

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

INDEPENDENT • MISSIONARY • ESTABLISHED 1786

VOLUME 25, NO. 1

OCTOBER, 1993

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

BY: C. D. COLE

"And the same time there arose no small stir about that way," Acts 19:23.

The early Christians the early believers and followers of Jesus Christ were known as "the people of that way." In the year 36, the Sanhedrin issued a commission to Saul of Tarsus authorizing him to arrest any whom he might find "of the way, whether they were men or women, and to bring them bound unto Jerusalem" When Paul preached in Ephesus in the synagogue for three months, we read that when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, Paul left the synagogue and began to preach in the schoolroom of Tyrannus. In the year 5, the same Saul (now Paul the apostle), made a defense from the steps of the Castel of Antonia, in which he said, *"I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons, both men and women," Acts 22:4.* Our Indian brethren call themselves the people of the Jesus way. And that is a significant name for followers of Jesus.

The question has often been raised as to whether Christianity is dogma or life. But reduced to its final analysis and represented by its simplest terms, Christianity is neither dogma nor life, it is a way the way from sin into the kingdom of God. Its bedrock and pavement is Jesus of Nazareth who declared Himself to be the way, as well as the truth and the life.

1. It is a plain way. The prophet predicted it when he said, *"A highway shall be there, and a way, and it*

shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein," Isaiah 35:8. Nevertheless, to the lost man, the most bewildering of all questions is this: *"What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"*

A pastor once received a letter from a man who said: "All my life I have been an attendant at church; I would like to be a Christian, but I confess that I have never yet learned how to set about it." And this might be the honest confession of many.

In this message I want to make the way of salvation plain so plain that any sinner taught of God will understand it; and yet so profound that any other sinner, of any age, who is not taught of God, will not be able to understand it.

2. Becoming a Christian is not the result of any magic formula of priest or preacher. There are no mechanics in the matter of being saved. In becoming a Christian there is a mental and heart experience. It is internal and not external. No geographical spot where you can go will make you a Christian. Salvation is not in a place but in a person. In salvation only one thing is needful and that is faith in a certain person, and the person is Jesus Christ. But before we come to that, we must touch upon a matter of preliminary importance. A man must repent before he believes, and he will repent before he believes if he ever believes.

Now repentance is not a saving grace; it has value only as it leads on to something else even faith in Christ. In

the moral and spiritual realm, in human experience in salvation, repentance is what pain is in a physical malady. Pain has not a curative quality, but it is pain that causes the patient to ring the doctor's bell. So John the Baptist went before Christ saying, *"Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* By this he meant to tell them they are sinners, lost and in need of a Saviour, and their repentance would be the pain of realizing they were lost. It is a change of mind towards God about sin such a change of mind that involves pain. But to amplify further:

A. In repentance there is an apprehension of sin as a fact. A calamitous fact, a dangerous fact, involving an adequate penalty. If God is a ruler, judge and hates sin, what would you think would be a just and adequate penalty? A man who is trying to explain away Hell and the unquenchable fire and the worm that dieth not is not a penitent.

B. In repentance sin is recognized as a concrete or personal fact. It is not enough to acknowledge that sin is in the world. I must recognize that sin is in me. When David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, he said in Psalm 51:1, *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions,* (verse 4) *"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."* David had always known in general terms that adultery was

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THE INHERITANCE OF GOD'S CHILDREN

BY: C. D. COLE

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," I Peter 1:3-5.

Inheritance is a possession derived by an heir from an ancestor or other person. When property changes hands, the deed is made to the man and his heirs. Much of this world's goods is not owned by men who themselves acquired it by their own toil. It has been acquired through the law that what a man has shall be left to his heirs when he is dead.

Our text speaks about heavenly property. Peter would comfort the poor and sorrowing and discouraged people of Christ by discussing their future blessings as the heirs of God. They had little, if any, of this world's goods, but they were heirs apparent to future and heavenly possessions. They had little or no authority in the affairs of this world, but they were heirs apparent to thrones in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Theirs was the promise that if they suffered with Christ, they would also reign with Him. We will first notice:

The Title To This Inheritance

Our title to the heavenly inheritance is by birth--a birth from above. By a natural birth many things are inherited. Some children inherit thrones of kings. They rule over men, not by virtue of their wisdom and fitness for such a place, but because they are the firstborn of kings. Some inherit great wealth. We often hear of million dollar babies, that is, babies who belong to millionaires. Some children inherit an ugly disposition from their parents, while others have a sunny and cheerful disposition handed down by their parents. And some inherit terrible diseases. And all of us have inherited a

sinful disposition and are by nature children of wrath. The first birth gives us nothing in which to glory.

But in the second birth, the supernatural birth of the Spirit, we become the children of God. And if children, then we are heirs of God. Our birth from above gives us titles to mansions in the skies, to the inheritance described by Peter as incorruptible, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven. The first or physical birth will not entitle us to any future blessings. To be born only once will mean to die twice: first physically, and then the second death which is the lake of fire.

The Assurance Of This Inheritance

The assurance of this inheritance is called a lively or living hope. This means that the inheritance is not yet possessed. We do not hope for that which we already have. Children of the rich before reaching their majority, do not have possession of the inheritance, but they look forward to the time when it will be in their actual possession. So the heirs of God have only the earnest or first-fruits of their inheritance, while the greater part of it is reserved for them in heaven. They cannot squander it while they are in their fleshly minority and in this world where nothing is safe.

1. The living hope means that the inheritance is certain to be received. This hope is an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast. The child of a rich man may hope to receive the wealth of his father some day, but that wealth may be lost before he gets it, and his hope may end in bitter disappointment. The hope of earthly blessings is subject to many vicissitudes, but no misfortune can happen to the inheritance of the child of God. Children of kings have been disappointed in the hope to reign over great kingdoms, because their fathers have had to abdicate and renounce the throne for themselves and their heirs.

2. But the hope of the saints is a living hope, which means also that death cannot deprive us of it. It is still

a living hope in the very ordeal of death. Solomon says of the wicked: *"When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of unjust men perisheth,"* Proverbs 11:7, but in Proverbs 14:32, he says *"...but the righteous hath hope in his death."* Death cuts to pieces all other hopes, and turns men out of all other inheritances; but it only serves to fulfill the hope of the child of God. Death is only a messenger sent to bring the children of God home to the possession of their inheritance.

One of the chief errors of God's people is that they are not willing to wait for their inheritance--not willing to wait for the hope laid up for us in heaven. We put too much emphasis on physical and material things here and now. Esau could not wait for his birthright; he despised it because it was something future, and bartered it for a mess of pottage. He satisfied his stomach at the expense of his soul. He traded his glorious inheritance for a temporary snack.

3. This living hope is based upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We are begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our hope was wrapped up in His work of redemption. If His work was a success, then our hope cannot die. And the resurrection is proof that the sacrifice He made for sinners was accepted of God. He says, *"Because I live ye shall live also"*. The glorious hope is that when we are absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord.

The Cause Of This Inheritance Is The Mercy of God

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," I Peter 1:3. Merit has no place in an inheritance. Merit is associated with purchase and prizes, but not with inheritance.

It has been said, "Great sins and

great miseries need great mercy, and many sins and many miseries need many mercies." And is not this great mercy to make of Satan's slaves sons of the Most High? John says, "*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure,*" I John 3:1-3. We are children of mercy which means that we were objects of misery before. Mercy is the cause of our being born again. We did nothing to bring about our spiritual birth. In this respect, the spiritual birth is closely analogous to the natural birth. "*He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people,*" Psalm 113:7, 8. Love, faith and hope are all the result of the new birth and not the cause of it. "*He that loveth is* (Gk., has been) *born of God,*" I John 4:7. "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is* (Gk., has been) *born of God.*" And in our text it is written that we are born again unto hope.

The Inheritance Described

Our inheritance is described by its qualities and as to the certainty of receiving it. Peter describes this inheritance as being incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. There is nothing in the nature of this inheritance that will be subject to corruption: it cannot be defiled by anything from the outside; and its joy will be everlasting. Heaven will be no disappointment to the child of God. As to its beauty, it is represented by the most precious things of earth--the most precious things the human mind can conceive of: gold, pearls, and precious stones. Heaven will be a place of freedom, freedom from so many things which have cursed the inhabitants of earth. There will be freedom from bodily pain, poverty, fear, and from sin. Paul triumphed over all the griev-

ous and painful ills of life because of his hope of a better day. He had pinned his faith and hope to One who would not disappoint him, but after the ills and sorrows of life were over, would receive him into glory. How miserable he would have been apart from the good hope through grace!

As to the certainty of our inheritance, the Bible says in I John 3:2: "*Beloved, now are ye the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*" And Paul assures us that: "*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory,*" Colossians 3:4. In all earthly hopes there is an element of unrest and uncertainty. He who hopes for continued good health cannot be certain that he will not soon be smitten with some fatal malady.

For God's saints the heavenly inheritance is now a matter of hope, but in the other world, we will possess it. The hope of the Christian is both sure and steadfast, and it goes with him all the way to glory.

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sinful a fearful thing but when it pointed its gaunt finger at him in the watches of the night and hissed, "Bathsheba" it brought him to his knees. He was penitent and cried for mercy.

C. This penitence must be followed by a hatred of sin and the desire to forsake it. One turns away from sin in his heart as a loathsome thing. In repentance the sinner is filled with horror over his mislived past. The man who is satisfied with his past life before God is not a penitent. He is self-righteous.

Now we come to the one thing needful. Suppose a disturbed penitent asks me what he must do to be saved, what shall I answer him? "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" This is the whole answer and the only answer. "*For God so loved the world that*

he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16. Jesus resorted to the kindergarten method, using an object lesson: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life,*" John 3:14, 15.

But what is it to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? It is easy to say, "Come to Christ, accept Christ, and believe on Christ." These are often only shop-worn phrases to the unsaved, however simple they may appear to the saved.

A. It means to believe in Christ as a historical person. This is necessary but not enough. There is no saving virtue in intellectual acceptance of an undisputed fact.

B. It means to believe that Jesus was what He claimed to be and His claim is perfectly clear. "*I that speak unto thee am he.*" Here he claimed to be the Messiah of the Old Testament. He claimed to be the eternal Son of God. He came from God and after finishing His work, reassumed the glory which He had with the Father before the world began. "*I and the Father are one.*" "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*" This often repeated claim caused the Jews to arrest Him and try Him on the charge of blasphemy.

C. It means to believe that Jesus did what He said He came into the world to do. And here He spoke plainly. "*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,*" Mark 10:45. He was tempted to turn aside from this work of blood redemption by Satan. Satan led him to a high place, and with a wave of the hand, directed his thoughts to the kingdoms of the world and said, "All these are mine. I know your purpose here on earth. I know you have come to save the world by dying for it. Why pay so great a price? I am the prince of this world. One act of homage toward me and you can have all the kingdoms. Just for once fall down and worship me and I will turn it all over to thee. There need be no cross or

crying. You can have the world at a bargain." But what did Jesus say? *"Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."* Jesus would not be moved from His purpose and program.

On a later occasion on his way to Jerusalem that memorable journey when it is said He set His face steadfastly to go toward the cross he spoke to His disciples of his death. He had been with them three years but had not been able to fully reveal to them his mission. They were not able to bear it. A man with friends and yet friendless, lonely in the possession of His great secret. Now as they journeyed through Caesarea Philippi, he asked them, *"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others Jeremias or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?"* Then Peter brave, impulsive, glorious Peter witnessed his good confession. *"Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."* Now it seems the hour had come when He could tell them His secret they were beginning to know Him. So as they journeyed on, He began to tell them how He must suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed. At that point, Peter could stand it no longer, but rebuked Him, saying *"Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto them."* And Jesus turning said unto him, *"Get thee behind me, Satan"*, the very words he had said to Satan in the wilderness. As He looked on Peter, He saw Satan had possession of him. This proves that the vicarious or substitutional death of Christ is the very heart and core of the gospel. To believe on Christ is to trust Him as the one who paid our sin debt as the one who settled with divine justice on our behalf. As evidence of true faith, we follow Christ and try to live to please Him.