

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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BLESSINGS OF BIBLE READING

By Ron Wilson

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This verse affirms the indisputable love that God has for His created beings. God loves us so much that He wrote us a letter. God wrote us a letter as big as a book. In fact it is a book: the book we call the Bible. When we write a letter to a beloved, do we not expect him/her to read it? God expects us to read His letter. If we love someone and write him/her a letter, how would we feel if he/she refused to read that letter? God loves us; loves us so much He wrote us a letter. How do you think He feels when we refuse to read His letter?

God gave us the Bible for the purpose of reading it. When the covenant was initially given to Israel: “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people . . .” (Exodus 24:7). Israel wrote it on their doorposts and gates (Deuteronomy 6:9). Before the conquest of Canaan: “when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing” (Deuteronomy 31:11). After the conquest began: “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them” (Joshua 8:35). After Israel’s and Judah’s apostasies during the reign of Josiah, the Book of the Law was found and it was brought to the king. “Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king” (2 Kings 22:10). Daniel evidently read from God’s word while in captivity (Daniel 9:2).

When the Jews returned to Palestine the reading of God’s word was an important part of their activities (Nehemiah 8:1ff). Jesus read it (Luke 4:16) and expected others to read it (Matthew 12:3,5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; etc.). When the Ethiopian eunuch had been to Jerusalem and “was returning . . . sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet” (Acts 8:28). Evidently Paul read (2 Timothy 4:13) and expected others to read (Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 4:16). In fact we are commanded to read; “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren” (1Thessalonians 5:27). Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). We can be filled with God’s righteousness by reading the Bible (Romans 1:16-17). It is noble to read the Bible (Acts 17:11 KJV). The Ethiopian eunuch considered God’s word important enough to read even in the desert (Acts 8:26-28). Take your Bible with you wherever you go: not for people to see but to read!

There is an old cliché: *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.* Well, *A Scripture a day keeps the devil away!* Our physical bodies need physical nourishment to stay healthy, and our spiritual bodies need spiritual nourishment to stay healthy. “My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word” (Ps. 119:25); and “I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have given me life” (v. 93). Jesus says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). He later noted, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). Peter adds, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you

may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

The longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119) is devoted to the Word of God. We can read this psalm when we are tempted (Psalm 119:11,37), when we are glad (v. 14), sad (v. 28), sick (v. 50) and well (v. 65). When we bring troubles upon ourselves we can read this psalm (v. 67,71), when we are persecuted (v. 85-87), discouraged (v. 92), when hungering for spiritual nourishment (v. 103), and when feeling insecure (v. 114). This psalm will help if we are anxious (v. 143) or frustrated (v. 169). David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22) and strove mightily to keep God’s commandments (Psalm 119:93,97). However, David sometimes fell short of God’s word; like the rest of us, he sinned (v. 176). David also knew that God in His mercy provides compassion and forgiveness for those who comply with His word (v. 174, 175).

David began Psalm 119 with, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart!” (vv. 1-2). We cannot possibly count the tremendous blessings that come our way by reading the Bible. The Bible is not an old dust covered book that we pick up simply to see if we can win an argument. Although it is to be used for preparation for assembled Bible study, it should not be confined to such. We ought to read our Bibles because we love God and recognize that the Bible is a message of love from God. God gave us the Bible because He loves us and wants us to be in eternity with Him. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). God did not give us the Bible to be a burden to us. The Bible is not intended to be something to weight us down but to lift us up (James 4:10).

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Let us read our Bibles with the intent of obeying what the Bible says; "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Revelation 1:3). The most important blessing obtained through the Bible is salvation. Jesus tells us, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). What should one believe? Jesus affirms it is the gospel. The gospel is the word of God (1 Peter 1:22-25). It takes the gospel to save people. Peter had to bring the gospel to Cornelius before he could be saved (Acts 11:13). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). It saved the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). To teach something different than the gospel is to bring a curse upon one's self (Galatians 1:6-9). The gospel is *the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation* (Ephesians 1:13). One must con-

tinue in the gospel to save one's self as well as others (1 Timothy 4:16). The gospel is *able to save your souls* (James 1:21).

The Bible is God's word (2 Timothy 3:16). It is full of power (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible has the power to cleanse our souls (John 15:3). The Bible has the power to sanctify us (John 17:17). The Bible can build us up (Acts 20:32). The Bible can save us (Romans 1:16). The Bible is our gospel armor to provide protection *against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:10-17). "[C]omfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

In order to read the Bible, one must have a copy of the Bible. Each person needs his/her personal copy of the Bible. Your children cannot read the Bible if they do not have Bibles. One of the wisest investment you can make in your children's futures on earth and afterward is to get each one a Bible. Get them a Bible even before they can read. Don't let them play with it as a toy, but teach them to respect it as an invaluable asset. Teach them even before they can read that the Bible is GOD's letter of love to them. Read from their Bibles to them. Let them look forward in delightful anticipation to the day when they can read God's letter for themselves. Set the example for them in this regard. Let them see you reading it, and tell them why you are reading it. Tell them what a comfort, delight and joy it is to read it.

You cannot read the Bible if you do not have a Bible. Get a Bible. Get a good Bible. Why waste time or money on perverted translations that might cause one to be led astray? Stick with reputable translations such as the King James Version or the New King James Version. Until you are well grounded and learn to be proficient with an exhaustive concordance and will use it, stay away from other translations. Get a good Bible. People spend thirty, forty, fifty and more thousands of dollars on houses, yet shop around

trying to find a Bible for less than five dollars. People spend thousands of dollars on cars, televisions, and computers but won't spend 20 dollars or more on a Bible. Perhaps some won't spend any money for a Bible because they know they are not going to use it (?).

If you are serious about understanding the Bible (Ephesians 5:17), you will be greatly benefitted by a few tools. One should begin with an exhaustive concordance. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* has been around for a long time and justly so. The next tool to procure is a decent English dictionary. Then one could seek out a Bible dictionary, a good reference on Bible geography and history, as well as appropriate maps. There are literally thousands of excellent tools that one can find to aid in understanding the Bible.

One big problem some folks have is that they don't want to spend money to help understand the Bible. Some folks need to open up their old moth-eaten wallets and pocketbooks for their own benefit! People think nothing of spending hundreds and thousands of dollars on lawnmowers, gardening implements, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, wrenches, and power tools but get panicky when it is suggested to buy tools to help with the Bible. While reading the Bible one sometimes needs help when reading something not immediately understood. The eunuch had the benefit of Philip on one occasion (Acts 8:30-38). Sometimes *Philip* might not be around. Then what can one do? If one has sufficient tools, one can greatly aid one's understanding of the Scriptures.

The Bible is God's word, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . ." (2 Timothy 3:16). God is perfect (Matthew 5:48); His word is perfect (James 1:25). That being true, His word, the Bible, can make us perfect; "That the man of God may be perfect . . ." (2 Timothy 3:17 KJV). "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). We are saved by

what? Power! The power of God. God put His power to save in the Bible (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12). There is power in the Bible! The Bible has power to save people. The Bible can save YOU! You don't need a pastor, preacher, or priest to tell you what to do; READ your Bible and see what GOD says to be saved (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). ". . . give attention to reading . . ." (1 Timothy 4:13).

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[Editor's Note: Articles such as the one above sometimes draw criticism from those who believe churches of Christ are guilty of Bibliolatry (worship of the Bible). Such charges are false and represent a gross misunderstanding of the author's intention. Articles like the one by brother Wilson are not intended in any way to detract from the sacrifice of Christ and salvation through His blood. But one cannot separate Christ from His words (Luke 9:26; cf. John 17:17). When one promotes the Bible, one is promoting the words of Christ and Christ Himself! Too many want to claim the person of Christ as Savior while ignoring what Jesus said. That simply will not work. When Scripture itself exclaims, "[R]eceive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21), it is evidence that articles which exalt the Bible as a means to our salvation do not go beyond the devotion God intended us to have toward His Word. If it were not for the Bible, we could not know anything about Christ and His sacrifice for us, or how we need to respond to God's love in giving His Son for us. Read and heed!]

THE NEW BIRTH

by Max Patterson

In John 3:3-5 Jesus expounded the new birth to Nicodemus. He told Nicodemus that it was an absolute necessity. "You must be born again."

It is interesting and puzzling that so many religious people affirm the necessity of the new birth, but deny what Jesus said it is. I have a newspaper ad entitled

"what it means to be born again," and not one time did the article cite what Jesus said.

There are three important phases of the birth phenomenon - a begetting (the implantation of the seed by the father), a bringing forth from the mother (birth), and the resultant state into which one enters as a consequence of that process (a family relationship with the family name and the inheritance privileges). Let us look more closely at this phenomenon from a spiritual standpoint.

First, there is a begetting by the Spirit. In James 1:18, "he begat us with the word of truth." Peter said, "being born again . . . by the Word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). Paul told the Corinthians, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). Please keep in mind that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Therefore, the gospel is preached; it is implanted in the human heart (mind), and if acted upon the conversion process takes place.

Second, there is the birth of water. To what does this refer? The "church fathers" clearly understood this to refer to baptism. (Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, etc.) William Wall, a Church of England scholar, asserted that not a single writer of antiquity denied the connection between the "water"

Jesus Said, "Except A Man Be Born Again, He Cannot See the Kingdom of God." - John 3:3

of John 3:5 and baptism. He suggested that John Calvin was the first to disassociate the two items, and that even Calvin conceded that his interpretation was "new."

However, if one is going to deny the necessity of baptism one has to find another explanation. The water of John 3:5 must mean baptism. A passage must be viewed literally unless there are demands, or compelling reasons for a figurative meaning. "Born of water" is consistent with language employed of baptism elsewhere (cf. Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12).

Look at a comparison of four verses:

Spirit	Water	Kingdom	John 3:5
Spirit	Baptism	Body	1 Cor. 12:13
Word	Water	Cleansed	Eph 5:26
Spirit	Washing	Saved	Titus 3:5

Third, one is, after this process, a new citizen in the kingdom of God. As a new citizen we have all the privileges and blessings of that relationship (Eph. 1:3). As a member of the family we proudly wear the family name. We are joined to the body.

Why not yield to the Lord's command to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Col. 1:13). Please do not deny the new birth, and what Jesus said it is!

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DRAWING MEN TO CHRIST

by Israel Crocker

Man has an inclination to worship. The object of an individual's worship may vary from others, yet he will worship something or someone. Often money is an object of worship for some, and others will elevate famous people. Accordingly, these worldly objects have a drawing interest to some people.

What should draw one to the worship of GOD? Jesus provides us with the answer, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). Let us examine the drawing power of the cross.

Many congregations of the Lord's church no longer look to the cross as their method of evangelism (i.e., these do not consider the Gospel powerful enough to interest the sinner). Dear reader, is this not an insult to God? The blood of Jesus Christ, they demonstrate, is not important enough for the lost. So, they have moved to other methods of drawing the crowds, such as entertainment. Congregations are turning to gymnasiums, family-life centers and youth activities for attraction.

Parents who cater to the entertainment "needs" of their children (which is especially common), and will attend congregations for this reason, should consider the placement of value they are portraying to their children. In effect these parents are saying to their children, "Don't be interested

or even feel indebted to Christ. Worry about your own selfish wants." Isaiah chided Israelites, "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them" (Isa. 3:4). Some parents today look to their children for spiritual guidance (Matt. 10:34-37). The cross of Christ alone is to be that which draws men and women to the church. Why? Because Christ shed His blood for the church (Acts 20:28) providing the only way of salvation for us. Gymnasiums and family-life centers never did a thing for us.

The misconception of drawing people by giving them what they desire is similar to the use of idols of the biblical times. God mocked the Israelites for their fascination with these idols. The people had overlooked how much of a burden these idols were to them. "They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble" (Isa. 46:7). The people had to carry the idols around and invest costly materials to build them (Jer. 10:1-5). Their idols could not speak to them, nor do anything for them. Yet, the Israelites thought their idols were allowed, for they believed God was in the idols (Isa. 57).

If some congregations could only realize that the same happens with the entertainment paraphernalia and programs. They use the Lord's money to construct costly buildings with costly maintenance, just like the idols of old times; and sadly, these congregations believe that the Lord is pleased with their "efforts of evangelism." If they would use the Lord's money for mission efforts that are biblical, they would discover that one genuinely converted person is worth more than all of the persons gained by entertainment. For the person drawn to the worship assembly by entertainment has no commitment to the church. Rather, he will easily seek better programs and bigger buildings that offer more for his entertainment needs.

Christ told the Jews what draws people to Him: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will

raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:44-45). It is still the "good old Jerusalem Gospel" that will draw a person to the cross of Christ (cf. Rom 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:18).

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1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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