

Shaqah

*Beware lest any man
spoil you through
philosophy and vain
deceit after the tradition
of men, after the
rudiments of the world
and not after Christ.*

Colossians 2:8

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Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip Busby

Last time, we talked about why and how God would bring destruction upon the earth in Noah's day. This installment of "Following The Biblical Stream" brings us to Genesis chapter 6 verse 14 which begins the discussion about how man might escape that destruction. Verse 14 opens with a simple statement by God to Noah, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood;..."

As monumental as the task was which was laid out before Noah, the instructions from God were very straight forward. In verse 14, God tells Noah the ark should be made of gopher wood, the interior space should be divided into rooms, and it should be sealed inside as well as out. Over the centuries, there has been a lot of speculation about just how the ark was built, and what it must have looked like. Most believe its construction was of beams and pegs. This is a reasonable thought because even if the technology of metal nails existed before the flood, nails would not have been a good choice for a structure which needed to be exposed to water.

Some speculation has been made that the ark may have been a sewn boat. This is a technique still seen in southern India, where holes are drilled in the edges of the wood and rope material is used to literally sew the pieces together into one cohesive structure. Then the holes and seams are made water-tight by using a material harvested from coconuts called "coir." This may be an interesting idea and a very ancient technique, but I'm not sure it would work for a structure the size of Noah's ark; and I'm almost certain it would not work for one which was to be built out of such substantial materials. The real point here is that people over the years have debated and debated over just how Noah built his ark, and the one thing we can be certain of is that the debate will not stop any time soon! This is in no small part due to the fact many people simply take a very evolutionary view of things and would like to dismiss the idea that "primitive" man could ever have the knowledge or brain power to build such a craft at all.

Now, you may ask, if that is so true, why don't people simply blow off the story as

fiction and move on? The answer to that is, almost without exception, there is a story about a very large or universal flood in almost every culture in the world. From the Orient to Europe, from Africa to the Native Americans there is a story about a major flood event which changed the course of history. This means, while people may debate the size, timing, etc. of the flood, it is very hard to dismiss it altogether. If there wasn't, at the very least, a very large flood sometime in the past which in some way affected the existence of every culture on the planet, there would not be all these stories!

This is yet another example of how the Bible teaches us the Jews are the people God intrusted His oracles with. (Rom. 3:1-2) Many of the world's stories have morphed and changed over the millenniums, but the one found in the Hebrew scripture tells us what really happened and why! Because creation is true and not evolution, Noah was not primitive or simple minded. The fact Noah lived some four thousand years ago says nothing about his intelligence. However, the fact he accomplished the task speaks volumes!

The bottom line is, we do not know much about how Noah built the ark, because the Bible does not give us details. Noah was given simple instructions which emphasized to him that he was building a craft, not for the purpose of sailing but for the purpose of floating. In essence, Noah was simply instructed to build a gigantic structure which could withstand water from all sides and ultimately have the buoyancy to stay on the top of rising water levels. This is why the word "ark" is used instead of "boat." In

truth, God did not tell Noah to build a boat at all. The original Hebrew word we get "ark" from could simply be translated into English as "box" or "container." The only other time we really find this same word in the Bible is in Exodus chapter 2 where Moses' mother puts him in "...an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch,..." Specifically it says she "took" for Moses this "ark." She did not build it; she took a common everyday basket or container of some kind which was already at hand. The container she chose was made of bulrush, likely because of its lightness and natural water resistance. Then, she further attempted to make this container waterproof by dabbing it with pitch. This was so she could place Moses' ark in an area where it may need to float. We often think of Moses floating in a quiet pool by the river or in the water out in the river itself, but what the Bible tells us is that his mother put him "...in the flags by the river's brink." Moses' ark was a box which could cradle him on dry land and would keep him dry, even float, if water was to touch or overtake it. This is exactly what Noah was to build!

This means we cannot even look to the boat building techniques of the ancient past for much insight on what Noah actually built. Boats are designed to move smoothly through the water; and because of this, the designs are often venerable to violent weather conditions. Noah would have been more concerned with structural integrity and water tightness than your typical boat designer. Noah's box would even need to handle being picked up by water and set back down, possibly on multiple occasions, as the flood waters rose and the current

grounded the ark for a time on a higher spot. These kind of conditions destroy most boats; so God did not tell Noah to build a boat, God told Noah to build an ark of safety!

This is where the gopher wood comes in. One of the greatest debates about Noah's ark has been over exactly what gopher wood is a reference to. Some say it refers to cypress or cedar, but the truth lies again in the fact it's not the specification which counts as much as the generalization. "Gopher" comes from a Hebrew word which transliterates into a word which in English is almost exactly the same as our word for the small burrowing mammal. The translators of the King James Version really did not have a term to translate the word into which would explain what was being said. Thus, instead of replacing the word with speculations of a specific wood, they did what they should have done; and that is, give us the Hebrew word in an English form. To explain what the word means today we may say Noah was to build an ark out of house construction grade wood. God was telling Noah not to build his ark out of something light and buoyant like bulrush. The ark Noah was to build needed to be made out of the kind of quality lumber one would use to build a solid wood structure for protection. The ark needed to be a float able fortress!

Then God tells Noah to build rooms in the ark. Again, not a specific design but the instruction that this ark would not simply be a rescue pod. If the flood was going to be a day or even a week long event, then maybe Noah could have gotten away with building one big open space where he could simply

shove everything in; but the flood was going to last for more than a week or month! There would have to be living space, and separate areas for the different animals. There would have to be places to store food, places for tools, places to carry some extra raw materials for repair work, etc. All aspects of survival needed to be taken into account.

Even the description for how to make the ark watertight is nothing more than the emphasis of the fact the ark was to be watertight. Noah is told to pitch the ark inside and out. This is simply to say that what is on the outside of the ark should stay on the outside and what is on the inside of the ark should stay on the inside. The ark would be sealed, and the only exceptions to this complete sealing of the ark is the instructions given in verse 16 which tells us there was to be a window and a door.

If verse 14 was not enough to convince you that God was asking Noah to do something monumental, then verse 15 certainly should. Verse 15 tells us the measurements for this watertight box Noah was to build. Now, in Noah's day there was likely no international standard for how long a cubit was; but from the things man left behind and the other places the Bible talks about measurements, we have a pretty good idea of what is being said. Remember, the metric system is a rational attempt to standardize measurements by setting a base mark and making everything smaller divisible by, and everything larger multiples of, ten. This can be done when you set down and choose to make a standard length which can be pre-

cisely divided and multiplied; but before man chose to make a ruler or tape measure, he tended to rely on lengths which he carried with him. The English system of measurements is based on this earlier idea of how to measure things. This is why we still have what is called a "foot." Men of earlier times measured smaller lengths by the thickness of their finger or fingers. On average, this came to about 3/4 of an inch, and it's generally where we get our English inch from. The width of the palm was used as well, and this averaged about three to four inches. Those who deal with livestock are familiar with "hands," which are still used to measure the height of horses. Men also used these measurements in multiples and/or had standards as to how many of one measurement made up another. A span is considered three palms or hands, making it between nine and twelve inches. A cubit is two span, making it eighteen inches to two of our modern feet.

In verse 15, Noah is told to make the ark 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. This would put the ark somewhere between 450 to 600 feet long, 75 to 100 feet wide and 45 to 60 feet tall. For perspective, Noah's ark was to be about as long as two American football fields or two soccer fields end to end, and a little more than half the fields' width. The ark was also to be as tall as a four or five story building. Now this may seem small compared to today's luxury ocean liners, but it is gigantic compared to the ships Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas in. His largest ship was the Santa Maria which, at about 115 feet, was twice as long as the other two ships in his fleet. Just think, these were about the best ships Europe had to offer by

the fifteenth century after Christ! It's just not likely Noah could have modeled too much of the ark after boats of the day.

Verse 16 tells us Noah was to "make" a window, not "in" the ark but "...to the ark." This is not the description of a window as we think of it at all. Now, it's highly unlikely, but not impossible, that Noah had access to glass; but one way or the other Noah would not have wanted glass; in the ark! What Noah was being told to do here is build a ventilation system. This is why the wording is phrased the way it is. Noah was being told to add on to the "box" God had already laid out. This ventilation system was to be "above," and it was to be built, "...in a cubit..." This means it would add a cubit of height not to, but on top of the box. Again, we are not given a significant amount of detail about this, but this system probably went the entire length of the ark. I believe it was wider than most depictions, so there was plenty of room for the warm stuffy air to rise up into this section of the ark and vent to the outside while allowing cooler fresh air to come in. In truth, we just do not know how ingenious the specific design Noah used may have been. What we do see is that in times before men had certain technologies, he found ways to do things which just astonish us today, or even baffle us as to how they did such a thing! Noah may have already known of a design or had a model available to him for venting a house, barn, or other large structure which, if we knew about today, would save millions in energy costs!

Noah was also told that he should put a door in the side of the ark. Some have sug-

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A Reprobate Mind

Part II

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

Is there forgiveness for a reprobate mind?

Man was created with a free will which means God did not simply want robots who were programmed to do one thing or another. God wanted individuals. This is shown clearly in the fact God originally did not make man a species. All the plants and animals were created in multiples. The animals were created in the form of male and female which gave them the capability to procreate. Plants were commanded to bring forth seed after their kind, but God only made one man. It was after He made that one man that God said it was not good for man to be alone. In other words, it was not good for Adam to be the only human in the universe. This is emphasized by the fact all the animals were brought to Adam, which he named, but no helpmate was found amongst them. God wanted man to have other beings who would constantly work and relate on the same level as Adam. None of the animals were up to this task, so God took a piece of Adam and formed a female. This not only put two humans in the universe but also gave man the ability to procreate. (Gen. 2:4-25)

What we often miss in God going through and telling us about this process, is the fact man is not intended to be a pack, herd, flock, school, etc. People are

individuals, each with their own minds and free will. The point in God taking a piece of Adam to make Eve has to do with making it clear that in spite of our vast differences, we each exist for the same purpose Adam was created for, and we are equal. In more than just a genetic sense we are all Adam! Now, that may sound like a saying to put on the front of a Christian T-shirt or the name of a contemporary song, but it's the truth. Just as God wanted to commune with Adam, so to, He desires to commune with each of us. This is why the Bible tells us that God is "...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." II Peter 3:9 We are all truly equal in the sight of God. "...God is no respecter of persons": Acts 10:34 This means God does not care into what family or culture you are born. He does not consider the things men consider. God is not picky about personality. He is not picky about hair or skin color, whether you are tall or short or what people would call fat or skinny. God loves all the people - not just the children - of the world; because to Him, we are all Adam!

What this boils down to is the simple point that God attempts to have a relationship with us all. He gives a measure of faith to us all, and He desires for us to reciprocate. Now, sin in our lives can be a great barrier to us getting very close to

God in this life, because God cannot tolerate sin. However, sin does not keep God from having a desire to know us. No matter how good or bad a person we have been, God still wants to have a relationship with us. This is why it's so important that we realize the word "reprobate" does not simply refer to an immoral person. Reprobate is about us ultimately being judged by God, as not useful for the purpose we were created for!

Now, the question which we are dealing with here is about the reprobate mind, and it is important we are clear on that fact! Man is a three part being made in the image of the three parts of God, and it is the mind, not the spirit or even the flesh, which we are talking about here. One of the biggest reasons we are told to die to the flesh and live in the spirit is not because the spirit or even the mind is pure already, but because the flesh is reprobate already. (I Pet. 4:6, Gal. 5, 6:7-8) The flesh we live in now is not suited for the purposes of communing with God, and it's why the wages of sin is the death of these physical forms! (Rom. 6:23) If we desire to live the life we were created to live, there is no value in what the flesh wants. The flesh is only hindering us from having a closer walk with God. That is why God not only allows us to die even though we put our faith in Him; but true believers understand, to live is to do the work of God on this earth and to die is gain! (Phil. 1:21)

Understanding the fact the flesh is reprobate already is key to understanding

what it means to have a reprobate mind. Our mind is made in the image of God The Father. It's the place where all choices are made. My flesh is hungry, do I feed it or not? Only your mind can choose. My spirit is heavy, but will my mind choose to ignore this fact? I am conflicted between something which will make me feel good and something opposite which I know is actually the right thing to do. What will I choose to do? Only the mind can decide! So, the dynamics of it all are actually pretty simple. Our mind never loses control of our flesh. The physical gray matter in our heads which we call the brain can get damaged or deteriorate. However, this is truly a physical problem just like so many other things which can affect our ability to operate "normally." Sickness of all kinds is simply the result of the deterioration of our physical being, and the ultimate end of all this is death. So, when the Bible talks about being "fleshly minded" it is not talking about a person whose flesh has taken over somehow. It's talking about a person who chooses in their mind to cater greatly to the desires of the flesh, instead of making balanced and righteous choices.

Since the flesh is already reprobate to the plan of God, choosing to live this way causes that reprobate condition to infect the mind. This is why we sometimes liken sin to a cancer. Sin lies in the flesh. (Rom. 7:25) This means it can be brought under control by putting our flesh under submission to our mind which is capable of following the plan of God. However, the more we cater to the flesh's desires the

more focused our mind becomes on obtaining those desires. The more this becomes the focus of our mind the more reprobate our mind becomes to the plan of God. This is why it's necessary to put our flesh under submission to our mind. Self-control is key to using your life for the plan of God, and this has to be worked on, on a continuing basis. The flesh's desires are always going to be with us in this life. Our flesh is always going to need things like food, water and sleep. We need our flesh to tell us what it needs to function, but needs are not all the flesh is going to desire. This is why Paul says what he does in Romans chapter 7. There he talks about wanting to do the right thing, but when he tries to, he sees another plan warring in his members. We will always have to fight with our sinful flesh while in this life if we want to live for God.

Now, because of this, some say being good is just a fable and they just aren't able. This is untrue! The truth is that our flesh does not desire to do the work of God or to have a relationship with God. Our flesh desires to have the things of this life and world, but this does not mean we should just throw up our hands and say, "Just let the flesh do what it wants, it'll be dead someday." What it means is, we must put the flesh under the submission of our mind which is not reprobate, and force it to be a servant of the work of God. Simply put, we cannot live without a physical form; but just because our flesh

has desires does not mean we have to allow the flesh to act on those desires.

Choosing is the key! When we say, "Being good is a fable and I can't because I'm not able, I'm just going to leave it to the Lord." we are giving in to the flesh, and we cannot do that. The Lord is not going to simply control us like a robot. The Lord gave us a free will. We must choose to open our Bible and get down on our knees in prayer in order to receive the teaching and direction God is trying to give us. Our flesh is already subject to our mind, but what we need to do is choose in our mind that the flesh and its reprobate desires are not going to be the way we live our lives. If our hand wants to do something which is unrighteous, we must not allow our hand to do it. If our ears are hearing something or our eyes are seeing something, or they want to hear or see something which is unedifying to our walk with the Lord, we should turn away from those things. Now, obviously there is no way as we live in a world of sin that we can block out everything, and God understands that. (II Pet. 2:1-22) However, there is a difference between being at work and over hearing a dirty joke a co-worker is telling and choosing to specifically listen.

So too, there is a difference between seeing a woman which we believe is attractive and specifically looking at her to lust after her. (Prov. 6:23-26, Matt. 5:27-28) We can control our actions, and Jesus

left no room for debate on the issue. Even if you feel you cannot control something, Jesus leaves no room to just give up. He said if your foot or hand offends you cut it off. If your eye is evil then pluck it out, because it's better for you to prematurely lose a piece of your physical being than to lose out on eternal life with God. (Matt. 5:29-30, 18:7-9) Now, it would be my sincere hope that no one would have to take such drastic measures in order to keep their flesh under submission, but let's face the facts, there it is in black and white. It is that important that we keep our flesh under submission, and that should give us a serious moment of pause before we ever say, "We just can't because we are not able!" Jesus' words should also emphasize to us that living in the "freedom of the spirit" - as some like to say - does not mean ignoring what the flesh does or "causes" us to do. It means we can afford to put the flesh under submission and not allow its reprobate desires to control our actions. We can, and we must! These facts must be clear if we are going to understand the condition of a reprobate mind.

Simply put, a reprobate mind is a condition we come to by our own choosing! Romans 1:28 does not say God gives someone a reprobate mind or that He causes them to have a reprobate mind. It says God gives a person "over" to a reprobate mind. This again is where it is important we understand the word reprobate. It is a judgment call that an item is of no use for its intended purpose. So what is being said is that God determines that the per-

son is not suitable for the purpose He created them for, which is to commune with Him. Turning them over to a reprobate mind means God stops trying to commune with them and leaves them to do whatever it is they choose to do. That fact brings us to the heart of what you have asked. Is there forgiveness for a reprobate mind?

Understand that Christians who say things like, "The sinner's prayer is the first prayer God ever hears you say," are totally wrong. From the creation forward, the Bible shows us that we are created knowing God. Adam was created knowing God, and it was his actions which hindered, but did not end, that relationship. Ending the relationship completely was going to take far more than just eating one piece of fruit. God knew what they had done, and yet after running around trying to figure out how to clothe themselves, they hear the voice of God walking in the garden. He's not snarling or fuming. He's walking in the cool of the evening, and He calls to Adam. Adam and Eve hide. God asks them why they would hide from Him and then uses the opportunity to point out the fact that eating of the tree He told them not to was already getting in the way of them having a relationship with Him. (Gen. 3:6-11)

When Cain gets mad because he feels his brother's offering got more attention than his, God comes to Cain and tries to console him by simply pointing out that if Cain wants to offer an offering which receives the same attention, all he has to

do is bring the kind of offering Abel brought. It was not a competition, and there was certainly no reason to be angry with his brother. Even after Cain rose up and killed Abel, God comes to Cain and basically says, "Let's talk about this." (Gen. 4:9-10) God loves each one of us and nothing is going to change that. This is why Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, he is convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God. God loves us and He wants to be with us. It's not His will that any of us should perish but that everyone of us should come to a place of repentance. God did not intend us to be overwhelmed, so lovingly, He did not create us with the knowledge of good and evil; but for us to truly have a free will, we had to be allowed choices. Thus, God put the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden, and we chose to take the knowledge of good and evil for ourselves. Then we failed to be responsible for it, and this should come as no surprise since God told us that the day we ate of it we would do something worthy of death. (Rom. 6:23) Sure enough, Adam and Eve could not even cover their own nakedness. (Gen. 3) Thus, the Bible tells us, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"; Romans 3:23 and "There is none righteous, no, not one": Romans 3:10 but that does not change the fact God loves us!

In the Ten Commandments, the third law given is, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"; Exodus 20:7 The main point for this law is the fact, bad things happen in this world, and

almost the immediate response of most people is to blame God for those things. This is simply why we call using the Lord's name in vain, "cursing." We are cursing God for the perceived wrong in our lives. This is idiotic because there is no power higher than God which could "avenge" us. In truth, we are the only ones who can hurt God, and the way we do it is by rejecting Him in our lives. What we need to see in this world is that God allows men to exercise his free will. Evil, sickness, and hurt in this world is a result of man's actions and choices, not God's! The fact falling short of the glory of God in being responsible for the knowledge of good and evil brings destruction and pain, is why the wages of sin must be death. Death ends our ability to harm others any longer, but God does not kill us the first time we fail to be responsible. Because He loves us, He attempts to instruct us in the ways of righteousness. This life is a chance to show what we desire. The fact we all fall short means we will all need forgiveness, but forgiveness is irrelevant to the one who does not desire the ways of God. So there is still a choice to be made!

As we walk this earth, the question is not, have we completed a formula which will get us to heaven: like saying a sinner's prayer, the taking of communion, or baptism in water. The question is not have we been a good enough person to make it to heaven? No one is perfect! (Isa. 64:6) So, the question is, do we want a relationship with God more than we want anything else? This is why we talk about

temptation. Temptation has to do with knowing something is wrong but desiring to do it anyway. (James 4:17) We need to understand temptation is not sin. Temptation is the realization of a desire which does not line up with having a relationship with God. As we attempt to walk with God, we must continually choose, because, again, we do not have to follow every desire. We can choose, even over and over if that's what it takes to ignore and set those desires aside. Now, some people choose well and some people choose poorly. The simple matter-of-fact is that even after choosing to walk with God, we all have a lot to learn! So, when we make mistakes, the question is, do we care or do we simply feel it doesn't matter? (James 1:12-15) We also need to look at the question of, do we think it's no big deal because we do not desire to know God above having certain things in our lives, (Ex. 20:3) or do we think it's no big deal because God can forgive us? This is important because of the dynamics of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not complicated. God can choose to forgive any sin He wishes. In fact, that is why He can allow us to live our natural life-span instead of killing us the minute we first sin. God has the power to forgive all sin, but He cannot be truly close to us until that sin is washed away. The only way for that to happen is for the consequences of sin to be nullified. Death does that, but it also leaves us without a physical form, and this is where the work of Christ comes in. Jesus died so that we

might have life, (John 10:10) and the blood of Christ has the power to wash away all sin! (I John 1:7) This is because, through the work of Christ, we can be born again, (John 3:1-21, I Cor. 15:51-57) and this gives God a choice.

Let me put it as simple as I can. God can forgive all sin, but He doesn't have to. Romans 4:8 states, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."; and why would God not impute sin to certain people? The answer is faith! (Rom. 4:4-5) You see, while here on this earth, we are never completely separated from God. God hears every word we speak. (Matt. 12:36) He sees every action we take; and it's our choices which will cause God to determine who stays and who goes from the Book of Life. (Rev. 3:5) That's how it works. The bottom line is, when every soul stands before God on the Day of Judgment, God will choose who is reprobate concerning faith and who is not. (Rev. 20:11-15) This is a choice only God in His Holiness can judge. Only God can look through all the mistakes an individual has made and see into their heart. (I Sam. 16:7) Only He knows - in spite of what people see on the outside - who truly desires to be with Him.

Basically, there will be two kinds of people rejected on Judgment Day. The first kind are those who flat refuse to have a relationship with God, and the second are those to whom faith was not important enough to turn from their sinful ways in order to have. God is not going to force

anyone to live with Him for eternity who does not want Him now, or who finds the pleasures of sin for a season too valuable to give up in order to have a relationship with Him. This is simply why good people do not automatically go to heaven. Heaven is not a place where all the good people go. Heaven is a place prepared for those who wish to be with God. From the moment we are conceived, God is with us. (Isa. 44:24, Jer. 1:4-5, Ps. 22:9-10) How close He is in our lives is up to us, but at the Day of Judgment, the ultimate call will be made for every human who has ever lived. Those who desire faith and holiness will be welcomed into God's eternal presence. Those who do not desire, or to whom faith and holiness was not important enough to seek, will be cast into the Lake of Fire. This will be ultimate life or ultimate death; but while we are walking in this life, God is trying to commune with us. He is trying to bring us to a place of repentance where He can teach us His ways and what He created us to be. From birth to death, God is attempting to speak to us, and there is only two things which can change that. We can specifically choose to send God out of our life, or through our actions, we can cause God to make the judgment call that a relationship with us is of no value.

The choice we can specifically make is defined by most people as the "unforgivable sin." However, that may be a wrong term to use. The blood of Jesus can forgive all sin, but as I said, God does not have to forgive all sin. This is what Jesus told us. In Matthew 6 we are told

that if we refuse to forgive others we will not be forgiven. Then in Matthew 12:31, Jesus said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men:..." This of course is dependant again on whether we care for it to be forgiven (I John 1:9); but Jesus said there is one sin God will not forgive under any circumstances, "...but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." Why? Because in truth, every man knows that God can hear every word and see every action, and that is what causes what we call, "conviction."

Conviction is a knowledge that the way we are living is wrong. We do not have to wait to hear God tell us on Judgment Day that we have sinned. The ability to feel conviction - like Adam and Eve felt when they could not cover their nakedness - shows us, God is still with us. We can feel convicted of specific sins and we can feel the general conviction of the fact we have fallen short. As followers of God, we need to learn how to separate the two. If we are feeling convicted of a specific sin, then we need to stop what it is we are doing and do what we can to set it straight. This will cause the conviction to go away, but the conviction we feel for falling short of God's glory will never go away in this life. We will, and should always be aware of the fact our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6) This is what should compel us to live justly, love mercy and walk humbly before our God. (Micah 6:8) We should not find it hard to forgive our brother his trespasses because we know we are not perfect; thus,

we have trespasses against others. We are not perfect, so, unlike God, we cannot expect others to be perfect. We feel the conviction of God because He is perfect, and He asks us to strive to be like Him. (Matt. 5:48) Feeling this should cause us to live in humility, to love mercy, and do our best to live justly, because our ultimate hope is in the fact God is just, merciful and will forgive the humble. (II Chron. 7:14) However, not everyone wants to feel this. Some people do not want to be bothered with the truth, and because God does not force Himself on us, there is a way to get this feeling to go away. Man in his free will can choose to tell God to go away!

Jesus walked as a man. This is why people pressed in to get to Him. One group of men even removed a portion of a house roof so they could get their sick friend to Jesus; but the Holy Ghost did not come to us in fleshly form. He is omnipresent! Our flesh cannot be saved, in the end, it must return to dust. To be whole again, our mind and spirit must be born again in a new incorruptible form. (I Cor. 15:51-53) This is what we talked about earlier. The flesh needs to be put under submission, but the spirit and mind must be trained in the ways of righteousness. Jesus came not to save our flesh but to replace it. Then The Holy Ghost was sent so that we might commune with God and grow. (John 14:15-17) If we tell The Holy Ghost's presence to leave our lives, then we have ultimately rejected faith: which is a relationship with God; and without

faith it's impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) Simply put, no Holy Ghost, no faith. No faith, no pleasing God; and if we do not please God, then we are reprobate. God will blot our names out of the Book of Life! (Ex. 32:31-33)

Now, the other thing which can change the fact God is continually speaking to us, is by showing, we not only do things contrary to the will of God, but we have such pleasure in them that a desire for God and His ways would never supersede. This takes us back to that third commandment out of the ten. Man - not God - is causing the hurt in this world. The only thing God is doing is allowing it. This is the wrath of God allowing us to suffer the consequences of our sinful actions. This is what Revelation 14 is talking about. In the ninth through the eleventh verse we are told, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

Now, most people think this scripture is talking about hell, but that is not true. This scripture is talking about here on this

earth. Sin creates pain and suffering of all kinds. When we try to live outside of the ways God created us to live, when we choose to do things without care for God's instructions, we find misery. Now, the ultimate wages of sin is death. (Rom. 6:23) This is what we're told right off the bat in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17) and that will not change. God is not going to stop man from dying. What God provides is a new life, but only for those who desire a life which is incorruptible. Here on this planet, God created us without corruption but capable of being corrupted. Nothing could be more obvious than that. What God is offering is a place where, not only will we be uncorrupted, but where corruption will not be possible.

However, most people want to do whatever they want, and then they want God to take away all the negative consequences. This is what many people think the difference is between heaven and hell. They believe heaven is a place where they can continue living the way they want without the consequences; but God in His Holiness wants to make it clear to us, it's not going to happen! God will not tolerate sin. Again, this is why the wages of sin are ultimately death, but here on this earth we are experiencing - for lack of a better term - a middle ground. God allows man to live a life-span here on this planet, but He doesn't leave sin completely unpunished. The wrath of God against sin, while we are in the here and now, is to allow the destructive forces of sin to be their own reward. This is why the verses in Revelation tell us the torment happens in the

presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. God's anger is represented by a cup called "indignation." Instead of allowing His Holiness to consume us, He simply stands back from where we are now: which means He doesn't continually intervene to change the consequences of sinful man's determinations.

The reference to the smoke of torment ascending up for ever and ever, has to do with making it clear that man will never make it work. God wants it to be clear that man's ideas are not just in some infantile state, and when he gets it trained or fine-tuned, it will start to bring good things. Man's sinful ways will never work. It doesn't matter how long he tries it or how long he is allowed to tune it, it will never bring anything but death and destruction. In fact, what history shows us is, the more man thinks he is making progress the worse things get! Literally, today men's hearts are failing them, not because they lack medical technology or because they work hard physical jobs, but simply because of the cares of this world. (Luke 21:25-27) We often refer to this as simply stress, and it's amazing how doctors and professionals from all fields are not saying we need to drastically change our system. In fact, more and more they tell us there is not too much we can do about stress. Instead, we are told, we must learn to "manage" it. God makes it clear in His Word, that's nothing more than a pipe dream. The fact man's ways creates torment will never change!

Some people get this point and some

people do not, but what creates a reprobate is the fact many do not care. Again, people get so much pleasure out of doing corrupt things in spite of the suffering it brings that they will never turn from them in order to have faith. Now, on Judgment Day, God will send many away because, whether they intended to or not, they never did turn to faith; but just as we do not have to wait until Judgment Day to feel conviction for our sin, God does not have to wait until Judgment Day to convict us of our sin! This is the fact which is being explained in Romans chapter 1! We are told in verse 28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;..." The next verses list the kind of behaviors people like this can be filled with, and it all leads down to verse 32 which tells us, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

These are people who feel the conviction of God in their lives. They know the things they are doing are wrong. They even know sin brings death, but they not only choose to do sinful things, they still, in spite of these facts, find pleasure in doing them. Now, when you talk about the one unforgivable sin, you are talking about a choice people can make to send the Holy Ghost and His convicting power out of their lives. A person would only do such a thing because they do not care to

ever have a relationship with God, and they do not want God speaking to them anymore. However, the kind of people being talked about in Romans 1 are people who do not send God out of their lives. They simply become so enthralled with the pleasures of sin that they can ignore all the consequences!

These are cold, hard people who do not feel the need to send God away because the fact He is there simply does not bother them. They can ignore God and still go on with what they want. When a person gets to this state, God no longer tries to speak to them because there is simply no point. If a person enjoys the pleasures of sin so much that God's conviction does not mean anything to them, then there is no point in God attempting to have a relationship with them. A mind which has went that far is never going to be of any use to God's purpose. A mind such as that could never live in an incorruptible world where the things they find so worthwhile are not even possible anymore. Thus, they are a reprobate mind, and by virtue of this condition even their spirit is lost!

So, is there forgiveness for such a mind? No! That is essentially what the word reprobate means. There is no reason to forgive. Forgiveness is for those who care about what God thinks and what God created us to be. Forgiveness is about forgiving us for falling short of God's glory. If we do not care about being perfect as God is perfect, then what is there

to forgive? Now, should we worry about falling into this condition? The answer is, not really, because the truth of the matter is, if we care enough to worry, then we know we have not been turned over to a reprobate mind. A reprobate mind is a mind which does not care! However, we should definitely remain aware of the facts. We should realize, faith in God is not something to be taken lightly. It should be cherished, and we should be compelled to stop putting off our relationship with God, because today is the day of salvation. (II Cor. 6:2)

God tells us about this issue, not because there is hope for the one who has been given over to a reprobate mind, but because it can help those who are started down that path. This issue shows us we cannot afford to continue in sin with the thought that God will always forgive us. We should all work out our salvation in fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12-16, Ps. 85:8-9)

Now, that being said, it should also be clear to us, God is not going to give up on an individual if there is even a shred of possibility. As I said earlier, it's not God's will that any of us perish, (II Pet. 3:9) and a reprobate mind is not something God gives us. God looks into the life of a person and sees that, that person is never going to turn no matter how much He speaks to them, and God determines He will not stand in the way of them doing what they want. After all, it's all they will ever have, and just as Paul became convinced, nothing can separate us from the

love of God. God still loves that person; but if that person does not return faith, and there is no chance they ever will, then attempting to have a relationship only deepens pain and causes more misery for which there is no point.

In closing, we should simply understand that God giving a person over to a reprobate mind is not unlike the concept of hell in general. Hell is a place where all those who did not choose to have faith in God can go and have exactly what they chose in life, a place where faith is not necessary. The truth many people just don't understand is, God's Spirit will not always strive with man. For everyone of us there comes a point at which a second chance is no longer possible. Whether that point comes while we are still living in this flesh, because we have developed a reprobate mind, or whether it comes because death finds us before we choose faith, it all boils down to the same thing, and all will end up in the same place. In that place, faith will not longer be available. God's presence will never bother you again! Now, some believe this will be a good thing, but they are very wrong. Because even a person given over to a reprobate mind cannot imagine what it will be like to be completely separated from the presence of their Creator. So always remember, God must judge us; but in truth, it's up to us. We all have a choice. From birth we all feel God, and we all know God exists. The simple question is, do we care?

***Questions submitted to the Institute,
answered by Philip Busby.***

FBS continued from pg. 4

gested there may have been multiple doors, but I don't think so. The following words of this verse point out the ark should consist of three stories. This is so Noah would understand that his door design needed to take this into account. He could not make a door which would interrupt the structural integrity of the three stories. This one door would need to be put in a particular spot, and the flow of traffic into and through the ark would then need to be designed around that fact. On top of this, is the fact, even one opening in the side of a watertight box would be problematic. This is why in chapter 7 verse 16 we are told, "...and the Lord shut him in." Noah may or may not have been able to close the door of the ark; but in either case, it took the hand of God to truly shut the ark!

Almost no fine details for the design of the ark are given here. Instead, what we see is a very simple overview of the most basic elements. Noah was to build a box out of high quality materials, splitting it into sections or rooms, and the whole thing, inside and out, was to be made watertight. Then he was told the dimensions of this structure. After that, he was told of some vital elements he needed to add to this box. He was told to build a ventilation system on the top, put a door in the side, and split the height of the interior space into three stories. So, how did Noah build this ark? Did it just happen to be that the one man who found grace in the eyes of the Lord was a very skilled builder, who understood all phases of engineering design and physical construction

work? I believe the answer is no, and that is part of the point. Noah was likely overwhelmed by the very thought of building such a structure, but Noah had faith! Not the definition we so often think of, where he just believed it would somehow all come together, but the true Biblical definition of faith. Noah had a relationship with God, and Noah knew that he would have to have God right by his side, instructing him every step of the way! The ark was a task only a man with true faith could have accomplished. This is true of so many things God asks us to do in order to take His Word to a lost and dying world. The fact this ark would have been impossible for Noah to build and yet it happened anyway, is the proof that Noah was being directed by more than just his own thoughts!

Over the years, man has learned to do quite a bit, but there are still some very simple things man just can't figure out. However, with God, all things are possible, at any moment in time. (Mark 10:27) This is not just because God is capable of speaking words and making things happen, but because we can walk with Him, know Him, even have a personal relationship with Him which guides us through the toughest tasks, even of our physical lives. Just like a loving father teaching his son to swing a hammer, God was there to instruct Noah every step of the way! The promise of God to those who love Him is not that this world will always be filled with blessings and pleasure, but that He will never leave us nor forsake us! (Heb. 13:5)

Until next time, Shalom!