

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

by Danny Tunnell

Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi and asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” They said, “Some say you are John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:13,14).

Jesus said, “But who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter blurted it right out: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus never corrected Peter. He didn’t say, “Now Peter, don’t say that; that’s blasphemy!” No! Jesus accepted it, He expected it, because He is the Son of the living God! He said, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona (son of John), for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17).

The question for every generation is, “Who is Jesus?” Who is this Jesus? He was a man. He was human. But very interestingly, He never committed a sin (Hebrews 4:15). He was human, just like us; but, more than that, He claimed to be the unique, only begotten, incarnate Son of God.

The Bible claims pre-existence for Jesus (John 1:1-3). Jesus birth in Bethlehem was not His origin. He has

always existed. From everlasting to everlasting He is God (Psalm 90:1,2). Before time began, He existed. He said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

The religious leaders of Jesus day, the scribes and Pharisees, answered the question, “Who is Jesus,” with hostility. They got angry and wanted to kill Him, and that anger led to His death.

The question for us is: “Was He God? Was He who He claimed to be, the Son of the living God?”

They only brought three charges against Jesus to crucify Him. (1) This man loves sinners, (2) He healed on the Sabbath day, and (3) He claimed to be the Son of God.

Jesus claimed all authority (Matthew 28:18). He forgave sin, and no prophet ever did that (Luke 7:48).

No one died like Jesus. There was darkness over the earth for three hours (Luke 23:44). They whipped Him, mocked Him, spit on Him, and put a crown of thorns on His head (Mark 15:15-20). With one simple command He could have called upon 72,000 angels to come to His rescue (Matthew 26:53).

But he didn’t. He said, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Could you forgive someone putting nails in your hands when you know you didn’t deserve it? There has never been such love as that. The centurion declared, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

Jesus endured all that for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). He looked beyond the cross. He had the capacity to see you and me. He knew He would be raised from the dead (Luke 9:22). He saw that there would be a gathering of people in His name who would make up His body. He saw the day when His people would be with Him in His eternal kingdom. That was the joy that was set before Him.

The question that Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” is the most important and relevant question ever posed. Jesus Christ is still very much alive and active today (Hebrews 13:8). How you answer that question will help determine where you will be a thousand years from today!

— Miami, OK

CHRIST SENT ME NOT TO BAPTIZE, BUT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

by Milton Smith

The title of this article comes from Paul’s inspired letter written to the church at Corinth. The passage is found in 1 Corinthians 1:17. Here, Paul did indeed write, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel . . .” (KJV). Sadly, many who teach the false doctrine of salvation by faith alone (before and without water baptism), will often take these words written by Paul and try to make them imply something that Paul never had any intention of teaching.

I actually had a friend point to this passage and insist that baptism was “no part of the gospel that Paul preached,” emphasizing that Christ did not send Paul to baptize. I was amazed by his misapplication of what Paul was actually saying here. Consider what an embarrassing position a person must take in order to make such a claim. To begin with, we must ask: did Paul baptize anyone? Indeed he did, and he mentions some by name (Crispus, Gaius, Stephanas) and does so in this very chapter (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:14-16). So the question must be asked: by whose

authority did Paul baptize these men? If not by Christ’s authority, by whose authority did Paul do such baptizing?

Again we must ask, did Paul “preach” baptism in any of his letters? He most assuredly did (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26,27; 1 Corinthians 12:13, et al). We must thus conclude that (1) Paul physically baptized certain converts and (2) emphatically taught the need to be baptized in his letters; obviously doing both by the authority of Christ. When the other apostles went into the world preaching the gospel and baptizing, they did so under the authority of Jesus Christ, who sent them forth on this world-wide “great commission” (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). When Philip “preached Jesus” to the Ethiopian nobleman and baptized him, by whose authority did he do so? Obviously, by the authority of Jesus Christ. With these facts in mind, let us carefully consider what Paul was actually saying in this passage (and what he was not saying).

To begin with, Paul was not addressing what he was sent to preach,

but what he was sent to do. “Preaching” is not “baptizing” and “baptizing” is not “preaching.” Preaching and baptizing are two different things. One can preach the need to be baptized but another person might do the actual baptizing. As a local minister, I have often served as the host preacher for gospel meetings where another has done the preaching. As is often the procedure, after the visiting minister delivered his message (i.e. “preached), if one responded to be baptized, I would do the actual baptizing. Many good scholars believe that Paul may have had some health issues that might have hindered him from being overly involved in the physical act of baptizing. If this be the case, preaching was his main mission, not the actual act of baptizing.

But two facts are clear: Paul preached baptism, and, on occasion, did the actual baptizing. Such facts are critical to properly understanding what Paul was saying and what he was not saying in this passage.

— Tulsa, OK

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

LOVE FOR GOD’S WORD

By Milton Smith

Bible study is not optional; it is expected of every Christian. A common phrase found numerous times throughout the Old Testament is the promise that Jehovah God will show mercy unto those who love Him and “keep His commandments.” Deuteronomy 30:16 speaks of the duty of His people to “love Jehovah” and desire to “walk in his ways, keeping His commandments, statutes, and judgments.” Most all are familiar with Jesus’ words in John 14:15: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” But Jesus also said in John 15:10, “If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love.” It was the aged apostle John who wrote in his first general epistle that all Christians should love God and keep His commandments (1 John 5:3).

Clearly, God expects us to keep His commandments! But how can this be done if we choose to remain ignorant of God’s Word? This is where good Bible study becomes a must. I’m often asked what things might be helpful to insure profitable Bible study. Whatever my suggestions might be worth, I’m happy to offer them if they might be of any help. To begin with, any study of the Bible must be done reverently. Respecting the Bible as the Word of God is an absolute must. Any irreverent, haphazard attempt to study God’s Word will always fall short of what is needful. The student must always have a desire to learn. This means that the reader must approach the Bible with an open mind and a willingness to do what the Book says to do; even if it means giving up previously held ideas that are not found in the Bible - no matter how cherished those ideas might have been.

Prayer should always accompany good Bible study. This does not mean that God will give us a “new” revelation as we study (for such is not promised to us today). But we can pray - as I have often done - that God might provide us with clear minds and pure hearts as we venture into our study. It is always important to consult other scriptures that might relate to a particular subject that the reader is studying. For example, the gospel writers will often give complimentary information regarding certain events in the life of Christ. One should honestly desire to understand what a passage is saying, love the Word of God, respect it for what it teaches, and live by those teachings. After all, Jesus once said, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge . . . in the last day” (John 12:48).

May each of us study our Bible every day and respect it for the great truth that it contains!

— Tulsa, OK

“Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in your way. Establish Your word to your servant, who is devoted to fearing You . . . Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:36-38, 97,105).

EVERY PERSON HAS VALUE

By Joe Dale Wilson

We live in a world that needs the Golden Rule applied every day and in every action. Jesus instructed us, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12). How we want to be treated by others should be reflected in the way we treat those with whom we have contact. Our world is full of people who take advantage of the weak. We have bullying in schools, jail houses and even in the work place. When this happens people feel they are better than others. Paul told the Philippians that we are to count others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

In God’s sight none of us are better than any other person. God knows the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30) and knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8). Why? Because He cares! Every person, regardless of gender, nationality, height, weight, complexion, economic status, warts and freckles are precious to God. He knows more about us than we know about ourselves.

God demonstrated how much He regards us by giving Jesus to die on the cross (John 3:16). Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24). He was speaking of His own death. He was able to bring others to God because He gave Himself up. The very first thing that Jesus tells those who would be Christians is to “deny” self (Matthew 16:24). When this happens a person can realize the value of others and be of service to them. Jesus tells us the second command is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

We cannot have a selfish bone in our bodies when we love others as we love ourselves. John tells us, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). Loving others is only demonstrated in a person’s life when he becomes more like Christ in realizing the preciousness of others. Jesus was that grain of wheat that gave up everything for us. When we become wheat and give up our selfishness for others we can have a tremendous effect on our world, producing 30, 40, or 100 times what we originally had (Matthew 13:8,23). We will increase the value that is in the world, school, work place, and home. Unselfish people bring out the best value in others.

In Matthew 18:1-4 Jesus’ disciples wanted to know who was the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus humbled them by putting a little child in the center of the discussion. He let them know that unless they became like little children they would not even be in the kingdom, let alone be the greatest. Little children see the value of others and they really do not think they are greater than their peers. Little ones in our congregations serve as examples of what God wants in our lives. They have no thoughts of personal greatness. We must humble ourselves to be like little children to see the significance of those around us.

Every person is valuable to God! Every person should be valuable to ME!

— Vernon, TX

Father

by Joe Slater

Where did the word “father” come from? The background of the Hebrew term (abh) is uncertain, but the Greek term (patēr) is from a root meaning nourisher, protector, upholder (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

Father can refer to your closest male ancestor; that’s the way we commonly think of it. But it can also mean a more distant or remote male ancestor (perhaps what we call a grandfather or a man with several “greats” before grandfather). The Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well said, **“Our fathers”** (that is, our ancestors from several generations back) *“worshipped on this mountain”* (John 4:20).

Most importantly, Scripture uses “Father” numerous times denoting God. We who are blessed to be fathers in the flesh strive to demonstrate those positive qualities of nourishing, protecting, and upholding that characterize our Heavenly Father.

Nourishing includes far more than merely providing a balanced physical diet for our children. It involves everything that supports growth; and spiritual growth is even more important than physical growth.

God provides the protection His children need from the storms and pitfalls of life. He is *“our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1).

Our children need the same protection from us as their earthly fathers.

Our Heavenly Father upholds us when the world would knock us down and when we, through weakness and sin, fall flat on our faces. Let us, as fathers, do the same for our children!

— Justin, TX

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

EDITORIAL . . .

TAKE HEED WHOM YOU HEAR

By Dalton Key

If the Bible says it, we’d best believe it. “Let God be true, but every man a liar.” (Romans 3:4.)

As we work to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, and yes, even truth from falsehoods, we should never dismiss the weighty words of the Almighty. Remember, “God cannot lie” (Hebrews 6:18).

Haven’t we wasted enough time listening to the “experts” who keep droning on and on, saying less and less, while wasting more and more words in the process? Bertrand Russell once observed, “Even when the experts all agree, they may well be mistaken.” Jesus put it even plainer. “If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

Listening to public opinion is no better. The majority of us has been in the wrong since the days of the flood. Where was the majority when the golden calf was being worshipped? Where was the majority when Joshua and Caleb encouraged victory over the armies of Canaan? Where was the majority when Pilate offered to release Jesus rather than Barabbas? They were where the majority has almost always been, on the wrong side of the issue. “You must not do wrong just because everyone else is doing it” (Exodus 23:2, NCV).

Perhaps we should just listen to the lawmakers. But no, the voice of government is often proven over time to have been mistaken, misguided, and altogether wrong. Just making a thing legal doesn’t make it right. The law in Daniel’s day prohibited prayer. Our Lord was crucified by those purporting to uphold the law. The early church lost thousands of her members to martyrdom because of the laws and lawmakers of that time. Legality and propriety are often miles apart, yet when push comes to shove, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

We could just listen to our heart. But the heart too-often leads us astray. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

The best and wisest course for all of us is to simply listen to the words of God above all else. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1,2).



ARE WE SEEKING GOD’S APPROVAL OR MAN’S?

by Danny Tunnell

“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29).

On what do we base our decisions? Is it, “How is this going to make me look? What will my friends think? Is this going to make people happy with me? Will it make me popular?”

The Christian life is not about being well-liked by everyone. It’s not about trying to impress people. It’s about being faithful to God. It’s about living a life trying to please God (Galatians 1:10). If we honor God, He will honor us (1 Samuel 2:30).

When we do the right thing other people will not always support us or encourage us. In fact, they may disapprove. Why? Jesus said, “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). Paul said “the god of this world has blinded” the minds of those who don’t believe (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Don’t make decisions based on other people’s opinions. Make decisions based on the word of God.

When God called Jeremiah, Jeremiah felt that he was too young.

“Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth” (Jeremiah 1:6). Do you remember how God responded? “Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver (protect) you” (Jeremiah 1:8). In other words, “Don’t fear the people, or what they say.”

People who are addicted to approval will never truly walk in the light (1 John 1:7). “Friendship with the world (the world system of evil) is enmity (actively opposed or hostile) with God” (James 4:4).

Don’t let someone’s disapproval stop you from doing what you believe God wants you to do.

In 2 Samuel 6, David and his men recovered the ark of the covenant. It had been stolen and now some 20 years later was being returned. David was so excited that he danced with all his might (2 Samuel 6:14). His wife Michal had been watching and she criticized her husband for doing that (2 Samuel 6:20). David was not celebrating for her approval, but in gratitude to God! (2 Samuel 6:21,22). David did not let his wife’s disapproval

stop him from doing what he believed God wanted him to do. Because of David’s devotion to God he is called a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

If you have God’s approval, that’s really all you need.

In 1 Samuel 15, God told King Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites (vs. 2,3). Why did Saul choose to disobey God? He tells us why. “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice” (vs. 24). In other words, he disobeyed God in an effort to be popular with people. He wanted their approval. What was the outcome? Saul lost the kingdom. God said to Samuel, “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king” (vs. 11).

Someone may say, “Is it really a big deal to seek man’s approval over God’s?” The story of King Saul shows that it is. On the other hand, when we choose God’s approval over man’s, we glorify God and show that we truly love Him (John 14:15).

— Miami, OK

Thoughts on Threescore and Ten

by Joe Slater

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10, KJV).

I reached my threescore and ten a few days ago. That milestone gives me pause to reflect a bit. By God’s grace I’m in fairly decent health, so look out, fourscore, here I come!

When Moses wrote that Psalm, he was already well above eighty years old. He would survive to 120! But he had lived through some frightfully difficult times as he led the Israelites through the wilderness. Their persistent rebellion had brought God’s wrath down upon them again and again! Multitudes had died before their time. The average human life span would continue to plummet for a good while.

My own life has been far less turbulent, though not without its trials. I’ve been blessed to do the work I love for over 46 years. I’m not naïve

enough to think I have 46 more to continue working! If I’m to accomplish anything for the Lord, the time is now. Then again, that has always been the case.

Only one life
Twill soon be past
Only what’s done
For Christ will last (C. T. Studd)
Faith, family, and friends surpass
all else in importance. I’ve always
“known” that but each passing year
makes it clearer.
I hope that’s true for you as well.

— Justin, TX

“Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God . . . The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away . . . So teach us to number

our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:1,2,10,12).

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:15-17).

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