

# How Solid is Your Foundation?

Written on: August 29, 2021

**Article by: Harold Bruggen**


According to the Cambridge Dictionary the foundation stone is defined as “a large block of stone that is put in position at the start of work on a public building, often with a ceremony.”<sup>1</sup> The historian wrote “... the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple.” (1 Kings 5:16-17 NKJV)

All the structures comprising the temple area, from the outside to the large courtyard and from the bedrock to the roof, were made of quarried rock, cut to size and “hewn” on both their inner and outer faces. The foundations were laid with large choice stones, some measuring ten cubits (4.57 meters / 15 feet) and some eight (3.66 meters / 12 feet). Having been ‘prefabricated’, the Bible goes on to say that the stones were then transported to the temple area in a quiet way as to show respect for the sacred site. No wonder that these stones were “large and costly” and especially the foundation stone. (1 Kings 6:1-7)



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Solomon used the very best materials and the most competent workers to build a dwelling place for the Lord, for above all, he wanted to please God.

The Cambridge Dictionary then expands it’s definition of the foundation stone to include a figurative meaning, referring to “the basic or important principles, ideas, facts, etc. on which something depends.”<sup>2</sup> So as to accomplish anything worthwhile in life you must lay a choice foundation. Everything else is going to be affected if the foundation is not laid with the best materials and the finest proficiency.

Jesus said “[The wise man] is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. ...” (Luke 6:48 NKJV). Those who are wise must build their lives upon the words and teachings of Jesus.

The apostle Paul added, that Jesus himself is the spiritual foundation upon which we are to build everything else in our lives. “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11 NKJV). The church has been bought with his blood, cleansed and sanctified through union with Him and indwelt by God’s Spirit.

While the psalmist wrote that: “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2 NKJV), this has been completely fulfilled in Jesus, the cornerstone and capstone of our faith.

In order to build something of enduring spiritual value, we must begin with the foundation provided by Jesus, who is Himself from everlasting to everlasting. And while some may take offence, He is for us the chief cornerstone, precious in God’s sight and also in ours.

<sup>1</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/foundation-stone>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

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# What to Choose?

Written on: August 29, 2021

**Article by: Dave Knutson**

In “The Millennial Mosaic”, Reginald Bibby explains the rationale guiding his research, saying :

“Our starting point is to recognize that life in Canada has come to be characterized by a central defining phenomenon: *pluralism*. In the face of diversity, there is a conscious effort to understand and accept differences, to interact and learn from one another. <sup>u</sup> Pluralism is a response to diversity.”

He then adds:

Pluralism has been at the heart of Canadian life, symbolized by the enshrinement of the cherished mosaic metaphor. This is a country characterized by diversity, where people have the freedom to live out life however they want, within the parameters of the law and economic means. The mosaic is an idea that had its roots in the cultural and nationality realm. But over time, its *application* has expanded to virtually all spheres of Canadian life — including age, gender, sexual orientation, families, leisure, lifestyles, morality, religion, education, politics, law, and physical and mental attributes. ***Pluralism is Canada’s response to diversity***. And with diversity has come the ***freedom to choose*** from a virtually unlimited number of options. Life in Canada is centrally defined by pluralism. (emphasis mine)

Canadians live in a country priding itself in a tapestry of values and the freedom to choose. Yet in order to keep from elevating any one value above another, all must be deemed equal in all respects. Value systems based on choice and selection must remain personal and not impose themselves upon others. This is the world that Canadian churches seek to influence and yes, even convert.

The Bible agrees that God extends freedom of choice to each individual. Our choices are paramount, for God honour them, giving them eternal weight. He does not cancel them out, neither depriving us of the rewards of good choices nor the consequences of bad ones. Choice is of God – for having created this capacity within, he safeguarding our freedom to choose.

The scriptures however do not present us with the ‘virtually unlimited number of choices’ referenced by Bibby. God speaks with a single voice. His word excludes all others. God has only one plan of salvation centred in one and only one saviour.

The apostles explained the exclusive nature of salvation in Jesus Christ when standing before the Jewish Sanhedrin:

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)

The apostle Paul had this to say about the singularity of what God has done in Christ in Ephesians 4:4-6:

“*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all*”.

It turns out that while the gospel is for all, there is nevertheless, just the one. It is both universal and exclusive. God's offer of salvation in Christ is extended to every person on earth without exception or qualification. It is even-handed and fair.

The Biblical choice is straightforward. There is salvation in Jesus Christ and no one else. Those who choose to believe in Him and to obey the gospel may be saved. Those who disbelieve remain lost. Our choice is simplified by the nature of God's absolute truth – which will never change.

While this kind of choice is simple, it flies in the face of pluralism and the cultural demand for a growing list of alternatives. In a multicultural society, it is not surprising to hear the opinion that 'all religions are equal', or that 'there are many paths to God'. These are the gods of our culture's imagination – the creations of personal preference.

When sharing the gospel, we must find ways to bridge this gap in expectations. It begins with the truth about the God who is really there, the God of the Bible. Once His singularity and exclusivity have been accepted, the groundwork is laid for a singular gospel and a single saviour.

The wonder of God's work in Christ is that he has found even one way for us to be reconciled to him. Let us trust the power of God's word to work in the lives of those who hear it – resisting the temptation to bend into a shape that we think our neighbours will accept. For only when it remains 'unchanged' and 'unimproved' by us, does it retain its power to save.

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# UNRAVELING REVELATION

Written on: August 29, 2021

**Article by: Geoffrey Ellis**

Why would not every active Christian be a frequent reader and avid student of Revelation?

- It's author is Jesus Christ.
- It is the last of sixty-six connected books, written by forty writers, over 1,500 years, inspired by God.
- It continues to challenge, even stymie, the world's scholars.

For Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 1:3a). And, "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:7b).

But, you say, it is filled with visions that are beyond me!"

- Yes, Revelation is a challenge worthy of a life-time of investigation!
- The first step is to identify what we CAN readily know about Revelation:

Jesus is it's author: "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants..." (1:1). "I, Jesus, have sent my angels to testify to you about these things for the churches" (22:16a).

John is Christ's amanuensis (secretary), in this case, the one favoured to see first hand and record the many visions that abound in Revelation. (John was one of the twelve apostles, who was especially close to Jesus, who cared for his mother, Mary, after Jesus' departure, and who spent the last quarter of his long life in Ephesus, serving as an elder.) "He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw" (1:1b-2).

While Revelation deals with earthly matters, many of its visions are about events happening in heaven, among the angels, and is thus challenging to comprehend..

The setting for this writing, at the end of the first century, was a time of unprecedented persecution of Christians, who were declared criminals by the ruling Roman state, who frequently tortured and killed them in grotesque ways. The Romans refined its terrorism to a degree not seen before or since – crucifixion. Both an immediate and an eternal response are given: immediate, the failure and defeat of the Roman state – "things that must soon take place" (1:1; 22:6); and eternal: "Behold, he is coming in the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (1:7).



John, who recorded the visions of this book, describes his experience: “I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in it, was on the island called Patmos [a prisoner] on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9).

An insight that offers great reward in gaining increasing understanding of the Revelation is to identify its dependence upon Old Testament allusions—over 500 have been identified! There are 184 direct quotations from OT books in Revelation: 49 from Isaiah, 34 from Daniel, 31 from Ezekiel, 21 from Exodus, 23 from Psalms, 16 from Jeremiah, and 10 from Zechariah. Considerable attention is given in Revelation to Daniel, chapter seven, in this connection. One can spend a lifetime profitably perusing the meaning and implications of these references!

The group to which Revelation was originally addressed were the seven churches of “Asia”, found at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. That these churches numbered seven, suggests that they are representative of all churches, signifying that Revelation has a universal appeal. These congregations had their strengths and weaknesses, their successes and failures. They were known intimately by Christ, faced the brutal challenges of the day, and were on their way to heaven – if they would keep the faith. We should see the unfolding panorama of Revelation’s vision through their eyes—believing that this look into the ages, with the ultimate victory of King Jesus at its climax, was received by them (and in turn by us) with gratitude, strengthening resolve, and great joy!

Finally, to recognize how Revelation is structured is of great importance for gaining an understanding of this book. To begin: Revelation presents a “book within a book”! It is all about the Scroll that “no one could open – no one in heaven, on

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earth, and under the earth” (5:3). The scroll was in the hand of God – it was a seven sealed book, written on both the inside and outside of its pages. No book before or since had a richer provenance!

(The scroll was the form of ancient books up to the time of Christianity’s beginnings, when the codex form began to be introduced. Scrolls were formed with each page’s two opposite edges joined with the next and rolled in a continued collection. The codex form –pages joined at only one edge—began then to be produced, the form universally present today. That the book that is at the heart of Revelation is in the form of a scroll, is not unusual, but that it was locked tight with not one but seven seals is of great significance in the unfolding message of Revelation.)

The existence of the book (“scroll”) is introduced with great attention in Revelation—in chapter 5. The earlier chapter 4 relates John’s invitation into heaven where he saw the throne of God, the presence of God, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders. As noted above, this special scroll was “in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne”—God! A “strong angel” was proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” For truly, “no one in heaven or on earth, or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it” (5:3). John is moved to tears “because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it” (5:4). Solution! One of the elders said to John, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (5 :5).

The act of taking of the scroll from the right hand of God by the Lamb of God, “standing as though it had been slain,” caused the living creatures and the twenty-four elders to sing “a new song.” They were joined by “the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands, and every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea,” worshiping God and the Lamb—in a great anthem of heavenly praise—all prompted by the knowledge that the Lamb would open the seven-sealed book!

Of course, not until the seventh seal is broken can the book be opened! Chapters 6 and 7 describe the opening of six of the seals by the Lamb. Each of the first four seals broken was responded to by the action of one of the four living creatures that surround the throne of God, with major consequences, on earth. This was watched by John. The fifth seal opened allowed John to see the souls of those who had been martyred assembled under the throne of God. The opening of the sixth seal allowed John to see the wrath of God visited upon the earth to those who ruled the earth and martyred the faithful. Yet the book is still closed!

Chapter 8 announces the opening of the seventh seal—but the book is not opened just yet! Rather, its opening is introduced with an appropriate fanfare—the blasts of seven trumpets by seven angels! Each trumpet blast in sequence introduces a further vision of the unfolding works of God. When the seventh trumpet is sounded, the book is ready to be opened! Yet, between the sixth and seventh trumpet blasts is presented yet another major vision, the Little Scroll and the Two Witnesses, (10, 11).

When, finally, the seventh angel blows the seventh trumpet, the book is ready for opening! Loud voices in heaven say, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (11:15). The twenty-four elders applaud God’s victory (11:16-18).

“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple...” (11:19a). At chapter 12, the contents of the scroll—the fate of the earth and the triumph of the Lord— begin to unfold.

Thus, the second half of Revelation gives the content of the seven-sealed book. As the opening of the seven seals and the blowing of the seven trumpets—that dramatically prepared us for the opening of this special book that originated in heaven—each produced a vision, even so the opening of the seven sealed book produced, not a written revelation, but rather a further series of visions! Some twenty visions are presented, introduced by John saying, “I saw” or “I heard.”

The defeat of Rome and earthly evil, the overthrow of the rebellion in heaven, and the ultimate triumph of Christ and his followers, are the emphases of “The Book.” While the detailed interpretation of the many signs of Revelation, are persistently challenging, the overall meaning is graphically clear—to the rejoicing and gratitude of all who faithfully follow the Lord Jesus, their Saviour and King. The message of the precious book, the scroll, written on both sides of its pages, is—VICTORY!

May this overview of the structure of Revelation, along with the review of its features, encourage us to be faithful, grateful, lifetime students of the greatest book in the world, Christ’s Revelation!

Grimsby, Ontario



# WHEN HARMONY IS ABSENT

Written on: August 29, 2021

**Article by: Tim Johnson**

It has often been said that compared to most congregations mentioned in the New Testament, the church at Philippi didn't seem to have any flaws that Paul needed to correct. The apostle called them his "joy and crown" (4:1). This great congregation was certainly admirable living and working in a community identified as a Roman colony. Opposition and suffering arose from this reality alone (1:28-30).

But were they really flawless?

Paul named two Christians whose behaviour was a blotch on the record of this fair church: Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3). Paul urged them to "...live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." What can we learn from these verses?

Let's begin by clarifying two minor points.

First, in the Greek language, the name Euodia could belong to a man or a woman. The possibility that Euodia was actually a man, has led some to speculate that the offending duo was actually a couple, and perhaps even the jailer and his wife from Acts 16. However, Paul said, "help these women," leaving no doubt as to their gender.

Then, Paul enlisted a person whom he called a "true comrade" or "yokefellow" (KJV) to assist Euodia and Syntyche with their problem. Since Paul did not identify this person by name, suggestions range from Silas, Timothy and Barnabas, to Epaphras who delivered this

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letter to the church at Philippi (1:7). Whomever he was, Paul trusted him to provide wise counsel in this situation.

It seems clear that Euodia and Syntyche were well-known Christians in the church at Philippi. They had assisted Paul in his work and shared in his struggles. He considered them, along with Clement, to be fellow workers, numbering them among the saved whose names he believed were written in God's 'book of life. "They belonged to the number of those who laboured" (M.R. Vincent<sup>1</sup>). In other words, they were not people on the fringe of the Philippian fellowship; they worked hard to serve their Master.

Yet for some reason they did not get along.

Their lack of harmony was disturbing the church. If it were not so, Paul wouldn't have publicly urged them – by name – to live in harmony. By doing this he enlisted the attention of the whole church. David Lipscomb wrote, "These two women...had disturbed the peace and harmony of the church. A Christian shows his selfishness and his disregard for God when he disturbs the body of Christ to gratify his own and gain his ends..."<sup>2</sup>

We would do well to point out that men who have set out to serve Christ have done their share of quarrelling as well. The gospels tell us that even the Lord's own apostles argued among themselves, about "Who is the greatest?" This dispute continued right up to the time of the last supper, shortly before Jesus led them out to the Garden of Gethsemane! (Luke 22:24-27)

But in Philippians 4 neither of these two women were willing to make peace. This was discouraging the church and Paul felt the need to publicly point out the problem and urge them to live in harmony. Their great service to the church was now endangered by the disservice of their personal disagreement.

Why is it that useful, accomplished, admirable Christians sometimes fail to get along, becoming instead a source of grief and heartache in the church? It surprises us when it happens, but perhaps we should not be startled. People of strong character with firmly held opinions often bump heads with others of their own kind.

When such members act out of concern for the teaching, the work and worship of the church, there is often little room for compromise. The presumptive behaviour of self-appointed strong-willed leaders, are understandably resented by others. We don't know what the issue was between Euodia and Syntyche. The fact that the apostle Paul does not identify a subject or point of disagreement suggests that this lack of harmony was personal and not doctrinal. All the same, it was destroying the peace in an otherwise harmonious church.

From Paul's point of view, some sort of intervention was needed to motivate these two women to settle their differences. He appealed to a trusted brother for intervention and perhaps also to the entire congregation. When precious unity is threatened by disruptive

problems between people, wise intervention is needed. Hiding our heads and hoping that a problem will go away on its own...solves nothing.

Earlier in the letter the apostle had already offered principles that have the power to dissolve these kinds of troubles. He wrote: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." (2:3) Humility and high regard for the value of fellow Christians produces consideration and harmony. What if Euodia and Syntyche decided that they would "not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (2:4)? Cooperation and appreciation could have rebuilt their relationship.

Above all else our disposition toward our brethren needs to parallel the attitude of Christ when He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (2:5-8) The Son of God deliberately came to earth from heaven out of concern for failing Mankind, taking our nature upon Himself, and offering the sacrifice of His own body and blood. None of us could find salvation without His humble sacrifice. We are to take this attitude upon ourselves as we serve Him together. If the two women in Philippi had taken this to heart, they could then fully "agree together in the Lord's fellowship." (NEB)

Seeking to avoid such problems ourselves, let's remember Paul's practical advice in 2:14-15. "Do all things without grumbling and disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." In a way we must prove who we say we are as we live in our own perverse times. Refusing to grumble and engage in disputes confirms to the world that we are living for something refreshingly better. We are responsible to appear as lights in the world. If we remember this, it's easier to live in harmony.

The church in Philippi was not flawless, but they served a perfect saviour who lived within each of them, including Euodia and Syntyche. I'm sure that they accepted Paul's advice and with help from their brethren, got back on track, working together in a more harmonious way. Let us determine to do the same.

Tim Johnson

Barrie, ON

1. M.R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Eerdmans Publishing Co.) Vol.3, P.456.

2. David Lipscomb, Commentary on Philippians (Gospel Advocate Co.), P.218.

# The Sermon On The Mount – Part II

Written on: August 29, 2021

**Article by: George Mansfield** Since our first article on this passage included introductory matters, we decided to give ourselves some extra space to more fully develop a discussion of the contents. We began by noting that this “Sermon” is the longest and most detailed one recorded in the Gospels.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus preached this profound sermon showing how people converted and committed to the cause of Christ were to live. The lessons contained in it seem endless and apply as much today as they did when first spoken.

It was John R.W. Stott who said, “The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best known part of the teachings of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood and certainly it is the least obeyed. With obedience in mind, let us consider *some* of the important sayings of Jesus that call for decisions and action.

## **How a Christ-follower should arrange his or her priorities:** (chapter 6)

Jesus was Mr. Real! He was genuine and forthright as a human being, yet also God in the flesh, speaking the words of his Heavenly Father as he was guided and indwelt by the Holy Spirit!

His teaching in verses 1-8, include constructive criticism directed toward those known for bias and bigotry.

Jesus warned against “practising one’s righteousness” for the purpose of being seen by ‘men’. He ‘*calling out*’ a common practice among religious leaders, who did not so much want to *do* the right thing as to be *seen* doing it. Jesus pointed out that in seeking the rewards of societal approval they were forfeiting the one that God really wanted to give.

It does not seem possible that anyone would ever criticize charitable giving since the benefits extended to those who received it were undeniably good. God actually intended for the benefits of giving to be experienced at both ends of the transaction. But giving for the purpose of being ‘seen’ substituted the rewards of human approval for the eternal benefits of divine approval. Once again, a tragic trade-off.

In verses 3,4 Jesus corrected the practice that he had just criticized. Giving ought to be done in private, in a way known only to oneself and to God. Therefore “Let your giving be in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” (verse 4). Forfeiting the praise of men allows us to be richly rewarded by our Heavenly Father.

Jesus then applied this same principle to prayer, saying: “When you pray, go into your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you!(Verse 5)

When our children were young we used to read to them from Bible story books. One, fresh in my mind, showed a man praying in the company of many, with one eye open! With that eye he scanned the crowd looking for admirers. Jesus said “do not do that!”. Leading a congregation in prayer is not the same thing as praying for the purpose of gaining the admiration and approval of others. Prayer seeks an audience

with God. Public prayer on behalf of a congregation brings the whole church into the presence of God. It is His approval that we seek – therefore we pray to be heard by God.

In verses 9-13, Jesus offered a model prayer for his disciples. We often refer to this as “The Lord’s Prayer.” It begins with praise to God and honour to his name followed by an appeal for the arrival of his kingdom on earth to the end that His will might be done on earth as it is in heaven. Then and only then does it turn and address the needs of the moment in the context of all that God is doing and planning to do. He wraps up with an appeal for forgiveness and conditions this upon our own willingness to forgive.

There is no question that Jesus underscored the importance of prayer and the value that God places upon it when it is offered in a way that is pleasing to Him. (Verses 14,15)

In verses 16-18, the subject changes from Prayer to Fasting. The only day upon which God had commanded his people to fast, was the Day of Atonement. Jewish tradition demanded much more, leaving the impression that fasting for its own sake was pleasing to God. Those who fasted were going ‘above and beyond’, and those who were *seen to be* fasting, set the standard for others. Jesus taught that we should keep all such things to ourselves – things done for the purpose of serving or honouring the Lord. They are between us and God, and not display items to put in the front window – or to post on the internet.

In verses 19-24 Jesus turns to some ‘nitty-gritty’ issues whose principles have universal application. Treasure in heaven has some obvious advantages. It is safe and secure, guarded by God. The benefits are spread over eternity – like an annuity that will never fail. And those who choose it will not fail to have what they need in this life. Those who live to accumulate treasure on earth may lose it in life and will certainly leave it behind when they die. But the greater danger is that treasure on earth may steal our heart away from heaven, so that we never take hold of the treasure that endures. God knows what we need and is not disappointed when we handle His money responsibly. But should it get in the way or begin to control our lives, let us heed this warning.

The temptation to secure our lives with money is strengthened by worry. God knows that we need food, clothing and somewhere to live. He provides these through his providence and more directly through the benevolence of His church. Those who seek first God’s kingdom and the righteousness that is found through union with Jesus find that God also ministers to their physical needs through the loving care of their brothers and sisters. When concerns for our physical needs are made to stand in line behind our spiritual ones, both are supplied by our Heavenly Father.

The last of this invaluable counsel is found in Matthew chapter 7. We will deal with six separate sections in our next article on chapter 7

Matthew 5-7 is a portion of God’s Word that we should know well. In this one place alone do we find this material all together. May we study this, absorb it, live by it and teach it as we have opportunity!

# Who Really Believes?

Written on: August 29, 2021

**Article by: Thayer Salisbury**

About thirty years ago a co-worker complained that he did not understand why anyone would hold up Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a good example or refer to him as a martyr. “The man was a screaming liberal,” he said. I am not sure what screaming had to do with it, but no doubt Bonhoeffer’s view of scripture was not what I understand to be required by the scriptures themselves. We are not talking about liberal politics here. My co-worker was suggesting that Bonhoeffer did not really believe in the inspiration of scripture, and he was probably correct in that accusation.

But I had read *The Cost of Discipleship* and saw no reason why I should not quote some of its profound statements. Quoting a true statement does not imply that we agree with the person being quoted on every point. I also saw no reason why I should not read other things that Bonhoeffer had written. So, in the spring of 1998 I purchased and read a copy of *Life Together*. I marked a few passages that I thought would be worth revisiting and set the book aside.

Frustrated that I could not do what I had planned to do one morning recently, I picked that book up again and began to reread the passages that I had marked twenty-three years ago. As I did so I was struck by a strange paradox.

On page 51 of *Life Together* Bonhoeffer, who perhaps did not believe in the inspiration of scripture, expresses the opinion that every Christian family should read together at least a full chapter of the Old Testament and at least half a chapter of the New Testament every day (in addition to praying together and singing some hymns). He makes it clear that church leaders should, of course, be doing more than this.

## **Do we live like we believe it?**

I could not help but think, “Here is a person with what might be called a ‘low’ view of scripture insisting that Christians ought to read a significant amount of scripture every day. Yet many who claim to hold firmly to a ‘high’ view of inspiration do not read that much in a week.” It occurred to me that, if a person’s or a church’s view of scripture were judged by actions rather than claims, a lot of individuals and churches that claim to believe in inspiration might be judged to not really believe.

That thought led to another.

## **Do we worship and preach like we believe it?**

I have often been in Sunday services that were almost devoid of scripture. Some had no scripture reading at all, others had only a very brief reading. What does this indicate about our view of scripture?

I have often heard sermons (and perhaps preached a few) where a text was read but was then ignored. Just a few days ago a brother mentioned hearing a sermon that began with a reading from scripture but then proceeded for more than thirty minutes on a topic not even mentioned in the text that had just been read. What does this indicate about our view of scripture?

I have heard many sermons that jumped from text to text to text, making a pretext of all, ignoring the context and pretending that the passages cited proved something that was not even being considered by the inspired writer.

Who really believes in the inspiration of scripture? Is it the one who proclaims that he does, although he may not read scripture? Is it the one who claims that he believes, but then uses the Bible as a jumping off point so that he can proclaim his own opinions? Is it the one that claims to believe in the Bible, but who then engages in activities that he knows God has condemned?

The scriptures themselves effectively answer these questions.

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Lk 6:46)

“God says: “What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you” (Psalm 50:16-17).

If there are any preachers reading this, let me have a word with you.

Do you ever ask yourself, “Might I be part of the reason my congregation does not honour the scriptures as they should? Is it possible that my use of scripture leads people away from the scriptures? If I do catch-word preaching, that uses the scripture as a jumping off point from which to speak on a subject not actually covered in my text, will this not lead to the misuse of scripture by the ordinary member?” Consider these words from David Murray’s book *How Sermons Work*.

“A major reason for seeking the purpose of the author is, therefore, consciously to shift attention away from ourselves to the Scriptures, away from our concerns to the author’s concerns, away from our own purposes to the author’s purpose.”

It is not bad to verbally affirm the inspiration of the scriptures. It is far better to preach and live as ones who really believe the scriptures.



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# Salvation: Like the Thief on the Cross or the church at Rome?

Written on: August 9, 2021

**Article by: Harold Bruggen**

We can not be saved like the thief, but we can be saved like the Romans.

We often share with folks, that we all need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. This is the same answer that Peter gave on the Day of Pentecost when those who heard him speak, asked what they needed to do to be saved.

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 NIV)

From time to time, someone will suggest that since Jesus took the thief on the cross to Paradise with him without baptism, that perhaps baptism is not now essential for salvation. We might observe however that this was a once-in-the-lifetime of Jesus, event. The thief followed no set of commands, had no right to expect the outcome that was granted and that the entire exchange set no precedent for anyone to follow. It was by its very nature an unrepeatable event.

Since that time, Jesus has ascended to and is sitting at the right hand of the Father. The instructions that he gave his apostles – for our salvation are set out clearly and preserved in scripture. Looking ahead to the ministry of the apostles, “ [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-16 NKJV)

Not to be dissuaded, those looking for another way to be saved will often turn to Romans 10:9-10 where Paul wrote: “ If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (NKJV) That beautiful and truthful passage was written to baptized believers.

Four chapters earlier Paul recounts what the brethren at Rome had done in order to obey from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to them. “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.” (Romans 6:3-4 NKJV)

And then he added: “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.” (Romans 6:17 NKJV)

Romans 10:9-10 reveals that we must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. The thief on the cross couldn’t believe that because it had not yet happened . We are required to believe that which the thief could not. Jesus had not yet died for the sins of the world and at that moment, no one could yet be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3-4).

The salvation of the thief is not an example that anyone has followed nor can it instruct us how to be saved today.

The cross has come and gone and with it the possibility of being saved like the thief. But we can be saved like the Romans by obeying “that form of doctrine delivered to you” just like the Romans did. (Romans 6:17) Then you will be in Christ, a Christian, raised to walk in newness of life, a new creature having put the old man of sin to death. “If anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV)

Fenwick, ON

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