

How Well Would You Be?

In 3 John 2 John says, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." If someone wished this for you and the wish came true how healthy would you be? Jesus said to the church at Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." (Revelation 3:1). I am sure they would not want someone to wish for them that their physical health would match their spiritual condition.

What about you? If your physical health matched your spiritual health how well would you be? I know of some who are feeble and unable to move about that would be like those spoken of by John. They love God and strive to please and glorify Him in all they say and do. They would indeed be thrilled to "prosper and be in health" even as their soul prospers. However, there are others who would die though they are now in good physical health. Which would it be for you?

- by **James Hahn**

Indiscriminate Forgiveness?

Many people, including Christians, believe that we are obligated to forgive someone whenever they commit a sin. For instance, if a man steals \$500 from me, is arrested and put on trial, many believe I should go ahead and forgive him - even though he remains unrepentant. Some see this as the noble thing to do; something that will help me. However, there is no biblical basis for this type of thinking.

The Bible does teach we are to forgive others, but the forgiveness has conditions attached to it. The person who committed the sin must seek forgiveness. Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3,4).

What happens when that same person does not repent and seek forgiveness? Are we to forgive anyway? No. We have no authority from God to do so. Paul wrote, "...forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). He will forgive us after we repent (Acts 8:22-24), and that is the pattern we should follow.

If we are authorized or even compelled to forgive someone before he or she repents, what does that do to church discipline? The person from whom a church withdraws is to be forgiven only after that person repents (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:6-11; 7:8-11). Forgiveness before the point of repentance would make the entire process a futile exercise in chaos.

Further, consider the scenario Jesus gives us in Matthew 18:15-17. One brother sins against another. If a one-on-one conversation brings repentance from the sinner, then the issue is solved. However, if the one in the wrong does not make correction, then the offended brother does not forgive him; he takes the next step to bring repentance. The principle laid down is that forgiveness, and thus reconciliation, is extended when the sinner repents, not before.

People must be accountable for their actions. Sinners need to know they are sinners and lost until they repent. If they have personally sinned against us and/or the church, they need to feel the burden of their sin. Our desire for peace or to simply not deal with the problem will not solve the issue. God does not approve of us putting aside sin in the absence of repentance; something that may endanger our souls.

- by **Steven F. Deaton**

Baptism and Blood

The blood of Jesus saves us from our sins: the blood was "*shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Matthew 26:28). What does baptism have to do with the blood?

Peter preached, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:38). Note that the expression "*for remission of sins*" is the same as in Matthew 26:28. Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins. How can both be true?

The answer is in Romans 6:3-4: "*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" This tells us that when we are baptized into Christ we are baptized into His death. We contact Christ's blood when we obey the gospel and are baptized into Christ.

What saves us? The blood of Jesus. How do we avail ourselves of the blood? Through baptism into Christ. Is baptism a work of our own merit? No. We simply must submit to the will of God. Now, how can anyone deny the necessity of baptism?

- by T. Doy Moyer

Injured By A Friend!

As Christians, we must expect to be persecuted and ridiculed by those of this world. Jesus said: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Luke 21:17). This is not surprising - it was the very treatment that Jesus Himself received. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Paul wrote: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

The harsh treatment of the world is always hard to endure, but what is worse is when the mistreatment comes from those who claim to love us. Too often we are assailed by those closest to us - our own brethren.

David spoke of the terrible hurt he experienced from a friend. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it.- neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company" (Psalms 55:12-14).

Have you been hurt by someone close to you? Have you been betrayed by a brother in Christ? Have you been wronged by those who should have loved you and treated you with kindness and affection? Don't imagine that you are the first to be misused in this way. What you have experienced has been common to God's faithful people throughout the ages.

How shall we deal with this sort of painful "wound?" In the same context quoted above, David gives the answer. "As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Psalms 55:16-17).

In the most difficult of times, continue to trust in God and serve him faithfully. Even when betrayed by a friend, maintain your confidence in Him. Remember, "your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

- by Greg Gwin