the prayers of their brethren, but they never prayed to or for the dead.)

But tradition and the awesome attitude often held toward tradition have led millions of sincere persons to honor Mary as "the mother of God" and "the queen of heaven," to pour our prayers to her as "mediatrix," "co-redeemer," "advocate" and "intercessor," to believe in such anti-Scripture doctrines as "the Immaculate conception" and "The Assumption" and to attribute to her all sorts of miraculous powers. Truly these things have gone far beyond that recorded in the only divine record God ever gave to mankind. Indeed, "Ye leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men." (Mark 7:8) Friends, we plead with you to leave traditions and return to the word of God.

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