

First Christians and the Bible

By Ronald L. Dart

What did the first Christians believe about the Bible? It is an interesting question for several reasons, not the least because, there was no Bible, as we know it when those first Christians were finding their way.

The books of what we now call the New Testament were being written in the years between 55 A.D. and 70 A.D. To the first Christians, these were the written testimonies and letters of the Apostles. Scholars have dated the first of the writings to the mid 50's A.D. Not one of the New Testament documents show signs that the Temple had been destroyed in 70 A.D.

Documents Copied

In the years following the destruction of the Temple, the second generation of Christians came on the scene, and these documents were copied, recopied and scattered around the Roman Empire.

Imagine you are one of the first Christians in your little church, somewhere in Asia Minor, and somebody comes in with a letter from the Apostle Paul. Wow! He puts his hands up and reads it to the congregation. What would you give for a copy of a letter by Paul? There were no Xerox machines, or anything like that. Writing them out was the only way you could create copies of these things. What may have been done is, someone would stand in front of people and carefully read the letter line-by-line, and the scribes would copy it word-by-word and create copies of Paul's letters. Copies ended up here and there. Scholars over the generations have found fragments of these manuscripts all over the Middle East.

The third or fourth generation of Christians began gathering all of the known apostolic documents into one collection. These came to be called, the New Testament, in our generation.

Holy Scriptures

The first Christians were not without a Bible. They referred to it with a different term. Since they wrote in

Greek, these documents, were called 'graphe' and this was universally rendered into English as, 'Scriptures.' The collection, that the first Christians called, the 'Holy Scriptures', is what we today call the Old Testament.

Scriptures Were Authoritative

For the first Christians, the Scriptures were authoritative. We have to think further about what that means. When we speak of the authority of Scripture, we are using a shorthand phrase for something that's a little more complicated.

continued on page 5 . . .

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

First Christians & the Bible

By Ronald L. Dart 1

2016 Can Be Your Year of Blessings

..... 1

In Vain Do They Worship Him

By Richard Glasgow 2

2016 Super Feast

By Allie Dart 3

February Scripture Memory Verses

..... 4

2016 Can Be Your Year of Blessings

Start the New Year with a goal to receive God's blessings. From the time Ron and I got married we tithed. Then we learned about second and third tithes. God required us to do this, and we decided we must do nothing less. Malachi 3:10 promises that if you will bring *all the tithes into the store house*. . . he will pour out a blessing that you won't have room to receive it. Are you short changing God? Are you rationalizing where your tithe is to go? Then this could be the answer to your financial woes while you're living from paycheck to paycheck? It takes faith to worship God with your tithes in the way he says. But I can vouch to the fact that bringing all the tithes into God's store house works.

Try it, you'll like it.

IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME

By Richard Glasgow

Okay, so you're a good Christian. You attend the right church, keep the Commandments, (including the fourth one), and observe God's Holy Days and you wouldn't dream of eating anything unclean as prescribed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. You routinely pray every morning and again before going to bed and you even read a portion of the Bible before going to work everyday.

You may even think that most people aren't nearly as devout as you are, although you would never voice that. You're doing *everything* the way you're supposed to and the vast majority of people aren't. even in your church!

Then there are those who *call* themselves Christians; *professing* Christians, if you will, who may talk the talk, but don't even come close to walking the walk. Maybe we should call them CRINO's . . . Christians in Name Only . . . because they probably worship God in vain like Jesus spoke of in Matthew 15:8-9.

But, back to you—*You* know in your heart of hearts that God *has* called you and you're thankful for that special calling. When called upon at church for the opening or closing prayer, you profusely thank God for calling us out of this sin-sick, wretched world and for the knowledge we have of the His Truth—and that's all well and good. That really *is* something for which to be thankful.

But brace yourself, because the next words out of your mouth might be woefully similar to, "thank you, Father, that I'm not like that publican."

What?

To be sure, we're very familiar with the parable Jesus spoke in Luke 18:10-13 about the Pharisee and the Publican. We might hear or read it as a casual observer and, on a particularly guilt-ridden day, we might even identify with the publican; but rarely would we identify with the self-righteously pious Pharisee.

When all is said and done, you may well *be* an honest-to-goodness "good" Christian. But if we think of ourselves as "better" or "special" than those who may not observe or be aware of everything in God's Word, we may be treading on spiritually treacherous ground.

It's not our responsibility to determine who is or

isn't a "true" Christian. That's God's job.

The disciples may have had a similar problem. In Mark 9:38-41 John said to Jesus, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." Then Jesus said, "Don't stop him, no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us."

Are we like those disciples who considered everyone outside of their little group to be "non-club members" or second class Christians—or maybe not Christians at all?

There are many Christian organizations around the world doing incredibly wonderful work. Countless Bibles have been freely distributed in countries where Christianity is forbidden. Millions of helplessly poor and abused people have been and are being fed, nursed to health and comforted by selfless Christian missionaries who have given their entire lives to serving others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Are these people not doing the very things that define pure religion? James 1:27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Think of the thousands of Christian missionaries all around the world who have devoted their entire lives to bringing poor, unfortunate people to the mere knowledge of Jesus Christ and how He died for the redemption of our sins. More often than not, these missionaries minister where Christianity is illegal and the risk of death is very real to them.

In recent years and months we've had to witness the audaciously brutal murders, kidnappings, rapes, and sexual slavery that have become so commonplace in Africa and the Middle East where Christians are targeted and forced to flee or be viciously murdered by radical Islamists. These people are being savagely martyred because they refuse to forsake the name of Jesus Christ.

Just a few months ago, at this writing, a crazed shooter at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, corralled 16 students in a classroom and asked each of them if they were Christians. When nine

continued on page 3.

In Vain Do They Worship Me
continued from page 2 . . .

of them said “yes,” they were immediately shot in the head, one right after the other. After the first student was executed, the other eight had plenty of time to wonder whether or not they should lie and deny that Jesus Christ was their Savior; but they faced certain death rather than deny Christ. Those who claimed not to be Christians were wounded, but not killed. Can anyone question their devotion to Jesus Christ by how closely they may or may not have adhered to biblical tenets?

And what about the thief on the cross being crucified right next to Jesus? Was he a Christian? Did he get baptized? Did he fulfill the requisites of a Christian? Yet, Jesus assured him He would be in Paradise.

If there’s something to be learned from the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, it might be this: if we think of *ourselves* as being the “true” Christians while thinking others are merely “professing” Christians, maybe *we’re* actually the ones guilty of worshipping God in vain. It’s *never* our job to decide who is a Christian or who is not. That’s God’s job.

It’s always helpful to remember that God is sovereign. He can work with anyone He wants in whatever capacity He wants without feeling the need

to inform us. What *we* need to do is make sure *we’re* living according to His will and not getting caught up in the status of others.

God tells us in Isaiah 66:2 . . . “This is the one I esteem; he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”

The publican *knew* he was a sinner and humbly prayed for mercy and forgiveness, whereas the Pharisee, because of his self-righteousness, was convinced he was absolutely *right* with God—when in reality his behavior was an affront to God.

If we desire to be right with God we need to consistently bear good fruit by growing spiritually, overcoming, and walking humbly before Him. Those who don’t bear good fruit will be figuratively cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:17-20).

Jesus said in Matthew 7:22-23 . . . “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

How horrifying it would be to hear those words from our Lord and Savior whom we strive to please.

Super Family Feast Site

CEM and CGI Working Together

By Allie Dart

You are invited to join us at one of our *family* feast sites, October 17-24, 2016!

We are excited to announce that for your convenience Christian Education Ministries will offer two Feast sites in 2016—one in East Texas as well as Land Between the Lakes. CEM has worked out arrangements to co-host with the Church of God International (CGI) for a Super Feast Site in beautiful Western Kentucky! This centrally located site will provide a great Feast location for more of God’s people. We feel no one should be left out. By providing you with two choices, we hope you’ll be able to attend and rejoice with us.

The same delightful program you’re accustomed to enjoying will be available at both sites. We’ve tried to

incorporate everything you have enjoyed—great sermons, lots of Bible study, Christian living seminars, state of the art YEA classes for kids, seminars for teens, lots of social events for every age group, providing opportunities to get to know and bond with other Christians at both locations.

Worship services for the joint feast site will be held at the Kentucky Dam State Park. This site is in the midst of a beautiful state park and far from the hustle and bustle of any big city. Your Feast experience will be even more pleasant without congested highways! Family recreation attractions are within minutes of the auditorium where services will be held in Kentucky. These attractions include hiking, laser tag, zip line, go carts, corn maze, Civil War site, a

continued on page 4 .

Super Feast
continued from page 3. . .

buffalo ranch, 1800s local town re-enactment, country music show, and a 50's music show.

Housing at both locations will accommodate any budget! Kentucky Dam Village's housing includes camping, cabins, or hotel rooms. These facilities are conveniently located on the same property where we have worship services. To make your reservations for camping, cabins, or hotel rooms at Kentucky Dam Village, call 270-362-4271. Tell them you are with the CGI/CEM Feast Group. If you have any questions about the Kentucky Dam Village, contact Festival Coordinator, James Pollitte, via email, jamespollitte@kih.net, or phone, 606-742-2222.

For a list of additional housing facilities in Gilbertsville and Grand Rivers, Kentucky, go to our websites or contact Wes White to request the list. Most of the places are less than 15 minutes from where services will be held.

Sharing delicious home cooked meals with brethren twice a day has made the East Texas Feast site a memorable experience. We're planning to do that again this year. This tradition makes the East Texas Feast more convenient and affordable while providing a great friendly atmosphere for fellowship.

Adults, please ensure you attend as many relevant and educational seminars as possible. Imbibe in the Words of Life! Kids from three to 20 will be eager to attend action packed YEA classes/seminars before services in various classrooms. High energy YEA seminars will be offered for teens. This is the place where teens meet and make friends. Seminars will be relevant and filled with excitement. Each seminar is designed to help teens ask questions, share and express their thoughts and ideas.

Children's church will be available for kids during services in Kentucky. This Super Family Feast Site offers your family many different options to learn more about the Word of God. There will be evening adult Bible studies as well. You will have access to a smorgasbord of Bible learning.

Each worship service will include traditional hymns as well as praise music accompanied by a choir and the band, *Peace of Millennium*, led by Wayne Weese, from Big Sandy, Texas. You are welcome to play an instrument or sing in the choir. For information on how

to participate in music during the Feast, contact Wayne at bigsandyweese@gmail.com. Let us know and we will send you music to learn before the Feast. Wayne will also schedule special music.

A senior citizens' luncheon and a pizza party for kids will be a part of the program. Both locations will offer other in-house activities such as a fun show, a family dance with DJs, a ladies' luncheon, and a pie-and-ice cream social with live professional entertainment. Boat rental is available adjacent to Kentucky Dam Village.

Join us in celebrating God's autumn festival as taught in Leviticus 23. This Super Family 2016 Feast of Tabernacles and CEM's East Texas Site will be a time of rejoicing with family and friends. Come make new friends. Come and bond with your family, friends, and brethren. Deepen your spiritual life as you worship our Great God! You'll be glad you did.

More information will be posted as we finalize the East Texas site and continue to add events. We look forward to making your Feast memorable at the Land Between the Lakes or the site in East Texas. Contact us at CEM or CGI to learn more! If you have any questions contact Wes White: 214-714-0356 or wdwhite49@yahoo.com or check out the websites: www.borntowin.net or www.cgi.org.

February Memory Verses

Topic: The Word of God and Prayer

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Joshua 1:8

Psalms 119:11

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Hebrews 4:12

Hebrews 4:16

1 John 5:14-15

1 Timothy 2:1-2

James 5:13-14

James 1:6

Please let us know how the memory cards are working for you. Do you have any suggestions for improving the program? Let us know. Remember you can also purchase a copy of Robert J. Morgan's book, *100 Bible Verses Everyone Should Know by Heart*, from CEM for \$12.95 or order it online.

*First Christians and the Bible
continued from page 1 . . .*

All Authority Has Been Given to Jesus

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Therefore He said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.”

When you think this through, this is a stunning claim by Jesus, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.” That’s what we’re talking about, the authority of Jesus Christ exercised through Scripture.

You can’t understand how the first Christians looked at the Bible until you begin to grasp this concept. Jesus’ authority is absolute. Paul saw it precisely that way. He wrote in a letter to the Philippians, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

What a powerful statement! “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth” is at peace with the statement that Jesus made “All authority in heaven and earth is given to Me.”

How Did the Scriptures Touch Lives?

Later Paul made a powerful statement about what the first Christians thought about the Scriptures. He wrote to Timothy “As for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-16). He is talking about that collection that we call the ‘Old Testament.’

What Can The Scriptures Do?

Look at what these Scriptures are able to do. They are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. What Scriptures? There’s nothing that Paul could possibly be talking about here, except the Old Testament Scriptures, because from the time Timothy was an infant, it was a long time before the first document that came into the New Testament was written.

Notice their good purposes. They are for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” So the early Christians, the first Christians saw the Old Testament as a set of documents to make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus, and it could be used for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training. So the Scriptures were authoritative for the first Christians.

Accusations against Paul

An issue arose in the Church at Corinth. A handful of people were looking for a reason to criticize Paul. They settled on the idea that Paul was in it for the money—never mind that Paul never took a dime from anybody in Corinth. Whatever the case, it provoked Paul to give a response on his part and he started with simple logic.

“Now this is my defense of those who sit in judgment on me. Don’t I have the right to food and drink?” “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as the other Apostles and the Lord’s brother and Cephas?” “Or is it only I and Barnabas, are we the only ones who have to work for a living? Who serves as soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and doesn’t get to eat any of the grapes? Who tends a flock and doesn’t drink of the milk” (1 Corinthians 9:3-7)? So far, all that Paul has done is to appeal to simple logic and normal human custom.

It Is Written

But realizing that logic doesn’t work on some people, Paul reached out for an authority. What comes to serve as an authority? “Now do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn’t the law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses.” Now take special note of what he just said: “It is written,’ not just said, written. Where? In the Law of Moses, “Do not muzzle an ox while it’s treading out the grain. Is it about oxen that God is concerned?” Paul asked. “Surely he says this

continued on page 6 . . .

First Christians and the Bible
continued from page 5. . .

for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the Plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing the harvest" (1 Corinthians 9:9-10).

Stop—unpack what Paul is saying. Some astonishing things emerge. One, he is citing the Law of Moses, which some people think was abolished at the cross. Two, he says it was written for us. Now mind you, this was written to a church full of Gentiles, non-Jews, more than 20 years after everything was nailed to the cross that was nailed there.

Paul says in verse 10, "It was written for us." Another thing, the original law that he is citing had little or nothing to do with animal rights. When Paul says, "for us" he means for us human types, in other words, this is an eternal principle of right and wrong, and it has to do with how we relate to one another.

Paul goes on to say, "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have all the more? For we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered at the altar?" Paul concludes, "the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel"(1 Corinthians 9:11-14). The authority cited to this church for a preacher's right to compensation is what? The Scriptures. It is Deuteronomy 25:4, "You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn."

It is a proverb and so many of the laws do fall in this category, they are aphorisms, they are proverbs and not something somebody does or doesn't do in practice. They are there for a reason so that we will understand from it principles that we can apply all over the place. The legalist will look at this and assume, "I don't have an ox so this doesn't apply to me."

The first Christians did not look at it that way, for them this was the authority of God, expressed in the Scriptures.

Citations from the Old Testament

Paul's letter to the Romans is loaded to the gills with citations from the Old Testament. There are no less than

56 direct quotes in a mere 16 chapters and there's another 70 indirect references. You have about eight references to the Old Testament per chapter on average.

Now this has some profound implications about how these people looked at the Scriptures. To them the Scriptures, the Old Testament in our terms, carried all the authority of God. Paul for example in the first chapter, of the Book of Romans, verses 16-17, had this to say, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith as it is written, "The just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). This is the quote, word for word, from the Prophet Habakkuk.

When you continue to read in Romans, Paul assumes a familiarity with Scriptures on the part of his readers and all he needs to say is "It is written." He doesn't tell you which Prophet, which Psalm, or any reference, he went on and on, and the people sat and sagely nodded their heads and said, "That is right, it is written there."

So, if the first Christians had a Bible, would it be fair to say, it was obviously that collection of books that we call the Old Testament? It is fascinating as you come to realize how many of what we think of as New Testament concepts arise naturally from the Old Testament. So much so that all Paul has to do is say "It is written" and he salts it all the way through the documents that he created.

So, what did the first Christians believe about the Bible? Order your *FREE* copy of Ronald L. Dart's CD, *About the Bible*, to get the rest of the story—the very basic biblical teachings that lay the foundation for our beliefs. Order this CD now!

Born to Win

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*That the man of God may be proficient and
equipped for every good work.*