

Expository Files

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Front Page

The “War” On Christmas By Jon W. Quinn

Well, it’s like this. I do not celebrate Christmas religiously. I do celebrate the coming of the Savior into the world, but it is not a seasonal celebration with me. I celebrate it daily with joy and gratitude, unless I am having an “off” day where I have let the world and its problems have too much effect on my spirit. Those are the times when I need to get back to the main thing.

I take advantage of the holiday by reminding those who become seasonally aware of Jesus that he did not come so that we might give Him a season but rather our lives. And he came to save us completely and eternally. I also might well point out some of the Christmas traditions that are not Biblical as well.

There are many negative things said about Christmas every year. Some say we should not even call it “Christmas” and have tried to remove all references to Christ. They say putting Christ into public celebrations might offend others of other faiths... or those of no faith. But understand this: these attacks are not really a “war on Christmas” but a “war on Christianity.” It is indeed a culture war.

The city of Chicago is distancing itself from a movie on the nativity for fear of offending non-Christians. This is the same city that hosts the “gay Games” every year, with a ribald Gay parade” with cross dressers and scanty dressers frolicking and cavorting “in your face”. They are pretty quick to say

“If you don’t like it, get over it.” It is obvious whose side the City is on in this culture war.

Chicago officials this week acknowledged they had asked the organizers of an annual Christmas festival - the German Christkindlmarket - to reject sponsorship money from New Line Cinema, which was using the festival to promote its upcoming release, "The Nativity Story." The film depicts the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ.

After Christian groups strongly criticized Chicago officials Tuesday, the city released a statement saying its decision was based on New Line's "aggressively marketing the movie" and not on the movie's theme. The statement said that "prominently placed advertisement may be insensitive to the many people of difference (sic) faiths who come to enjoy the market," adding that the city's guidelines "are to refuse to reduce any blatant commercial message."

In the past couple of years, some retail stores told their workers to wish people a more generic “Happy Holidays” and not “Merry Christmas”. That seems to be reversing now, several chains have reversed earlier decisions and are again permitting “Merry Christmas”. Others are still too nervous about it.

But I know what the true war is about. It is not about Christmas. It is about Christ. It is Christ who many find offensive. And that is a shame.

6 For this is contained in Scripture:

"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,
And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."

7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve,

"The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the very corner stone,"

8 and,

"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God;

you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:6-10)

“How Lonely Sits the City”
(Lamentations 1:1-22)
By Jon W. Quinn

“I told you so! I said this would happen!” But did you listen? No-o-o-o!”

The book of Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah following the fulfillment of his prophecies of doom and gloom concerning the fate of disobedient and faithless Judah. The book is essentially an expression of loyalty to God as well as a confession of national sin and sorrow over the consequences.

The book is poetic in nature, like the Psalms or the Book of Job, though it is listed with the prophecies rather than with the poetry of the Old Testament. Jeremiah took no joy in seeing his prophecies come to pass. He had been watching a moral and spiritual national train wreck for decades and knew that disaster would be the ultimate result.

The five chapters of the book of Lamentations are actually five mournful poetic works describing the devastation and sorrow of Israel and Judah and especially Jerusalem. Judgment and Divine reckoning had come upon the unrepentant land.

The Lonely City

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!

(Lamentations 1:1)

The destruction of Jerusalem had been complete. The temple was destroyed and its treasures had become loot for Babylon. The walls of Jerusalem were broken. All that remained of the city was rubble.

Disobedience and neglect of God and His will certainly brings destruction. The most precious things in our lives today can be lost just as certainly as the Judeans lost theirs. The warm fellowship of our brethren, the stability and assurance and joy that true faith brings to the human heart, the good example we can be for our family, friends and neighbors can all be lost. "In the days of her affliction and homelessness Jerusalem remembers all her precious things that were from the days of old..." (Lamentations 1:7).

Even as the calamity befell Jerusalem, how many fearful and hopeless hearts appealed for more opportunities to repent? "Please Lord, let us start over!" But the opportunities had passed. The consequences of being a partaker in the generations of sin and neglect had now arrived. The Day of Reckoning is too late to make the changes. Today is the day of salvation!

The Broken Alliances

Those that Jerusalem had depended upon for help had turned their backs on her; "All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies." (Lamentations 1:2). Jeremiah had long warned against depending on human alliances rather than depending upon God. King Zedekiah, son of Josiah had asked Jeremiah to pray for the nation but he would not listen to Jeremiah's counsel. Jeremiah had warned him, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Thus you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come out for your assistance is going to return to its own land of Egypt. The Chaldeans will also return and fight against this city, and they will capture it and burn it with fire.'" (Jeremiah 37:7-8). And now, that of which Jeremiah had spoken had come to pass. No help came from Egypt on the day of disaster.

Friendship with the world will bring similar results today. Judah had sought to secure itself in its pact with Egypt. This had given them false confidence and hope. They had boldly rebelled against the Lord while proclaiming that they had nothing to fear by doing so. But their dependence upon their alliance with Egypt and adopting the immoralities and idolatries of their friends was nothing but hostility toward the true and living God. "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is

hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4).

We must not overestimate the assurances of a world that often seeks to minimize or mock the value of living by faith in God. The world's treasures and assurances are all empty on the Day of Reckoning. Faith overcomes the world. “Blessed assurance! Jesus is mine!” There is nothing more sure than this. “The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. “ (1 John 2:17).

The False Gods

"The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against His command; “ (Lamentations 1:18). Judah had indeed rebelled against the command of Jehovah. Before the destruction had come, Jeremiah had asked some penetrating questions concerning the gods in which the people were now placing their confidence. As the day approached, Jeremiah had asked,

"But where are your gods
Which you made for yourself?
Let them arise, if they can save you
In the time of your trouble;
For according to the number of your cities
Are your gods, O Judah.” (Jeremiah 2:28)

All those gods, but no deliverance. As Babylon laid siege to the city, the imprisoned Jeremiah had chastised king and nation with the question "Where then are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, "The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land'?" (Jeremiah 37:19). Because Jeremiah had spoken the truth, this great friend of Judah was accused of being a traitor.

But while Jeremiah was a prisoner, his prophecy was not imprisoned. It would still come to pass. Likewise, we should not allow the world and its gods to silence the word. We shall speak it and live it. The Day of Reckoning is coming!

What Could Have Been

This disaster never had to be. We do not have to wait until the Day of Reckoning comes and we are full of regret. A ruined Jerusalem mourned, "See, O LORD, for I am in distress; My spirit is greatly troubled; My heart is overturned within me..." (Lamentations 1:20). But it never had to turn out that way. It doesn't for us either.

But that is up to us just as it was up to them. We can choose the course of our lives with little or no regard for the Lord's counsel, and we will see distress on the Day of Reckoning. But there is a clear alternative. We can overcome the world and the Day will be one of joy and victory. "You, O LORD, rule forever; Your throne is from generation to generation... Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored; Renew our days as of old," (Lamentations 5:19-21).

The Carpenter's Son Builds a House
(Ephesians 2:19-22)
By Ed Barnes

JESUS was the son of a carpenter; a fact attested to by the local residents of the town where he grew up (Matt. 13:55). It is almost certain that the wood craftsman skills of his father Joseph were learned by Jesus. The custom in those days among the working class was that a trade be passed down from father to son, and was often done through several generations. The scriptures make reference to this custom in Mark 6:3 where we see Jesus visiting his hometown of Nazareth. While there, he is actually called a carpenter by the local residents. I suppose it is possible that Jesus actually worked as a carpenter before he began going about His Father's business (Luke 2:49), but it is almost certain that he learned the trade and was thought of as one who was carrying on his father's chosen craft.

The Greek word translated carpenter in the above referenced passages is defined as "a worker in wood" (Greek -English Lexicon-Baurer, et.al.). Not too surprising! In R.C.H. Lenski's commentary on Mark the word is defined as "one who makes things out of hard material . . . almost always a carpenter. Yet one who makes utensils, furniture, and house fittings, for in Palestine all the houses are constructed of stone, the country being full of rock" (p. 236). In the normal course of events, therefore, Jesus would have become such a carpenter himself and lived his life in fulfillment of that role.

He didn't, of course, but nevertheless become a great builder! We now turn our attention to the house that the carpenter's son built.

There are some New Testament passages where the building skills of Jesus play into the language. In John 2:19 for example, Jesus is asked by the Jews to give a sign of His authority. He answers by referring enigmatically to the temple of Herod, a great structure built of stone, and says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Of course, as verse 21 bears out, Jesus was speaking of the destruction and rebuilding (resurrection) of his own body, not the stone structure built by King Herod.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus makes a promise that involves the greatest building project ever undertaken. In response to Peter's confession that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declares, ". . . on this rock I will build my church."

Indeed the Scriptures go on to reveal that Jesus fulfilled His promise to build a church. He did so only after having purchased the material from which his church was built (Acts 20:28; Eph. 2:13). In speaking to those who made up the church in the city of Corinth, Paul assures them that the foundation upon which they were established is none other than Jesus, For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:9-11; see also Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6,7).

Jesus built the promised church. He alone is the architect, builder, owner and Lord. The church he promised to build began on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. The event, which is recorded in Acts 2, was accompanied by the promised (Acts 1:4) Holy Spirit ; gospel preaching by Peter and the other apostles; an invitation to repent in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; the initial response to that invitation on the part of 3,000 people who were baptized; a picture of the early church working together and the addition by the Lord into his church of those who were subsequently and likewise being saved.

Thus Jesus built his church. He did so in keeping with his promise, and by virtue of his resurrection, exaltation and declaration as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36).

Some wonderful details of the church that Jesus built are provided in Ephesians 2:19-22. Within this context there are six distinct Greek words

that are built upon the same root. That root word has to do with a dwelling or house. In this case Paul has labeled that dwelling "The Household of God." Of that household, Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

Paul's main point in Ephesians 2:19-22 is that converted Gentiles, once distinct from Israel, are now God's people as well, and he uses this "house" imagery to illustrate this fact in several ways.

The text reads as follows:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Even though the context is speaking of the household of God with Jesus being the chief cornerstone of that house, it is still describing the church which was promised, built and continues to be ruled by Christ. Very few passages emphasize the aspect of the church as the house built by Christ the way that this one does. Notice how various points about the house that Christ constructed are made through the carefully chosen language of the passage.

The word foreigners (aliens) originally meant something like "along side the house" in the sense of "separated from or away from the house," a nuance not present in the English translation (Windham, p. 70). Paul then points out that the Gentiles are now an integral part of the household of God, no longer "away from it." It is an accomplished fact that the Gentiles are in Christ, as their place in it is spoken of in the past tense with the word built. Paul says that the whole building (edifice) will grow into a holy temple in the Lord, emphasizing the living aspect of the building. Finally, in verse 22 the idea of being built together places emphasis on the expected continued growth of the house, and the term dwelling place, is yet a sixth usage of the same Greek root, here indicating the special purpose for the house built by Christ.

Jesus, the son of a lowly carpenter from Nazareth thus becomes a great builder. He has built a living and continuing house that we can benefit from

and become a part of yet today, two-thousand years after the original foundation was laid.

Sources: A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT. Baurer, et al.p.995. Commentary on Mark's Gospel. R.C.H. Lenski. p. 236. New Testament Greek for Preachers and Teachers. Neal Windham. pp. 70-72.

What Is The Issue Between A Man And God ***Rom. 2:17-29***

¹⁷Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

²⁵For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

²⁶Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?

²⁸For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

In this early part of the letter to Rome, the apostle is establishing what the problem is in the human race. That is essentially important, in both Bible study and in making good personal decisions about God. We simply must have a good view of what the problem is, in the human race.

The truth is: **Sin** is the problem in the human race. And Paul wanted to be very clear that not just the Gentiles, but likewise the Jews were guilty of sin. Sin is a universal problem, crossing all lines of blood, genetics and race.

Now the destination of this argument is: **Everybody needs the gospel of Christ, because everybody is suffering with the same problem.** The conclusion is stated well in Rom. 3:23, “for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.” Part of this is the above paragraph, Rom. 2:17-29.

Here’s what I want to address based on this passage → **What is the issue between a man and God?** By “man” I mean, *person, human being*. We want to get to exactly what the matter is between a person and God. The problem called “sin” needs good clarity and we should steer a course away from distractions or irrelevant matters.

It is our purpose to rule out certain things that may obstruct good perspective. We are eager to know what the issue is, what it is all about, between a person and God.

The Main Issue Is Not . . .

1. What We Call Ourselves. There were Jews in Paul’s time who were not willing to consider themselves as guilty sinners in need of the gospel. They took comfort in what they called themselves. You see that in verse 17, where Paul said: “Indeed, you are called a Jew.”

Labels are often inadequate, particularly in religion. Labels do not prove standing with God. We cannot assume, if people wear a certain label, that label is informative or proof of anything. And when we call ourselves “Christians,” we cannot be satisfied that we have met or completed some obligation. Understand, it is all right to call yourself a Christian. But there is much more to be done, on a level way beyond nomenclature. What we call ourselves may fall short of what we are. The issue between a man and God runs far beyond the use of a name or label.

2. The issue is not – What We Claim. Again, there were Jews in Paul’s time not willing to consider themselves in need of the gospel and typically, they would claim to “rest on the law,” and they would make their “boast in God.” We are talking, here, about matters of profession, not practice: claiming, boasting and pride – not heart and life. Even when a legitimate

name or label is used, verbal profession may be far removed from practice, or character.

3. The issue is not – What We Approve. There were those who remained loyal to Judaism in Paul’s time and they would say they approved “of the things that are excellent.” We may agree to things that are right; we may approve of things that, in reality, are excellent. But such agreement or approval may not reflect heart and life. One can name and claim and agree and approve – yet still be an alien sinner, or an apostate. The issue is not *what we call ourselves or what we claim or approve.*

4. The matter is not about – What We Learn. Learning is not always reflected in living! Learning is essential, but not an end in itself. Learning only for academic knowledge is of no spiritual value. Paul, in this passage, describes people who said they were instructed out of the law. This would be like someone today saying - *I’ve read the Bible. I’m a Bible student! I know what the Bible says!!* An immature, sectarian spirit might say – *I know more than you know; I know better than you.* Paul said, “Knowledge puffs up.” To be a learner is not necessarily, to be a genuine disciple in your life. The learning of genuine discipleship is learning that is lived, not just claimed.

5. The issue is not – What We Teach. Those Paul refers to thought themselves to be “instructors of the foolish.” They were proud of the fact – they were “teachers of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.” This reads almost like a resume; *here’s what I’ve done; here’s my record, my experience. Look at me.* But that’s not the heart of the matter, when it comes to a person and God!

When we use the Bible to understand the fundamental issue between a man and God - that is, between humanity and deity – ***let’s not get caught up in things that miss the point!*** I may **call** myself a Christian. I may **brag** about or **claim** all kinds of things. I may be **proud** of what I approve, what I’ve **learned** and what I **teach**.

These matters, however, do not constitute the main issue between us and God. And I say to you – there are people who’ve been baptized; people who are anxious to claim membership in the church of Christ; people who are confident in their knowledge, their ability and their experience . . . **Yet, they are not what they ought be in their lives!!**

Melvin Wheatley said this, that is relevant to our study:

*“We are split spiritual personalities.
We swear allegiance to one set of principles
and live by another.
We extol self-control, and practice self-indulgence.
We proclaim brotherhood and harbor prejudice.
We laud character but strive to climb to the top
at any cost.
We erect houses of worship, but our shrines are our
places of business and recreation.
We are suffering from a distressing cleavage
between the truths we affirm and the values
we live by.
Our souls are the battlegrounds for civil wars, but
we are trying to live serene lives in houses
divided against themselves.”*

What is the issue between a person and His God.

The Issue Is, How We Live!

Listen to this in our text:

²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.

The apostle takes up this matter of being a teacher and making that prominent in your “resume;” being proud of your work, as an “instructor of the foolish.” He says this: “You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” Teachers of truth are not exempt from the truth they teach!

In fact – if you know the truth, and you can teach the truth, **the greater part of your teaching influences lies in your practice of what you teach!!**

When teachers do not model the instruction they give us, we tend to not take it seriously; it becomes an impairment to the process.

The issue between a person and God is not the ability to teach others, but rather – **the wisdom of living the truth you teach!**

Paul is saying to some of the leaders of Judaism: “*You come to the Gentile, and propose yourself as a guide for his blindness, but you are walking in darkness.*” “*You come to the Gentile, as though he were dumb and you take delight in being his instructor . . . but you failed to instruct yourself!!*”

Paul is exposing pride, boasting, inconsistency and utterly ridiculous religious profession.

And The Issue Is, Content Of Heart

Rom. 2:29a - “but he is a Jew who is one inwardly...”

I may call myself a Christian; build up an impressive resume; become a teacher of good things and enjoy the applause of men - **but the issue is, what is the content of my heart before God!** We tend to place so much emphasis and confidence in external ritual, we get lost and stay lost. We attempt to handle our relationship with God through motions and appearances. **But the heart is the heart of the matter.**

If God is not in your heart, He cannot be in your life, and if He is not in your life, **you live and die without Him!** Do you recall reading this statement in 1 Sam. 16:7?

“...The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Psalms 51:10 shows what our prayer should be: *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

We often sing the song that poses the question: ***Is Thy Heart Right With God?*** That’s the issue between a man and God. *And ...*

The Issue Is → God’s Approval!

I may approve of myself; you may approve of me, and I may approve of you {*the old “mutual admiration society.”*} What matters ultimately is: **Do We Have God’s Approval!**

Notice the last phrase in verse 29: “whose praise is not from men but from God.” This has such direct force against the whole behavior of hypocrisy. What I should seek is God’s approval.

Now it is at this point that I need to say: **Because of Jesus Christ, you can have God’s approval.** Left to your own power to reform and live right – **God’s approval would escape your grasp.** But the good news is, because Jesus lived, died and was raised from the dead . . . By the activity of faith in Him, we can be brought out of sin, into righteousness - - - and to an ultimate place, where we enjoy God’s approval. That’s what matters. That’s what it’s all about.

Conclusion:

Paul writes to us so clearly in this passage, regarding fruitless, boastful, hypocritical religious practice, where man is honored rather than God; where there is obvious inconsistency between claim and conduct and where there is shameful disparity between what one teaches and how one lives. Let’s learn to get ourselves properly directed, in heart and conduct. The real issue between a man and his God is not name, claim, boasting, teaching. No – it is life and heart, seeking God’s approval. That’s possible, because of the sacrifice of Christ.

A young preacher was excited about his first sermon. He had been off to college, and thought he was adequately prepared. He walked boldly up to the pulpit, with his head high, just radiating self-confidence. But right away – in his first words, he stumbled over the reading of the Scriptures. Then he lost his train of thought; his notes were not adequate; he really became rattled. He quickly ended the message, and walked out of the pulpit dejected.

Later, one of the elders whispered to the embarrassed young preacher: “If you had gone up to the pulpit the way you came down, you might have come down the way you went up!” The elder was right.

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Is there something you need to do about all of this?

A Powerful Lesson from Zephaniah *Matthew Allen*

Zephaniah lived during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. His small book is a part of the section of the Bible known as the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are referred to as such because of the briefness of their writing, not because of the content found within. While we may not know much about the writer himself, Zephaniah sends a powerful lesson to the people of his day all while giving each of us many things to ponder about our own generation.

Zephaniah was the great-great grandson of king Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king and worked hard to initiate religious reform in Judah. After his death, his son Manasseh took the throne and actively persecuted the prophets of Jehovah. Jewish tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two by those employed by Manasseh. Altars to Baal and Molech were rebuilt. The people were encouraged to consult with mediums and practice superstition. Evil and violence once again filled the streets of Jerusalem. This trend continued after Manasseh's death into the reign of Amon. He too, became a victim of the violence of the day by being assassinated, 2 Chronicles 33:24-25. After Amon's death, the eight-year old Josiah was put in as king. It is during his reign that Zephaniah's ministry began. During the eighth year of Josiah's reign, religious reform was initiated. 2 Chronicles 34:3 says that Josiah began to seek the God of his father David. By the twelfth year, Josiah moved to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images. The next few verses describe that this reform took place throughout Judah. 2 Chronicles 34 goes on to describe a movement toward God that takes place throughout the rule of Josiah. It was a very significant event.

With this in view, the religious reform that Josiah pursued is not mentioned in the book of Zephaniah. Was he not impressed with the events taking place? Zephaniah describes a people who enjoyed violence and deceit 1:9; engaged in dishonest business practices 1:11; were stagnant in their belief in God, 1:12; and were absorbed in their materialism and pleasures,

1:13. But what may be most revealing about the spiritual condition of Jews in 630 B.C. is found in Zephaniah 1:5. In the preceding verses Zephaniah announces the coming doom upon Judah and Jerusalem. Among those who would experience it are those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, and those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom. Were the reforms of Josiah effective? Yes. Had they not been, we might not see any reference to the LORD by Zephaniah in 1:5. But, it seems while the people may have had a greater consciousness of the LORD, they still believed they could mix idolatry with the true religion of God. Those who bowed down to the host of heaven were those who worshipped the planets and stars – very common traits of eastern religion. “Milcom” was another name for the star god – Molech. That people were swearing by the name of this god shows they had elevated this idol to the same level as Jehovah. The people of Judah were told they would be punished for disloyalty to God. God demands total loyalty and allegiance. The first chapter of Zephaniah ends with this statement of fact: On the day of the LORD’S wrath all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, 1:18.

What can Christians of the twenty-first century take from this? How strong is our loyalty to God? While we may not bow down to the stars of heaven or worship graven images, we have our own “idols” to deal with. For example, how many fall down to the idol of materialism – letting it sap away our resources and time to feed its insatiable appetite? The effects of the materialistic mindset may be far more reaching than we care to realize. Many work constantly just to keep up with the times. Constant work takes away from the important things. We’re run ragged and even brag about it! This has led to a general attitude that sees no harm in offering leftovers of time and energy to God. Materialistic concerns have been elevated to the same importance as God Himself. What is the effect? Family suffers. The local church suffers. Our communities suffer. Like the people of Judah, we too must learn that our affections can not be divided. Our loyalty must be to God first – before all else. Jesus said, no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth, Matthew 6:24. Zephaniah may be an obscure Old Testament book, but it contains powerful lessons that each Christian living today must consider.

Matthew Allen

Salvation and Works
“What do you have that you did not receive?”
(Topical Study)
By Jon W. Quinn

People have tossed the subject of “salvation and works” around since the beginning of the gospel. In truth, we have statements in the New Testament that show the inspired writers of the Bible battling erroneous views from two opposite extremes. Some wrongly suggest that Paul and Peter, or Paul and James, contradicted one another. But they did not. They merely fought against the extremes at both ends of the same issue. Paul taught against the concept of earning salvation by works while James taught against salvation by faith alone apart from any works. Because they were tackling different problems, they emphasized different points of truth, and when taken together, they compliment one another.

Seeing Both Sides

We are saved by grace through faith. Many are the passages that address the false concept that we can save ourselves by our own good works or by works of the Old Law. We are saved “not of works” which has reference to good deeds that we might do (Ephesians 2:8-10). Neither is our justification “of works” when referring to works of the Old Law (Romans 4:2-4; cf. vss. 9-11). We are not saved “by deeds done in righteousness” referring to the righteous deeds we might do and ought to do (Titus 3:5). These passages present the truth from one perspective.

But the same truth, approached from the other direction, shows that we are, in a sense, justified by works. We are “justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). What we did or did not do will be considered on the day of judgment and it will make a difference as to where we spend eternity. See Jesus' parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats for a good lesson on this (Matthew 25:32-45). Jesus is the author of salvation to those that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). So, what does the Lord mean when we bring all these together?

Keeping Saved

How do we keep right with God? Because of the grace passages some think that works do not play any role in keeping right with God. "Once saved, always saved." But this cannot be so. The church at Ephesus had once been an active church (Revelation 2:2). These people had been busy doing the Lord's will. But they had grown slack. The only way they could be right with God was to return to doing the deeds they had done at first (Revelation 2:5)! The Corinthians were also told that they must continue in the word (1 Corinthians 15:1,2).

Because of the works passages, some think we earn salvation. Some are very uncertain of their standing with God because they know deep down they can never be worthy of His grace and we are all painfully aware of our own frailties.

Do not forget God is aware of this! He knows we cannot merit our salvation. We deserve death, but the Lord has a free gift for us (Romans 6:23). Yes, we have needs that we cannot supply, but the Lord can (Hebrews. 4:16).

So When we correctly put all these together, we do not find a contradiction, but rather two perspectives on salvation that must be taken together in a complimentary way. Any doctrine that puts an interpretation on one of these perspectives so that it contradicts the other is a MIS-interpretation!

The Place of Works at the Judgment

Those who deny that works we have done are at all involved at the outcome of the proceedings at the Judgment Seat of the ages must ignore many passages that say otherwise! There are so many scenes of the Judgment we can examine. We have already noticed the parable of Jesus describing the judgment scene as a division of the sheep from the goats. Jesus highlights what they had done, or failed to have done, as He announces the eternal decree. The Bible also says that people will be judged "according to their deeds" (Revelation 20:12,13). Other passages about the judgment and the deeds we have done teach us that we can lose our souls due to our deeds (Matthew 16:26, 27) and that the righteous judgment of God is according to the deeds we have done, whether good or bad (Romans 2:5-10). Other passages show us the same thing (see 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7,8; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:23-25; Revelation 2:23). We

must not let our preaching and teaching suggest to someone that our deeds will not be considered at Judgment!

But thank God for His mercy and grace! Without them we would be lost! Even if starting today I lived perfectly for the rest of my life, moving mountains by faith, in the end, I am still but an unprofitable servant to my God and unworthy of salvation (Luke 17:10)!

Works Will Save Us And Keep Us Saved

How can this be reconciled with passages such as Ephesians 2:9? Does it not say that salvation is “not of works”? Actually, the passage says “not of works, that any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:9). The works that are involved in our salvation are not works about which we can properly boast. Salvation is “not of yourselves” (Ephesians 2:8). That is, salvation is not by our own efforts or power. But the works of God are plainly involved.

There are two categories of the works of God. There are the works of God - the things He did for us (John 3:16) and then there are the works of God, the things He does through us. For example, when I hear the gospel, it is up to me whether to believe it or not. If I receive it into my heart, it will bear fruit in my life. I will undergo growing faith and repentance. I will seek to obey the Lord. It is God that is producing that increase. When I believed, I submitted unto God to work within me (John 6:28-29; I Corinthians 3:5-7). This is why Paul would say "and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Galatians 2:20). Paul's endeavors, he said, were not his own, but Christ living in Him! And these works of Christ in us are absolutely essential to our salvation! They are the result of Christ dwelling our hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:17). From where does one get his strength during the difficult times of heartache, or temptation, or persecution, or sickness, or spiritual weakness, or uncertainty? We get what we need through Him (Philippians 4:13)!

Understand that none of this is apart from our wills and efforts. But the power is God's. Disciples are to let their lights shine, but the glory belongs to God. It was His strength provided by His grace to me if I wanted it. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians; "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

To the extent that I obey the Lord, He works in me. The saved in the parable of the sheep and the goats did many good things which the lost did not do. But if they had done the very same good things without the Lord, it would not have effected their salvation at all. But in the Lord, these works of faith are the Lord working through us bringing about our justification by faith and works.

Plan of Salvation

By Jon W. Quinn

Plan #1

Announced by the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to new believers in Christ who asked what they must do:

"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
(ACTS 2:38)

Plan #2

On the back page of a tract, sinner were urged to pray this prayer to be saved. This prayer is not found in the Bible; nor were alien sinners commanded to pray for their forgiveness.

The Sinner's Prayer:

"O' Lord, I accept that I am a sinner and that Jesus died for my sins. I now accept Him into my heart as Lord and Savior asking for your mercy and forgiveness in His name. Amen."

The editors of Expository Files are happy with plan #1 and thankful to the God of all grace for it. We cannot recommend Plan #2 at all, but will change our minds when this prayer can be shown to us in the Bible.



The Final Page 13.12

“Hard Pressed On Every Side?”

2 Cor. 4:8-14

Warren E. Berkley

I was recently looking at Paul’s statement: “hard pressed on every side.” The context is, his careful efforts to explain his ministry to those in Corinth who had been troubled by outsiders, who sought to undermine his influence and work. Paul wasn’t comfortable with this kind of writing (“boasting”), but was compelled to respond to men with destructive agendas.

He wrote, “we are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.”

“Hard pressed” in the New King James is “afflicted in every way” in the ESV and NAS. In the New Testament in Plain English, it is: “being squeezed.”

Now this is something we can identify with. Though it may well be, we do not suffer the kind of pressure Paul endured, we do know what it means to be “squeezed” or “hard pressed.”

You may feel this pressure in your budget, your health, your schedule, your relationships, your temptations. Pressure or stress is a realistic feature of life on earth. Life on earth is hard. It was particularly hard for Paul, a victim of hostility and terror at the hands of those who rejected the gospel. He was “persecuted” and “struck down,” so that death was working in his life. He was “hard pressed on every side.”

But he was not crushed! Perplexed, but “not in despair.” His endurance was a function of his faith: “But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore spoke, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you,” (vss. 13,14).

From this I need to learn – whatever kind of pressure I feel, as a child of God; whatever specific form the squeezing may take, being crushed is not inevitable. When I believe and speak according to the truth of the gospel,

when I live unto Him, there is never any reason to “lose heart.” *Read now, 2 Cor. 4.*

“And though we shall at last seal this truth with our blood, we fear not, being persuaded that as the body of Christ was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, so shall our bodies be raised, and that we shall have an eternal life with him in glory.” Adam Clarke