

Sacred Scriptures

*"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God,
which liveth and abideth forever"*

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THE BLIND RECEIVE THEIR SIGHT

by Brad Rankin

Jesus performed an extraordinary number of diverse miracles during his ministry which was not an uncommon sign of a man from God. Jesus empowered his apostles with many signs and wonders and the Holy Spirit enabled other devout children of God to perform miraculous acts. Prophets and apostles demonstrated God's miraculous powers for His glory. Naaman was cleansed of leprosy by the powers of the prophet Elisha. We remember that it is recorded that Elijah, Elisha, Peter, and Paul raised the dead. However, as amazing and awesome cleansing leprosy and raising the dead may seem to us, we must consider the significance of Jesus Christ's power to restore sight.

We recall that when John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus inquiring about his being the Savior, Jesus responded with a list of evidences that would prove to John that he was the Christ. Jesus instructed these disciples to return to John and to inform him that "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt 11:5). There is no doubt that John understood the importance of Jesus including the fact that the blind were receiving their sight. John was fully aware that David and Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would have the power to open the eyes of the blind.

In Psalm 146:8, David wrote, "the LORD openeth the eyes of the blind." Isaiah stated, "the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness" (Isa 29:18), "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Isa 35:5), and that the Messiah was

coming "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isa 42:7). These statements seem to refer to both physical and spiritual blindness. Although miraculous healing of physical blindness is gone, the power to restore sight to those who are spiritually blind is still with us today. Each and every Christian receives their spiritual sight at baptism.

All Christians can recall the days when they lived in spiritual blindness. We were wandering in the darkness of sin, stumbling through this sinful world in the need for a leader and a guide, and we were blessed in finding Jesus. These days are not recalled with fondness, but these memories help us as we reach out to the lost souls who are our neighbors. Each of us is capable of sharing this gift of spiritual sight with others.

We remember in the account of the apostle Paul's conversion, that Paul was not instructed by Jesus regarding what should be done for salvation. Paul was told that a man named Ananias would reveal it to him. We recall that Paul received his sight at the same time that he received the gospel, immediately before his baptism. Each of us has an obligation to those around us, much like Ananias did in restoring Paul's sight (Acts 9). Ananias was the instrument used to give sight back to Paul both physically and spiritually.

If we are not diligent as Christians, the blindness that once ruled our lives can easily return.

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The scriptures include a number of examples of disciples that allowed their blindness to return. One example provided to us is the congregation of Christians at Laodicea. The Laodiceans believed themselves to be rich and in need of nothing, but Jesus informed them that they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked..." (Rev 3:17) Jesus instructed them, through the apostle John, to "anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev 3:18).

Peter has instructed us concerning the spiritual attributes that build upon our faith, such as virtue and knowledge (II Pet 1:5-7). He continues "but he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (II Pet 1:9). Peter is telling us that if we fail to grow and mature as Christians, we can become spiritually nearsighted. This impairment can be extremely harmful to our spiritual lives. We must always keep our eyes, and our focus, on our eternal reward.

The apostle John reminds us in his first epistle that blindness can be caused by hating our brother (I John 2:9). We then recall the last

attribute in II Peter 1 added to our faith is charity, our deep concern and love for the souls around us. It is easy to see people in the world who suffer from this type of blindness, but the apostle John was warning Christians not to fall into this spiritual blindness. Each of us must examine our own lives and relationships to be certain we have clear vision when it comes to our love, care, and concern for our brethren and for those outside the body of Christ.

Just as David and Isaiah prophesied, Jesus continues to open the eyes of the blind. All of us are a witness to this power. Jesus continues to be the salve that we need to maintain clear vision and to prevent becoming nearsighted. We must always thank God for the gift of Jesus, and that we have been blessed to have received our sight. We must never forget that we are to assist our neighbors in gaining their spiritual sight. As Christians we must continue to use our eyes of faith, so that we can follow the admonishment of Paul "to walk by faith, not be sight" (II Cor 5:7).

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Member of Gardner, KS church of Christ

BEWARE OF FALSE DOCTRINES

by Kevin Morton

Several years ago, I had lunch with a man that I worked with named Anthony. I was working for KU Student Housing at the time, and he was a resident assistant. We started talking and he asked me the question: "Are you saved?" I told him that yes, I had accepted Jesus and been baptized, but that didn't seem to satisfy him. He replied, "That's great, but was there ever a time when you realized that Jesus was in your heart?" Again, I said yes, I realized I needed to be baptized, and did it. Still not satisfied with my answer, he asked a third time, "But when was the exact moment that you knew Jesus was in your heart?" At this point, I was starting to get a little irritated because in my mind I had already answered this question twice. I was beginning to see, though, that baptism was not what he was trying to get at, so I told him that my belief developed over time, and I

came to the realization that I needed Jesus as my Savior gradually. I finally realized that he did not think baptism was a necessary part of salvation, so I asked him what he thought about scriptures like Acts 2:38 and I Peter 3:21. His reply was that he thought that it is a good idea to be baptized, and it makes God happy, but it is not a necessary part of salvation. At that point, our conversation began to shift to other topics.

This is just one example of how obvious the truth can be to one person, and how Satan can disguise it so cleverly for another. I'm sure many, if not all of us, have faced situations not unlike this one. Anthony is one of the kindest, most caring, and cheerful people I know, and I'm sure he wasn't

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purposely trying to mislead me. He showed concern for my soul. As Anthony expressed, believing in Jesus is a vital step to being saved; however, the Bible also teaches us that baptism is another equally important step in the process of salvation.

There are countless false doctrines in the world today. Some are quite obvious, but others, like their originator, Satan, are a bit more subtle, and have the potential to slowly and quietly work their way into even the most knowledgeable of Christian minds.

2 Cor. 11:13-15 tells us that people who twist the word of God, or simply ignore or overlook parts of it on purpose "are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." This is why we must continue to diligently go over the word again and again. This is why you see elderly men and women who have spent a lifetime studying the word continue to do so until the day they go to meet the Lord. It is amazing to me, but it seems as though the more I study God's word, the more things I pick up on that I had not noticed before. This is true even of scriptures that I have read countless times before.

Besides gaining new knowledge, we must also study continuously in order to stay in peak spiritual health, that we might "...always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..." (1 Peter 3:15). We must strive to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Even though Paul had been filled with the Holy Spirit and was teaching these people, they continued to verify what he said by using the Old Law. In an age where that measure of the Holy Spirit is no longer given to people, we

must make every effort to do the same thing, because as already stated, there are many false doctrines in the world, and some may come mistakenly by one of our own members.

No one is perfect, except Jesus, and one of our own brethren may make a mistake in something he says or teaches, in which case we must use the word to correct him "with gentleness and respect." We have an example of this in Acts 18:24-28 where we find a man named Apollos who had heard the teachings of John, but not those of Jesus. He spoke boldly in the synagogue about what he had heard, but it was not the whole truth. So, Priscilla and Aquila explained to him about Jesus. The end result was that Apollos now knew the complete truth of Jesus, and went to

Achaia, where in verses 27 and 28 we see that he "was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

Our best weapon against false doctrine is the word of God. Apollos used it in this example, and it is still the most effective tool we have today. 1 John 4:1 also bears this fact out: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

I will leave you with a final warning from Paul against false doctrines. This warning can be found in Romans 16:17,18: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

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Member of Ottawa, KS church of Christ

"There are countless false doctrines in the world today. Some are quite obvious, but others, like their originator, Satan, are a bit more subtle..."

A CRIMINAL GRACE

by Eric Owens

"And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink. And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots; and sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. And they put up above His head the charge against Him which read, 'THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

"At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'

"In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, "I AM the Son of God.'" And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him" (Matthew 27:33-44)

This is the scene at the cross. Distressful. Chaotic. Loud, but lonely.

And incomplete.

I am thankful for the separate Gospel accounts surrounding the life and, particularly, the death of Jesus, because each includes details that the others don't. Matthew solely accounts the fruitless remorse of Judas. Mark names Barrabus as a proven insurrectionist and enemy of the state. John records

Christ's garden passion prayer for me. And without Luke, we'd have never known-for one man-today was a good day to die.

Look in a common dictionary, and you'll find luck defined simply as "chance". To be lucky is "to have good fortune, to be more successful than one deserves." We usually don't think of execution as a lucky thing for a prisoner, ...but for one, it was the most fortunate, undeservingly good occasion in his life.

"Two criminals died on the cross, that day. One died at the same time as Jesus...the other died with Him."

"And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!'

"But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your Kingdom!'

"And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:39-43).

We generally think of Jesus alone on the cross. But for three hours, He had a friend.

And for the criminal, on the cross with Jesus was the best place he could be.

What was it that had changed his hardened heart? Had Christ, in earlier times, healed his mother? Had he witnessed and been convicted by the compassion Jesus demonstrated on the streets of Jerusalem? Before denying His teachings, had he been in the multitudes that Christ had taught and fed? Somewhere, the criminal had contact with Jesus before.

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He knew this Man to be innocent, have a kingdom, and be most capable of a soul's salvation. Looking through the eyelids of death, this penitent was willing to admit his wanton need for a Saviour. You can see in his defense of Christ how he longed for a King worthy of praise and citizenship in a kingdom where forgiveness was the rule of the day.

Two criminals died on the cross, that day. One died at the same time as Jesus...the other died with Him.

Their crimes? Robbery. Not too much unlike our own. We have all robbed God of His glory when we sully His image with our sin. Pilfering moment-by-moment the time with which He has blessed us, intending for us to return it to Him in service and honor. Although He gave Himself freely, it was our iniquities that stole the very life-breath from The Son of The Living God.

We all have the same choice of those two criminals. Die with Him, or in spite of Him. Paul recognized this and acknowledged his choice to the Galatian brethren: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;

and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

On one day, we who believe and have obeyed were crucified with Jesus. Mine was a cool October evening in 1978. When we choose the baptismal death with Christ, we acknowledge our wanton need for a Saviour. We've found a King most worthy of praise, and a kingdom where forgiveness reigns supreme. I obeyed because I'd determined that on the cross was the best place I could be. And now, for a few short hours-which is the sum of my life-Jesus has a friend. To be crucified with the Saviour is to be exalted with the King. Oh, the glory of paradise with the bright, shining Son.

What good is the confession of a criminal?

What good is the defense of the Truth from the mouth of a sinner?

What good fortune is it, to find the grace of God?

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Member of Prince Rd, IL church of Christ

HOW GOOD IS THE GUARANTEE?

by Marty James

Most of you are aware that Paula and I purchased a small acreage south of Boonville that we hope to make our home someday. We are truly blessed in this regard, and are truly thankful for the opportunity. With this planned move, we are beginning to plan and make purchases for our property. Some of these are major items, and the above question is one that I always ask before consummating the purchase. As purchasers, we directly correlate the terms and length of the warranty with the quality of the product.

Four of the items I usually look at in a warranty are length, what is covered under the warranty, who stands behind it and any terms that could void the warranty. How many of you would pay \$30,000 for a new vehicle that only had a thirty

day warranty? Next we might ask, who stands behind the warranty. Again, if you paid \$30,000 for a new vehicle, which would you feel better with having a warranty from, Ford Motor Company, GM, etc. or Joe Smoe manufacturing that has been in business only a few years? Would you purchase this vehicle if the warranty applied only to the doorknob? And finally, how many of us would buy that new vehicle if the terms of the warranty indicated that it would be void if you didn't change the oil every week or perhaps voided if you drove over 5,000 miles in a year?

Now I know some of these examples are kind of silly, but the point I am trying to make is that we gain a lot of confidence in the products we buy

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because of the quality of the warranty. At any rate, this whole process got me to thinking about the guarantee God gives us when we decide to become a follower of him. Let's see if these same criteria apply to guarantees from God!

First, let's look at what is covered under God's warranty program.

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (II Corinthians 5:1-5, NIV).

God has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing that he will redeem our earthly bodies for one that is free of defects. Paul is talking about eternal life. If we dedicate our lives to God, we will get to trade in this old body for one that is perfect. This body is full of defects, problems, pain, sorrow and "groans" as Paul says, but our new body will be perfect, without pain, fear or death. Through Isaiah we are told, "he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 25:8, NIV).

When we buy a new car or whatever product, if it is defective, depending on the terms of the warranty, we might get to exchange it for a new one. But this product will be prone to the same mechanical weaknesses as the first one. It may or may not be new and improved. Not so with God's warranty. We get to exchange this weak and imperfect body for one that is incorruptible! Praise be to God.

How long is God's warranty good? How about as long as we live and are faithful to him.

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14, NIV).

The Holy Spirit is God's seal that we belong to him and his guarantee that he will do what he has promised. This promise doesn't expire in two, three or four years, it is a promise we can take to our death. The Holy Spirit is like a down payment, a pledge, a validating signature on the contract.

"How long is God's warranty good? How about as long as we live and are faithful to him."

In banking, I deal with contracts every day. Some types require the bank's seal on them. This seal guarantees my signature is true and that I am authorized to contract on the part of the bank. When we grant loans, usually we want a down payment, because this assures us that the borrower has some of his or her money at risk and gives us more assurance that we will be paid. God gives us these assurances through his promises and seals it with the Holy Spirit.

Who stands behind God's warranty?

"But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been 'Yes.' For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 1:18-22, NIV).

As we mentioned earlier, some of the warranties offered on products today may not mean

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much if the company goes out of business when you need the warranty. That is why older well-established companies can usually charge more for their product than a startup company. Most people will pay more for quality. God's promises are true and we can take assurance that there is no higher authority, no better quality, and no re-insurance needed. God is final.

"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants'" (Hebrews 6:13-14, NIV).

"The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7-8, NIV).

Finally, what are the terms of God's warranty? I once heard a story about a spoiled young man, who's father bought him a new pickup. Either the father failed to instruct him about proper maintenance of the vehicle, or the young man didn't care. According to the story, he never changed the oil. As you can imagine, that engine eventually locked up due to sludge and dirty oil. Do you think Ford made good on its warranty? Probably not. The vehicle was abused and not cared for according to the terms of the warranty.

We recently purchased a Morton building for our new farm, partly due to the quality of workmanship and the warranty. One of the warranties is for leaks. Do you think Morton will honor the warranty if they discover holes in the roof caused by me shooting at birds with a rifle? Of course not. Yet many in the religious world today expect God to make his warranties valid when mankind fails to abide by the terms of the contract--failing to follow the Bible.

An often misapplied passage of scripture is in John chapter 10 where Jesus gives one of his many parables on sheep. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28, NIV).

As Paul Harvey would say, "and now the rest of the story." "My sheep listen to my voice; I know

them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28, NIV).

Note the often forgotten text. God's promises and warranties are true, but we must follow him. We must listen to his voice through the written word of God and follow its instructions.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21, NIV).

Failure to do so would be similar to the examples of voided warranties mentioned above. And while many on earth may lie or trick companies to get them to honor warranties, there will be no deceiving God. "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 perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23, NIV)

In summary, God's promises and warranties can give us great comfort, promise, hope and encouragement. When we decide to follow him and become his child, we are given the promise of eternal life. God gives us his contract, his seal, and his guarantee through the Holy Spirit. Mankind then must abide by the terms of the contract. We cannot carelessly abuse the "product" and expect God's warranty to still apply.

Today, there are many confusing stories concerning God's promises. I hope this simple illustration will bring some understanding to each of you and that we will all work to keep our names in the "book of life".

"He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Revelation 3:5, NIV).

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Member of Old Lamine, MO church of Christ

"Most people will pay more for quality. God's promises are true and we can take assurance that there is no higher authority, no better quality, and no re-insurance needed."

DELIVERANCE ON GOD'S TERMS

by Jeremy Morris

Those faithful and trusting in God understand, at least inherently, the solidarity of God's promises issued to those accepting his call. Even in the times of old, God promised through his prophets, "the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people," I Samuel 12:22.

God desires to take care of his children. As any good and loving Father, God looks after those dear to his heart unwilling to lose sight of them or allow them to be undelivered in time of need. No matter how deep the despair or mighty the trial, "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," II Peter 2:9.

Yet, often unacknowledged by those of us here below, God's deliverance and sustenance comes to us on God's terms, not ours. More so, such deliverance and sustenance comes when our Father knows we need it and not when we think we need it.

Consider Jesus Christ. With the time of his trial and crucifixion at the brink, our Savior asked for deliverance from the dreadful task; even so, our Lord recognized the need to leave the times and means of deliverance by his Father up to his Father. By memory we recall Christ's words, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will," Matthew 26:39.

God knows our strengths and weakness. God considers our capacities and shortcomings. Even more, God knows what we need more than we understand. With such omnipotence, the tremendous gift of God's deliverance comes at the time when we need it the most.

Caught in our own self-evaluation, we may firmly believe that our state is one deserving of help from above; yet, God may disagree. With the hand of God under us, and his grace surrounding us, in our foolishness we far too easily lose sight of what God has already given us.

The prophet Jeremiah received the promise of God that he would survive the fall of Judah and obtain protection and good favor from the enemy. But examine how God fulfilled his promises. Food came

in the form of only a single loaf a day as long as bread could be found in Jerusalem. Did God deal unfairly? During the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah had bread while others starved.

Protection by God's hand was found inside prison walls for Jeremiah, sometimes down in the mire. Even so, while we consider this accommodation ghastly, those prison walls gave Jeremiah safe harbor from the sword and peril outside.

Even Jeremiah, a prophet of God who pled for a nation to trust in God, at times needed his own teachings. At times in his prison cell, Jeremiah would question God's deliverance. At these times he soon recalled the Lord's mercies and promises which never ceased-even in prison. "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, Therefore I hope in him!" Lamentations 3:21-24.

Deliverance always comes to the faithful. We just need to wait for it to come on God's terms.

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Member of Murray Rd, MO church of Christ

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