

(20) Sheepgate Topical Bible Study (STBS #4)**THE BIBLE AND THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED**

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are really my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:31-32) These studies are designed as individual Bible meditations to be prayed over section by section over a period of days. They may also be easily adapted for use by Bible study groups. Some of the topics treated in this particular study may be controversial. Sometimes controversy has to be faced in order to sort out the truth that sets us free. (Jn.8:32) We will deal with topics that have divided Christians for at least the last quarter of the entire time since Christ was on earth. What, if anything, does the Bible say about topics such as life right after death, or purgatory, limbo, indulgences, and prayer for the dead? Many of these are not clearly mentioned by name, yet in one form or another they've been associated with Christianity from the beginning. We'll examine Bible passages that seem to take these ideas for granted. This study is not intended to bring everlasting proof to any one view. Instead, by examining the interpretations of honest to God Christians of various traditions, we'll perhaps understand each other better. Maybe we'll each understand ourselves better too. Most important, we hope, by sharing insights we'll all gain in the truth that is Christ. (Jn. 14:6) We don't claim the right to tell anyone what to believe, except that Jesus is Lord, the Bible is Gods word, and salvation is by the grace of God. If we have this common starting point, lets proceed from hear.

PRAYER BEFORE BIBLE STUDY

COME HOLY SPIRIT, ENLIGHTEN US, THAT THE WORDS YOU HAVE INSPIRED IN THE BIBLE MAY BE AS FIRE IN OUR HEARTS, WARMING AND LIGHTING OUR LIVES. GIVE US UNDERSTANDING TO KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE IS SAYING TO US, AND THE COURAGE TO OBEY WHAT WE LEARN. MAY WE WHO SHARE THE WORD OF GOD BE BLESSED WITH HIS LOVE FLOWING THROUGH US ALL, IN THE NAME OF JESUS OUR LORD, TO THE EVERLASTING GLORY OF OUR FATHER. AMEN.

Luke 16:19-31 (The story of the rich man and Lazarus.)

(note: You may want to write your reactions to these meditations in a note book or journal)

Read the parable carefully in view of the to the following questions:

(Remember, this is a parable Jesus tells to make a certain point. *(Look for the point in the last verse.)* We have to be careful when we try to draw a teaching other than the exact lesson Jesus meant to point out in the parable. However, I also think it's safe to assume Jesus wouldn't use misinformation in the incidentals of his story.)

1. What kind of after life environment does the story present to you?
2. Rather than prayer for the dead, we have the dead praying for the living. Is it successful prayer, why?
3. How is afterlife in this story like the traditional picture of heaven and hell? how is it different?
4. Do you think this represents an old testament shoal, or limbo, or is it new testament salvation? (Jesus had not yet died to save us)
5. What else about this parable impresses you?
6. What point does Jesus intend to make by use of this story. I Peter 3: 18-20 & I Peter 4:6 "Jesus, being put to death in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit, preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed God as long ago as when Noah was building the arc."
7. Did Jesus die and go to Hell? In what sense, and why? Note: from Apostles Creed, "He was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven."
8. Why does Jesus preach to disobedient spirits who were in prison (dead) for so long?
9. What do you think this prison might have been? Was it eternal Hell? Temporary punishment? an old Testament holding place awaiting the time of salvation? other?
10. In your opinion, did the preaching of Jesus bring them salvation? John 5: 25-29 Verse 29 obviously refers primarily to the resurrection of the dead that's still in the future. In verse 25, "the hour is now at hand when the dead shall hear the voice of Christ, "might be related to the "descent into Hell, "of the Apostles Creed, and of I Peter 3: 19-20. (Sometimes reading in more than one good translation will help you get the sense of a passage.)
 - a. In view of the readings so far, is there only a single and eternal punishment in afterlife?
 - b. Does afterlife for the saved seem to be limited to a single and eternal heaven?
 - c. List the various states, places, or conditions of after life mentioned of alluded to. I Corinthians 3:11-15 verse
11. It all has to rest on Christ. In Christ we are saved. verse
12. Now that we have our salvation in Christ, what will we do about it? verse
13. When our life is over it will be tested by fire. verse
14. If our life's work passes the test of fire we get a special reward. verse
15. If our life's work fails the test we suffer for it, but are still saved (by Christ). Yet it's the fire that cleansed us for heaven.

Read - 2 Maccabees 12:38-46

(note: You may want to write your reactions to these meditations in a note book or journal)

in the Deuterocanon Note: The Deuterocanon is not included in many Protestant Bibles. Also called Apocrypha, these are writings from later Old Testament times. They were generally accepted by Jews in Jesus' time, and are quoted in the New Testament. They give strong support to Christian consents. Modern Jews do not accept them. Some Protestant groups regard them as inspired in a way that is subject to other parts of Scripture. Others simply value them as an insight to the historical thought of later Old Testament times. Catholics accept them fully into the canon of the Bible and regard all Scripture as equally inspired. A few Christian groups distrust the Apocrypha and ignore it completely. If the Deuterocanon is not in your Bible, borrow one from a Catholic, Episcopalian, or Orthodox friend.

2 Mac. 12:38-46 "It is a good thing to pray for the dead." Historically late Old Testament Jews as well as early Christians prayed for the dead. They also expect the saved dead to pray for them. Witness the importance of the catacombs.

I Cor. 15:29 "Baptized for the Dead." No modern Christian seems to be sure exactly what this means. The word Baptism can mean a spiritual cleansing not necessarily the sacrament of Christian initiation. All Christians agree, I believe, that salvation is a gift of God that must be accepted during lifetime. The benefit of baptism for the dead must be other than salvation. It must be for a soul already departed and saved, but somehow still in need of some final cleansing. If there is a cleansing that can somehow be helped along by the living, what's it mean? This idea fits with ancient tradition, in the Church, that later came to be called indulgences. Indulgences were subsequently misused and played a part in the Protestant Reformation. Since then the very word has had a bad reputation, and the idea is largely ignored. Have we missed something?

2 Peter 3:8 Another way to pray for the dead. Don't be ignorant of the fact that time is as one to the Lord. God doesn't live day by day as we do. He is eternal. The past, present and future are all as one to Him. This is a mystery our Earth bound minds can't comprehend. But we can trust in it. In prayer for a departed loved one, we can go back in time with the Lord, to the point of the brothers death? We can ask the Lord to reach out and receive him, or go a minute earlier and ask for the grace of repentance.

FATHER GOD YOU ARE THE MASTER OF TIME. WITH CONFIDENCE WE ASK YOU TO GO BACK INTO THE LIFE OF OUR DEPARTED FRIEND AND HELP HIM TO PREPARE FOR ETERNITY. BE THERE, OH LORD, AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH, AND WITH YOUR ANGELS ACCOMPANY HIM INTO YOUR KINGDOM. AMEN. THANK YOU LORD.

Colossians 1:24 "Suffering to complete what remains of Christ's." If this weren't in the Bible we'd be scandalized by the very idea. But it is in the Bible and it must mean something. It should not be explained away.

1. Is the suffering for himself (*PAUL*) or for others
2. We know that Christ's suffering is sufficient for our salvation. This suffering that we join with Christ's is for another purpose. What clues do you find in the scripture passage? 2 Cor. 1:5-7, Heb. 12:7-11, I Peter 1:7, Mark 9:49-50, Mat. 10:38

Value of suffering: Since suffering seems to play a key role in the cleansing we've studied, let's look at these scriptures for additional light on the subject.

1. What is the relation between suffering and sin
2. Do you think there may be a relationship with our redemptive (and willing) suffering with Christ, and the coming of his kingdom soon?
3. How do you see suffering as a cleansing process?

Other related scriptures to read and pray about. 1 Pt.4:19, 1 Pt.4:12-15, 2 Pt.2:4, Acts 2:27-31, Rm.3:23-24, Rev.1:18, Rev.6:8, Rev.20:13-14, 1 Cor.15:42-44, 2 Cor.5:9-10, Heb.9:23-28, Heb.10:26-31, Heb.12:1-13, Eph:1:14 1, Jn.5:16, Job 1:4-5, Jn.21:25, Jn.16:4-13, Lk.12:58-59, Lk.22:31, Lk.23:39-43, Mk.9:43-50

From the Deuterconon: Sirach 11:22-30, Jdt.8:25-27

The following from Matthew: 10:28 23:33 16:18 5:10 5:25 12:32 13:52 16:19 18:23 22:2

Note: These short selections should be viewed in context to better understand them.

CONSIDER THESE STATEMENTS (one at a time) *Some are obviously true, others reflect good ancient traditions, and some, along with others in this study, are speculative and need to be approached with discernment.*

1. We know that God freely forgives all who come to him in repentance. There is no charge of any kind, for forgiveness. No penance or suffering is needed to renew our relationship with God.
2. Purgatory is not a means of salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God. Purgatory is perhaps, a way of making the final preparation for Heaven. Like putting on a wedding garment if its not already on. (Mt.22:11-14)
3. The words purgatory and indulgences are not scriptural words. To many Christians these words are spoiled. We don't have to accept these words, but we do have to consider the reality of the scriptural concepts of reparation for forgiven sins and cleansing fire.
4. If sin gives power to evil, redemptive suffering takes it away.
5. We know that forgiveness renews our relationship with God and frees us from guilt of sin. The results of sin are still with us. We'll call this the hangover of sin. The hangover of sin is why we need the cleansing with fire in this life and after death. Note: Every sin damages God's order. Every sin gives power to evil. Every sin damages the sinner. Simple forgiveness does not undo the damage. Reparation is not the same as forgiveness. forgiveness is free. In reparation we join our works with Christ's infinite merits to repair the damage of sin.
6. Our cheerful suffering, fasting, penance, good deeds, prayers, and praise join as seeds with the merits of Christ to cleanse us, others, and the world of the Hangover of sin. This must be what St. Paul meant in Col.1:24.
7. Like a criminal may serve his sentence and be legally square with society, but the damage he did may still be evident. Like a sickness may be healed and gone, but the patient is still weak or perhaps even crippled. Like Baptism frees us from original sin, but we still suffer from evil hangover all our lives. (human weakness etc.) Like Jesus won the victory over the world by His death and resurrection, yet Satan is still very active as a hangover of the Kingdom of darkness. So when God forgives our sins there is still a hangover of damage in ourselves and our victims and our environment due to our sins. Christ's death is certainly sufficient to repair the damage, but by God's plan we have to join our deeds and suffering with Christ's to overcome this. We should do this during our lifetime. If not, presuming we are saved, we must do it by fire. Nothing imperfect can be part of our perfect God. Having looked at the possibilities of suffering, and of prayer for the dead, Let's conclude this study by reviewing a more important related concern: our own salvation.

MINI CATECHISM

1. What is a Christian? Acts 11:26 The followers of Christ were first called Christians at Antioch. A Christian is one who has rejected the popular lifestyle and values of the world and in faith chosen those of Christ. (Jn. 15:19)

2. How can I live in the world and not be of the world? Heb. 13:14, James 4:4, Rom. 14:23, I Chron. 29:15. We can do this only by an active faith, the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We must be a new man. Fear the Lord and not man. (Prov. 29:25)

3. What is salvation? Salvation is being saved; rescued from the power of evil in the world, and freed to be the kind of person we were created to be. Salvation refers to the individual and to the whole people of God coming to the perfect freedom of the Kingdom to come. It is for both now and eternity.

4. How must I be saved? Jn. 3:16, Rom. 10:1-11, Believe Jesus will save you and say so. Acts 3:19, Lk. 13:3, Repent. decide to change your lifestyle. James 2:14-17, Live your faith. Faith must be active to be real. Eph. 2:8-9, You can't save yourself, so don't brag about it.

5. Why is Church membership important?
 - There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. You have a functioning of the Body of Christ.
 - The Church is the normal channel of God's blessings. (but not the only one)
 - Christ founded the Church. It's his idea.
 - You can't be a true Christian without being part of church. (Mt. 16:18-19).
 - You need support and fellowship of other believers to keep going. (Jn. 13:35)
 - Love one another. (Acts 2:44)

6. Is there sometimes a need for reparation for sin after death among the saved? Answer!: You answer this one yourself!

Note: We revise our Bible studies from time to time. We would be happy to hear of your insights, relevant scriptures or disagreements. Any questions or correspondence about this Bible study may be addressed to, Sheepgate Publications, Route 2, Box 268, Daggett, Mich. 49821