

# TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

July 2023

## BEING “SINLESS” VERSUS BEING “FAITHFUL” TO THE LORD

Clear communication is often difficult. Sometimes, the person communicating does not do the best job of expressing himself. At other times, the person on the receiving end does not do a good job of understanding what has been communicated. The eternal Creator has communicated with mankind through the pages of Scripture, the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). When communication between God and man is lacking, the fault does not lie with the all-powerful, all-wise God, but with humans.

One aspect of God’s communication to mankind that is often misunderstood is what God expects from His people. Some people are reluctant to become Christians, thinking, “I could never live the rest of my life without sinning, so it is pointless to try.” Even Christians sometimes say things like, “I want to go to heaven, and I hope I do, but I’m just not sure, since I still make mistakes occasionally.” Many Christians live in constant fear and doubt regarding their soul’s salvation because they know they are not sinless. So, what about it? Does God expect sinless lives from His children, or have some misunderstood what God has communicated through His word?

Through Scripture, God has communicated what He expects from mankind. Let the reader take note and be encouraged, for God has never called His children to *sinless* lives: His admonition and requirement is to *be faithful*. The apostle Paul wrote, “*It is required in stewards that one be found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:2, emphasis added, *ccd*). To the church at Smyrna, Jesus said, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Revelation 2:10). Faithful Christian living is not only possible . . . it is both *required* and *expected* of God’s children.

Jesus came to this earth “*to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). He faced temptation and overcame it every time (Hebrews 4:15). Because He did so, “*He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25). Becoming a Christian means dying to sin (as detailed in Romans 6:3,4), but such does not mean Christians never stumble. Christians stumble from time to time, as John points out in 1 John 1:8-10, but for Christians

who confess their sins, “*He is faithful and just to forgive . . .*” (1 John 1:9). Christians who stumble have a great promise from God of continual cleansing from sin (1 John 1:7). If God had called humans to live sinless lives, all mankind would be utterly without any hope of obtaining eternal life. Thankfully, however, God calls Christians to *faithful* lives, **not** *sinless* lives!

Since no one is sinless, how is a “faithful” Christian defined? The answer to this question is a matter of the direction of one’s life. The New Testament teaches that Christians who stumble and sin have forgiveness, for they are still walking “*in the light*” (1 John 1:7), where Jesus’ blood continually cleanses sin. However, the New Testament also teaches a child of God cannot live in, or practice, sin and expect to be saved. After listing “*the works of the flesh*,” Paul says, “*those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Galatians 5:19-21, emphasis added, *ccd*). In other words, Christians cannot **live in sin** and expect to have heaven as their home. Faithful Christians, through human weakness, stumble into sin from time to time, but they neither abide there nor make it their “hometown;” they pass on through, confessing shortcomings and going right back to their “hometown” – walking “*in the light*” of God’s Word (1 John 1:7; compare to Psalm 119:105).

How does a Christian grow in faithfulness? Remember Paul’s words: “*I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32). Strive daily “*to be conformed to the image of His [God’s, *ccd*] Son*” (Romans 8:29). Work diligently to bear an abundance of “*the fruit of the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:22,23). Always work to implement the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, knowing God’s promise is true: “*If you do these things you will never stumble*” (2 Peter 1:10).

While we will never be *sinless* as humans, we surely can *sin less*! “*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18). Jesus came to give humans abundant life (John 10:10). Faithful Christians will not just *barely* enter heaven; theirs is an **abundant entrance** (2 Peter 1:11)!

-- Chad Dollahite

## LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING UZZIAH

Uzziah, also known as Azariah, reigned as king of Judah for fifty-two years (B.C. 791-740). Careful readers of the opening verses of three prophetic books of the Bible will note that he was king during the days of the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah.

It does not affect our salvation, but it is interesting that Zechariah (Zechariah 14:5) and Amos (Amos 1:1) both mentioned an earthquake which took place when Uzziah was king. In Zechariah's case, he spoke about that earthquake over two hundred years after it took place. It is common for us to put an event in historical perspective by noting when it transpired – before, after, or about the same time as something else. By using a well-known earthquake as a marker (Amos 1:1), ancient inhabitants of the earth did the same.

Like some other kings of Judah, Azariah was “a mixed bag,” at times showing commitment to what God desired and at other times disregarding the Lord's instructions. Here is a general assessment of his life: “*And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD . . . except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places*” (2 Kings 15:3,4). Let us examine some specific lessons from the life and reign of Uzziah.

➤ During a portion of the time when Uzziah was king in Judah, both Judah and Israel were at the peak of their earthly strength. In Uzziah's battles with neighboring nations, he was successful. What is the explanation for his victories? Here is the Bible's three-word answer: “*God helped him*” (2 Chronicles 26:7). With God as your Helper (Psalm 46:1), you win in life! And why did Jehovah help Uzziah? Because the king “*sought God . . . and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper*” (26:5).

Read further to see that Uzziah owed his strength to the Lord. With God on His side, Uzziah “*became exceedingly strong*” (26:8). Again, we read, “*So his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong*” (26:15). Fame and fortune may appeal to worldly minds, but woe to those who put more emphasis on those matters than they do on faith, fortitude, and favor with the Almighty.

➤ Uzziah's pride led to his downfall. “*But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God*” (2 Chronicles 26:16). In this monarch, we see a demonstration of the truth that, “*Pride goes before destruction*” (Proverbs 16:18). Each one of us needs to beware of this powerful tool of Satan. If he cannot cause us to stumble via immorality or false teaching, he will try to destroy us with pride. Leaders in the church especially need to be on guard against

haughtiness (1 Timothy 3:6). Remember this: without the Lord, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

➤ Unauthorized worship does not please God. In what manner did Uzziah act contrary to God's will? “. . . *he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense*” (2 Chronicles 26:16). According to the law of Moses, (1) there was supposed to be such an altar in the temple, and (2) Israelites were supposed to burn incense on it. If that is true, why was Uzziah's action counted as sinful? Because burning incense on that altar was the duty of the priests and no one else. Uzziah was not a priest. He was from the tribe of Judah, which was not the priestly tribe (Levi was). Thus, Uzziah was an unauthorized person. He was intense, and he may have had splendid intentions, but his action was unauthorized by God and therefore was an act of rebellion against Him. Let this truth be stamped permanently in our minds: man-made plans are never as good as the Lord's. Doing things man's way causes worship to be in vain (Mark 7:7,9).

➤ Uzziah became a leper, and the reason is clear. When the legitimate priests of the Lord tried to prevent the king from marching into the temple to burn incense, he was enraged. “*And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead . . .*” (2 Chronicles 26:19), and he remained a leper until the day of his death. There is an important principle here for serious Bible students. In order to get “the full picture” on any Bible topic, we need to read *all* of the information provided in God's word. Often the message in one Bible passage can help us understand what is recorded elsewhere in the Scriptures. Here is the application: in 2 Kings 15:5, we simply read the *fact* that the Lord struck Uzziah with leprosy. To find the *reason for* and *details* of that punishment, we must read 2 Chronicles 26:16-20.

➤ We should admire and imitate the boldness of those priests who tried to prevent Uzziah's rebellious action. Led by the chief priest, they withstood the king to his face, saying “*It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God!*” (2 Chronicles 26:18). Sometimes it is necessary to stand up against and rebuke those who have sinned. No person, regardless of his/her role, position, or title, is exempt from the need to be corrected.

You may not consider yourself to be a history buff. But, all of us can learn from the Old Testament!

-- Roger D. Campbell

## Jesus — the Good Shepherd

Described in the Bible as “*that great Shepherd of the sheep*” (Hebrews 13:20) and “*the Chief Shepherd*” (1 Peter 5:4), Jesus said this about Himself: “*I am the good shepherd.*” (John 10:11).

The concept of a shepherd caring for his sheep is one that is mentioned repeatedly in the Scriptures. In the context of John 10, as Jesus spoke about His sheep, He said, “*there will be one flock and one shepherd*” (10:16). As Jesus said, He is that Shepherd.

From John 10, what do we learn about Jesus as the good Shepherd? As other shepherds do (10:2-4), the Christ leads His sheep and they follow Him. He leads by His perfect example and by His teaching. Those two matters go hand in hand, and no devoted sheep of His would ever disregard either aspect.

The good Shepherd gives abundant life. Jesus said, “*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (10:10). The Master causes us to have the best, most-fulfilling life a human can enjoy. Through Him we have all spiritual blessings and are made to be the best person possible.

The defining mark of the good Shepherd is this: “*The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep*” (10:11). In Bible language, Jesus “*gave Himself a ransom for all*” (1 Timothy 2:6). The picture we see over and over is God’s Son laying down His life for us, a sacrifice like no other. The sinless Shepherd offered Himself that sinful sheep might be rescued from danger and receive the greatest benefit ever. What is that wonderful blessing? Eternal life. Jesus said, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life*” (10:27,28).

How does the good Shepherd differ from a hireling? A laborer is worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7), so it is not wrong for a person to be employed as a shepherd. The hireling whom our Lord describes, however, is a person who works *only* for the purpose of being paid. The sheep do not belong to the hireling, so when the wolf/danger comes, he flees (10:12). Why? “*The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep*” (10:13). The good Shepherd is so different! He cares for the sheep and that is why He is willing to protect them with His own life. Whatever the hireling does, he does it for himself. Not the good Shepherd; He does it all for the sheep.

Three things stand out about the good Shepherd’s motives. He lays down His life to obey the Father (10:18), to save/give life to His sheep (10:10,28), and to show His matchless love (10:17,18). He is amazing!

-- Roger D. Campbell

## Lessons from 1 John 3:10-18

This is a section of 1 John that highlights the need for God’s children to love each other. That is a theme that will continue into chapter four and even the first portion of chapter five. So, let us talk about love.

(1) 3:10-15 – **The call for Christians to love one another** – Under the Spirit’s guidance, John approaches the topic of brotherly love in a number of different ways. First, one who does not practice brotherly love is of the devil (3:10). In contrast to that, one who is “of God” loves his fellow disciples.

Second, since the very outset, brotherly love has been a part of Christianity. “*For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*” (3:11).

Third, we are not to be imitators of Cain, who lacked love for his brother, Abel (3:12). When things are as they should be, members of a biological family love one another, and it comes naturally. That is the way it ought to be in God’s spiritual family, too.

Fourth, brotherly love among members of the church is an indicator that those who practice it “*have passed from death to life*” (3:14).

Finally, “*Whoever hates his brother is a murderer*” (3:15). In this context, to “hate” a brother means the same as *not loving him* properly. According to the Bible, such an unloving person does not have eternal life (3:15). That truth gets my attention! What we have seen is John using a variety of ways to motivate Christians to do one thing: love each other.

(2) 3:16 – **Love demonstrated by God** – “*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.*” It is not enough to *know* what Jesus did for us, nor is it enough to *talk* about what He did. The Lord’s appeal is for us to *imitate* His sacrificial spirit: “*And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (3:16).

(3) 3:17,18 – **Love in action** – “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” (3:18). No, it is not wrong for a follower of Jesus to verbalize his love for other servants of the Lord. Paul did that (2 Corinthians 12:15). So did Jesus (John 15:12). The point that John is emphasizing is the need for us to do more than *talk* about love: it is God’s will for us to *show* it. John points to an example when a Christian has sufficient worldly goods and sees his brother in need. When one has the love of God inside him, what does he do? He takes action . . . the action to provide what a brother needs.

Any local church is blessed immensely when its members truly love one another. May each of us strive to be a person who sincerely loves unconditionally.

-- Roger D. Campbell

## THE CHALLENGE TO AVOID DEVELOPING A CONSTANT, NEGATIVE, PESSIMISTIC ATTITUDE

“Negative,” when applied to a person or attitude, means “adverse, unfavorable, disagreeable; marked by features of hostility, withdrawal, or pessimism that hinder or oppose constructive treatment or development” [merriam-webster.com]. From the same source, “pessimism” is: “an inclination to emphasize adverse aspects, conditions, and possibilities or to expect the worst possible outcome.”

We are living in a world where things do not always go the way we would like. We face many things that cause stress, such as loss, loneliness, sickness, difficulties with children, aging parents, hardships with school and jobs, time management, and temptation. These things influence us and tend to foster negative attitudes. Persistent negative thinking, anxiety, depression, and similar disorders are growing all over the world. Forty million adults in the U.S.A. are affected, which is nearly twenty percent of the population [adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics].

You could be thinking of someone you know at this moment, but do not fall into the trap of only looking outwardly. The truth is, any of us can, and many of us have, struggled with having and *holding* negative attitudes. Any time things do not go the way we want, there is the possibility of having negative thoughts. This is momentary and natural. What we should not accept or allow is for these kinds of attitudes to become our normal “setting.” There is great danger in allowing our attitude to be affected so that negativity and pessimism become constant.

We may tend to think that the ones who suffer in such ways are unfaithful, or at least weak in their faith. That is an unfair assessment of our brethren. Even the most faithful and Christ-centered of us face these difficulties at times. Who would question the faithfulness of Job? Struggling with negative attitudes does not necessarily equate to a lack of faith or to sinfulness.

Do you remember Noah, who had such trust in God that he built the ark exactly as God commanded? (Genesis 6:22). What about Abraham, the father of the faithful, who was willing to sacrifice his son on an altar? (Hebrews 11:17-19). Or Moses, God’s chosen leader of His people (Exodus 3-4)? And David, the king who was called “*a man after God’s own heart*?” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). Do we not read of their personal struggles being manifested in fears, doubts, misunderstandings, and, sometimes, wrong decisions? They had to deal with life, just like we do. They were

not wrong for having negative feelings and attitudes in difficult times. What we must beware of is letting negativity or pessimism take root and become a regular, nagging weight around our necks. We must see the problems that come with that kind of burden.

Constant negative attitudes hinder us from being joyful as God wants us to be. Consider the Philippian letter that Paul penned by inspiration while imprisoned. He enjoined the brethren to be full of joy despite difficult circumstances, hurtful people, and the loss of the things of this world; all of which cause undue worry in our lives (Philippians 4:4-8). The inspired solution: do not be anxious about *anything*, but pray about *everything*. Trust God!

Carrying the load of pessimism is not helping us to be Christ-like or evangelistic. Jesus was the picture of a gracious and loving attitude. He was despised, rejected, envied, betrayed, and crucified. Yet, with all the suffering brought upon Him, He displayed mercy, grace, and love to all of mankind. His desire was to save us from sin (Matthew 20:28; 26:26-29; 1 Timothy 2:4; Titus 2:11-14). We are called to Jesus through His word (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14) and further drawn by His attitude (1 John 4:7-21)! If we are to be Christ-like, we will work to develop and maintain a positive outlook that will be displayed in our words, in our actions, and on our faces. If we are going to bring others to Christ, we must show them the eternal hope and joy that He has given us!

If those who are close to you (family, friends, co-workers) regularly tell you that you have a negative or pessimistic attitude, it is likely that you do! Listen to what they have to say. We are not talking about strangers or enemies – these people (family and friends) care about you. They are letting you know that your constant negativity is hurting you and them. They want you to recognize the problem so that you can work to correct it. What you are dealing with may be more than a momentary unhappiness; it may be a soul-altering pessimism. Those who love you do not want you to be plagued with such an issue. Seek help from God through prayer and study of His word. Seek help from faithful brethren. If more is needed, seek help from a counselor who is a Christian and will guide you in godly growth.

-- Dave Leonard

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