

# *It Is Written*

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## BEFORE GOD - BEFORE MEN

By Bill Hall

"Take Heed that you do not your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

True righteousness is primarily "God-conscious" rather than "man-conscious." God is pleased as we sing His praises, or teach His truth, or lead in prayer, or help the needy, or give to support His work, if our purpose is to gain His approval and bring glory to His name. But woe to that person who sings for the purpose of displaying his beautiful voice. Woe to that person who seeks the praise of men as he leads in prayer. Woe to that preacher who "tickles the ears" of his listeners. Woe to that person who gives to be seen of men. When he gains their praises, he "has his reward in full"; none awaits him from the Father in heaven.

In keeping with this teaching, the Bible reveals God's judgment of two different couples: one enjoying God's approval, the other suffering His disapproval.

God disapproved of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). His disapproval was not because of the amount of their offering. They had brought a very liberal offering. They had even sold a possession in order to give, and while we do not know what portion they brought, they obviously brought what they thought would be sufficient to impress the apostles. But herein lies the key to their real problem: They were more conscious of men's reaction to their benevolence than they were of God's. Had they been conscious of God in what they did, and had they been seeking His approval, they would not have lied. But they did their righteousness "before men, to be seen by them"; and, in their concern for impressing men, they lied concerning the amount which they brought.

In contrast to Ananias and Sapphira, there were Zacharias and Elizabeth, of who it was said, "And they were both righteous before God" (Luke 1:6). While many, no doubt, observed their righteousness and, as a result, glorified the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16), Zacharias and Elizabeth obviously were not as concerned for man's approval as they were for God's approval. It was God's approval that they sought; it was His approval that they gained.

God blessed Zacharias and Elizabeth, choosing them to be the parents of John, the forerunner of Christ. He punished Ananias and Sapphira with immediate death, and, in keeping with Jesus' statement of Matthew 6:1, they "have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

Hypocrisy is loathsome to the Lord. For a person to appear outwardly religious and sincere, while inwardly he only desires the praise and approval of men is to be guilty of gross hypocrisy. Let us seek always to do our righteousness before God to be seen of Him. The glorious and eternal "reward of the Father" cannot be compared with the fickle and fleeting praise of men.

## *They Can't Live It*

By Bill Hall

Many who have never entered the Lord's service explain their hesitancy with the words, "I'm afraid I just can't live it." We usually try to quell their fears, but the truth is, they can't live it, for their concept of what it is they are trying to live is a completely false concept.

Consider the man whose wife became a Christian. He was sure she couldn't "live it." He watched her carefully, and sure enough, one day under considerable stress, she lost control, yelled at the children, and said some things a Christian ought not to say. "If she were a Christian," the man thought, "she wouldn't talk like that; I knew she couldn't live it." On another day the preacher came around, and in reaction to something someone said, he turned a bit red, although he otherwise controlled his temper. But the man saw the tinge of redness, and immediately he concluded, "That preacher can't live it either." He eventually observed faults in other Christians,

and finally concluded that none of them could "live it," that the whole church was a bunch of hypocrites. Of course, he never even tried, for he knew his weaknesses all too well. He knew he couldn't "live it."

Poor man! He thinks that the Christian life is a life of perfection; that all "Christians" fall into one of two categories: either they are perfect or they are hypocrites. He knows he can't live up to perfection, to the standards he has set for others, and is thinking with an almost self-righteous attitude, "One thing about it, Preacher, I'm not going to be a hypocrite."

But there is pardon for the sincere Christian's imperfections. "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). And that Christian who sincerely strives to live for the Lord, and daily seeks His forgiveness, though he should have a thousand weaknesses, is no hypocrite. There are hypocrites in the church, and we offer no defense in their behalf. But weaknesses do not necessarily imply hypocrisy.

Let the faithful Christian, then, not be intimidated by the constant charge of "hypocrites in the church." And let the sinner forget about living "it," if by "it" he means perfection, and let him come to Christ, through who he can go to heaven.

## Esau's Profanity

By Jim R. Everett

It is more difficult to categorize some Bible characters as altogether evil for the simple reason that, generally speaking, there was much that also identifies them as good. The evil identified with them surfaces in isolated cases. However, the character trait warned against and not to be emulated, is a flaw which is uniquely identifiable with a particular person. Esau was a profane person.

When I read about Jacob and Esau, there is much to cause me to admire Esau more than Jacob (Gen. 24:25-34; 27:1-42). Esau was a loving son and there was a strong bond between him and his father Isaac. He loved the outdoors and as a hunter gratified his father's taste for venison. On the other hand, Jacob was a "mama's boy" who was conniving and deceitful. He took advantage of his brother's weakness in order to bargain for his own advantage.

The boys were both human beings and, like all human beings, they had good and bad character traits. However, God made a choice of the youngest (Jacob) over the eldest (Esau), not for individual salvation, but for ancestral lineage (Romans 9:13). The one character flaw that providentially accomplished the lineage coming through Jacob was Esau's profanity (Hebrews 12:16-17).

The birthright entailed rank and authority over the other children (Gen. 27:29; 49:3). It meant that the firstborn received a double portion of the paternal inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). And, in Esau's case, it would have brought the bestowed honor of being in the patriarchal lineage of Abrahamic, national promises.

But, Esau despised his birthright (Genesis 25:34); i.e., he held it in low esteem. That is illustrated in his selling it for a mess of pottage (Genesis 25:29-34). He held what should have been holy as common. This is why he is called "profane." If he had placed the proper value on his progenitor rights, he would never have sold them, especially for meager morsels. In fact, the value he placed upon his birthright is evidenced in the price for which he sold it.

From Esau we should learn to curb strong impulses by reason and conscience. We should ever keep in mind the proper relation between the present and temporary and the future and abiding. And, we should learn to keep the sensuous subordinate to the spiritual.

## Two Men

By Kyle Campbell

The first psalm is a concise analysis between two ways. The fate of the righteous is seen in Psalm 1:1-3. The righteous delights in the law of the Lord instead of the way of the sinner. Because of this, he is like "a tree planted by the rivers of water." The fate of the ungodly is seen in Psalm 1:4-6. The ungodly are like chaff, who are blown away by the wind, and they will not stand in the judgment.

Jesus described the two ways in Matthew 7:13-14. There is a broad way that leads to destruction and a narrow way that leads to eternal life. Will people make the right sacrifices? Will you have this kind of life (1 John 5:10-12)? The Lord knows the way of the righteous, and He knows who are His (2 Timothy 2:19).