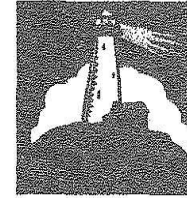


UPON THE ROCK

April 2002

Volume 5 Issue 4



ADD TO YOUR FAITH LOVE

II PETER 1:7

Larry G. Reynolds

One of the greatest needs we all have is the need to be loved and to love. God reveals to all mankind that He loves us greatly. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." From these passages we learn that in order to be saved we must love God and our neighbor. The Bible clearly states that, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (I John 4:8). From these passages we conclude that the subject of love is an important part of God's scheme of redemption. In this article we will cover three major points in regards to love: (1.) The Scriptural definition of love (2.) The value of love in our service to the Lord (3.) How to grow in love.

THE SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION OF LOVE

The Bible defines love by showing love's qualities in I Corinthians 13. God gives us both the negative and the positive qualities of love. First the positive qualities: love suffers long, is kind, rejoices in truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, never fails. Secondly, the negative qualities: does not envy, does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek

its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity. As you view these qualities you will see the qualities of God in each one. When God revealed His love to us He revealed Himself. "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved if God so loves us, we also ought to love one another (I John 4:9-11). The Bible defines love by revealing God and His qualities and challenges to love like Him.

THE VALUE OF LOVE IN OUR SERVICE TO THE LORD

Through the years, some in the religious world have tried to prove their love by shouting from the rooftop, others, by putting it on a bumper sticker and honking if they love Jesus. Many believe that whatever they do "in the name of the Lord" will be pleasing to Him. Yet consider Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-23 "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. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

Proper demonstration of love toward God is keeping His commandments. "If you love Me, keep my commandments. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:15,21). We also demonstrate love by doing good to them that hate us, blessing those that curse us and praying for those that spitefully misuse us. We are to resist them when they do evil and treat them as our Father in heaven treated us (Luke 6:27-36). Jesus has fully demonstrated such love; "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Therefore we come to know what love really is when we look at Jesus our Lord. "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16).

HOW TO GROW IN LOVE

The Christian life begins with faith and grows by adding these attributes to their lives. This last attribute is love because it is connected to all of the rest. All of these are possible because we are born again by the incorruptible word of God (I Peter 1:23). By the word of God we come to know what true love really is because the word of God tells us of the love of Jesus and of the love of God (I John 3:16-18; I John 4:9-10). In other words we can know true love because we have been purified and understand the need for a sincere, pure love. If we fail to love with sincerity and purity, it indicates that we have never been purified, born again, or have not allowed the love of God and Jesus to motivate us.

If you are not a Christian, we want you to enjoy the blessings of God's love and the love of His children. But these blessings are only for those who have purified themselves by obeying the truth. Why not do so today?

Make Your Calling and Election Sure

Brandon Britton

It is troubling that so many Christians are afraid to say they are saved. I have frequently asked the question, in Bible classes ranging in size from three to three hundred, "Would you go to heaven if you died right now?" The usual response is, "I hope so. Maybe. I'd like to think I would." I have yet to hear a person respond, "Yes. I am going to heaven when I die." Contrast this with the average member of a denominational church, whose answer would be confidently and definitively, "Yes." We are going to have a difficult time convincing this person he should leave his man-made church, where he is confident he is heaven bound, for the Lord's church where most of us are not sure.

Can we be sure of our salvation? Is it possible for us to know we are going to heaven? The apostle Peter not only believed it was possible, he exhorted others, "*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to*

make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10,). Keep in mind that while Peter physically wrote these words, they did not originate with him. Just a few verses later he would explain, *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Peter 1:20-21). The words he wrote were the words given to Him by the Holy Spirit; he spoke/wrote the Word of God. Through Peter God says to His children, make your calling and election sure.

In order to assure our salvation we are to give diligence. We are to hasten (take action swiftly) with great zeal and earnestness in our pursuit of glorifying our Father through humble obedience (Matthew 5:16). The congregation in Laodicea sickened the Lord with their halfhearted, lukewarm service (Revelation 3:14-17). They were not giving diligence and therefore should question their salvation. The purpose of being diligent in our service to the Master is to make our calling and election sure (secure). It is God who does the calling, and it is by the Gospel that He calls us (II Thessalonians 2:13-14). God does not speak to us with a still, small voice, send an angel, give us a dream or vision to call us. It is by the preaching of the Gospel that individuals are called (Romans 10:13-16). *“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”* (1 Corinthians 1:21). *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). God does not draw us to Him with some miraculous and irresistible pull as some claim and teach. Jesus explained how God calls and draws the lost to Him in, *“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). The calling of God is His invitation to us to be saved through Jesus.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). The election is man’s acceptance of that invitation. Man is not elected

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Upon The Rock
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unconditionally by being the lucky winner of some pre-eternal lottery of life. Any sinner who is willing to obediently submit to the commands of God and obey the Gospel is eligible to become one of the elect (I Peter 1:2). God did not predetermine WHO would be saved, but HOW they would be saved. God predetermined His plan for redeeming man from sin through the blood of His Son Jesus before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 3:9-11). A sinner becomes one of the elect when he obeys the plan of salvation (Romans 1:16-17; Colossians 1:14-15).

Prior to this verse Peter listed what we refer to as the “Christian Graces.” He exhorts us to, *“add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:5-8). The implication is that, *“if these things be in you and abound...if you do these things, ye shall never fall”* (2 Peter 1:8,10).

There are two separate thoughts in this verse that need to be explored. One is that salvation is conditional. It is possible for a Christian to fall from grace (Galatians 5:4). When Peter says, *“If ye do these things, ye shall never fall”* (2 Peter 1:10) he implies if we do not do these things we will fall. He would later paint a very vivid and graphic mental image in 2 Peter 2:20-22 of one who has turned from Christ and fallen from grace, *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”* (2 Peter 2:20-22). Paul listed the sins of the children of Israel to the church of Christ in Corinth to serve as examples to the Christians that they could fall (I Corinthians 10:1-12).

The second thought for consideration is that a Christian can know he is saved. Again we appeal to Peter for proof of this statement; *“if ye do these things, ye shall never fall”* (2 Peter 1:10). The Holy Spirit, through Peter, says you can know you are saved. The other side of this coin is that if you as a Christian neglect to do these things it is possible for you to fall. If we are not diligently serving the Lord we should question, doubt, fear, worry about our salvation. When Paul drew near the end of his life he knew that he was saved, and taught that others could as well. *“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:6-8). He had previously encouraged the Christians in Rome that nothing could separate them from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:35-39). The only thing that can separate a Christian from God, and salvation, is sin. *“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear”* (Isaiah 59:1-2). However, *“if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* and *“if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:7,9). *“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:1-2). Because Jesus is our perfect High Priest, we can have confidence to boldly approach the throne of God, *“that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16). Simply put, the Bible teaches that a Christian can know that he will go to heaven when life is over.

If you are not sure of your salvation, may I ask you a question? Why have you not done something about it? If you have gone astray, come back. Join in with the Prodigal Son and say to your Father, “I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me one of your hired servants.” If there is persistent and consistent sin in your life, repent and confess your faults, asking the Lord for forgiveness. If you are not going to heaven,

The Law of God – The Hope of Man

“I myself serve the law of God.” That hope is the only hope of sinful man. Apart from the law of God, man cannot be delivered from the body of death that constantly haunts him. With God, the desires of the honest soul are realized. He is freed from the penalty of sin that his conscience knows should be exacted. The burden of sin is lifted and he sees justification as the means by which deliverance from his conscience of sin is achieved. Thanks to himself? No!! No!! A thousand times, No!! Thanks be to God. God is the means by which deliverance comes!

How This Hope Is Realized

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.... But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:3-4, 17-23).

conscience by making everything legal. Or, as Solomon put it, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.” (Proverbs 21:2). Like the Israelites when they departed from the law, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). This tendency of man, namely to see good in a relative sense, is the reason that absolute good and Law is necessary. Otherwise anarchy reigns!

The Law Demonstrates Man’s Absolute Need for God

“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” (vv 21-23). Note the hopelessness in Paul’s statements declared as a man apart from God. He found another law, namely that evil was present with him. Even when he resolved to do good, evil was still there, warring against the law of his mind. With the knowledge of absolute good, a pinnacle to which man cannot attain, he constantly finds himself in sinful conditions.

With this realization, hear his cry. “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (v 24). The cry of the man in the flesh (i.e. the man who supposes an existence apart from the spiritual) is a cry of hopelessness. Try as he might with every fiber of his being he cannot escape the law of sin and death. Sin lives and he dies! “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

However, hear God’s response to the cry of desperation! “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” (v 25). The answer to “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” is “Through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Man isn’t left to wrestle with an unsolvable enigma. God provides the answer!

you do realize that means you are going to hell?! If you have the slightest doubt or question, why allow another second to pass? Make the decision now to give diligence and make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never fall.

SALVATION IS CONDITIONAL

Phil Grear

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) God wants no one to be lost. He paid the awful price of his Son to make salvation available to us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” (Titus 2:11) Many will be lost, but the fault will not be God’s. What else could he have done? He planned for our salvation. He sent Christ to pay for our salvation. He inspired the Biblical writers to record the plan that we might know of it. He has given us opportunities to obey. There is nothing more He could have done. But sadly, many will still be lost. Salvation is conditioned on our response to what God has done. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11) The word “if” implies condition. We will never fall, and will receive an abundant entrance in the everlasting kingdom of Christ If we add the graces Peter mentioned in verses 5-8, work to “make our calling and election sure.” But what if we do not? We will fall and will not obtain an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. Such has always been true. God gave Cain and Abel instructions as to how he was to be worshipped. Abel followed them, but Cain did not. Cain then became so jealous of Abel’s acceptance by God that he killed him. Cain had chosen not to do God’s will, and so had not been accepted. “And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wrath? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” (Genesis

4:6-7) “If thou doest well...” Cain found out the consequences of “If thou doest not well...”

Noah was told to build an ark to protect his family during the flood. Salvation would come as long as they stayed safely in the ark. “But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee.” (Genesis 6:18) Those who did not enter the ark died. (Genesis 7:21) Those in the ark were saved, and all others died. Salvation was conditional.

Naaman had leprosy. When he heard that the prophet Elisha could cure him he quickly went to see him. Elisha told him, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” (2 Kings 5:10) What if Naaman did not go and wash seven times in the Jordan River? He would not have been healed, and it would have been his own fault.

God has always made his salvation conditional. He has always required obedience. This is clearly seen in what Jesus taught concerning salvation from our sins. Consider the following statements. “For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24) Salvation is conditioned on our belief and acceptance of the fact that Christ is the Son of God. Without that faith we are lost.

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3) No repentance means no salvation. God has never promised to save those who refuse to submit to him.

After hearing Philip preach Jesus, the Ethiopian Eunuch asked, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36) He was told, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” (Acts 8:37) His salvation was dependent upon his belief in Jesus as the Son of God. What if he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God? Then he could not have been baptized.

spiritual. For purposes of Paul’s argument, the physical man (the flesh) is depicted as living in an existence apart from the spiritual side of man. However, that existence is a miserable existence. Try as he might, man in the flesh, does not, yea cannot, live above sin. Even when he knows what to do, he sometimes fails to do what is best, thus offending his conscience. When he acts contrary to his conscience, sin revives and he dies.

This argument is true whether man lives under the law of Moses (vv 1-3) or any other system of moral law. Sooner or later, we all violate our own conscience and, at least to that extent, become sinners. Does that mean that the law (any law) is itself sinful? That is Paul’s question in verse 7. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ The answer... “Certainly not!”

Then of what value is the law (any moral code)? Hear Paul’s answer — “So that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” (v 13). In the flesh, we tend to judge goodness in a relative sense. This tendency is universal. However, this method of viewing goodness is fundamentally flawed. Goodness is absolute. God is good! In fact, He is the only One who, in the absolute sense, is good (see Jesus’ statement at Matthew 19:17). When we say that someone is a good person, we either speak in a relative manner or we speak an untruth. With this realization, that there is such a thing as absolute good, man finds that he cannot attain that position. Sin becomes exceedingly sinful and his conscience reminds him of his helpless state, “Sin revives” and he dies!

Man left in this condition will do what the comedian suggested in the introductory paragraph; we will make everything legal. That is, we will rationalize our sinful acts so that our conscience stops accusing us. The thief rationalizes that the people from whom he steals probably got what they have through shady methods so it is okay to take it. The blue-collar thief rationalizes that the company doesn’t pay him what they should, so it’s okay to take a little extra behind their back. The hardened criminal blames society for the raw deal that he has gotten in life and rationalizes a life of crime. Man in the flesh will soothe his

Fourth, make your calling and election sure. Unlike God, we have the unfortunate tendency to forget what we have learned with the passing of time. It is, therefore, needful for us to be reminded of the truth on a regular basis and encouraged to continue in it (2 Peter 1:12-15; 3:1; 1 Timothy 4:16). Peter said, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do *these things*, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10). What *things* does Peter have in mind? He seems to be referring to those “Christian graces” (2 Peter 1:5-7). Indeed, “if *these things* be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). The way, therefore, that we make our calling and election sure is by incorporating these graces into our Christian life. On the other hand, “he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9).

If we are to be established in the truth it must be present. It must be known, understood, and obeyed. And let it be remembered that even those who are established in the truth must be diligent to make their calling and election sure.

Revelations from Romans (8 of 12)

The Revelation of Hopelessness Under the Law (Romans 7)

Jim Bullington

The comedian from years past boasted tongue-in-cheek of a way to eliminate all crime. Of course, such a claim would grab anyone’s attention. “That’s right,” he said, “eliminate all crime. And, I’ll tell you how to do it — Make everything legal!” Audiences laughed and their lives went on. That comical line from years ago has stuck with me. Explore how it relates to the teachings of Romans 7 and modern day applications.

The Law Demonstrates the Futility of the Flesh

In Romans 7, Paul argues from the position that man is not wholly mortal; that mankind is composed both of the physical and the

Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples before he returned to heaven were, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15-16) Salvation is conditioned on our acceptance of the Gospel. If we believe the Gospel and are baptized we will be saved, otherwise we will be damned.

Much is said today about “unconditional love”, that is love that is given with no strings attached. Certainly God’s love is unconditional. He does not love us because of who we are, but because of who he is. God is love. (1 John 4:8) But unconditional love does not mean unconditional acceptance. Cain was asked, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:7) We can live in such a way that God will not accept us. We can refuse the wonderful offer of pardon and salvation he offers. And if we do, we can be sure that he will allow us to go our own way. He forces his salvation on no one. “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17) “Whosoever will” has always been the determining factor in pleasing God.

The concept of “conditional salvation” also implies that it is possible to lose our salvation once we have obtained it. The Scriptures never promise “once saved, always saved”. Peter said that we must give diligence to making our calling and election sure because “if ye do these things, ye shall never fall”. But what if we do not do these things? Then obviously we will fall and not receive an entrance into “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Our salvation is conditioned on our *continued* obedience to Jesus. We are never promised that God will save us regardless of our attitude and actions toward him. May we always strive to gain, and never lose, that blessed salvation in heaven.

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THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM

Patrick Morrison

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10,11). It is interesting to note that Peter writes these words to Christians. Many in the religious world teach that once one is saved from past sins (becomes a Christian), then he or she is forever saved, never in fear of eternal separation from God due to ungodly living or negligence of duty, Yet these words of Peter put to rest this false teaching of once saved always saved. God’s children must labor tirelessly to add the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity to an already existent faith. To neglect these glorious virtues will surely lead one to fall, to make unsure his calling and election, and bar one from entrance into the eternal abode of the saved. Those who are faithful to God, who are growing as they ought, will not have to “sweat it out” wondering if they will make it into heaven by “the skin of their teeth.” Too many have the mistaken idea that if they do just enough, meet the minimum requirements, then they can slide on into heaven. Those who approach Christianity with an attitude of “just how little can I do to be pleasing to God” will find the gates of New Jerusalem forever barred, while the gates of hell stand wide open. For others who reject such foolish thinking, and are willing to do what God has asked, those pearly gates will swing open for an abundant and triumphant entrance.

Peter refers to the everlasting kingdom as the eternal dwelling place of the faithful Christian. The word “kingdom” is used a number of ways in the New Testament. One way in which the word is used is much like we would think of it, as a physical territory ruled over by a king (see Matthew 24:7). However, the overwhelming majority of references to a kingdom in the New Testament speak of a spiritual kingdom. This spiritual kingdom is looked upon in two different ways. Many times the word “kingdom” has reference to the church upon earth. That the church and the kingdom are one in the same is clearly taught in the Scriptures, regardless of what mainline denominations

effort. If for no other reason, we ought to believe that the truth can be known and understood because it has a Divine source (Mark 13:11; I Corinthians 2:9-13; Galatians 1:11). When Peter says, “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation,” he is saying that the scriptures did not originate with the prophets themselves. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Let it be remembered that “God is not the author of confusion” (I Corinthians 14:33). God’s word, then, must be harmonious, clear, logical, accurate, and understandable. And if God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” we know the word He has given to humanity must be understandable. It is, therefore, left for us to read and to understand (Matthew 24:15).

Third, the truth must be obeyed. God has always demanded an obedient reaction to his word. James says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). Peter could say these brethren were established in the truth because they had purified their souls “in obeying the truth” (I Peter 1:22,23). Paul affirmed the very same thing of the brethren in Rome when he wrote, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). How, exactly, did these brethren obey the truth, or, that form of doctrine? They were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Romans 6:3-7; Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Peter 3:21). No person living today can ever hope to be saved and established in the truth without obeying the gospel in this way (2 Thessalonians 1:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4). What hinders you to be baptized? (Acts 8:36).

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Gentiles never would have heard the truth (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). The hope of the lost world does not rest upon direct operations and still small voices. Rather, "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Corinthians 1:21). But not just any preacher will do! While there is no shortage of preachers in the world, there are far too few "preachers of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). When the majority of this world's preachers step down from their pulpits and platforms they leave their audiences firmly established in the present good words, fair speeches, cunningly devised fables, damnable heresies, commandments of men, and opinions (Matthew 15:9; Romans 16:17,18; 2 Timothy 4:3,4; 2 Peter 1:16; 2:1). This world needs preachers who will "preach Christ crucified" (I Corinthians 1:23). The church needs preachers who will preach the gospel and leave their opinions out of the pulpit (Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 1:17; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 4:2). The body of Christ needs elders who will "buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23). If the truth is not present, that is if the truth is not being taught, a church cannot be established in it.

Second, the truth must be known and understood. Some will say, "You cannot *know* truth because you cannot *know* anything for certain." But if we cannot *know* anything for certain, how can any man say, "I *know* you cannot *know* truth"?? It is inconceivable to think that the brethren to whom Peter wrote were established in the truth but did not know the truth! (2 Peter 1:12). Unless Jesus was the biggest fraud of all time we must believe Him when He says, "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is a fact that the majority of humanity does not know the truth. This is not because the truth is beyond our comprehension. Rather, it is because our comprehension of the truth is conditional. Jesus said, "*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth*" (John 8:31-32). Our Lord never promised that a casual, occasional glance at the Bible would be sufficient to yield a saving knowledge of the truth. He did say, "If ye continue in my word," if you "study to show yourself approved unto God," if you "meditate day and night" in His law, if you talk of His words "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" you will know the truth (2 Timothy 2:15; Psalm 1:2; Deuteronomy 6:7). We have to be willing to put forth the

may say to the contrary. One has only to read Matthew 16:18,19 to find the church and the kingdom are synonymous. Both Jesus and John began their ministries preaching that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). The establishment of the church at this time was only about 3 years away. Jesus told his disciples that some of them would not see death until they saw the kingdom come (Matthew 16:28). If this has reference to the eternal kingdom of heaven, then there are some disciples of Christ who are over 2,000 years old! However, if this has reference to the establishment of the church upon earth, then they had only to live a short while longer before they saw it come (see Acts 2). Numerous are the references to the kingdom already being in existence after Acts 2. In writing to the church at Colossae, Paul said that they had been translated, or moved, from the dominion of Satan into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). Notice that this is in past tense, having already been accomplished. The Christians at Colossae certainly were not already in heaven, so Paul must have been speaking about their being in the church. He later refers a number of men who had helped him in his work as being fellow workers in the kingdom of God (Colossians 4:11). Fellow workers in heaven? No. Fellow workers in the church? Yes!

Many times the references to the kingdom of God in the New Testament speak concerning eternal salvation in heaven. Jesus stated that not every one who called upon him as Lord would enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21). We can know this has reference to heaven, for in the next verse he says, "Many will say to me in that day [emphasis mine, SPM]." That day is the day of judgment, when all men will stand before God to receive the sentence of eternal life or eternal torment. The Bible speaks numerous times concerning the inheritance that awaits the faithful child of God in the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5). Paul said that he was in the kingdom (see again Colossians 1:13; 4:11), yet stated that God would preserve him until the heavenly kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18). Eternal salvation in heaven is the inheritance of all who are in the church and who remain faithful to the Lord.

Whether the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God upon earth, the church, or the kingdom of God in heaven, the church glorified, it is

always with the idea that this kingdom is everlasting or eternal. Long before the Messiah ever came into the world, Daniel spoke about the coming Messianic kingdom, the church. He describes the church as a kingdom which shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44; 7:13). The Hebrews writer speaks of the church as a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). Despite the best efforts on the part of those who despise Christ and the church to destroy her from the face of the earth, the church has survived and thrived. Nothing that Satan can do will ever destroy the precious body of Christ. The church has survived since her inception some 2,000 years ago, and she will continue upon this earth until time is no more. Even apathy and indifference on the part of many within the Lord's church will not spell her complete and utter doom. There will come a time when the church will cease to exist upon the earth. That time is when time is no more, when the earth and everything therein will be consumed with fire. When the end comes, the church upon earth will cease to exist. However, this does not mean that the church will cease to exist at all. Remember that the church is an everlasting kingdom, an eternal kingdom. When time ceases, the church will continue. Christ will deliver the church up to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24), where the church will continue forever in the bliss of heaven. The kingdom of God upon earth will then become the kingdom of God in heaven. This kingdom too is everlasting, having been prepared for the faithful since before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

The church upon earth is composed of all those who by faith in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24) are led to repent of their sins (Luke 13:3), confess their faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37), and be buried in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The church is composed of the saved, those who have had their past sins washed away by the blood of Christ. One cannot hope to be saved eternally until he first becomes a member of the Lord's church. Jesus is the Savior of the body, the church (Ephesians 5:23). However, just because one is saved from past sins, just because one has become a member of the Lord's church does not guarantee that one will be saved eternally. This is why we must "give diligence to make your calling and election sure." The day is coming when Christ will return to claim his bride, the church, and take her home to heaven. Are you a member of the Lord's church, the one you read about in the Bible? If not, you will be left standing outside the gates of heaven. If you are a

member of the Lord's church, are you striving to grow more into the image of Christ every day?

Live faithfully for the Lord each day, and that abundant entrance into the everlasting bliss of heaven will be yours!

ESTABLISHED IN THE PRESENT TRUTH

A. J. Cox

Before our Lord was betrayed He said to His beloved and impetuous apostle Peter, "behold, Satan hath desired to have *you*, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou are converted, *strengthen thy brethren*" (Luke 22:31, 32). This was Peter's purpose in writing his two epistles. His intention in both, generally, was to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance: That they may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour (2 Peter 3:1,2). In the first, those words would give his brethren hope in the face of their fiery trial and manifold temptations (1 Peter 1:3-13; 4:12,13). In the second, those words, the fruit of which is the full knowledge of God, would prepare them to meet the false teachers of their day (2 Peter 1:2,3; 2:1; 3:3, 4). This is not to say that they had forgotten the words of the prophets and the apostles. To the contrary, they knew and were established in those words! "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be *established in the present truth*" (2 Peter 1:12). These were mature Christians who, according to Peter, were "established (confirmed, fixed, stable, set) in the truth," What a testimony! If only this could be said of every Christian living today. How did these Christians become established in the truth? How can we become established in the truth?

First, the truth must be present. Whereas the King James Version says, "established in the present truth," the American Standard Version reads, "established in the truth that is with you." Had it not been for Christians faithfully carrying out the great commission these