

21C-Watch-Vol2-no5-May98

Comments&Letters

From Our Readers

Defending Truth; Demolishing Error

I thank God and praise Him for the edifying tack and sound doctrine from the Scriptures I perceive in the April 1988 issue of Twenty-First Century WATCH.

I am particularly pleased by the carefully written article expounding from the Scriptures the extremely relevant question, "What Are We Supposed to Watch?" with that excellent sidebar "How to Watch."

As a genuine father of our faith advises, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV). It appears that your ministerial trainee, Richard W. Williams, listens to the genuine fathers of our faith, the authors of Holy Scripture. May his reward be great!

I was heartened by the honest and clearly put answers to difficult questions in the "Questions and Answers" column, and encouraged by the godly insight, exhortation, and careful use of Scripture I found in Lloyd W. Cary's article, "Are you Powered Up?"

Your ad for The Resurrection-Real Event or Historical Hoax? evinces sound-mindedness and a right-minded desire to honor the Word of God, defending truth and demolishing error: just the sort of thing I like to see! In the real "New Testament Church," success was described in these terms: "the Word of God increased" (Acts 6:7); may you embrace that definition of "success" more and more!

I was pleased to see your tasteful ad for what appears to be a thoughtful and well-crafted Web site; even I "surf the Net" now and then (with a lot of help from a friend, on his computer!).

I noticed the clear organization and tasteful typesetting of your Armor of God program bulletin, and can honestly say that I am also pleased by every nuance of editing, layout, and typeface choice of your newsletter.

Please send free gift subscriptions to these two spiritually hungry friends of mine....

May you continue to grow in grace to exalt the Word of God, be richly blessed, and receive a great reward!-
J.C., Austin, Texas.

(Editor's Note: *Richard W. Williams was ordained into the ministry of Jesus Christ on March 28, 1998.*)

Can't Put It Down

This is not much to send, but maybe it will help on postage as you send me booklets and the *Twenty-First Century WATCH Newsletter*. I enjoy these booklets and *WATCH* newsletters so very much. When I get the *WATCH* newsletter I do not stop reading it until I finish reading it. It has so much good information and very helpful to me in understanding the Bible as you tell us where we can read the chapters and verses in the Bible-
E.C., Savannah, Georgia.

Straight Answers on Web Site

I am sending you and offering to help you continue God's work....As the years went by I found myself even denying His very existence. Then one day I believe God opened my eyes and heart to my sinful nature and I was appalled at what I was becoming and cried out to Him for help. I began reading the Bible and searching the Internet for the truth about God. I found CGI's Web site and found a place I could finally get some straight answers to a lot of questions. Your literature is easy to understand and is quite refreshing and enlightening. I thank God for opening my eyes and also I want to thank you all for your work-
M.B., Petawawa, Ontario, Canada, via e-mail.

Watchtower Magazine?

Please send me the magazine *Watchtower* along with the tape on "Tongues." I've never understood that. I thank you for any information on how to get into the presence of God-
M.C., Hot Springs, Arkansas.

(Editor's Note: *Our publication is called Twenty-First Century WATCH. This is not to be confused with the "Watchtower of Jehovah's Witnesses. Our publication's title was inspired by the words of Jesus as they appear in Matthew 24:42: "WATCH therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."*) -End-

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Is Obedience to God Necessary for Salvation?

**Is belief in Jesus enough to get us saved and keep us saved?
Or do we need to obey what He says?**

by Lloyd W. Cary

A man once tried to persuade me that obedience to God is not necessary because all we need to do is believe in Jesus and "give our hearts to the Lord." We are then, he continued, eternally secure and "once saved, always saved." That's all there is to it, he assured me. We are then a shoo-in; it's a done deal.

Is this true? How should we answer? If we confess Jesus is Lord, are we then at liberty to disobey Him? Does obedience nullify grace? Does it make God angry if we try to obey Him? It's time we see what the Scriptures have to say about this vital subject.

A wise man once observed, "Obedience is the only sensible alternative for those who cannot lead." Mankind has demonstrated throughout history that he has not been able to lead his life in the way that will bring lasting happiness, peace, and prosperity. "O Lord," Jeremiah said, "I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). "There is a way," the Bible warns, "that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

No one can read the Bible through without becoming acutely aware that, from the beginning, Almighty God has required His people to obey Him. Indeed, without obedience, a person's worship of the Creator is in vain (Mark 7:7). Obedience implies an authority to be obedient to. That authority is God. Unquestionably, one of the greatest errors within Christendom is the concept that the Ten Commandments are canceled or "done away." A greater misconception can hardly be imagined. The implied "Eleventh Commandment" seems to be: "Ignore the previous ten especially the Fourth!"

As parents, God Almighty directs us to train up our children in the way they should go at every waking opportunity concerning His commandments, statutes, and ways (Deuteronomy 6:17; Proverbs 22:6). Instead, in our society today, children are now forbidden to read the Bible in our public schools. According to the latest ruling by the Supreme Court, any plaque displaying the Ten Commandments must be removed from certain places. The consequences of this suppression of God and His laws are filling our prisons with criminals far too numerous to cope with. The Scriptures contain literally dozens of passages in which God appeals to the sinner, or lawbreaker (1 John 3:4), to turn from the way of disobedience and death to the path of obedience and life. Faithful obedience is, in the final analysis, the diametric opposite of sin.

Obedience is an outward expression of our inward faith and is the only biblical sign that a believer loves God (John 14:15,21,23). "For this is the love of God," "Notice! Here is the Bible definition of love-"that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Bible prophecy indicates that in the last days the whole world is going to be tested on this matter of obedience and that once again, as in the days of old, the choice will be between the commandments of God and the traditions of men (2 Timothy 3:15).

The Church of God, International, therefore, cautions all its readers to beware of the smooth-sounding arguments put forward by misguided ministers who claim it is no longer necessary to obey the Ten Commandments. Nothing could be further from the truth. That the Holy One of Israel requires all His followers to obey His commandments is borne out by the writings of all the prophets and repeatedly attested to by the lives of His people down through the ages. We would be miserably failing in our duties if we led you to believe anything else.

It would be well for every Christian to memorize the Ten Commandments verbatim as they are recorded in Exodus 20.

According to Scripture, the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Jesus Christ came to earth not to rescind His Laws, but to redeem mankind from the penalty of breaking God's laws (Matthew 1:21; Romans 8:3,4).

God's commandments have been observed by His faithful followers from the dawn of human history and will continue unchanged through the endless cycles of eternity. The Eternal says, "I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Do we believe this? God blessed Abraham "because Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5). God asked four chapters before the Ten Commandments were codified on Mount Sinai, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?" (Exodus 16:28). Christ warned in Matthew 5:17,18: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [fill up to the brim-as an example]. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."

God's commandments are, in effect, the constitution and by-laws-the immutable code of practice-of every son who will enter into the Kingdom of God (Psalm 19:7,11). They will stand forever (Psalm 111:7,8).

God has repeatedly pronounced blessings on all who obey His laws, and curses upon those who disobey them. No mortal arguments, however weighty they may at first appear, can alter these facts. God has laid two options before mankind: obedience, blessings, and life on the one hand, and disobedience, cursings, and death on the other. (Deuteronomy 11:26,28). There is no middle ground.

The message of every prophet of God has been basically the same: "Repent. Turn from your evil ways and keep the commandments" (cf. 2 Kings 17:13,15; Ezekiel 18:21,27; 20:11; Luke 13:3).

From its inception, God's church has been made up of believers who endeavor to obey God. Obedience is an expression of living faith and is by far the most reliable sign of true discipleship (1 Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 11:4; 1 John 2:3,4; 5:3; Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

By contrast, blatant disobedience to God's law and the stubborn refusal to forsake pagan tradition are the marks of a false church. Those who stubbornly refuse to obey God and cling to a church, group, or organization which advocates disobedience will ultimately have to give an account to Jesus Christ as to why they did not obey Him. Sincerity and sentimentality are not criteria for truth. Satan and his demons are utterly sincere-but they are sincerely wrong. Christ classifies the worship of some as vain and futile (Matthew 7:21,23; 15:8,9).

God's grace-His divine favor and undeserved pardon for sins repented of-in no way cancels a believer's obligation to obey the Ten Commandments. Obedience, when correctly understood, is faith and love in action (Isaiah 42:21; Romans 3:31; Romans

6:15,16; James 2:17; John 14:15). Faith and works are not opposed, as some would have us believe, but complement one another like a hand and a glove (James 1:22).

When questioned about how one may gain everlasting life, Jesus the Author of Salvation replied plainly: "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

This correct answer is seldom, if ever, given by religious teachers today. And yet it is the one Christ gave when asked about the way to life. See Ezekiel 18:21,27,28, where this qualification for life is further explained.

Moreover, God uses His law as a seal or brand upon the believer's mind and actions. It is, figuratively speaking, placed in the foreheads and right hands of all those who obey Him. The forehead stands for one's mind, beliefs, and motives. The right hand represents one's actions, deeds, and works (Deuteronomy 6:48; Proverbs 7:2,3; Isaiah 8:16; Hebrews 8:8,10; Revelation 7:3).

In view of such overwhelming evidence, we are admonished first to have faith in-believe and trust in-God and His Son Jesus Christ. We are then counseled to add to our faith obedience. Our obedience will demonstrate to God and men that our faith is indeed alive and not lip service only. That, in essence, is the message of the Bible, and it would be folly to avoid it (Proverbs 28:79; Ecclesiastes 12:13; James 2:17,20; Revelation 22:14).

In answer to the man who tried to persuade me that no obedience to God is necessary because all we need to do is believe in Jesus and that "once saved we are always saved," I told him, "Friend, if you are right, I'm okay. But if I am right, you're in a heap of trouble." He was stunned, for he had no answer.

For further study read all of Psalm 119 and the Sermon on the Mount, which is recorded in Matthew 5-7. In these majestic passages the values and obligations of obedience are magnified and presented in full perspective. Study them carefully, and prayerfully ask God to help you put them into practice. Do not make the mistake of following the advice of misguided leaders who are blindly leading millions into error. "But on this one will I look:" said God, "On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

Jesus upholds the law.

Matthew 5:17,19: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17,19).

Matthew 7:12: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 19:17: "But if you would enter into life, keep the commandments."

Matthew 22:37-40: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

John upholds the law.

1 John 2:3: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."

1 John 2:4: "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

1 John 3:4: "Everyone who commits (practices) sin is guilty of lawlessness; for {that is what} sin is, lawlessness (the breaking, violating of God's law by transgression or neglect-being unregulated by His commands and His will)" (Amplified Bible).

1 John 5:2: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments."

1 John 5:3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

2 John 6: "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments."

Revelation 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and enter through the gates into the city."

Paul upholds the law.

Romans 2:13: "...for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified."

Romans 2:25: "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And 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?"

Romans 3:31: "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Romans 7:7: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'"

Romans 7:12: "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."

Romans 7:14: "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal...."

Romans 7:22: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."

Romans 8:3,4: "...He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Romans 13:8,10: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

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Questions&Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

Is Jesus preparing a
place" for us in heaven?

Question: What did Jesus mean when He said, "I go to prepare a place for you"? Some people claim this supports the view that Christians go to heaven.

Answer: In John 14:13, Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Since Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, and since God the Father dwells in heaven, we might safely assume that the "Father's house" of which Jesus spoke is in heaven. Moreover, since Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you," we might safely assume that the "place" He is preparing is in the Father's house in heaven.

But notice that Jesus did not say that His followers would go to heaven and take up residence in the new mansions He had prepared for them. On the contrary, He said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus will receive His saints when He comes again-not before! He will establish His kingdom right here on this earth, and the saints will reign with Him (Revelation 2:26,27; 3:21; 5:10).

The term translated "mansions" is better rendered "rooms," "abodes," or "chambers." The Father's house, Jesus says, has many rooms, and He is now preparing a place for His disciples, but they will not take up residence in their new place until the Father's house-the Father's dwelling place-comes to this earth.

Jesus promises, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God" (Revelation 3:12).

The apostle John saw the New Jerusalem in a vision. He wrote, "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:2,3).

Notice that the dwelling place of God-the "Father's house"-will be located here on this earth.

What is the "added law"?

Question: Is the law "added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:17,25) the law pertaining to sacrifices, washings, and so forth, or is it the "moral law," or Ten Commandments?

Answer: The law Paul speaks of in the book of Galatians is the entire law as codified in the Sinaitic covenant. It includes the Ten Commandments as well as the sacrificial and ceremonial laws. It was "added because of transgressions" in that it was codified and given to Israel in order to make the people aware of their sins. As Paul said to the Romans, "I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:7).

One of the law's functions is to make us aware of our transgressions. When Paul said that the law was added "till the Seed should come" (Galatians 3:19), he did not mean that the law had no more purpose or function once Christ (the Seed) had come. Rather, he meant that the law had accomplished its purpose in making us aware of our transgressions and, therefore, our need for a Savior. The "Seed" did not abolish the law, but the record of transgressions for those who put their trust in Him.

Because of the law's function in making him aware of his sins and of his need for a Savior, the apostle Paul could say, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

The law also has the function of revealing the way of life God would have us follow (see Psalm 119:97-104). Because of this function of the law, Paul could say, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Romans 7:22).

Did Jesus have brothers and sisters?

Question: Biblical scholars point out that the Hebrew and Greek terms for "brother," "sister," and related terms do not always refer to a sibling or close relative, but can refer to a kinsman or even a friend or ally. If this is true, then doesn't this mean that scriptures referring to Jesus' "brothers" and "sisters" really refer to His kinsmen or close friends, but not to actual brothers and sisters?

Answer: It is true that terms such as "brother" and "sister" can refer to close and distant relatives as well as friends, allies, and spiritual kinsmen. To determine the sense in which these terms are used in a given text, one must carefully consider the context.

In Genesis 28:14, Jacob is called the "brother" of Laban. Here, "brother" refers to a kinsman, for Laban was Jacob's uncle. In Genesis 14:14, Lot is called Abraham's "brother," though Lot was in fact Abraham's nephew. And, of course, numerous passages in the New Testament speak of the members of the church as "brethren."

In some instances, however, the context shows that these terms must be understood in the normal familial sense.

The Nazarenes who challenged and rejected Jesus' authority reasoned, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). The reference to Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters in the same passage renders the idea that these brothers and sisters were "cousins" most unlikely.

The doctrine of the "perpetual virginity" of Mary is taught nowhere in Scripture. There is no good reason to think that she gave birth to no other children after Jesus was born. - End-

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