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Is God Unrighteous? The Prayer of a Righteous Man

By Harold Turner

In Romans 3:5 Paul asked, "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?" The Bible is filled with warnings that someday God will take vengeance upon those who have not done his will. In 2 Thess. 1:7-9 Paul said, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Someday those who have rejected Christ will have to pay for their sins. But for some reason, men have a serious problem of believing that some way this just will not happen. All sorts of ideas have been offered to show that this just cannot happen. For example, many reason on the basis of sympathy, saying, "Surely, a God of love and mercy could not punish His creation in a place like hell." Others have suggested that hell is not real, and that Jesus used this expression to scare people into doing right.

Is hell real? Is it a place of fire where lost men will exist consciously forever? Some have suggested that if we clearly understand the Greek words which are translated "hell" we will see that Hell is not a place of everlasting torment. The Greek word "hades" is translated hell in several places in the New Testament. In his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine defines hades as, "The region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the Ascension of Christ). It never denotes the grave, nor is it the permanent region of the lost; in point of time it is, for such, intermediate between decease and the doom of Gehenna." Gehenna is the place of eternal punishment. Gehenna is pictured as a place of everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, Matt. 25:41. In Mark 9:43-48 Jesus warned that if one's hand, foot, or eye offended him to cut them off, saying that it would be better to enter into life without these than "to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth

not, and the fire is not quenched". In Matt. 13:49, 50 Jesus said, "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Hell is a real place for real people. Though originally prepared for the devil and his angels, it is a place where all the lost will spend eternity.

But why will men be cast into hell? This question is sometimes asked with a reflection upon God, as though God is to blame for man going to hell. Jesus pictured life as two great roads, showing where they both lead. In Matt. 7:13, 14 he said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Jesus pictures the broad way leading to hell, and warns against walking in this way. Man's problem is that he wants to walk in the broad way, and then when he reaches its destination he suddenly wants things changed, and blames God for his situation. God has done everything heavenly possible to keep men out of hell. He has shown his desire that all men be saved in Christ. When men go to hell, they go by their own choice. "God is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) What more could we want God to do, than he has done, to keep men out of the broad way? The choice of ways is left to us. God has done all he can do to turn us away from hell.

But why did God make man when he knew he would sin and go to hell? This again is a question that places the blame on God for man's being lost. God has made man a free moral agent with the ability to make his own choices. God has shown him all the good things he can enjoy by following Christ, and has warned of all the bad things to experience by following Satan. God prepared hell for the devil and those who follow him. He

By Lavern Stewart

The Bible teaches us to confess our sins one to another and to pray one for another, James 5:16. However, it is not everyone that has the promise of having his prayers heard when he asks God to forgive the sins of a brother. James also wrote that it is the fervent prayer of a RIGHTEOUS man which avails much. Peter also wrote that God's ears are open to the prayers of a RIGHTEOUS man, 1 Peter 3:12.

A righteous man is one who respects and obeys the Word of God, Luke 1:6. God's word is the standard of righteousness, Psalm 119:172; Rom. 1:16. To be righteous involves keeping the commands of God, 1 John 3:7 — "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." Jesus connected keeping God's commands with being righteous, Matt. 3:15.

In 1 John 5:16 God promises to forgive a person's sin when his brother prays for him, unless he is sinning unto death — meaning that he will not repent of his sin; for God forgives only the sins that we confess, 1 John 1:9. Now if God will not forgive a sin unless it is confessed, and if He only answers the prayers of one who is keeping his commands, then what good would it do for an unfaithful man to pray for another? It would not do any good even if the one being prayed for had repented and confessed his sin. He would do more good praying for his own sins to be forgiven, which he had repented of and confessed.

What is our attitude toward the Word of God when it is taught? Do we reverence it? In Proverbs 28:9 the Bible says, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayers shall be an abomination." If it is a known fact that a person is unfaithful, he should not be used in any of God's services, 2 Timothy 2:2, 20, 21.

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and Harold Turner

First Love and First Words

By J. H. McCaleb

The church at Ephesus was indicted because it had left its first love. This group was exhorted to repent and to do the first work. And yet, just before this sharp criticism, the Ephesian Christians had been commended for their good work and their labor. "I know thy works and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil." Apparently, there was something wrong in the situation. The works were good but the circumstances surrounding them seemed to be faulty.

The church at Corinth, in spite of some weaknesses, was commended for its liberality and other good works. However, it was criticized sharply because of the bitter contentions among the members. They were guilty of forming little cliques among themselves, each one preferring a certain church leader. They even went so far as to call themselves by the leader's name. This practice led to a spirit that left the good works as a doubtful testimony to the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

At Ephesus there was no apparent open division; rather, there seemed to be a concerted effort to eliminate evil deeds and false teachers. But in this veritable frenzy of well-doing, love began to lose its force. The prime motivation became obscure, and one fell into the trap of doing works for works' sake. The harshness of the effort apparently produced a harshness in human relations, and, when man loses compassion for man, he begins to lose his grasp on God.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

That Form of Doctrine

By Glynn V. Purdy

Doctrine is important to our salvation. In Romans 6:17, 18 Paul wrote, "...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." The word "doctrine", from the Greek "didache", simply means "teaching" and refers to God's teaching to man—the Bible. Paul told Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." (1 Timothy 4:16) The salvation of Timothy's soul, as well as those who heard him, depended upon "taking heed to, and continuing in the doctrine", or the teaching of God. There is no salvation in the creeds and doctrines of men, see Mathew 15:7-9.

But just what is this "form of doctrine"? In Romans 1:16, 17, Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." We must continue in the doctrine to be saved, yet, the gospel of Christ is the power of God to save man. Therefore, the gospel of Christ and the doctrine that saves are the same thing.

Within the gospel is "revealed the righteousness of God." This too is important. After Peter understood that the gospel was for all men, he said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34, 35) Thus we learn that those who work righteousness, those who continue in the doctrine of Christ, and those who obey the gospel are saved or acceptable to God. (See Mark 16:15, 16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9) So the righteousness of God is revealed to us in the gospel — the doctrine of Christ, and when we obey this doctrine, or work this righteousness, we are saved, and then we must continue in it.

When do we begin to work this righteousness? In Romans 1:17, 18, Paul said these had been made free from past sins and had become the servants of righteousness when they "Obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered" them. Before this Paul said they had been the "servants of sin." Man belongs to whomsoever he obeys,

Romans 6:16. Being made free from sin and becoming a servant of God takes place at the same time that one obeys "that form of doctrine," which Paul preached (taught) the Romans.

What is "That form of doctrine?" In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul describes the gospel he taught, saying, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." From this we learn that the doctrine was basically the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. What is the form of this doctrine that we are to obey? In Romans 6:3-6 Paul describes this form or likeness, saying, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." When the Romans obeyed a "form of the doctrine" they were made "free from sin" and they became the "servants of God." The "form" was that they had died to sin, were buried in water, and rose to walk in a newness of life. They were baptized "into Christ." In 2 Cor. 5:17 Paul said,

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature..." The only way to enter Christ is through baptism, Gal. 3:27. Baptism is for the remission of sins, Acts 2:38, and in baptism sins are washed away, Acts 22:16. This, then, is just another way of saying that one must do what God says in order to be saved, Matthew 7:21. Have you obeyed that "Form" of doctrine, or just the doctrines of men? Only God's way will save.

"Bending our knees in prayer helps us from breaking under the load of cares."

"While seeking happiness for others we unconsciously find it for ourselves."

The Silence of the Scriptures

By Ordell Heavin

Do we believe in speaking where the Bible speaks? Do we believe in being silent where the Scriptures are silent? This principle is clearly taught in 1 Peter 4:11 where Peter warned, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Everyone who will know and practice the will of God must know how to establish just what His will is. Today, everything of divine service must be authorized by Christ, as Paul shows in Col. 3:17, saying, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." Man can and must understand the will of God in order to please Him.

The silence of the Scriptures does not give men the liberty to bind or loose anything. Sometimes men are heard to argue for some practice, saying, "Where has God said not to?" Scriptural authority cannot be established where there is no Scripture, and where there is no Scripture there is no divine authority.

In Deut. 29:29 Moses said, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." This principle is also true today. It sets forth two important facts, (1) the secret things belong unto God, not us, and (2) the things revealed belong unto us. What God wants man to know he has revealed. This clearly shows there are two classes of things — one belongs to God, the other to man. Man is out of place when he tries to teach or practice things that God has not made known. We can take a firm stand on the things that God has revealed in his word, but we fail both God and man when we teach things not revealed. Such teaching is forbidden, (Matt. 15:9).

Peter warns us that if we speak we are limited to the oracles of God, 1 Peter 4:11, and Paul states, "Preach the word." (2 Tim. 4:2) We must preach and teach only what has been revealed in the Scriptures, and leave off our "think so's."

There are three things to consider in establishing Scriptural authority. First, there is direct commands to consider. For example in Acts 2:38 Peter, guided by the Spirit, commanded these people to repent and be baptized. This was divine orders from the Spirit of God. Too, in 1 Cor. 11:23-25 Paul said, For I have received of the Lord that which also I

delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread: And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Here again we have divine orders from the Lord. These, along with many other things, are set forth as direct commands from heaven.

The second thing we must consider in establishing Scriptural authority is that of divinely approved examples. There are some things taught by approved example. Peter said that Christ left us an example that we should follow in His steps, 1 Peter 2:21. In 1 Cor. 11:1 Paul said, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I am also of Christ." Jesus told the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth, John 16:13. The practices of the early church under the leadership of the Spirit guided apostles provide examples for the church today. As seen above, Jesus gave the command to break bread, and we have examples of the early church meeting upon the first day of the week to keep this practice, Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; 16:2. This example is set forth as an authorized pattern, and is thereby binding. It is binding because it is a pattern set forth by the apostles who were guided into all truth by the Spirit.

The third principle to consider is inference. Drinking the fruit of the vine necessarily infers having some container to drink it from. Being buried in baptism necessarily infers having sufficient water in which to bury a person. An inference is something necessary to carry out the things authorized by the Lord. Mechanical instruments are not inferred to help us carry out the command to sing, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16. Baptizing Lydia's household does not infer that infants were baptized, Acts 16:15. Unless there is approved authorization by the Lord nothing is necessarily inferred. We must respect the silence of the Scriptures as well as what they have revealed. May we learn never to add to or take from what has been revealed (Rev. 22:18, 19), neither to pervert or wrest the Scriptures (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Peter 3:16).

"We deem those men most remarkable who think as we do."

Ways to Keep The Church From Growing

By Ted Knight

Doug Threet has written an article suggesting "Ways of NOT causing the church to grow." There are many things which actually prevent growth in the local congregation. What are some of them?

- (1) Very simply, but highly important is **DON'T INVITE PEOPLE** to worship services or Bible study — **IF** you don't want the church to grow.
- (2) Don't keep preachers around very long. The most productive years of a minister's work starts **AFTER** the fourth or fifth year. So, **IF** you are not interested in the church growing, insist that a change of preachers come about every two years.
- (3) Don't be enthusiastic about the local congregation's work. Passive churches rarely attract new members — **IF** you don't want the church to grow.
- (4) Always depend upon someone else in the church to give. God expects everyone else in the church to give but me. Don't give and the church will always remain the same size — **IF** you don't want the church to grow.
- (5) Never plan for growth. Only plan for the **PRESENT** number of church members and current programs — **IF** you don't want the church to grow.
- (6) Suffer from the "cut-back" syndrome. Since we are suffering inflationary times we must "cut back". Don't challenge the brethren to accept challenges and sacrifices — **IF** you don't want the church to grow.

I think that Doug has some interesting thoughts. Really I suppose that all one has to do to insure a **LACK** of church growth is **NOT DO ANYTHING**. I believe that method would be as successful as any that I could possibly think of. But I am thankful that the majority of God's people are very much interested in church growth. I believe that we are willing to be involved and sacrifice in order that the church might enjoy growth. Do you want the church to grow? If so, what are **YOU** going to do about it?

"Marriage is like a small tree — they both grow with proper love and nourishment."

Confident and Unafraid

By Elmer L'Roy

"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. Those things were written so that we could have hope. That hope comes from the patience and strength that the Scriptures gives us." (Romans 15:4 EVD.)

Some Christians are strong with faith and some are weak. Those who are strong tend to be exasperated by the quibbles and "hang-ups" of the weak, and often beat them down because of the displeasure of putting up with them. The weak in faith often demand that all brethren join with them in their scruples. They can become very domineering and bind them as law. A difficult and unpleasant situation, but verse 1 of Romans 15 says that the strong in faith "should help them with their weaknesses." It takes both wisdom and forbearance for the strong to be helpful. One thing is clear, however, that whatever the cost is, the strong must "not try to please themselves" (vr. 2). "Even Christ did not live trying to please himself" (vr. 3). Paul quotes a portion of Psalm 69:9 in support of the above statement. With patience and strength Christ suffered reproaches greater than most of us are likely to suffer. Paul's point seems to be that if Christ were willing to bear so much for all of us, we should be willing to show love to one another. Not only this verse, but all the examples of God's servants in the Old Testament, who by self-denial and patient suffering to be faithful to God and uphold His honor, teach us to be patient and strong to love and help ignorant and misguided men. Christ accepts us with all our weaknesses. We should accept one another.

To what does the word "hope" refer in Romans 15:4? To heaven and eternal life? Ultimately, perhaps, but it seems that some other meaning is immediate because of what Paul says in verse 5 and 6. Admittedly, with some weak brethren it takes a good deal of "patience and strength" (steadfastness and comfort, ASV; endurance and encouragement, NIV). If the example of Christ and the Old Testament Scriptures are to instruct us to be patient and strong, to accept difficult situations and sometimes unpleasant people, another meaning should be given to "hope." Something like this seems fair enough: "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. Those things were written so that we could have confidence; i.e., be unafraid." Of what? Unafraid to be kind, to be gentle and humble, to be vulnerable

in order to show love to others, even weak and misunderstanding believers. God endures the opposition of ignorant men, and He makes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the good and evil alike. Why? Well, for one reason He isn't afraid. He is supremely confident so He does not feel a need to smite His enemies lest they overcome Him. If we are not strong enough in faith to know that we are His, we are then among those of weak faith whom others must indulge! If we have confidence in God, we will no longer judge one another and insist on running others' lives. If we suffer for doing good, know that affliction and struggle "are helping us gain an eternal glory." (2 Cor. 4:17 EVD).

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"If our business is to do the will of God, He will take care of the business."

"The shortest way is not always right, nor the smoothest the safest, therefore, be not surprised if the Lord chose the farthest and roughest, but be sure of this — He will choose the best."

"The only thing Jesus ever cursed was the barren fig tree. He did it because it was a disappointment to all who came to it for sustenance. It took its nourishment from the earth and the air, but gave nothing in return. We who have been blessed so bountifully by Him must remember that "to whom much is given, of him much is required."

"The world and the church need people who can do something; not those who can explain why they did not do it."

Is God Unrighteous? (Cont.)

prepared heaven for those who follow Christ. God made man as an object upon which he could bestow his love and blessings, while man just figuratively spits in the face of God and serves the devil. And in spite of man's contempt, God still loves. He loved man so much that he gave his only begotten son to die in the hope that man would repent and return to the love of God.

Is God unrighteous to take vengeance? Certainly God doesn't want to take vengeance on any, but sin must be punished. For all who will let him, Jesus will pay the price for sin. But to reject Jesus is to reject the only hope of escaping the vengeance of God. Is God to blame if man follows Satan into hell? God would be unrighteous if he did not do as he has promised to do. Any person who is lost has only himself to blame. Any person can be saved if he is willing to follow Jesus. But, be certain of one thing, hell is real, and it is eternal. The judgment is a poor place to face the reality of this truth. We can accept the love of God and he will lead us to a place more beautiful than the human mind can imagine. The choice is up to each of us.

"Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears."

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