

I WAS BLIND, BUT NOW I SEE

By Danny Tunnell

In 1772, John Newton penned the world's most famous hymn. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see!"

We hear people say, "When I see it, I will believe it." That is completely wrong when applied to faith. By faith we can be certain of what we do not see with our physical eyes (Hebrews 11:1). "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so what is seen was not made out of what is visible" (Hebrews 11:3, NIV). He didn't say, "God made it out of nothing." He made it out of things you can't see. This is mind-expanding!

(Doubting) Thomas said, "Unless I see . . . I will not believe" (John 20:25). Christ's own words: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

There are many things in the world that you cannot see, but they are there. They are not part of the "visible spectrum," what we can see with our eyes. We see only a tiny fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum, just a sliver.

We can't see Y-rays (gamma rays), or U-rays (ultraviolet light), or infrared, or microwave, FM, AM, or long radio waves (google: Electromagnetic Spectrum Wavelength Chart). Most of what is in the room you are in right now, you can't see. When you had an X-ray, did you see it when it went through you? It was there and it had color. Ever use a microwave? Did you see the rays going through the food and warming it up? They were there and they had color. When you listened to the radio, did you see the waves come through the air to your antenna? How about TV signals and telephone signals? We don't say, "These things don't exist because I can't see them." That would be foolish.

In John 3:8, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the Spirit. He said, "It's like the wind." You can see the effects of the wind - the trees move, the leaves move - but you don't see the wind. There is a whole realm of the unseen the Bible talks about. Some people deny that it exists and treat it like a fairy tale or as imaginary (Luke 24:11). Other people are scared of it (Mark 5:15). Neither view is right.

— Miami, OK

TOO LATE TO STOP THE TRAIN

By Bobby Dockery

A public service TV ad, urging caution when approaching a railroad crossing, notes that a train traveling 30 mph takes half a mile to come to a full stop. Many tragic accidents result from careless drivers approaching the track when it is already too late for an oncoming train to stop.

The Old Testament story of King Josiah provides a striking parallel. Josiah was not the wisest, or richest, or strongest king militarily - but no other King ever matched his wholehearted devotion to God. Josiah was a reformer dedicated to purging his land of false religion. He began repairs to the temple which was in a ruinous state. During this work, the Book of the Law of God was found in the ruins. When it was read in the King's presence, he tore his clothes in grief! He realized his people had been guilty of appalling violations of God's law because they had lost sight of God's Book! God's spokesman declared that Jerusalem would be destroyed because of its sinful neglect of His word. Destruction was coming and nothing could stop it. The reforms of Josiah came too late! God had already set in motion the

events by which Jerusalem would be overthrown!

The lesson is clear: There is a point of no return in God's dealings with man.

1) This is True of Nations. Man in the 21st Century has tried to remove God from history. We seek to confine God's sphere of operation to the church house, while assuming that the affairs of state are directed by congresses and parliaments. We talk glibly about the "separation of church and state" as though such a thing were even possible! God cannot be separated from the State because governments rise and fall at His will. Acts 17:26 proclaims that it is God who determines the appointed times of nations and sets the boundaries of their habitation. History is nothing but the record of God at work among nations! God has repeatedly overthrown nations when their cup of iniquity became full (cf. Romans 1:8). What of America??? Is it too late to stop the train?

2) This is True of Families. Many families are failing to provide spiritual training for their children. They make no attempt to attend church or study

The Bible says we are to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Those who walk by sight only cannot see the light of the gospel. They are in a hopeless condition. They can't see what Jesus did for them. They are blind to it. The "god of this world" (Satan) has blinded their spiritual eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4). Everything that we can see and touch is temporal. But the unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Have you ever tried to talk to someone about spiritual matters, only to be shut down? Instead of pushing it and aggravating them, you may need to back off and pray for them when you are alone. Pray that God will open their eyes and send laborers across their path that they will listen to (Matthew 9:38; Acts 26:18).

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. The believer will never be without Him. Even if you are the only person in the hemisphere, you'll never be alone.

People who mock Jesus and say disrespectful things about God's people are spiritually blind. Thank God we can say, "I was blind, but now I see."

— Miami, OK

the Bible regularly. Life's spiritual dimension is totally neglected. Perhaps they promise themselves: "Someday we will find time for God!" But Solomon warned that we can wait too long! "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you shall say, 'I have no delight in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). We can wait too long to provide spiritual guidance for our families.

3) This is True of Individuals. We can wait until it is too late to escape the consequences of sin in our own lives. It is possible to remain so long apart from Christ that no place is found for repentance (cf. Hebrews 12:17). Hearts can harden in neglect; We can become so entangled in sin that we find it impossible to leave! There is a point of no return for the soul!

Though most people try not to think about it there is a coming day of reckoning with God. The time to prepare for that coming day of Judgment is now! Then it will be too late!

— Fayetteville, AR

Old Paths

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

ENSLAVED BY NOTHING

By Cecil May Jr.

In his first Corinthian epistle, Paul responds to questions the church asked (7:1). Context indicates that Paul quotes sentences from their letters and responds, usually with something like, "Yes, but." ESV and other translations indicate when Paul is quoting by putting quotation marks around such sentences. For example: "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (6:12).

While Christ teaches that all foods are clean and, therefore, lawful (Luke 11:41; Acts 10:10-15), Paul notes that in addition to being lawful, things to be engaged in need to be "helpful" and "not enslaving."

One who continually practices sin, whatever the sin, becomes enslaved by it (Romans 6:16). The modern phrase is "addiction." We are familiar with drug and alcohol addiction. There is also sex addiction, power addiction, and even money addiction. News stories abound of multi-billionaires, with more money than they could ever use, committing crimes to get more, getting caught and going to jail. No amount for them is ever enough!

A few winters back during a bitter cold spell, I was sitting in a warm restaurant enjoying a hot meal and a steaming cup of coffee. Through a nearby window, close enough to touch him if the class had not been between us, was a tall young man in a short-sleeve shirt. He was probably in his forties. He was shivering. He was smoking a cigarette, taking puffs between shivers. How addictive! How enslaving nicotine must be to compel an otherwise sensible, healthy young person to leave the inside warmth and stand freezing to inhale some cigarette smoke! "I will not be enslaved to anything."

Smart phones, texting, Facebook, Instagram, the internet: all can be effective tools for accomplishing good ends. Like others, I find myself saying, "I don't know how we got along without them." However, they too can be addictive, enslaving. A mother told me she sat across the table from her teenage son as he sat with earbuds, texting. She tried to talk to him, but he was oblivious. She finally took out her phone and texted him!

If social media interferes with family time, if you cannot talk intelligibly with friends for tweeting or texting, if you cannot bear to be separated from your phone for even a few minutes, you might ask yourself, "Am I addicted?" We should say with Paul, "I will not be enslaved by anything."

During football season I follow my favorite college teams and a few adopted pro teams. However, for some, it seems sports is their religion and their team is their god. Their conversation year around is about their team and the teams their team will play. They spend thousands of dollars a weekend to go to games. Their joy or deep grief is wrapped up in whether their team wins or loses. Are we teaching our children that Bible study and worship assemblies are more important than ball practice or ball games? Compare the time, interest, money and intensity of involvement in sports with the time, interest, money and conversation about Christ, worship and help for the needy! Remember, "'All things are lawful,' but I will not be enslaved by anything." (We were saddened to receive news of brother May's passing a few days ago. His life served as an admirable example to all of us of speaking the "truth in love." He will be missed.)

KILL THE MESSENGER!

By Joe Slater

A wise king seeks advisors who will tell the truth, whereas a foolish ruler wants yes men who will tell him what he wants to hear. Entirely too often the fools carry the day, as exemplified by King Jehoram of Israel.

Because of Israel's persistent idolatry under Jehoram and his predecessors, the Lord allowed the Syrian king Ben-Hadad to besiege Israel's capital, Samaria. The resulting famine became so severe that a donkey's head sold for 80 shekels of silver, and roughly a pint of dove droppings brought five shekels of silver. People were literally eating their own children! (See 2 Kings 6:26-29).

A wise and godly king would have been moved to repentance. But wicked Jehoram vowed to kill Elisha, God's prophet who had rebuked the king's sinfulness. Not that long ago Jehoram had witnessed God's utter defeat of the Syrians when Elisha prayed (2 Kings 6:8-23). Now, however, all he wanted was the prophet's blood. Yes, indeed, "Kill the messenger!"

Jehoram had learned well from his grandfather, Ahab, who persecuted Micaiah for foretelling his defeat in battle and ultimate demise. Many other reprobate rulers followed in their footsteps. Herod Antipas murdered John the Immerser for rebuking his adulterous marriage. The Sanhedrin murdered Jesus for exposing their hypocritical lawlessness. In all cases the evildoers thought killing the messenger would solve their problem; but it never did!

To my knowledge my life has never been seriously threatened for speaking the truth. More than one has been plenty angry with me, but not to the degree of trying to kill me! However, the concept of blaming the messenger is alive and well. Let's remember that the message is God's; the faithful messenger has no control over it, nor will being angry with the messenger cause the message to change.

— Springfield, IL.

"Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Galatians 4:12-16).

FEEDING THE INNER MAN

By Wayne Burger

Spiritual gurus and modern day cults have given the idea of meditation a bad connotation. Actually, meditation is a Biblical idea and a wonderful means for spiritual growth. To meditate means to spend time in deep thought about a particular subject.

Jean Fleming suggests another reason few folks do much meditating. "Our practical, materialistic society so values action over meditation, study and prayer that we often feel guilty when we stop to think, study or pray" (Between Walden and the Whirlwind, p. 47).

"Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening" (Genesis 24:63). When Joshua took over leadership of the nation after Moses' death, God instructed, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night" (Joshua 1:8). Several times in Psalm 119 David said that he meditated (v. 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99). Even though we do not have a specific mention of Jesus meditating, it is implied in that He spent time alone (Matthew 4; 14:13, 22-23; Mark 6:31; Luke 6).

Of course our goal should be like the righteous man in the first Psalm and it says of him, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night" (v. 2).

Somewhere I've come across a statement which should be our challenge: "In the midst of our chaotic lives of activities, demands and responsibilities, it is possible to retreat, reflect and read and by so doing to feed the inner man, to grow in our spiritual lives, while remaining intensely involved in a very needy world."

Let's find the time, even if it is just a few minutes a day, to meditate on God's word.

Each one must find his special spot and time. Isaac's time and spot was evening and in a field. (Genesis 24:63.) David said that he meditated during the night watches while in bed. (Psalm 119:148; Psalm 63:6.) Some folks prefer morning, others prefer evening and some during the day. The time matters to no one except you. What's best for you? Hopefully, you can find a time when you can be alone with your Bible and your God.

Great blessings await us when we meditate.

— Littleton, NH

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1,2).

EDITORIAL . . .

WITH ALL MY HEART

By Dalton Key

God desires control over more than just our bodies. He longs - above all else - to change our hearts.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1,2). We offer to God our bodies as living sacrifices, conjoined with, or perhaps more accurately, resulting from the complete reshaping of our minds.

This inward affection for God is referred to by Christ as "the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:38).

Heaven's message has always taken aim at the heart and soul of man. Peter's inspired message on Pentecost "cut to the heart" of those who heard it (Acts 2:37). The word of God, "sharper than any two-edged sword," pierces "even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12.). "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7).

Without a sincere change of heart, outward expressions of obedience are both hollow and impotent. We are "set free from sin" and become "servants of righteousness" only after obeying God's teaching "from the heart" (Romans 6:17,18).

The new birth results in a better way of living, but the new birth concerns the spirit, the inner man. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). We "have purified our souls in obeying the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). Notice the inspired words of Paul: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

Conversion, if genuine, includes the whole man, body, soul, and spirit. While our behavior must manifest fruits of repentance, while we must live right and do right, we must first freely offer to the Lord our hearts and souls and minds.

Jesus combined these kindred elements by insisting, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).



THE WASHING OF REGENERATION

By Milton Smith

Paul wrote in Titus 3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (NKJV). Today, many would probably be surprised to learn that before the false doctrine of faith alone began to become popular, the vast majority of those in the denominational world viewed Paul's words, "the washing of regeneration," as being a clear reference to water baptism. In past generations, the connection between water baptism and the washing of regeneration was accepted by most all Bible scholars.

Today, many erroneously teach that water baptism is a "work" and "works" are excluded from the gospel plan of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10). Holding to this false view, they desperately try to find a new meaning to Paul's reference to "the washing of regeneration." I have long held the position that the "works" mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 2:8,9 refer to the works required by the old Mosaic Law. But any works that one might attempt to perform in order to "earn" his or

her salvation would also be excluded (i.e. works that would actually put God under obligation to save us). Any convert who is properly taught does not obey the command to be baptized thinking that he is about to "earn" his salvation by voluntarily submitting to water baptism. Being baptized is a simple act of obedience, not a meritorious act.

The truth seeker with an honest heart should not have any trouble seeing that "the washing of regeneration" and water baptism are one and the same. In what other way does one undergo a "washing of regeneration" for remission of sins except through water baptism? Especially when we consider the fact that the Greek word used here (regeneration) is a compound word meaning "born again." In John 3:3-5, Jesus equated being "born of water" to being "born again." Paul himself (who wrote of this washing of regeneration), was told by Ananias to "arise and be baptized" to "wash away" his sins (Acts 22:16). Paul told the Corinthian Christians that they had been "washed . . . sanctified . . . and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus"

(1 Corinthians 6:11).

Hebrews 10:22 states, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." The fact that the New Testament clearly connects the Great Commission baptism with water (John 3:5; Acts 8:36; Acts 10:47; 1 Peter 3:20,21) should tell the honest reader that Paul's washing of regeneration is a reference to water baptism. Both Thayer and Arndt and Gingrich in their Greek lexicons associate the washing of regeneration in Titus 3:5 to baptism (as did respected Greek scholars such as A.T. Robinson, Adam Clark, J.W. Shepherd, J.H. Moulton, et al.).

If those holding to the false idea of salvation by faith only would rid themselves of their prejudicial views against water baptism for the remission of sins (i.e. being born of water), the meaning of this passage could be clearly seen.

— Tulsa, OK

HOW WELL WE KNOW PEOPLE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Joe Dale Wilson

What would you think if a person was drowning and no one noticed? No one except her coach! In June of 2022 at the World Championships in Budapest, Anita Alvarez, an American artistic swimmer was performing her routine, but when she completed her performance she did not come up for air. She had passed out under the water and was sinking to the bottom of the pool. Neither the audience nor the judges noticed! A beautiful young lady was drowning and all those watching failed to notice! Andrea Fuentes, her coach, thought something must be wrong because she knew how long Anita could perform without air. Fully clothed, shoes and all, she jumped in and swam to the bottom to rescue her pupil and friend. Andrea knew exactly how long Anita could survive and did an honorable deed by saving her life.

How well do we know one another? If one of our church members is struggling in some sin or adversity, do we know them well enough to leave the ninety and nine to go after the one? Jesus seemed to think that we should (Matthew 18:12). The

uniqueness of our sweet fellowship requires intimate knowledge. It exemplifies the autonomous nature of the congregations of the churches of Christ. We are to know each other well enough that we can help our brother or sister to carry their heavy load. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1,2). The church is our safe place in life. We encourage and edify each other and offer one another strength in hours of weakness. No one is an island! One of Paul's saddest days was probably when, as he wrote, "no one stood with me, but all forsook me" (2 Timothy 4:16). We are told by the wise man that "two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

Our world is a great deal like the audience that failed Anita. It enjoys games and happiness but is not aware of the desperation of those fighting for life! Let's ask ourselves: Do we know each other well enough to know

when our help is needed? Are we willing to dive in and risk our life to save someone else? Do we see when our brother or sister might be about to quit trying to live the Christian life? It takes courage to be a lifeguard for the Master!

— Vernon, TX

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