



The Things That Are Made

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He called "Fullness Bible Study". He was definitely one who
held

The 'Acts-28 Belief" like myself. ☐☐ Jan Lilleby. ☐☐☐☐

A common accusation against the Bible is that it dooms the billions who have never heard of it. How can one, they ask, be required to have faith in something he has never heard of? The answer usually given to this argument is felt to be less than adequate, and certainly an answer should be given because the true God is just, and unfair to no one.

It is the contention here, that God has revealed Himself to every one of the billions who have lived on this earth and they have had the ability to act positively or negatively to this revelation. This message has been so simple that no formal education or high "I.Q." has been needed. In various parts of the Bible there are statements made, which clearly indicates that every human being, no matter where or when he was born, has opportunity for justification in God's eyes by reacting to the things around him in such a manner as to fulfill God's requirement for salvation.

The statement in Acts 4:12 that, "there is none other name...whereby we must be saved", may lead Bible students to think that one must have heard "the gospel" to achieve salvation. However this statement is really saying that Jesus of Nazareth is the only Savior there is, whether or not one has heard of Him. Nothing more is said or implied here.

In the first and second chapter of Romans Paul is reviewing the situation of man's relation to God. He starts in 1:18, to speak of man from his very beginnings and goes on until

in 2:16 the end of man's reign upon this earth occurs in "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men...", which is the second coming of Christ.

According to this story the first men knew God, but their descendants turned away and began to worship images. God did not stop them by force, but allowed them to go their own way, and they sank to a very low state. There was no excuse for this because the evidence of God's existence was and is always there. This is stated in Rom. 1 :19,20: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in "the things that are made". (R.S.V.). And what are the things that are made? They are the things of nature: the sky above, the earth with its trees, mountains, animals; the sun, snow and rain. By these things is the Creator revealed. The person can understand this by his power of reason which all possess. As said before, one needs no formal education, in fact the native of the jungle may be more responsible to God than the city person who sees little of nature.

The fact that those who have never formally heard the Word are capable of responding positively to God is stated in Rom. 2:14-15, "When Gentiles (nations) who have not the Law (the Word) do by nature what the Law requires....they show that what the Law requires is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears "witness....". In other words they have the evidence and have their own natural capability of responding positively.

When Christ was on earth He gave a message that was so simple, there was no way that even the least educated could misunderstand. He taught a simple message of love toward fellow man. Loving one's neighbor, He taught, was really the secret to entrance into the Kingdom which the Jews were then waiting for. This is told in the story of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 10: 25-37, we see a certain teacher of the Law of Moses asking Christ, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer was a combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 which says, "You should love the Lord your God with all your being, and your neighbor as yourself".

To the question, "Who is my neighbor?" the answer was the story of the Good Samaritan, who fulfilled the righteousness of the Law, though he did not fulfill the formality of the Law. This means he was satisfying God by faith; it could not be done by works. Then notice that this man not only helped a fellow human being, but one he had been taught by society to despise, for the Jews and the Samaritans hated one another. In helping the Jew, the Samaritan ignored the teachings of society around him,

following instead, the dictates of natural conscience which lead to love and mercy, things pleasing to God.

The Samaritan pleased God, not because of any technical knowledge of written manuscripts, though the Samaritans did possess and claimed to be living by the Law of Moses. But Jews had passed up their own countryman before the Samaritan helped him, thus ignoring the Scripture, so it was not a case of lack of knowledge but refusal of ordinary kindness on the part of one, and its acceptance on the part of the other, which is the point. It is vital to note that this story has to do with inheriting eternal life since this was the original question.

Here we have the very essence of the Word of God, spoken by the Son Himself in relation to inheriting eternal life. The passage above is from Luke 10, and in Mark 12:28-34 the same idea is stated on another occasion when Christ was asked, "Which is the foremost commandment of all?" His answer was in two parts. The first part was, "God is one, and you should love Him with all your being." The second part which He said was "like the first" was, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". These two parts are essentially the same in that the only way a human has of showing he loves God is by loving his neighbor. We cannot shower presents upon God. The Gentiles were trying to do this for their various "gods". They would try to show their utmost devotion by giving their gods their most cherished possession, their children. This was the degrading practice of human sacrifice. But the Bible teaches that the only way one can indicate devotion to the true God is by loving one's fellow man.

The "sacrifice" which the Jews brought to the temple under the Law of Moses was not a case of giving presents to God but was actually a penalty for breaking the Law. The "sacrifice" was a donation to the upkeep of the temple. It was used by the priests as part of their subsistence. It bore no relationship at all to the "sacrifices" of the heathen to their "gods".

We now have several points to indicate that God reveals Himself to everyone everywhere. First the statement that God is "clearly perceived in the things that are made", second, "the nations having not the Law (Word)" are capable of fulfilling "by nature" that which the Law requires, and last the statement of Christ in regard to eternal salvation, that the foremost of all the commandments is "love your neighbor". The third point really encompasses the second. If one truly loves his neighbor he fulfills the requirements or "righteousness" of the Law...by faith.

Of course this is not saying a person can be justified by works. The idea of loving one's neighbor is an ideal we

should strive for. In reality one finds as the apostle Paul did in Romans 7:21-25 that we cannot fulfill our ideals because we are imperfect and that is why a penalty needs to be paid which we cannot pay but was paid at the crucifixion. The lesson of the story of the Good Samaritan needs to be understood as one of intention not perfection. The truly devoted one is he who admits his own inability to attain perfection and therefore knows he must depend on God for salvation since he cannot attain it by his own works.

The Law of Moses with all its ceremonies never was intended to give the person salvation by the doing of those ceremonies. It was intended to be a "schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:24), to show symbolically, by the nature of its ceremonies, that man is imperfect, that he cannot please God, that he owes God something and cannot pay, but that God knows this and will make the payment Himself. The ceremonies, together with the writings, tell of the Anointed One who was to come and bring blessing to Israel and the nations, to destroy the enemies and rescue the believers from destruction.

Simple reason would say that if the Bible claims to be the book for all people, then the basic teaching of it must be extremely simple, and it is. If the greatest commandment of God is "love your neighbor", then anyone can understand. If loving your neighbor is the requisite for eternal life; if the evidence of God is in nature, and what is required on our part is being honest, and humble, and admitting our own helplessness in the face of eternity, then any human being with the ability to reason, regardless of how "primitive" his tribe may be, has the ability to fulfill the requirements of the God of the Bible. No human at all is left out. All are born equal in this respect, and the basic teaching of the Bible is justified.

The written Word is an added treasure of priceless value. Many say that God sees to it that this Word is sent in one way or another to those who fulfill the basic requirements, and this may possibly be so. Certainly any who do not have this Word would be greatly lacking in potential knowledge and the feeling of security that goes with it. In Romans 3:1-2 when only the Jew had the written Word, it says, "Then what is the advantage of the Jew?...much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles (words) of God". In the previous verses (17-29) Paul has been saying that the Gentiles could fulfill the righteousness of... the Law, but many Jews were not fulfilling it and would be lost.

The basic message of the Bible is sometimes distorted by the way it is presented by religious leaders. They stress the things which man has made and subtly present themselves as channels leading to God. Years ago a leading "evangelist"

was heard to say, "If you wish to be saved place your hand on the radio as a point of contact and repeat after me, etc". This is not appealing to reason at all. This preacher was using a material object and himself instead of reason as the channel to God. Not only that, but he was using a stock phraseology for the person to repeat. This preacher condemned formal religion for its ceremonies, yet he was doing the same thing. It is very common for those preaching the Bible, to present themselves and certain physical objects or ceremonies as essential or very important in pleasing God, but the Bible teaches otherwise.

In Matt. 13:58 there is the statement that at a certain place Christ, "did not many mighty works (miracles) there, because of their unbelief". The explanation is that the miracles were for added knowledge to those who already had the basic faith acquired from "the things that are made".

The basic call of the Bible is so simple that Christ could say in Matthew 18:3, "Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven". The whole idea is that children have not yet become perverted by society. They are still able to reason in an unprejudiced manner, This takes us back to the story of the Good Samaritan who of his own free will rejected the conditioning effect of the environment of society around him, taking his cue from "the things that are made".

When asked for the "most important commandment" Christ gave an answer so incredibly simple that any human anywhere can understand and live up to it, regardless of what he "never heard of", Thus the Bible is vindicated of any charge of prejudice or being "hard to understand".

Prayer

Some time ago the editor was at the home of friends and listened to a talk given by members of a certain sect who, although they said at the beginning they believed in the inspiration of the Bible, after some discussion and pointed questioning, finally said, "The Bible we have now cannot really be trusted because it has too many copyist's errors in it. But we do not need the Bible today because we now have the inspired word of the "prophet" (their prophet) to teach us the truth". Their teaching contradicted what the editor believes about the Bible, the most important being their teaching of justification by faith plus works.

One thing interesting was their insistence upon prayer. A point which they stressed several times was to "pray about this and ask God to tell you whether we are right". Now, this talk they gave was obviously rehearsed and the things they stressed were obviously things which they had found by long experience to be the best points to stress in order

to influence prospective converts. They had found, no doubt, that getting people to pray about their teaching had been an influence in their favor.

Assuming these people to be wrong in their teaching, one might ask just what it is about prayer that seems to lead people their way. Even if one assumed them to be correct, it is seen that rival sects also call for prayer in the same way; obviously they too find this leads converts their way. One constantly sees and hears on TV and radio, appeals for money with the call to "pray about this" and these people also, must have found this helpful to them.

Does prayer today, lead a sincere seeker into truth? If one is in any doubt about something, can one pray and be assured that an answer will be forthcoming which can be depended upon? If the group described above has found that people are lead by prayer to become their converts, does that prove God favors their group and that they are correct? But we see that rival groups also call for prayer; they must find that it helps them too. This is certainly a problem and not the only one connected with prayer.

Years ago at a prominent Baptist church, the minister remarked about a letter he received from a woman. She said the minister said that if one sincerely prays, the prayer will be heard and answered. She prayed for the safety of her son in the Korean war, but he was killed. So the minister gave a discourse on "unanswered prayer" a discourse which is given often by ministers in fundamental churches.

This discourse is always the same. Either the person praying is "out of the will of God", or God has decided to answer the prayer in a "different way" which will be more beneficial in the long run. Usually the latter reason is given, and the person is assured that the prayer was heard and will definitely be answered "in God's own way and time".

But there are difficulties to this reasoning, in that one cannot really prove in the first place, whether a person is out of God's will at a given time, and second, if a person chooses to believe God is answering the prayer in His own way, then how does one know it is answered at all? One may say that the next fortunate thing that comes along is that answer, but how can one prove this? Should we go on guesswork? Of course not. We need to be able to prove the things said about the Bible, or we mishandle it.

Also the problem of unanswered prayer among Christians is increased by the claim of answered prayer among those the Christians call "heathen". One can find innumerable testimonies among these "heathen" to their prayers being

answered, which is not supposed to happen.

It is the contention of this writer that the answer to all these problems is a dispensational one. If one discerns what in the Bible is meant to apply to us today, in what is called the "Church Age", as distinguished from what is purely historical and meant for our edification as history, and one understands just when this "Church Age" began, and what is the true nature of this present age, then one will understand what prayer is supposed to be and do, and the problem will be eliminated.

It is very important first of all to understand that Biblical miracles are not occurring today. For instance Peter healed a man who was born with a useless foot. No modern "healer" would even attempt that. Christ healed a man with a "withered hand: (undoubtedly severe arthritis), and the hand was normal immediately. Fevers left immediately. The totally blind saw immediately. No such things are occurring today. Recovering from illness is not a Biblical miracle. The stage performance of the "healer" of today with hypnosis and shock therapy is not a Biblical miracle. One must apply reason to what one sees or one may be tricked. Paying very strict attention to what the Word says will keep one from going astray.

Throughout the Bible, up to and including the period covered by the book of Acts there were miraculous happenings. God was then making Himself physically apparent to man. This is not happening today!! And our concept of prayer must be tied in with this. In past ages God physically communicated with man. He is not doing so today, so prayer takes on a different nature. It is because people associate the nature of prayer in past dispensations with this present one, that these problems arise, such as having to explain why prayers are not answered, and that explanation is nothing but speculation with no evidence.

In past ages when believers prayed, things happened and there was no question about it, for the evidence was visible to all. Earthquakes occurred; prison doors opened of themselves; the dead were raised. In Mark 9:14-29 there is recorded the only case where the disciples could not effect a cure, and they were told by Christ in v.29 that "prayer and fasting" were necessary because this miracle was very difficult. Notice that fasting is associated with prayer and is considered important. Here is something never mentioned by those today who claim prayer "changes things". It is evidence that these people are not studying the subject of prayer well, before they offer opinions on it. ("fasting" not in some MM but in Syriac)

Answered prayer is associated with the miraculous

manifestations seen in other ages. In those times it was proper to ask God for physical needs and those needs were miraculously filled, and the evidence was visible to all, and became a visible proof of God's existence and power. In Israel's case these were for "signs and wonders" designed to show the nation that they should listen to that speaker because he was divinely inspired of God. Answered prayer was part and parcel of the miraculous abilities of the apostles.

Answered prayer in the Bible was a direct interference by God with the natural course of things, and to repeat, it was part and parcel of the miraculous of the Bible. To repeat, those miracles are not occurring today.

The nature of this present era (dispensation) which began formally at the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. when Israel's religion was cut off and which had already been announced by the apostle Paul in the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians is characterized by a lack of miraculous manifestations on the part of God. Today we understand about God by what is called circumstantial evidence, which is perfectly good evidence, accepted in any court of law, We are not "eye witnesses". We have the "things that are made" and we also have the Word, and this Word, contrary to some, has definitely been carried down to us in a satisfactory manner. All the Biblical critics are agreed that what "errors" there might be, do not appreciably affect the story as a whole. Although no translation is inspired or perfect, we have the means by certain reference books to refer to the ancient languages and bypass any mistranslation. Any Bible student can do this. No special training is needed.

Our attitude toward prayer today should be in keeping with the nature of this present dispensation. This is the era of reasoning as opposed to seeing. Our attitude toward prayer should reflect this. We should not be expecting God to do things out of harmony with the nature of His present administration. This is not a lack on God's part or any injustice to the one who prays, the one who prays should pray in understanding. If one is lacking in understanding, that is not God's fault. The Word is there to be studied and there the knowledge may be gained.

If one prays lacking this understanding, one is apt to be frustrated and disappointed. It is a simple fact that many prayers are not answered and people rationalize and call something an answer which is not what was prayed for, and as was said before, there is nothing but their word that the prayer was answered. This is not the way it was in other dispensations when answers were obvious.

The reason people can be drawn into wrong ideas by prayer is

that for one thing, they have not studied the Word enough to know what is for today and what is not. They think they can get knowledge in a supernatural way, But this is divine inspiration and not for today. In praying, what happens is that the person opens his mind in what is actually self-hypnosis and becomes receptive to any idea which strongly asserts itself. The idea which is going to be most prominent is what that certain sect was just saying to him. Without Biblical knowledge to guide him, his mind accepts that prominent idea and he thinks it was God who said it, when actually he has fallen victim to the common Law of Suggestion.

If we fall back on rationalization and simple insistence without any real evidence, then we do something very wrong in relation to the Bible. We make it look bad. Those who do not believe it, know there is no evidence to what the believer is saying, and they attribute this lack of evidence to the Bible itself and say the Bible has no value. This on the part of the believer constitutes mishandling the Word. The believer today has no evidence of what he says except common reasoning and that is what he must go on. If one will adhere to the correct dispensational divisions of the Bible, one will be much better able to defend the reputation of the Word.

In this Church Age when our understanding and faith in God is on an abstract or reasoning level in contrast to the visible and emotional level of past ages, the word "prayer" takes on its most deep and spiritual meaning. The words of Christ in John 20:29, "Blessed are they that have not seen, yet have believed", have their greatest and most full meaning. Today prayer can be called what it has always been meant to be when viewed in its greatest depth and fullness, and that is, "an attitude of mind".

Here we have a constant communication like an electrical current, with God always seeing and caring and the believer always feeling this surge :.!" energy. The believer, when maintaining a spiritual attitude, is automatically communicating with God, who knows all thoughts. Though today we do not receive gifts miraculously, we still are blessed in such a way that we can truly say that God's Grace is more than sufficient.