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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

What Does The Bible Mean When It Says Jesus "Bore" Our Sins?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

There is some controversy among Christians about what passages like 1 Peter 2:24 and Hebrews 9:28 mean when they say Jesus "bare our sins." Fortunately, as we say "the Bible is its own best commentary" and it does not leave us in the dark about the phrase. We don't have to search high and low for some obscure translation or definition from some source nobody has ever heard of in an attempt to explain away the plain meaning; instead we can just believe what the Bible says straight out is the meaning for Jesus bearing our sins.

This terminology is found twice in Isaiah 53; likely, Hebrews 9:28 is a quote from Isaiah 53:12, and 1 Pet 2:24 would be a reference to verse 11 and/or 12. BibleStudyTools.com says the word "bare" (nasa, Strongs #5375) in Isaiah 53:12 means "to lift, bear up, carry, take." The context of Isaiah 53 confirms this definition: verse 6c says "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." If something is "laid" on you then you "bear" it of course. So verse 6 tells us exactly what verses 11 and 12 are saying – Jesus bore our sins in the sense that our sins were laid on Him.

Many Christians only give lip service to the rule of interpretation that says context helps dictate the meaning of a verse. They only follow that rule when the context seems to uphold their preconceived view of a verse. If the context dictates another meaning, for example how Isaiah 53:5-6 explains our phrase in 11-12, they throw the context rule right out the window. They only care about context when it suits their purposes.

The scapegoat of Leviticus 16 affords the same definition for "bearing sin": verse 22 says, "the goat shall

bear upon him all their iniquities” and verse 21 has “all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat.” So the goat bore the sin of the Israelites in the sense their sins were put on the goat. Of course, the scapegoat is only a type of Christ; he didn’t really take away their sins. In reality Jesus is the one who bore the sin of the Israelites (and ours). In reality our sins were placed on Him.

In this case, “bearing sin” means Jesus took responsibility for our sin. This meaning for the word “bear” is illustrated well by its use in Leviticus 24:15-16: “Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. ... he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him...” Another illustration: If a father has to “bear” his son’s financial debt (we might say the debt was “laid” on his shoulders), that means Dad literally takes responsibility for his son’s debt, he pays his son’s debt. Similarly, doesn’t Acts 20:28 teach Jesus paid our sin debt?

This does NOT mean the guilt of our sins was transferred to Jesus (the Calvinistic view); it is impossible to rewrite history. Instead this means Jesus took responsibility for our sins by taking our curse (Galatians 3:13) our penalty, our consequences. This is confirmed by the preceding verse, Isaiah 53:5, which teaches our sins were laid on Jesus in the sense “the chastisement of our peace was upon him.” Jesus was punished so we could have peace with God. Jesus took the punishment for our sin so we wouldn’t have to. He became the penalty substitute for mankind, and all those who trust and obey Him take advantage of that (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

I Have Fought a Good Fight

J.D. Tant (1861-1941)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

"Sixty years have come and gone. I hope and pray that long after I cross the great divide, hundreds will read my sermons, be taught the way of life, and take up their cross and follow Jesus. I am leaving this bit of history that others may know that life was no flowery bed for me but fraught with many hardships all along the way. If Paul could tell his experiences and troubles for the benefit of those who would live after him, I see no reason why my readers should not know something of my past life that it may encourage the poor boy or girl who seeks a higher plane in life, to know that all difficulties can be overcome by the one who will not give up the fight.

I was born in Paulding county, Georgia, 1861. I was only eight days old when my father started to the war, and was four years old when he returned, and I was taught that he was my father, and that I must respect him. Our home was on the New Hope church battleground. After the battle nothing was left on the farm but some oak trees. My dear mother and oldest brother walked twenty-two miles to where they heard of a wheat field outside the army's march, and pulled up two bushels of wheat, beat it out on a rail the next day, brought it home and for three months we lived under an oak tree, with nothing to eat except boiled wheat and salted water put on it. The salt was obtained by mother's digging up the ground where the smokehouse had stood and boiling the dirt to get the salt from it.

At the age of fourteen, I joined the Methodist church. At fifteen years of age, with my parents, I moved from Georgia to Texas. About this time I became interested in an education, and fortunately we located near a high school, but unfortunately I had only one dollar to supply all my earthly needs. I invested that in three yards of cloth, from which my mother made me a pair of pants. I did not have a single school book. My teacher agreed that he would leave one window unfastened each night and for me to come and get all books containing my lessons for the next day, learn my lessons, and put the books back next morning before school.

About this time I thought I was up on vocal music and began to teach in different communities. I stood high with the Methodists and passed my examination for a preacher at nineteen. I then went to southwest Texas, and was teaching music, and breaking wild horses to ride, for a living, and preaching Methodist doctrine to help the people. About this time I heard old Brother W.H.D. Carrington preach the gospel, and I

was shaken into a congregation of Christians on my Methodist baptism when twenty-one years of age. After trying to preach the gospel, and ease my conscience for three years on Methodist baptism, I made up my mind by studying the Bible that the Lord knew nothing of sect baptism. I then got on a Texas pony and rode one hundred and twenty-seven miles and had John Durst to baptize me into Christ.

On one occasion I started out afoot to my appointment to preach, fifty-five miles away. No brother would loan me a horse, yet a Baptist woman let me ride her saddle horse. Six miles before reaching my appointment I had to swim a creek and got wet all over. I wrung out my clothes but my shoes were new and with all the work I could do, I could not get them on while wet. So I went on to the church house and found it crowded. I walked down the aisle with one shoe on and the other in my hand, set it on the pulpit and preached the gospel.

Many times I have ridden forty miles during the night, have laid down and slept on the ground two or three hours, and gotten up and gone on to my appointment. I have gone more times than one without dinner and supper to reach my appointment to preach.

The church of Christ at Holland told me to go out and preach and they would guarantee me \$50 per month, provided the people would give it to me. Some subscribed liberally. One old brother, worth \$80,000 promised \$10 to the work and never did pay it. Another brother worth \$40,000 promised \$10 and paid it. One sister worth \$600,000 was glad I was in the work, was anxious to help, but on account of a large herd of cattle she had bought, was unable to pay anything.

It was J.D. Tant who held the first meeting in Killeen, Bell County, Texas, bought candles to light the house, stayed at a third class hotel, and bought my horse feed at a wagon yard from Wednesday till Sunday before a single member out of the five families who lived there invited me to their homes. Yet I formed a congregation of eleven members and put them to work. Killeen now has a good house and two hundred members, yet I do not suppose they want me to preach the gospel there. I have labored five months under Holland at \$50 per month as they had promised. Then they called me in and heard my report. I had baptized fifty-three and done much good, but they feared they would have a drought. They were pleased with my work, but did not feel able to support me longer for the work. They paid me \$96 of the \$250 they owed me, and let me go. I guess they will pay me at the judgment day.

During September, 1886, I got up my first debate. I did not have sense enough to get up the proposition so I rode one hundred and forty miles horseback to get McGary and Hansbrough to help me word propositions for debate. Since then I have had experience in debating seventeen states with thirteen denominations. I have held over two hundred debates, and think I know more about debating than I did then.

It was during the year 1886 that I attended the Austin state meeting where the church of Christ divided, when a small faction pulled off and organized a human society, and introduced instrumental music in worship. I did not go there to attend the meeting, but to hunt for a wife. I found the girl I wanted and told her my business. Four years later we were married. She became the mother of two children. Both of them are now dead. She was called home in 1894. A grander woman for a preacher's wife never lived. I count on seeing her with the redeemed in the city of our God.

In 1896, I married Miss Nannie Yater, who now stands by my side and helps me fight the battles of life. She is the mother of six children.

I write this bit of history only for the benefit of the young who may come after me so they will not think a preacher's life is all flowers and sunshine. If I had to live life again I know of but few changes I would make. I learned forty years ago that to become a Christian, a man must hear Christ (Matthew 7:24), have faith in him (John 20:30,31), repent of his sins (Luke 24:47), confess Christ (Matthew 20:32), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). I have never had occasion to change but still preach it that way today.

As I come nearer the river's bank, I am fighting harder and trying to do more that God may welcome me than ever before. Only a few more miles and I shall rejoice to see the other side. If God accepts me, all will be well with me.

J.D. Tant died at 4:30 o'clock, Sunday afternoon, June 1, 1941. He was buried in the Cleburne Memorial Cemetery,

Cleburne, TX. A simple stone marks the spot, bearing the legend: "Jefferson Davis Tant, 1861-1941, 'I have fought a good fight.'" (From the book of J.D. Tant's sermons, *The Gospel X-Ray*, published by Firm Foundation in 1933.)
Guardian of Truth - November 20, 1986.

The biography of my grandfather, titled **J.D. Tant, Texas Preacher**, was written by my father, Yater Tant about 1958, and is still in print, and I have been told it has sold more copies than the biography of any other gospel preacher. And my grandmother's biography, **Nannie Yater Tant**, is also still in print. They are fascinating stories.

Things Taken For Granted

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Tuesday evening, I came downstairs from my office, and it seemed the temperature was higher than normal. I asked Sylvia and she thought so as well. I checked the temperature and sure enough it was about 83 degrees. The first thing I did was to check the batteries in the thermostat, not the problem. Next, I went outside to check the unit, which was not running, and upon closer inspection the condenser fan was locked up. The last few days have really taught us that we have taken the AC unit downstairs for granted. This is so easy for one to do.

The expression "things taken for granted" is defined as, "to expect someone or something to be always available to serve in some way without thanks or recognition; to value someone or something too lightly" (**McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs**).

Certainly, it is not just AC units we take for granted. There are many things of much greater value and importance which we often fail to appreciate like we should until they are gone. What about our health? Maybe you are in good health at the moment, yet all that can change in a matter of seconds. Are we thankful to God for our well being physically speaking? We must make sure we use our bodies as a living sacrifice in serving the Lord while we can (Romans 12:1). One never knows when we may not be able to visit the sick, go teach someone the gospel of Christ, or assemble with the saints. I remember several years ago going to visit an older member of the Lord's church who was in the nursing home. He began to weep, telling me how much he wanted to go to church services but now he was unable. Lord help us to appreciate our health.

What about our family, friends, and our brethren? Do we take them for granted? I often hear people say how much they would like to speak to their parents again. Either to ask their advice about something or just once again to utter the words "I love you" to them. One of my best friends passed from this life about 9 years ago at the age of 61. Our plans were that he would retire, buy an RV, and we would travel over the country, I would preach, and he would lead singing. That never happened. Instead of taking our mothers and fathers for granted let us honor, love and serve them while they are living (Ephesians 6:1-3). May we be to our friends one which "sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). Please help us Lord to never take our relationships in life for granted.

There is one thing I think covid taught many of us, how much we miss the opportunity to assemble with the people of God and worship. For a few weeks the church here did not meet for worship and Bible study. We were able to present lessons and broadcast them on YouTube so we could at least be instructed and encouraged by the study of God's word. Yet there was something missing. The Lord knew what was best for His people. Not only are we not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together but we are also to stir up love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). The first Sunday we were able to assemble again I remember the excitement and joy expressed by so many. To once again be together, to sing, pray, give, study, and partake of the Lord's Supper, how uplifting and encouraging it really was. It was so obvious we had taken this for granted for probably many years. Our God and Father in heaven help us to be thankful for the privilege of coming together with Your people to worship You.

I am so afraid far too many who profess to be Christians take our great God for granted as

well. Throughout the day how many times do you find yourself just thinking about Him, His greatness, goodness, and power? How often do you approach His throne, petitioning Him for His grace, mercy, and forgiveness? Do you spend time expressing unto Him your thanks for all the blessings received from Him, both physical and spiritual? The song "Count Your Blessings" reminds us to count our many blessings, naming them one by one, and it will surprise us what He has done for each of us. Some use God about like they do a spare tire on their car, the only time they think of Him is when there is an emergency. How often do you think about your spare tire? Have you checked it lately? I think I know the answer. The Psalmist said, "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice" (Psalm 63:6-7). Oh gracious Father help us to never take You, Your Son, nor Your Spirit for granted.

By the way, the AC man is on his way. Hopefully we will sleep comfortably tonight and appreciate more the blessings given to us by God in this great land in which we live.

Proverbs Saved My Neck

Mike Thomas | Bowling Greek, Kentucky, USA

There have been a few times the book of Proverbs proved to be a most profitable resource in helping me make wise decisions.

Avoid Surety

"Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, one of those who is surety for debts; If you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?" (Proverbs 22:26-27). Actually, this one is mentioned quite often in the proverbs (6:1-3; 17:18). The advice is consistent: "He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure" (11:15).

Surety is referring to what we call co-signing a loan for someone, which will sometimes come up when we are trying to help people. Sometimes a friend has such poor credit that the only way they can get the car loan or qualify for the rent agreement is if you sign the contract with them. The book of Proverbs says stay far away from those deals because of the danger it will most likely create for you financially. This is not to say we can never do it for a relative or a fellow Christian who we know is truly reliable, but those are very rare cases. Most of the time this is a terrible idea, one that will eventually ruin you financially and jeopardize your relationship with that person. The more prudent path is to avoid those arrangements altogether.

It is awkward at first, especially when you appear to be their only hope of getting the credit, but God's word says you are asking for trouble in "helping" people in that manner. You might as well prepare to assume the loan (and loss) because it will most likely happen, which is why the bank is unwilling to lend them the money. Be wise and learn to say No. Specifically, "I have a standing policy to not enter those arrangements with anyone." You will be glad you did.

Avoid Inappropriate Relationships

"Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes into his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent" (Proverbs 6:27-29).

This too is addressed quite often in the proverbs and the message is very clear: avoid adultery at all costs. Namely, "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away" (verses 32-33). It is such an important message that it is the predominant thought in chapters 2-7, so apparently this is a danger that God wants us to especially be on guard against. Anyone who has spent enough time in this world knows why. Our world is immersed in the message of sexual immorality, lust, gratification, and carnal living. Proverbs is saying be wise and avoid situations that will get you in trouble, as with your "neighbor's wife"

and people you are familiar with.

Adultery most often occurs between people who know one another. Since that is so, do not let your desires cause you to think inappropriate thoughts about your friend, acquaintance, or even fellow Christian. Let godliness reign and choose love instead – for your spouse, their spouse, and our holy God. Paul said it best to the Thessalonians:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness”
(1 Thessalonians 4:3-7).

This is exactly what Solomon suggested in Proverbs many years prior. Can you dump hot coals down your shirt and not get burned? Neither can you entertain inappropriate thoughts and moments with someone who is not your spouse (especially when one or both of you are married) and not have it ruin you. The wise path to take is avoid coals altogether; namely, do not be alone with that person either in reality or in your mind! Lust equals fire and fire equals pain, so stay away from the heat. If you must help someone in trouble, do so with your spouse or with an elder from church, so as to avoid any temptation or ungodly innuendo. More often than not, this principle has been a lifesaver of many a preacher, elder, and fellow Christian.

Avoid Hasty Judgment

“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (Proverbs 18:13).

How many times have we found this to be true? We hear the case from one person’s perspective, buy into their logic, and indict the other person before hearing their side. Then, when we do eventually hear the other side of the conflict, we realize we were not presented with all of the facts nor did we consider other alternatives. This is the way fools operate, which is why Proverbs says to use better judgment. “The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (18:17). The wiser response is to patiently examine all of the facts before reaching a conclusion or offering a judgment. This will prevent us from getting involved in conflicts that are rooted in ignorance, arrogance, and impulsive behavior.

Instead, let us walk in love and godly expectation as Christ suggests. Love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:6-7). If I love someone, I will not believe the first sinful report given on them but will instead give them every chance in the world to prove it false. Indeed, I will “hope” the thing being said about them is incorrect and approach them with a desire to defend them, especially if that is what the truth reveals. Love endures all things because of a sincere desire for righteousness to prevail and for the innocent to be vindicated. Only a fool will reach hasty decisions through misinformation and personal vendettas. This is “folly and shame to him” who acts that way.

Conclusion

The book of Proverbs is loaded with valuable information that will give us guidance and good judgment. This is true because the “words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd” (Ecclesiastes 12:11). We can depend on these well-driven nails because they are rooted in God, “who alone is wise” (Jude verse 25) and is the ultimate source of what is right.

Jesus Was A Legalist

DO YOU REALLY KNOW JESUS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

The #1 result for the words "Jesus" and "legalist" on the internet is an article titled, "**Why Jesus Hates Legalism.**" The author calls legalism a sin and tells us that "*Jesus had more conflicts with the legalists of*

His day than any other group." In fact, the writer tells us that Jesus deliberately provoked the legalists by not following their hand-washing customs and by healing people on the Sabbath. Obviously, the writer of the article in question, like many others, identifies the Pharisees as legalists.

After chiding two common definitions of legalism (1. emphasis on obedience, and 2. manmade rules), the writer gives us a custom-made definition:

Legalism is an attempt to gain favor with God or to impress our fellow man by doing certain things (or avoiding other things), without regard to the condition of our hearts before God.

It concerns me when folks feel they need to create their own definition. Did all the linguistic experts miss the mark? We won't find a definition for "legalism" in a Bible lexicon, since it is not a Bible word. So, it makes sense to use a trusted source for the meaning of words - perhaps, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary? There, we find the following definition:

...strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were not legalists, at least not according to the dictionary definition of the word. In Mark 7:8-9, Jesus said:

For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men - the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. ...All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

Paul described the Pharisees as *"the strictest sect of our religion"* (Acts 26:5). Strict, yes. Legalistic, hardly. They had great zeal for tradition, for the teachings of their fathers, for their own rules and interpretations, but not for the word of God. In Mark 7, Jesus gave an example of their contempt for the law of God. They had released the people from God's command to supply the needs of their parents. Further, in Matthew 5 we find a series of "you have heard it said, but I say to you" statements. Jesus was correcting the misuses of God's word and erroneous teachings of the Jewish leaders (5:19-20).

Some cite Luke 11:42 as evidence of Pharisaical legalism. Surely tithing your spice cupboard is legalism to the extreme! Notice the verse with me:

But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Where did Jesus condemn tithing spices? He spoke out against their failure to focus on justice and love. He concludes they should focus on love, justice, and tithing. All of these were part of the law of God.

As we turn our attention to Jesus and the claim that He was a legalist, I remind you what legalism is. The dictionary definition is:

...strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code.

Consider the following statements by Jesus:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

But why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

...blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it! (Luke 11:28)

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. (John 12:48)

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words... (John 14:23-24)

Time and again Jesus emphasized the need for people to obey the word of God. That, my friend, is legalism. Jesus kept God's law, and He expects you and I to do the same.

Sources:

bible.org

m-w.com

The Kingdom of Din

Patrick Andrews | Conway, Arkansas, USA

from an idea by Lorrie White

The light was ever-present,
Up above the Kingdom of Din,
Yet the Dinnites would only see it,
Only briefly, now and again.
When a ray of light would penetrate,
Down into their darkened abode,
Through a fissure of rock above them,
Or sometimes, through a small hole.

The citizens of Din were warned daily,
To immediately and always take flight,
They were told of the pain they would suffer,
If they ever looked into the light.

The Dinnites lived continuously,
In total darkness, because of the fear,
Of what a small beam of light, might do to them,
If they ever clumsily, stumbled too near.
They had heard the horror stories,
Of those who had looked up at the light,
The stories they told of the pain they endured,
Created generations of fright.

The terrors grew in abundance,
About those fools who would look up again,
They would disappear forever,
Never more seen in the Kingdom of Din.

The King of Din loathed all his subjects,
Yet he would lie to keep them below,
He watched them grope around in the darkness,
While relishing his control of their souls.

"Anyone," he proclaimed,
"Whom the light can draw in,
Would forever cry out in pain,
One moment they're here,
The next moment they're gone,

And would never be heard from again.
The light can somehow consume them,
And take them away from their home,
Away from all of the pleasures down here,
To die somewhere else all alone”.

One day a Dinnite named Stephen,
So afraid of the world up above,
Tripped on a rock in the darkness,
And awoke with a feeling he loved.
A small beam of light penetrated,
Into the only world that he knew,
The warmth of that light was ecstatic,
The things he'd been told were untrue.
Little by little he opened his eyes,
It hurt a little but it wasn't intense,
Pretty soon his eyes were wide open,
Along with all of his sense.
He heard a sound unfamiliar,
Along with some he knew very well,
He didn't know the sound was called laughter,
He just knew that it made his heart swell.

The other sound he heard was familiar,
But it was quite different in its own way,
He was sure that he heard folks that were crying,
But he'd never heard folks cry in this way.

He mustered what little courage he had,
And called out to those he could hear,
“What in the world is going on;
Just what are y'all doing up there?”

He soon saw a face that was familiar,
Leaning over the hole he was in,
The face of one, who'd been taken before,
One who'd vanished from the Kingdom of Din.

The man had an expression that covered his face,
The expression, he learned, was a grin,
He lifted Stephen up, onto his feet,
And out of the hole he'd been in.

The beauty of this new world was brilliant,
Illuminated by such a bright light,
The luminance he'd been so afraid of,
Was instead such a beautiful sight.

He soon figured out the laughter,
And put a smile on his face,
As he began to recognize others,
That had been freed from the very same place.

His tears began to fall to the ground,
As laughter gushed out of his lungs,
All the fools he used to make fun of,
Had been feeling the warmth of the Son.
The holes that penetrated the darkness,
Allowing beams of light to come in,
Were dug by the fools who had sought out the light,
Now, trying to free the slaves still in Sin.

Had you been freed from the darkness,
How would you live out your life,
Would you just enjoy your freedom,
Or would you take on a job filled with strife?
Because those who are still living in darkness,
Hate those who are digging the holes,
Those who are reflecting the light of the Son,
In an effort to save someone's soul.

Had you been a slave in the Kingdom of Din,
Living in ignorance, darkness and fear,
How would you react to one providing a light,
Pointing you to the Son that's up there?
Those who abide in the darkness,
Afraid to stand face to face with the light,
Just what are they really afraid of,
What holds them in the Kingdom of Night?

One thing I learned in the Kingdom of Sin,
Is that darkness runs from the light,
Darkness will boast of its greatness,
But it will never stand up and fight.
I also learned, when I was in Sin,
That I couldn't help one single soul,
I had to be on the side of the Light,
To lift someone else out of the hole.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

"But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:19-21).

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Background to the Establishment of the Church in Thessalonica

The book contains the written account of the Apostle Paul's three missionary journeys, all of which took place from approximately 47-57 AD. The first of his journeys began in Antioch of Syria, about 12-14 years after he had become a Christian. Having departed for the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, both he and Barnabas traveled to the island of Cyprus before sailing on to the southern region of Asia Minor, taking John Mark as their helper. It was during that journey that the gospel was taught to both Jews and Gentiles and the Galatian churches were established.

After the first journey was completed, Paul later said in Acts 15:36, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." And so began the second journey with Paul and Silas traveling throughout Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches, while Barnabas took Mark and sailed off to Cyprus. Coming to Derbe, Paul found a certain disciple named Timothy who "was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him" (Acts 16:1-3).

"And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas (Acts 16:6-8)."

As they had already preached in the southeastern region of Asia Minor on their first journey, it would seem that it was the southwestern region that was being forbidden at that time. Not being able to go either north or south, they were being methodically pushed along a corridor to the west. The restriction was temporary because Paul was later permitted to travel to Ephesus and enter the Jewish synagogue and reason with those who were there (Acts 18:19-21).

It was in Troas that a vision in the night appeared to Paul regarding the people of Macedonia, leading him to conclude that "God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:8-10)." This is significant in that it marks the point in history when the gospel first came to Europe, initially to those living in Greece. The change in pronouns also indicates that they were joined by Luke the physician.

After putting out to sea, they crossed over to Samothrace, "and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi" (Acts 16:11-12). Passing

"through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:1-3).

These verses, and others, tell us how Paul went about teaching the gospel to those who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the people of Israel and them that feared God. The fact that he "reasoned with them from the Scriptures" and "was explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" tells us that he went to the writings of the prophets and spent time quoting, comparing, and drawing conclusions that the listeners could understand, in much the same way that he had done earlier in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16-41). Afterwards, he was able to say, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ (Acts 17:3)."

These words which Paul spoke remind us of a similar discussion that Jesus had had with some disciples on the road to Emmaus:

"O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27).

As we read Scriptures such as this, we are being taught proven methods of teaching the gospel to others (Acts 18:24-28). Additionally, in this case Jesus is also instructing us to believe all that the prophets have

spoken, the necessary implication of which is that we should believe all that has been written in the Old Testament Scriptures. Regarding those whom Paul was reasoning with in Thessalonica, the Scriptures say, "Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women (Acts 17:4)."

Not everyone was persuaded, however, in that the

"Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar, and, attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people."

Hearing of these things, the city authorities intervened legally, and brought the matter to an end. "The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (Acts 17:10)."

When the Jews heard that Paul was in Berea, they came there and stirred up the people again. This prompted Silas and Timothy to remain in Berea, while Paul was conducted by the brethren as far as Athens. "Receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they (the brethren) left (Acts 17:15)."

While Paul waited for them:

"his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present" (Acts 17:17).

It was at about this time that Paul had an opportunity to speak to the "men of Athens" in the midst of the Areopagus, the result being that some men joined him and believed (Acts 17:22-24). Silas was delayed in coming to Athens, but Timothy was able to rejoin Paul there, who then sent him back almost immediately to the church in Thessalonica to find out about their faith, and to strengthen and encourage them (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).

Afterwards, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There, he found a Jew named Aquila who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3). Being of the same trade, Paul stayed with them.

In Acts 18:5, it is reported that both Silas and Timothy finally came down from Macedonia to where Paul was in Corinth. After their arrival, they would have told Paul about all the things God had done with them in much the same way that Paul and Barnabas had when they came to the brethren in Antioch of Syria after the completion of their first journey. And indeed, Timothy brought good news regarding the faith and love of the church in Thessalonica (Acts 14:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:6).

It was then that "Paul began devoting himself completely to the word (Acts 18:5)." This was most likely made possible by the "gifts" that had been sent "more than once" for his needs by the church in Philippi (Philippians 4:15-16).

As Paul spoke to the people of Corinth, some resisted and blasphemed, but many of them "when they heard were believing and being baptized (Acts 18:8). And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-11).

Encouraged by the Lord, "Paul settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." It was during this time (49-51 AD) that the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written and delivered to the church in the hands of Timothy.

The Judgment

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One of the people Sandy is sending the Bible correspondence course to sent Sandy a lesson from Dr.

Charles Stanley with the lesson to be graded. The lesson the lady sent, entitled, "Your Convictions About the Judgment of the Believer," teaches there will be two divine judgments, one of believers (2 Corinthians 5:6-10) and one of unbelievers, which Dr. Stanley calls "the Great White Throne Judgment" (Revelation 20:11-13).

Dr. Stanley gave no evidence from Scripture that these are two separate judgments. In Matthew 25:31-46 the Master Himself taught there will be one final judgment at which all will be present (verses 31-32). At that time the saved will be separated from the lost (verses 32-33). Some there "will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46).

Dr. Stanley assumes that, when Paul states, "we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10), he means all the saved. Why then does Paul reason in the next verse, "Knowing, therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11)? "Therefore" indicates he is drawing a conclusion from what he had just said. The judgment of 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 will involve terror. Does that sound like its just a matter of degrees of reward for those already saved in heaven?

There is no scriptural basis for teaching multiple final judgments. Matthew 21:31-46; John 12:48; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; and Revelation 20:11-13 all speak of the same day. There is one judgment of "all," and "all who are ungodly among them" will be convicted at that time (Jude verses 14-15).

There is no scriptural basis for the doctrine of degrees of reward for the saved. We must work to be saved (Philippians 2:12), but, having done all we are commanded, we are yet "unprofitable servants" (Luke 17:10). Our sins have earned us death (Romans 6:23). A man justly condemned to die cannot do enough good works to earn life, and certainly not to earn rewards. You cannot do enough community service to negate capital murder. All the saved will receive the same reward, whether they "have born the burden of the heat of the day" or "labored only one hour" (Matthew 20:1-16).

Believers who fail to live obediently to the Lord will be eternally lost (Matthew 7:21-27). What will be your sentence on "the judgment of the great day"? (Jude verse 6).



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