

The
Gospel Gleaner



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

West Fayetteville Church of Christ

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ is pleased to bring you the *Gospel Gleaner*. Are you familiar with the churches of Christ? Have you ever attended our services before?

At West Fayetteville we desire to return to the New Testament and to be the church of the Bible. In the Bible, we find that the church is the assembly of all those who have been called out of the darkness of sin by obeying the gospel. These souls added by God to the spiritual body of Christ, which is His church (Acts 2:42, 47; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church belongs to Christ. It is His church. We, therefore, seek to honor Christ as our Lord in our worship, teaching, and daily walk.

One can be added to this sacred assembly and spiritual kingdom by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:17); believing the facts concerning Christ as revealed in the gospel (John 8:24); repenting of sin (Luke 13:3, 5); and by being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-13; Galatians 3:26-27) to wash sins away by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7).

For more information about the church, or God's plan of salvation, a free Bible Correspondence Course, or to set up a personal Bible study, call or write to us.

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Andy Erwin, Minister

Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. The West Fayetteville Church of Christ reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

West Fayetteville and the *Gospel Gleaner*

Andy Erwin

The *Gospel Gleaner* has now officially become a work of the West Fayetteville church of Christ in Fayetteville, Tennessee. I count it a tremendous honor to be the evangelist for this congregation. I believe this to be one of the finest congregations in the Lord's church anywhere.

For years this good and capable congregation has manifested its interest in evangelism through the work of the International Gospel Hour, jail ministries, correspondence courses, and sound gospel preaching. West Fayetteville is overseen by five godly elders who share our love for the Lord, His word, and His church. The elders are Steve Jefferson, Van Massey, Marty Pepper, Gerald Todd, and Don Wallace.

Our readers' response to our hour of financial need has also been very touching to me, personally. Notes, letters, calls, and donations have come from many of you and you have proven that this is *your* paper and have determined that it isn't going anywhere, Lord willing, any time soon.

The paper will undergo one significant change. We will not be publishing on a monthly basis any longer. Instead, we will publish every two months. The reason is really to ac-

commodate me in my work as the evangelist for West Fayetteville and to dedicate my time to a multifaceted ministry and to my wonderful family. We will be publishing 32 pages each issue with a variety of articles and writers from across the country.

While the printing schedule is changing, the mission of the *Gospel Gleaner* remains steadfast! Our hope is to stand where Christ stands. We wish to help our readers grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Peter 3:18).

We will also continue to defend the gospel against false doctrine and inform you about such. Our goal is to make heaven our home and to help as many souls as we can go to heaven with us. Thus, we wish to help the Lord's church discern good from evil.

We also hope to provide a paper that you can share with your friends who are not members of the Lord's church. We will continue to answer religious errors and proclaim biblical truth while maintaining a Christ-like spirit. We will continue this work for *the Lord, His Word, and His Church*.

We thank you for your love, prayers, and support. And now, enjoy *your* paper!

FENCE STRADDLERS

Hugh Fulford

The story is told of a civil war soldier who did not want to take sides but remain neutral and be accepted by both sides. He put on a pair of Confederate britches and donned a Union jacket. He was shot in the seat by a Yankee soldier and in the chest by a Rebel soldier and died of the injuries he incurred as a result of trying to be on both sides!

This reminds me of many professed soldiers in the Lord's army today. One can never tell for sure which side they are on, though they will always piously profess that they are on the side of the Lord and scripture. They have a "talent" for speaking and writing in such a way as to try to never cause any objection from either side. They can speak and write in such a way that they never say that undenominational Christianity is not possible in the world today, but neither do they speak and write in such a forthright manner as to say that it is possible.

They can speak and write in such a way as to say that the church is not a denomination, and then turn around and use the most denominational terminology imaginable to refer to the

church, leaving the impression that the church is just another denomination originating with men.

They can speak and write in such a way as to leave the impression that instrumental music in the worship of the church is not authorized, but then they can speak and write in such a way as to leave the impression that not having instrumental music in worship is only "our tradition" and that whether or not we have it is really not a "big deal."

They can speak and write in such a way as to make people think they do not approve of women taking leading roles in the public worship and work of the church, and then they can speak and write in such a fashion as to leave open the possibility of women assuming leading roles in the work and worship of the church.

One professor in the Bible Department of one of our Christian universities has acknowledged to me (in writing) that he believes instrumental music in the worship of the church is scriptural, and also that women may do anything in the worship assembly that men may do – including preaching! At the same time he said, "I do

not articulate my views when the leadership of a particular congregation thinks otherwise." How is that for trying to wear "Confederate trousers and a Union coat" at the same time?! As a matter of fact, how is that for basic Christian integrity?

The retired Chairman of the Religion Division of one of our supposed Christian universities told me that he once wrote an article for the *Gospel Advocate* and received criticism from his liberal friends. Years earlier he had taken a leading role in the launch of a progressive/liberal journal, *Mission*, which has long since "bit the dust." Later, in an apparent attempt to appease his conservative friends, he wrote an article for the *Gospel Advocate*, and drew criticism from his liberal friends! *Some* folks are too liberal for the conservatives and too conservative for the liberals. They want so badly to straddle the fence and try to please both sides!

In the long, long ago, an old prophet said to the people of God, "How long go ye limping between the two sides? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered not a word" (1 Kings 18:21, ASV). How sad! The effort to straddle the fence and offend no one, but to have everybody's approval, was in vogue 3,000 years ago!

Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matthew 12:30).

Don't be a fence straddler. It's a fatal position to occupy spiritually. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15, KJV).

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"CHOICES"

Raymond Elliott

The late country singer, George Jones, recorded the song, "Choices," which sounds like a confession regarding the bad ones he made in his life and that he was "living and dying" with those choices.

The Lord God made man to be a free moral agent, that is, he possesses the ability to make choices in life, either good or bad. That has been true since the time Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden.

Choices Given to Israel

Before his death, Moses, the great leader of the children of Israel, informed the people the following: "And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Ger-

izim and the curse on Mount Ebal" (Deuteronomy 11:29).

God did lead them to the mountains: Mount Gerizim was the mountain of 'blessing.' Mount Ebal was the mountain of 'cursing.'

Moses commanded six leaders from six tribes to stand on Mount Gerizim to pronounce the 'blessings' that would come upon the people 'if' they obeyed the commandments of God. He also commanded six leaders from six tribes to stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce the 'curses' that would come upon the people if they disobeyed the commandments of God (Deuteronomy 27:11 ff.).

In Deuteronomy 30:15, 19, Moses said, "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil." And, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

The Lord God allowed the Israelites to choose between "life" and "death."

A Choice Is Given to Us

Jesus Christ also gave the people of His day a choice that is applicable for all of mankind as long as time shall stand. "Enter by the narrow

gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13, 14, ESV).

How sad indeed that "many" will choose the easy way that leads to destruction and that only a "few" will choose the way that is hard that leads to life!

On the judgment day, when Jesus Christ will sit on the throne of His glory, your eternal destiny will not be your choice, it will be His! You will either hear, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" or, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:34, 41). The decision you make presently will determine the direction you will follow in this life, and eventually, your eternal destiny.

Please remember, you are "living and dying" with the choices you make in this life. Our prayer is that you will choose 'life' in Jesus Christ. If you do, you will "die in the Lord" and will be blessed in the eternal care of our Heavenly Father (Revelation 14:13).

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The Principle of the Matter

Tom McLemore

Are we going to follow the New Testament or not? We cannot evade this question by saying that following the New Testament on one matter is not as important as following it on other matters. If we claim to follow the New Testament, and in one matter we should say, "It is not important to follow the New Testament *on this matter*," then *we have ceased to follow the New Testament*. We have begun to follow *ourselves* instead.

All or Nothing

James states the principle in James 2:10, 11. "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."

If we follow the whole New Testament but fail to follow it in one point, we become accountable for not following the New Testament. The same New Testament that teaches, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34), also says, "...singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts..." (Ephesians 5:19). Now if

we love one another as Christ has loved us, but do not follow the direction to sing and melody to the Lord *in our hearts*, we have ceased in principle to follow the New Testament.

This principle is undergirded and reinforced by the stern warnings in Scripture against adding to or taking away from the word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:17, 18). And that applies down the line to "one letter," and "one stroke of a letter" (Matthew 5:18). Such is simply *the principle of the matter*.

An Impossibility

Just as no man can serve two masters (Luke 16:13), one simply cannot follow the New Testament and not follow it *at the same time*. And if we decide that we need not follow the New Testament on as little as one single matter (such as the kind of music God commands), in principle we have decided that we need not follow the New Testament *at all*. Such is simply *the principle of the matter*.

Once one has decided that one need not follow the New Testament, one has also in principle presumed to speak evil against the New Testament and to judge the New Testament.

A Doer or A Judge?

The principle is stated in James 4:11. "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge." One who presumes to judge one point of the New Testament to be dispensable has in principle presumed to judge the New Testament *as a whole* to be dispensable. Such is simply *the principle of the matter*.

It ought to be obvious that when someone pronounces a New Testament doctrine or practice as "no big deal," one has taken off the hat of "doer of the word" and put on the hat of "judge." Surely no one who presumes thus to judge the New Testament of Jesus can believe that Jesus is one's Lord and Master. Surely no one who assumes the position of judge over the word of Christ can believe one has Christ's blessing and approval.

If in principle people have the audacity to decide that they need not follow the New Testament at all and thus presume to speak evil against the New Testament and to judge the New Testament, they cannot legitimately claim to be servants and disciples of Christ. Such people have become the servants and disciples of their own

selves. And should such individuals persist in claiming to be worshipers of the Lord Jesus, of them Jesus would most certainly say, "You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines'" (Matthew 15:7-9).

Do not be deceived. Christ is not mocked. One either follows the New Testament or one does not. Such is simply *the principle of the matter*.

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The Prerogative of the Elders

Ron Thomas

Do you have elders that you support? Hopefully you do. In your support of them, do you ever disagree or complain about some policy of theirs that is in place? Perhaps you have not. On the other hand, perhaps you have. If you have, then you are one of many who have done the same. This usual "course of action" can be very bad for the local congregation.

The men who serve as elders of the local congregation are in position to serve the Lord, overseeing the work.

The teachings of the Holy Spirit call upon them to do so (Acts 20:28).

Unfortunately, there are some men who serve as elders who have only a surface relationship with God. It shows. Such men do not have the Lord's best interest in view. They have their own interest in view, or that of another human being, perhaps in agreement with their own. It is a precursor to church dismay and disarray.

When the Holy Spirit does the leading (teaching), the men who serve as elders are men who *should* serve as elders. These are men who are committed to the Lord's way in all things pertaining to righteousness and are committed to the individual saint's spiritual well-being. Don't you want men like that to serve and lead? I know I do.

These Holy Spirit-guided men will apply 1 John 4:1, 1 Peter 4:11, Acts 17:11 and Romans 15:18 in all aspects. Men guided by the teachings of the Holy Spirit are men who allow only the oracles of God to be taught, nothing of the opinion sort.

They test all that is taught in relation to God's revealed will, bringing glory to God in the process. Men who do this are guided by the Holy Spirit's teaching, not the nebulous, subjective way of thinking to which many subscribe today.

OPINIONS AND TRADITIONS

What about matters of opinion? In Mark 7, the religious leaders asked Jesus why His disciples did not walk in accordance with the tradition of the elders (7:5). This suggests an important question: are matters of opinion and the traditions of the elders similar? They are in respect that they originated in the mind of man.

In the context of Mark 7, the opinions of men who lived long before the time of those who inquired of Jesus became more than just a tradition, it became an authoritative rule to be obeyed. Even worse, the traditions of man set aside the Word of God (7:8).

In the local congregation, opinions and traditions also play a role. Men who serve as elders often put in place or sustain an already-put-in-place policy (opinion/tradition) for the local church.

If the policy does not conflict with the express will of God (as in Mark 7), it is the prerogative of the elders. Presumably, they believe this is the best approach to the local setting of the saints, and they have given respectful attention and consideration to the thoughts and observations of the congregation. Godly elders are open to hearing from the saints their observations and ideas making congregational settings better.

In my estimation, it is to the advantage of the elders to let the con-

gregation know, on an occasional basis, the rationale for their tradition or opinion in doing such things. Some opinions/traditions are obvious, such as meeting times (what hour on Sunday, a Wednesday meeting or any meeting at all). There are other opinions or traditions that generate more of a response, such as what one wears in leading/assisting in the public service of the assembly of the saints, or who is even allowed to participate (it is not a right, but a privilege/honor). Such things as who is the treasurer and how often a report is printed for the congregation are important matters, but not so important to initiate a riff among brethren.

Transparency in such matters is tremendously important. The idea of secrecy in the eldership encourages others to murmur and establish their own form of secrecy.

I DISAGREE

What if someone has a strong disagreement with the opinions and/or traditions of the elders, under whom they serve? There are some who attend the assembly of the saints, aware of the local customs, but become frustrated because there is no understanding of the rationale for what is done. Sometimes there are accusations leveled against the leaders (or a leader) as being domineering or dictatorial when nothing of the sort may be the

case. This lack of understanding instills an out-of-place interpretation.

How should one approach this difficulty? Given that these men follow God's word in all areas of godly living and leadership, our approach toward them (elders) with whom we disagree is for us to submit to their authority (1 Peter 5:5-7). One does not have an option in this matter, that is, if one wants to be pleasing to the Lord.

Someone might chafe under their leadership. If so, it is proper to seek an audience with the elders and share and pray together. Avoid being adversarial.

It may be that prayerful sessions have not worked. Is this because of their failings, or your insistence that such a thing change or be done in a certain way?

In either case, my suggestion is for each person involved to submit to the *Lord*, casting all concerns/anxieties on Him. Allow Him to be our strength and see what we (personal application) can do to be a positive contributor to the work of the congregation. It is the prerogative of *God* that we submit and support those who are leading us. Won't you?

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A Good Minister

Stephen R. Bradd

The apostle Paul wrote the following to the young evangelist Timothy:

“If you instruct the brethren in these things, if you visit the sick and the shut-ins, if you comfort the dying and their families, if you are involved in all the activities and programs of the church, if you efficiently run the church office, then you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed” (1 Timothy 4:6).

Hopefully you realize that 1 Timothy 4:6 doesn't actually read that way! Nowhere does the Bible define the role of a preacher or evangelist in this manner.

Sadly, many religious folks seem to believe that this is the way it is, or at least the way it should have been written. Rather than letting God's word define the role of preachers, many have allowed denominational thinking and practices to do such for them. Many believe that a good minister is one who spends most of his time visiting, comforting, counseling, and essentially “running the church.” This is what most denominational preachers do. Some in the churches

of Christ have come to expect the same thing from their ministers.

Every Christian's Responsibility

Careful students of the Bible will learn that it is every Christian's responsibility to visit the shut-ins, comfort the dying, serve the needy, be active in the programs of the church, etc. (cf. Matthew 25:34-40). These things are not the exclusive work of preachers, although such has become their designated work in many cases.

A good minister, according to the Bible, is one who will preach God's word! He is always ready to “convince, rebuke, and exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

A good minister should devote a good portion of his time to studying and teaching God's word. Too many sermons today are filled with shallow thoughts and very little biblical substance.

In many cases, the simple reason for these empty sermons is that the minister doesn't focus his energies on lesson preparation. He is too busy playing the part of a pastor or shep-

herd--and the "people love to have it so" in many places (Jeremiah 5:31).

Who Is at Fault?

Who is at fault for this notion in the Lord's church that a good minister is one who primarily scurries about taking care of everyone and everything? **First**, preachers are to blame. Some preachers are afraid to speak out on this subject (among others) because they might upset people, and, consequently, they might lose their "job"!

Other preachers see nothing wrong with behaving as a pastor. They desire to be the leader of the congregation. Studying and teaching are not high priorities to them. They'd rather "wait on tables" than give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:1-4). "Waiting on tables" is certainly a commendable work, but it should not be the primary work of a preacher.

Second, fault lies with elders who are not willing to assume their responsibility as the true shepherds of a congregation, but would rather push their responsibilities off on the preacher.

Third, fault lies with members of the Lord's church who do not want to accept the responsibility or commit the time that Christian living demands. Some seem to think that they pay a preacher to do their visiting,

secretarial work, benevolent work, organization of activities, etc. And, if they pay him well, then their personal responsibility is mitigated. Such is far from the truth.

The Solution

What is the solution to this problem in the Lord's church? Obviously, brethren must be taught what the Bible says about the duties of a good minister.

The solution will take men of courage in the pulpits who are not afraid of losing their support and who desire to give themselves to studying and teaching.

It will take elders who are willing to reassume their role as shepherds, and members who are willing to lay aside carnal thinking for biblical instruction and get busy working in the kingdom.

Friends, do you and the congregation where you worship have a good minister or a pseudo pastor?

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Does Baptism Save?

Mel Futrell

The New Testament, God's final revelation to man (Jude 3), speaks of several things by which we are saved and justified. Below are a few that are explicitly mentioned in Scripture:

- We Are Saved By Faith (Romans 5:1)
- We Are Saved By Jesus' Blood (Romans 5:9)
- We Are Saved By Hope (Romans 8:24)
- We Are Saved By Grace (Ephesians 2:8)
- We Are Saved By Baptism (1 Peter 3:21)

Again, there are others, but this handful is sufficient to make our point. Personally, I don't know of any professing Christian who would object to the first four. They would have no problem acknowledging that we are saved by such. However, number five has and continues to meet strong resistance.

Many religionists just can't fathom and don't accept the truth that baptism saves. They have apparently made up their minds, and no amount of Bible proof is going to change it—period. As evidence of this mindset please consider the two quotations below:

"Please understand. Symbols are important. Some of them, like communion and baptism, illustrate the cross of Christ. They symbolize salvation, demonstrate salvation, even articulate salvation. But they do not impart salvation."¹

"Baptism, an ordinance ordained by Christ, does not save sinners. But it symbolizes a believer and what saves. Baptism cannot work a regeneration, but it pictures the change already wrought, testifying symbolically that the believing subject is in a saved state."²

Now the first quote is from Max Lucado, an apostate preacher. The second is a statement from the Southern Baptist Convention — and you see there is not a dime's worth of difference between them! The truth of the matter is both statements deny the essentiality of baptism for salvation.

One should have no difficulty in seeing the error in the above quotations. But just in case there is a need for further clarification, allow me to place Max Lucado's argument in traditional, logical form:

- Symbols do not impart salvation.
- Baptism is a symbol.
- Therefore, baptism does not impart salvation.

It is beyond dispute that this represents a clear denial of the necessity of baptism in order to obtain salvation from past sins. And the fault lies in the minor premise with the belief that baptism is a symbol. So where does that leave us? Let's go to the passage that is at the heart of the matter.

Our Baptist friends and other religious denominationalists have for many generations appealed to 1 Peter 3:20-21 as a proof-text of their "bap-

tism is a symbol" heresy. Nevertheless, a casual glance at this inspired text quickly reveals what the apostle Peter did not say and what he did say. And the difference between the two is of the utmost importance. In fact, it is a salvation issue.

Peter Did Not Say

- Baptism is a figure of our salvation.
- Baptism is a picture of our salvation.
- Baptism is a symbol of our salvation.
- Baptism figuratively saves us.
- Baptism symbolically washes away our sins.

What exactly did the apostle Peter say in 1 Peter 3:20-21?

Peter Did Say

- Eight souls were saved by/through water.
- Salvation by baptism is the "antitype"³ of Noah's salvation by water.
- Baptism does also now save us.

Now the question is: "Whom will we believe?" Will we believe "preachers" who are biased for one reason or another against baptism or the straightforward words of the apostle Peter?

How one answers this is of critical importance and bears on the salvation or damnation of the souls of men. Let me remind you that the Lord Jesus Himself told Peter and others, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

Baptism does save! And it saves because it is in baptism that one

comes into contact with the death of Jesus and His blood which washes away our sins (Revelation 1:5).

Jesus shed His blood in His death (Matthew 26:28; John 19:34). We are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3). Therefore, it is in baptism that we come into contact with the blood of Jesus.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow—There is power in the blood!

ENDNOTES

1 Lucado, Max, In The Grip of Grace, Word Publishing, 1996, p.50

2 "Salvation Symbolized," Southern Baptist Convention tract.

3 For an explanation of the term "antitype," consider this quote from Thomas Warren from the Warren-Ballard Debate in 1952. "Mr. Ballard said (about baptism), 'Why it's a figure of a figure.' No it isn't. There is a difference between a figure and a like figure. This says like figure...This is not *tupos* in the original, it's *antitupos*...So here is the sinner transplanted by means of baptism as a condition laid down by God for him to obey, and brought over here to be a child of God saved from his sins." Warren-Ballard Debate, 1979 third printing, p. 195f.

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An Exciting Opportunity: *Your Church Can Grow!*

Robert L. Waggoner

Like plants and animals, churches grow naturally whenever they are properly cultivated and nourished. When churches do not grow, weeds of temporal worldliness may be choking them. Their spiritual diet and exercises may also be inadequate. Ideally, people in healthy churches are eternally minded and enriched with extensive biblical knowledge. Increasing spiritual enrichment in congregations begins with acquisition of greater Bible knowledge and continues with exercises in doing good works.

For many, a question arises regarding how to acquire greater Bible knowledge. Of course, everyone can read their Bibles. Churches have classes for children and adults, etc. Even so, quality is often lacking. How can a better quality of Bible knowledge be obtained, such as would be acquired in a university setting?

You can administer your own school by utilizing an excellent curriculum that is very inexpensive. For details, go online to **ThoughtTheScriptures.com**. Over fifty courses are now available and more are being added. Each course can be completed within fifty days or less. A student can choose to take only one course, or as many as four, depending upon how

much study time a student has available. These courses are suitable for adults and for high school students. Textbooks are currently available for studying nearly every book in the Old and New Testaments. These courses are taught by some of the finest Christian teachers available.

Your school can function on a locally arranged schedule that is suitable to nearly everyone. Schools do not require large numbers. A school can begin with two or more students. Your school is not regulated by civil governments, but by your own local congregation. You can name it whatever you choose. Individuals can choose to take these courses without being in a school, but churches would do well to encourage their members to take courses together to encourage each other in their studies.

You may not have heard about this Bible study program before because it is comparatively new. It went online in September of 2015. It was developed for teaching the Scriptures worldwide to individuals who had no other access to quality biblical studies.

History has demonstrated that wherever faithful Christian schools exist, churches grow. That's what happened at Ephesus when Paul

taught in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). That's what has happened in America and now mission countries as well. Natural healthy growth of plants, animals, and organizations is generally slow. We generally do not see things grow, but after a period of time we can look back and recognize that growth has happened. Church growth can happen where you are. Why not start an online Bible school in your home congregation?

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No Church Is As Good As God's Church!

John T. Polk, II

One of the many dangers for the churches of Christ is the overwhelming passion to be like all the other churches, and/or accept them for ourselves. When God sent the Israelites into the Land of Canaan, it was with very specific instructions (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

It took years of conquest, settling, and then dissatisfaction for the earthly "king" concept to develop. After the United Kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, the people divided. Under Jeroboam, everything went downhill because he changed their

religion from what God had ordered (see 1 Kings 12:25-33).

The Church of Jeroboam

Jeroboam made changes in the religion God had specified. He changed the:

1) **God** (Exodus 20:1-5) into two calves of gold preaching the error at Sinai when "they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" (Exodus 32:4);

2) **Tabernacle Assembly** (church) into alternative shrines: Dan (name means "judge") & Bethel (name means "house of God") wrong places (however, God's House was Judged by this action);

3) **Specified Levitical Priests** to unspecified "from every class of people, who were not of the sons Levi";

4) **Communion** feast "like the feast that was in Judah," but it was not "the Feast of Tabernacles" specified by God to be on "the fifteenth day of the seventh month" (Leviticus 23:33-43);

5) Offered sacrifices on "the altar which he had made," thus changing the **acts of worship** God specified;

6) **Incense** before the Most Holy Place was to burn continually before God (Exodus 30:7-9, 34-37; 40:26-27), thus the people were no longer in constant **communication** with God.

Jeroboam: (1) offered them choices that God had not given; (2) ignored

God's specific ordinances; (3) appealed to men's weakness: do what you want first; (4) never changed the people's attitude once ruined (2 Kings 17:19-23; 2 Chronicles 10:19); (5) is held responsible for those who sinned by following his doctrine.

Fifteen times God identified those who walked in "the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 14:16; 15:30; 16:31; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29,31; 13:2,6; 13:11; 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28; 17:22); and "in the way of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 16:2,19).

The Church of Jeroboam or the Church of Christ

Today, there are those who advocate that we can make these same changes to the church of Christ and still be acceptable to God! People have changed the:

1) **God.** Icons, stained glass windows and statues are the objects of devotion more than "to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17);

2) **Tabernacle Assembly.** In Jerusalem, James and the elders in the church of Christ told Paul "The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come" (Acts 21:22). The church of Christ in Corinth was "the temple of the living

God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16);

3) **Specified Priests.** Christians may "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22), which was first preached on Pentecost in Acts 2:38. Christians, "as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5);

4) **Communion Feast.** "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

It was "on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7);

thus showing the regularity of this remembrance.

5) **Offered Sacrifices.** "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

It is by Christ that we should "continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

These sacrifices in His name include: singing and praying (Ephesians 5:19-20), giving (1 Corinthians 16:2), preaching the word (2 Timothy 4:1-2). None but priests/Christians can offer acceptable sacrifices.

6) **Incense.** Christians are "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

These prayers are offered "without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), are offered before God in Heaven as "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8). None but Christians can offer acceptable prayers.

How can any in the churches of Christ think they can accept what oth-

ers have changed and be more acceptable than Jeroboam? Christians cannot be united to those who are not yet Christians, nor should those who have not fully accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ be considered priests of God!

Re-read the principle about priestly sacrifices which God had given to Moses:

"And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you" (Exodus 12:48-49).

Paul wrote to the New Testament church of Christ: "what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

There are those who are "outside" because they have not accepted the rules to come "inside." While they are "outside," God will deal with them (2 Thessalonians 1:3-10).

Those of us who are "inside" must not, and cannot, apply our rules to justify those who are "outside." In

other words, the Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:38, 47), and only "Jeroboams" will make exception to His rules and minimize His distinction.

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Those Traditions

Owen D. Olbricht

What about religious traditions? Are they all bad? That depends on the source of the tradition and in what areas it is practiced.

The Greek word *paradosis* "tradition" simply means a practice that has been handed down. We must ask: who handed it down and in what area is it practiced?

Four Areas of Traditions

- Human traditions of little consequences in non-religious areas.
- Human traditions in religious areas that do not violate God's tradition and may have developed in keeping God's tradition.
- Human traditions that violate God's tradition.
- God's revealed tradition that God has handed down through inspired men.

Areas of Little Consequence

In all walks of life we have traditions of little consequence whether they are traditions of family, community, school, nation, or society. These include food, clothing, reunions, holidays, etiquette, and a number of other things which do not violate biblical teaching.

Religious Areas That Do Not Violate God's Laws

Congregations develop their own traditions, which may have been practiced by churches over a long period of time. This can include standing for prayer, communion before or after the sermon, meeting times, singing invitation songs, welcome circle after baptism, and many other things.

In one congregation a person who requested baptism on Saturday evening was told he had to wait until the congregation met so he could walk down the aisle. He wanted a baptism, not a wedding ceremony!

Another person demanded everyone stand while singing the song, "Stand up for Jesus," but that person did not require everyone to "lift high your royal banner."

In many places those in group prayers are expected to hold hands while standing in a circle. I have wondered how this practice differs from the washing of hands before

meals that was required by the Pharisees and scribes.

Maybe some of these traditions should be questioned, especially human traditions that add to or change what God commanded, thus violating God's tradition.

Such human traditions included sprinkling for baptism, christening babies, special religious services to honor human achievements, women pulpit preachers, and many other such traditions. Jesus called them traditions of men (Matthew 15:1-8; Mark 7:1-13) for they violate God's commandments, making them wrong for Christians to practice (see also (Galatians 1:14; Colossians. 2:8). They can also be called commandments of men (Mark 7:7; Titus 1:14).

God-Revealed Traditions

God-revealed traditions are those that are revealed in the Bible which God has handed down through inspired men for us to follow. These should not be set aside in order to practice human traditions.

Translations may have "ordinances" or "traditions" for *paradosis* (1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians. 2:15; 3:6).

Conclusion

Not all traditions are wrong. In order to determine a good or a bad

tradition, a person should determine the course of the tradition and the area in which it is practiced. Such questions should be asked:

- Who started the tradition?
- Why observe it?
- Does it violate God's teaching?

If a tradition falls in the first two categories mentioned above, it can be changed or practiced. But if it causes a brother or sister to stumble, it should not be followed (Romans. 14: 21; 1 Corinthians. 8:13; 9:9-23; 10:31-33).

If a tradition adds to, takes the place of, or takes away a commandment of God. It is sinful and should not be practiced (Mark 7:7-13; Colossians 2:8).

If a tradition is commanded by God, it is not optional, but must be practiced.

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The Last Twelve Verses of Mark

Gerald Cowan

QUESTION: *In Mark's account, chapter 16, verses 9 through 20, there is a marginal note stating that earliest and best manuscripts do not include that Scripture. If that is the case what would be the reason for such an omission in the earliest manuscripts and its inclusion in the later ones? Do these words actually belong in our Bible?*

Thank you for an important and highly relevant question. The opponents and deniers of baptism as essential for salvation, as stated in Mark 16:15-16, are happy to find any excuse for rejecting the passage.

There are other manuscript problems in the Bible but this one is highlighted by critics, often on ideological and theological grounds. Before we proceed with an answer to your specific question let us make a critical observation.

If Mark 16:15-16 is omitted from Scripture what it teaches about the way of salvation and the will of the resurrected Jesus is stated elsewhere and cannot be questioned in all appearances.

The various signs that were to attend believers are all to be found elsewhere in the New Testament, with the exception of "drink any deadly thing" (verse 18). Removing Mark's statement only removes one of many corroborating and supporting passages. It does not change the overall doc-

trine or even any specific doctrine taught in Scripture about the plan or way of salvation prescribed by the Lord or his will and promises for his disciples. Neither omission nor inclusion of these twelve verses in Mark 16 would challenge or change any New Testament doctrine.

The marginal notes in many translations of the New Testament are not completely accurate, and in this case there are two facts that cast doubt on the marginal note you cited in your question.

Ancient Manuscripts

First, the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus uncials referenced in the notes are widely acknowledged as being among the best and most accurate manuscripts available to us but **they are not actually the earliest**, dating as they do from the 4th Century. Both draw upon earlier manuscripts but are not copies of an autograph original.

Second, they are not complete. Codex Vaticanus (AD 300-325) has a

blank space where the long ending of Mark would be, but it was never filled in. It is missing several books in both Old and New Testaments. Codex Sianiticus (AD 330-360) contains all the canonical New Testament books, plus two apocryphal writings: the complete Epistle of Barnabas and parts of Shepherd of Hermas. It does not show the empty space for the ending of Mark which is in Vaticanus.

Codex Alexandrinus (dated about AD 400-440, only about 40 years after Sinaiticus) contains the section with verses 16:9-20. This might indicate an emendation or addition to the text of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus except for the fact that several earlier manuscripts, translations, quotations and citations in patristic literature (writings of so-called "church fathers") dating to late 1st and early 2nd centuries contain verses 9-20.

The omission of these verses in some copies is unexplained but certainly not conclusive evidence that these verses were never part of Mark's original, commonly dated at about 45 AD, only a dozen or so years after the events recorded in it. But the extant evidence, both external and internal, support the contention that Mark's original ending was lost from a copy that was then copied repeatedly without the ending. Other copies of the full text were also recopied and circulated.

A Strange Ending

One who reads Mark 16 would be surprised if it ended abruptly at verse 8. At that point nobody has seen the risen Christ. Three women have seen an empty tomb and heard an angel announce the resurrection but no human is yet an actual witness of it. How can the gospel which is based on the fact of the resurrection of the Lord end without a clear declaration of the evidence, including eye-witness testimony of the resurrection?

The conjecture of many scholars is that the original ending of Mark's gospel was lost, explaining its absence from many handwritten copies that circulated in many places. However, complete copies of the original were circulating in other places. The long ending of the epistle found in most translations today, whether it be Mark's original statement or something added by others, is in part a conflation of verses from Matthew 28, Luke 24, and John 20.

If the verses in Mark are not genuine at least they do not add to or delete from the other accounts, or differ in any material way from the rest of Scripture – except for the matter of drinking any deadly thing (verse 18) which we noted earlier.

Arguments some make, based upon perceived difference in vocabulary and writing style, that 16:9-20 shows

a different author are not without merit, but are not weighty enough to support the contention. In fact, the difference can be explained by numerous factors such as a lapse in time caused by personal circumstances, and mood at the time of writing.

The content of the words themselves could elicit a slightly different vocabulary and style that would not indicate a different author but simply a change in the author himself.

Conclusion

Are these words attributed to Mark words from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)? The message and meaning are without doubt in harmony with the uncontested words of God from other writers.

Ending the gospel abruptly at 16:8 would leave disciples and readers confused, perhaps frightened by silence about the resurrection of Jesus if the only information they had is this one writing.

Textual critics should include verses 9-20, but can be honest in saying there is some continuing controversy about authenticity and genuineness of the exact words. But if they are truly honest and concerned with getting the full message of God to their auditors they can also add that these words are

true to the scripture teaching and may be accepted and applied doctrinally without hesitation or fear.

Even if the words themselves are excised in translation, the doctrines they teach are uncontested and genuine. Such explanatory notes in the margin would be of inestimable value to the reader.

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A Journey into the Greek

Robert Clark

Usually, when we begin a journey, the only thought we have in mind is the destination. Sometimes the journey itself, with the stops we make along the way, can be almost as interesting as the destination. At the very least we'll typically end up seeing a few things that we weren't expecting. So it has been with my journey into the Greek of the New Testament.

For years I had an interest (actually more of an obsession) with the many different English translations of the Bible. So much so that if I heard a preacher or a speaker read more than a verse or two from the New Testament, I knew exactly which translation he was reading from.

My interest was for the most part based on ignorance. I couldn't understand why there are so many translations of the English Bible. Therefore, I spent countless hours studying passages of Scripture from multiple translations and looking up the definitions of individual Greek words that are used in the Scriptures.

At that time I had never studied a second language, and it seemed to me that translating a passage of Scripture should be just a matter of exchanging each individual Greek word with the corresponding English word, and this being the case, all English translations should read almost exactly the same. I had no idea just how wrong I was or how little I actually knew about the subject. I had thought about studying New Testament Greek for a few years, but never seriously.

Helpful Encounters

Eventually I came across some books written by Jack P. Lewis. One book called: "Questions You've Asked about Bible Translations" and another one called: "The English Bible from KJV to NIV."

These were the first books that I came across written about different Bible translations where the author didn't seem to have a bias toward one translation over another. The books are full of information that I found useful. As it turned out, about that

time Jack P. Lewis authored an article that was printed in the *Gospel Advocate* magazine where he included his email address.

I contacted brother Lewis with some questions I had, and he was kind enough to answer each one. He even sent me the text of some other papers he was working on that had to do with New Testament Greek. After reading his books and all of his papers that I could get my hands on and asking him every question I could think of, I finally came to the realization that I wouldn't be satisfied unless I learned to read the Greek New Testament for myself.

Just the thought of tackling New Testament Greek was intimidating. After all, I'm not college educated. In fact, because I wasn't interested in applying myself, I was barely able to graduate high school, at that time a quarter century in the past.

How could a guy my age ever learn Greek? I'm just like most other people in the fact that whether or not we have the ability to learn something new is mostly dependent on whether or not we have a sufficient amount of desire to learn the particular subject.

Typically, if something is very interesting to us, we can learn it. If something is not very interesting to us, it will be very difficult for us to

learn. This being the case, once I made the decision to learn New Testament Greek, the only uncertainty was the amount of time it would take.

Helpful Books to Study

I've been through several different Greek grammars but the one that was most responsible for me being able to get a basic grasp on the language was William D. Mounce's, "**Basics of Biblical Greek.**" Mounce approaches the subject from more of a common sense point of view than most writers of other Greek grammars.

For example, he has the student learn the concept of nouns first where the writers of most other Greek grammars very quickly throw the student into the Greek verbal system, which is similar in approach to trying to teach a baby to walk without letting the baby first learn to crawl.

The only real negative to Mounce's grammar is the fact that each chapter starts out with a section called "Exegetical Insight." I don't agree with all of the exegesis in these sections and I'm sure you won't either, but that doesn't change the fact that his method of teaching is sound.

If you'll study Mounce's grammar, you'll end up with a basic understanding of the Koine Greek language. The only other obstacles will be increasing your vocabulary and the fact that you'll still need to learn some of the

more in depth concepts of the language. There are no short cuts. You'll have to work constantly on the vocabulary.

To increase your understanding of the language after you finish Mounce's grammar, I suggest reading David Alan Black's, "**It's Still Greek to Me**" and after that move on to Daniel B. Wallace's, "**Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics**" which is also available in an abridged version called, "**The Basics Of New Testament Syntax.**"

For people who have an interest in New Testament Greek, but do not want to take the time to learn the language, I'll mention a couple of books that you may find interesting. The first is "**Exegetical Fallacies**" by D. A. Carson. This book is a wealth of interesting information on how the Greek of the New Testament is often misused by "Greek scholars."

The second book I'll mention is "**Advances in the Study of Greek**" by Constantine R. Campbell. This book contains a lot of insights into the ways that the study of New Testament Greek has progressed over the years. Actually these two books are very interesting whether you're studying Greek or not.

There's one other book that I want to recommend. That book is called "**God's Language and Scripture**" by

Moises Silva. I'm recommending this book to everyone who has the slightest passing interest in the original languages of the Bible, even if you do not plan to study Greek or Hebrew.

In this book, the introduction alone speaks volumes about how so many "Greek scholars" comment about the Scriptures of the Bible from a standpoint that is based on etymological studies of individual Greek words. But beware! The introduction of this book may just inspire you to study the original languages for yourself.

A Word of Encouragement

Truthfully, my learning the New Testament Greek was not an extraordinary accomplishment. It just took consistent study. I'm convinced that most anyone with a sufficient amount of desire for the subject can learn to read the Greek New Testament.

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The Councils and Creeds of Men

Andy Erwin

Church councils and creeds are a common practice among denominationalists. The obvious fault with a creed is that certain doctrines are included and certain doctrines are excluded. Who is to say which doctrines should be included and which should be excluded?

Augustine told us the church has been appointed as the custodian and interpreter of the Bible. Thus, the church determines for the people what should be included in their credal statements and what should be excluded. However, if a creed is one doctrine less than the New Testament, it is too small for Christians. If it has one doctrine too many, it is too large for Christians.

To see the consequences of Augustine's doctrine, simply observe how the Roman church were "custodians of the Bible." In medieval times, it was not only unlawful, but injurious for the people at large to read the Scriptures. The following is an address by the Cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church to Pope Pius III (1439-15903).

"Of all the advice that we can offer your holiness we must open your eyes well and use all possible force in the

matter, namely, to permit the reading of the gospel as little as possible in all countries under your jurisdiction.

“Let the very little part of the gospel suffice which is usually read in the mass, and let no one be permitted to read it more. So long as the people will be content with the small amount, your interest will prosper; but as soon as the people want to read more, your interest will fail.

“The Bible is the book, which more than any other, has raised against us the tumults and tempests by which we have almost perished. In fact, if one compares the teaching of the Bible with what takes place in our churches he will soon find discord, and will realize that our teachings are often different from the Bible, and oftener still, contrary to it.”¹

Compare the Cardinals' advice to the Pope with the commandments of the Lord:

- 1.) Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (John 5:39).
- 2.) He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God (John 8:47).

3.) He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

4.) All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:18-20).

Such an attitude as was expressed by the Cardinals is very rarely expressed in so many words. One other similar example is found in the Council of Toulouse (1229), as a canon was passed stating:

“We forbid the laity to possess any of the books of the Old or New Testament, except, perhaps, the Psalter or Breviary [book of psalms] for the Divine Offices...but having any of these books translated into the vulgar tongue, we strictly forbid.”

It was the position of Rome not to allow the Bible to be read or translated so that it could be read by the common man. Man was at the mercy of the Catholic Church for his knowledge of God, the church, and the plan of salvation.

¹ This statement is preserved in the National Library of Paris, folio number 1068, volume 2, 650-1.

For translating and printing the Bible into English (1526), William Tyndale was condemned as a heretic and sentenced to death on Friday, October 6, 1536. He was tied to a stake, strangled, and then his body was burned. His last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." His prayer was answered in the coming century, culminating with the Authorized Version of King James in 1611.

Reformers

Beginning in the Sixteenth Century, a series of reformatory movements occurred. A German monk and college professor named Martin Luther (1483-1546) became a great reformer and critic of the Catholic Church in the Sixteenth Century. He also translated the Bible into German. His main focus however was opposing the sale of indulgences and preaching a doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Other reform movements include Zwingli in Switzerland, Calvin in France, the Church of England (also called Anglican and Episcopalian), the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), Congregationalists in England and America (Puritans), Baptists, and Methodists (from John Wesley).

On the reformatory movements and their subsequent creeds, John F. Rowe, in his book, *History of Re-*

formatory Movements, has rightly observed these four points:

- "Creeds began at the very point where reformation ceased."²
- "None of these creeds, whether Catholic or Protestant, tells a man how to become a Christian. They tell a man how he may become a Catholic, a Lutheran, a Reformer, an Episcopalian, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Baptist, perchance. There is not a Confession of Faith in existence that ever saved a soul.
- "As human compositions, one is just as full of light and knowledge as another, and just as efficacious in the salvation of the soul. "They all originated in the councils of men; they were digested in the heat of human passions; they were concocted and planned by envious and rival theologians; they became the symbols – the insignia – of rival princes; they have always engendered strife, hatred, malice, bigotry, intolerance and persecution, and will continue to do so until the end of time. "There is no Christian love in them; there is nothing in them that will unite the people of God and make them one people.

² John F. Rowe, *History of Reformatory Movements*, (Indianapolis, IN: Faith and Facts Publishing Co., 1993), 44.

“The mind of God is not found in them, and the spirit of Christ does not breathe through them. They confuse the human mind; they divide the counsels of Christians; they paralyze the power of truth; they make a fable of the gospel; they mock the prayers of the Savior; they make void the law of God; they infuse the spirit of sectarianism; they cramp the human intellect; they place insuperable barriers between those seeking love and unity upon the basis of the Bible.”³

➤ “Why did not the ‘Reformers’ of the sixteenth century continue as they had begun? Who authorized them to make creeds and catechisms, and to formulate church standards?

“Why did they occupy more time in discussing Transubstantiation and Predestination – both metaphysical and untaught questions, and not comprehensible by the common people, and on which no man’s salvation depends – than they spent in preaching and teaching just what the apostles preached and taught?

“The followers of the Reformers of the sixteenth century have had three hundred and fifty years in which to follow up the apostles,

but up to this time they have not found them.”⁴

Rowe states in very plain-spoken terms the futility of replacing one credal system with another. In such cases a person is still bound by a manmade religious system – only different than the first one.

By the time of the late Eighteenth Century, denominations and their creeds had become a common practice. By the time of the Twenty-First Century, many thousands of denominations and their creeds have come to exist.

Churches and their Creeds

The Roman Catholic Church has what they call their **Catechism**.

When the Greek Orthodox Church was formed, their creed was called the **Nicene Creed**.

When Luther revolted against the doctrines of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, his followers formed their own catechisms: **Luther’s Large Catechism** and **Luther’s Small Catechism** (for children and novices). The Lutherans hold to the **Apostles’ Creed**.

John Calvin’s revolt against Catholicism resulted in the **Geneva Catechism**. Calvin’s work would be-

³ Ibid., 52

⁴ Ibid., 68-9

come the basis for the **Westminster Confession of Faith**, which is maintained by Presbyterian churches. As Presbyterians disagreed on this catechism, more churches were formed and more catechisms framed.

As a result of conflict between Lutherans and Calvinists, the **Heidelberg Catechism** was formed. In 1680, the Baptist minister Hercules Collins published his own revision of the Heidelberg Catechism. Later, the General Assembly of 1677 adopted a catechism that was largely based on the **Westminster Shorter Catechism**.

Mainstream Baptists in America use the **Baptist Church Manual**, either written by Hiscox or Pendleton.

The Anglican Church, which began as a result of King Henry VIII separating from the Church in Rome, has a catechism known as the **Book of Common Prayer**.

Resulting factions of this church, such as John Wesley's Methodist Church, have formulated their own **Book of Discipline**.

The trend of forming new churches and writing new creeds continues today, and it appears that the end of such creeds will only come when the Lord returns. Truly, "Creeds began at the very point where reformation ceased." The existence of these

creeds is what caused early restorers to preach, "No creed but the Bible."

Without Authority

No man, council, congregation, or creed has ever had the authority to usurp, supplement or substitute the authority Christ has over His church—in any way — though many have tried.

The church must be found submissive to the authority of Christ in all things (see Ephesians 1:22 and Colossians 1:18). Christ has all authority in His church, and by His authority we have our creed — the Bible.

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). The gospel He has given is profitable for doctrine and every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Not even an angel from heaven has the authority to add to it (Galatians 1:6-9). Thus, we must never think more of men than the word which is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Return to the Bible Alone

Only when we return to the Bible and the Bible alone as our sole rule for faith and practice will we speak the same thing, mind the same thing, and there will be no division among us (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Philippians 3:16-18).

The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). Only when the seed is planted in the heart and obeyed will a Christian be produced. It is our conviction, and in keeping with the principle of sowing and reaping, that the seed of the kingdom will not produce anything but citizens of the kingdom.

If a person wants to become a Christian, he must follow the words of Christ. If a person wants to become a Lutheran, for example, he must follow the words of Luther. A simple comparison of the two creeds – the New Testament and Luther's Catechism – will show that the two are not the same. Therefore, you have two different seeds producing two different products.

Thus, while it is true that reformers believed they were acting righteously in producing a creed to distinguish them from Catholicism, such actions were quite clearly superfluous, as the only document needed to distinguish one from a Catholic is the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

The result of such creeds is more division, greater confusion, and a multiplicity of churches never found in the Bible.

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Ash Wednesday: Earmark of Apostasy

Andy Erwin

The Nashville Tennessean carried an article on March 1, 2017 citing:

“Members of two churches — **Glen Leven Presbyterian Church** and **Woodmont Hills Church of Christ** — lined up Wednesday evening in front of the Rev. Mark Bryan, waiting their turns for the imposition of ashes.

“From dust you have come, from dust you shall return,” Bryan said, repeating the blessing as he drew a cross in black ash on each of their foreheads....On Wednesday evening, the ashes that blackened Bryan's fingers and the foreheads of those in attendance came from palms used during both churches' Palm Sunday services. They were burned to ash before the service, but then combined with more ashes created Wednesday night.

“Bryan asked those in the pews to write down on small slips of white paper the parts of their lives in which they desire God's intervention and forgiveness. He then invited everyone to drop them in a bowl at the front of the sanctuary, and he lit them on fire, burning them into ash....”

The **Hunter Hills church of Christ** near Montgomery also partook

in Ash Wednesday and sent out the following email:

“Didn’t grow up in a tradition that observed Ash Wednesday, the season of Lent, or the liturgical church calendar? That’s okay. Join us tonight at 6:30 PM for a special service for teens and adults as we discuss repentance and our need for God’s saving grace in our lives. This will be a night of singing, prayer, silence, teaching, Scripture, and **communion**. And if the thought of ashes concerns you, don’t worry, we won’t actually be doing that part :) Hope to see you tonight.”

A Case Study

It is sad to see brethren so far gone from the New Testament that they are observing a Roman Catholic “holy day” and manmade rituals which blend paganism and Judaism. However, such serves as a case study for the rest of us.

Once a Christian, or congregation begins compromising, adding to and taking from God’s word, picking and choosing what they will and will not do, outright apostasy is the eventual conclusion. Both of these congregations – Woodmont Hills and Hunter Hills – were born out of the controversy of compromising the New Testament for the traditions of men and have swelled their numbers by compromising the truth of the gospel throughout their existence. God will

be their Judge (2 Timothy 4:14). Compromise will be their undoing.

Sadly, their apostasy likely began with just *one* compromise which led to another. Now they are practicing a Catholic heresy.

Avoiding Compromise

If brethren will only make a hard stand for the truth the first time doctrinal error and compromise is introduced, they can remain faithful to God. The best way to avoid compromise in the Lord’s church is to be so completely enthralled with God’s saving truth and its power to save that you would never dare to compromise it. “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23).

Moreover, to love Christ with all of our hearts and to place Him in the center of every doctrine and practice is absolutely essential to remaining faithful and avoiding compromise. “But why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

Love for the Lord’s church must also fill our hearts. Why would we desire to become denominational and pagan if we truly love what the Lord established on Pentecost (Acts 2)?

Why would anyone feel the need to observe Ash Wednesday if they were truly appreciative of the worship God has ordained?

Brethren, do not err in following the false pretenses and pretended piety these groups display. If man could find grace and forgiveness by smearing ashes in the shape of a cross on his forehead, then the cross itself is in vain! Why did Jesus die and why did He give us the gospel to obey, if we could be saved through manmade doctrines and make-believe rituals?

One doesn't need to introduce heathen rituals to discuss "repentance and our need for God's saving grace." He needs the gospel! He needs more of Christ dwelling in His heart! He needs a heart broken by sin and healed by the cross.

When we hear of events like this we are reminded of the two greatest problems facing the Lord's church today – ignorance and arrogance. Such brethren err not knowing the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29). Not only do they not know the Scriptures, they do not care.

Once it has been decided that we do not need to follow the Bible on *one* subject, it has been decided that we do not need to follow the Bible on *any* subject.

Such ones "proceed from evil to evil" (Jeremiah 9:3). It will be interesting to see what their next compromise will be.

Remembering Garland Elkins

Jim McGill

Garland Elkins (1926-2016) was born near Woodbury, east of Nashville, August 19, 1926. He had four brothers and two sisters. His father and mother and all his grandparents were faithful Christians living in the community. His parents would often have preachers visiting in their home. His father and the visiting preacher would stay up late, talking about Christ and the church, and his daddy would let Garland stay up and listen to their conversations.

Garland had been offered an athletic scholarship to a college he planned to attend. But he heard N. B. Hardeman preach. He was so impressed that he enrolled in Freed-Hardman College instead, graduating in 1951. He always continued to have a high regard for Hardeman.

The Elkins Family

Garland and Corinne were married 67 years. Their three daughters, Connie, Denise, and Jan, have established a scholarship at Memphis School of Preaching in honor of their parents. For the past twenty-six years until his recent death Garland served as the preacher for the Stanton congregation northeast of Memphis and as an instructor and Dean of Public Relations at Memphis School of Preaching. In the current issue of the school periodical *Yokefellow*, Garland is featured as

he was being honored on his 90th birthday.

Garland's Preaching

In his early fulltime preaching, Elkins worked several years with the Linden, Tennessee church. There had earlier been a church of Christ there, but it had gone into digression. Interested Christians from neighboring communities joined in successfully re-establishing the Linden church.

Elkins later preached at Highland View in Oak Ridge and in Virginia at Roanoke and at Newport News.

When he came to Memphis, while working with the Getwell congregation he had the opportunity to co-edit the annual *Spiritual Sword* Lectureship books, and to be involved in planning the annual *Spiritual Sword* Lectureship and co-editing the *Spiritual Sword Quarterly*.

Garland was a good writer as well as a good preacher. Whether in personal evangelism or in public preaching, writing, and debating, he was concerned with saving souls. His was a life of personal purity and guilelessness, somewhat reminiscent in that respect of the late W. A. Bradfield.

He loved debating for the good it accomplished – but he was so good at it, and he welcomed opportunities to defend truth and oppose error.

Phil Donahue

When he appeared on the Phil Donahue national television program in 1984, he won a great victory for truth without ever raising his voice, completely leading his host in the kindest manner. Since the program was also broadcast on the Armed Forces Radio

and Television Network, Garland received messages of appreciation from Australia, Japan, and various European countries, besides many from America.

When Garland debated the leading promoter of the state lottery on a Memphis television station, his opponent conceded his admiration for Garland's ability.

With his great poise, he (along with men such as Alan Highers and Robert R. Taylor) was well suited to moderate the open forums in the great tradition established by the late Guy N. Woods at the annual Freed-Hardeman lectures.

The Crusade

On the opening night of the Billy Graham Crusade in Nashville, when Memphis School of Preaching students and others were distributing many thousands of teaching brochures, Garland was coordinating the effort. He was seated at a little table on a sidewalk leading toward the stadium. An angry woman spoke to him accusingly...

"Does Billy Graham know what you are doing?"

Garland's reply was immediate and, characteristically, as gentle as her tone was harsh...

"I don't know whether Billy Graham knows, but the Lord knows."

Garland Elkins died in Memphis on October 28, 2016. He was 90.

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The
Gospel Gleaner



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

“The Churches of Christ Greet You” (Romans 16:16)

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ is pleased to bring you the *Gospel Gleaner*. Are you familiar with the churches of Christ? Have you ever attended our services before?

Faithful churches of Christ desire to return to the New Testament and to be the church of the Bible. In the Bible, we find that the church is the assembly of all those who have been called out of the darkness of sin by obeying the gospel. These souls are added by God to the spiritual body of Christ, which is His church (Acts 2:42, 47; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church belongs to Christ. It is His church. We, therefore, seek to honor Christ as our Lord in our worship, teaching, and daily walk.

One can be added to this sacred assembly and spiritual kingdom by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:17); believing the facts concerning Christ as revealed in the gospel (John 8:24); repenting of sin (Luke 13:3, 5); and by being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-13; Galatians 3:26-27) to wash sins away by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7).

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The Gospel Gleaner

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Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. The West Fayetteville Church of Christ reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

The *Gospel Gleaner* is free to all while supply is available.

PERFORMANCE IS NOT WORSHIP

Ronald Bryant

Life is a gift from Almighty God. He, the uncreated creator, has given unto us "life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25). Physical life is characterized by uncertainty and brevity (James 4:13ff). Physical health and strength are desirable, and the pursuit of them is to be respected and wisely considered. The physical body is an amazing and complex unit. The health of body and mind are vitally connected, and that connection is to be respected. One can be strong physically, yet be weak mentally, and vice versa. The exercise of the body does not equally benefit one's intellect, nor does the exercise of the intellect benefit one's body.

The inner man includes, but is not limited to one's intellect. The inner man includes the heart, soul, and mind. The education and training of one's mind is essential to spiritual life and spiritual well-being.

God's Truth

Additionally, spiritual life is dependent upon the truth of God – that which God has revealed by inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Apart from the Scriptures man is left to imagination, no matter how learned he may become otherwise. He can observe the

wonders of life, of the universe, etc., and be held in awe, yet apart from the revealed will of God, he can bow down only to the unknown.

Spiritual life rests upon faith in God and His revealed will, and upon correct response to Him, not upon human wisdom or speculation. Every aspect of the Christian life is to be ruled by the truth of God. Every command, every requirement contained in the revealed will of God is addressed to man, and at the deepest level of his being.

Worship: A Response to God's Truth

Faith and obedience are responses to God, not simply compliance to decrees. Every action prompted by faith requires and is a manifestation of the heart and mind, i.e., the inner man. Faith is to come to rule the inner man. Purity of devotion is a state of being. Worship, both public and private, as designed by God, is bound up with the heart, soul, and mind of man. It is designed to impact man (each person) at the deepest level of his being.

Prayer arises from the desire of the heart of the believer (cf. Romans 10:1ff). Praise of God is the expression of heart-felt gratitude, humility,

joy, and reverence which arise from and indicate the state of the inner man.

While worship involves physical activity and expression, it originates and manifests the state – the devotion of the inner man. For example; worship in prayer involves the voice, the attitude of the body; literally the bowing of the knee, the prostration of the body, yet, worship is never simply physical activity.

Worship is ruled by humility (a state of mind), reverence (a powerful conviction of God's worth), gratitude (joyful giving of thanks), faith (deep soul-stirring conviction), and love (a self-forgetful sacrificial devotion). Again, these same thoughts, emotions, and desires control the singing of praise (Colossians 3:16-17; Hebrews 13:15), and the giving of one's means (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6ff).

The Lord's Supper involves several physical actions, yet of major import it requires reverential concentration – remembering, examining, introspection, and anticipation – all involving, even ruling, the heart and mind – the totality of the inner man.

Undeniably, every aspect of worship, as revealed by God, is designed to impact and benefit the worshiper at the deepest level of his being. Therefore, worship is to be entered into

with the greatest of care; to the end that faith in God, and love for Him be allowed full reign, that soul transforming conviction and resolve control. Can less than this be called worship?

Give Careful Consideration

God's revealed will demands far more than casual consideration. His will demands careful thought, even the deepest of respect, acceptance, and application. There is far more involved in the "renewing" and the "transforming" of one's soul than casual, or even habitual thought.

Faith – biblical faith in God and in Christ is life controlling and life changing. Love – biblical love for God and Christ is life controlling and life changing. There is a great difference between possessing faith and being possessed by faith (Galatians 2:20)! There is a vast difference between possessing love and being controlled by love (2 Corinthians 5:14)! There is also a vast difference between "going to church" and in entering into the worship of God!

Whether we ever learn to seek after God, or to give ourselves to Him in loving devotion, it remains that He calls each of us to faith (Hebrews 11:6), to love Him supremely (Matthew 22:37ff), and to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). He calls us to these things, out of love for

us, and for our spiritual benefit! It is therefore appropriate to insist that it is essential that we, individually and collectively, give the most careful and prayerful attention to our spiritual conduct, health, and strength. It is vital that we learn that going through

the motions is of no spiritual benefit. Excitement is not worship. If it is a performance, it is not worship!

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Truth

Andy Robison

Discouragement can overtake a soul who tries to make sense of the world events and the attitudes of the people involved. It is sickening to see violence. Racism is inexcusable. The mistreatment of women is despicable. Religious persecution is wrong. Trafficking of human beings is slavery resurrected, and incomprehensible to any mind with any sensitivity.

In addition to the events, one might be overwhelmed by the direction of the discussions. Many times they are fueled by issues of personality rather than substance. Truth often has no place in a discussion, on either side of an issue. It is all about feelings—how one side feels hurt and another side feels empowered, or vice versa. Facts and even reality are distorted and it seems no one cares.

In vain I search each way for truth,

In vain I look for reason.

*My people turn with every wind
To values of the season.*

*What once was right is wrong this
day;*

What once was wrong it right.

*My wicked people are destroyed
Our ignorance the plight.*

*The God of heaven who reigns above
Has taught us truth from error.*

*His mercy saves all those who hear,
But rebels reap His terror.*

*One day all people shall be judged;
The standard is the Lord's.*

*His righteousness has been revealed
In His own holy word.*

*Oh, help me find the truth, dear God
Through all the darkest clouds.*

*And help me as a candle shine,
One light for dismal crowds.*

Finding Truth: A Challenge for Every Age

Our disheartening is nothing new. It might be granted that it feels new to a generation that was raised in an era where most people had morals, sensitivity, and sense. Nevertheless, in every age, in some places, there are the barbarians who wage war against truth.

Once the idea of truth is deleted from the public mindset, anything goes. It starts with the supposedly pleasurable practices of immorality, drunkenness, drug use, etc. Then, it spirals into the senseless violence that is typical of a godless society.

Think about it, without any concept of God in a culture, there is no reason to behave, no responsibility to be felt, no consequences if one does not get caught. This leads to chaos.

The only way to achieve some kind of solace is to place hope in God's word. It is and always will be true, and it will outlast all nations and cultures, especially those who rebel against it (1 Peter 1:22-25; Psalm 9:17). Truth will prevail. God's word is truth (John 17:17). It is to be absorbed and cherished: "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23).

Find the truth through study (2

Timothy 2:15). Stand by the truth. Live by it. Think through the issues. Come to the right conclusions. Proclaim them. The world needs them desperately. They will be unpopular; they always have been. Yet, the world needs the truth. The children need skills of critical thinking, and they cannot have that without the truth being presented as at least one option.

The devil will wage war to suppress right ideas and reasonable thinking (Romans 1:18). God's people must wage the good warfare of truth in the marketplace of ideas. Be reminded: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strong holds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

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Will He Find Us Faithful?

Robert Waggoner

The parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) is relevant to our times because civil authorities often do not insist upon righteousness. We face not only growing wickedness in our world, but also the prospects of the wrath of God's judgment against our communities because of this wickedness. The parable of the unjust judge was spoken "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart." To apply this passage to our times, we first focus on two biblical precepts, characterize our own times, and then notice what it is that our Lord instructs us to do.

Two Principles to Study

Two biblical precepts implied by this passage are that (1) civil authorities are for the purpose of administering justice (i.e., maintaining righteousness) and (2) God destroys wickedness. Both Old and New Testaments indicate that civil governments are to administer righteousness (Genesis 9:6; Psalms 9:4; 122:5; 1 Kings 10:9; Romans 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14; 1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Civil Authority

The earliest biblical record of the origin of civil governments comes after the time of the flood in the days

of Noah. No civil government prevailed before then to withstand wickedness. With the advent of civil governments, evil was often checked.

However, nations often turn away from God, and therefore sometimes do and sometimes do not administer righteousness according to God's desire. Even ancient Israel often failed to administer righteousness.

Today, national policies concerning justice (righteousness) are often mixed, sometimes following the word of God and sometimes not. With the arrival of the internet, we've now reached a point in human history wherein a medium of communication is in many ways beyond the realm of nations to administer, and hence, beyond their ability to prohibit wickedness in some areas.

Pornography, for example, is rampant on the internet. Because the internet is worldwide, there seems to be little that a national government can do to suppress worldwide distribution of pornography.

God Destroys Wickedness

That God destroys wickedness is both declared and illustrated in the Bible. "He has brought on them their

own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the LORD our God shall cut them off" (Psalm 94:23).

"The righteous God wisely considers the house of the wicked, overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness" (Proverbs 21:12).

When the wickedness of man was great in the earth during the time of Noah, and "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," the Lord determined to destroy humanity (Genesis 6:5-7) except for the household of righteous Noah, which He did when He sent a great flood (Genesis 7-9).

When God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land in which he sojourned, He indicated that it would be a while, however, because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their great wickedness (Genesis 18:20-19:13; Jude 1:7).

When the Israelites were about to enter into the promised land, God informed Israel that the land was being given to them, "not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart . . . but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the

word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Deuteronomy 9:5).

Before Israel entered the promised land, they were informed that should they become wicked, then the Lord would "send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me" (Deuteronomy 28:20).

Many years later, after Jerusalem had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah declared, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'You have seen all the calamity that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no one dwells in them, because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense and to serve other gods whom they did not know, they nor you nor your fathers'" (Jeremiah 44:2-3).

True for Today

If God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8) – and He is – then His pronouncements and judgments against wickedness are as true today as they were in times past. There seems to be an abandonment of

respect for God, the Bible, the church, and Christianity on the one hand; while on the other hand, there seems an abundant increase of wickedness in many forms.

During the last half century, we saw wickedness impact family life in the rise of unwed couples living together, unwed teen mothers, divorce, deserting fathers, battered wives, abandoned children, child abuse, molestation and neglect, incest, legalized abortion, single parent families in poverty, attempts to legalize same-sex marriages, and elder-neglect.

In personal conduct, we've seen a rise in alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling, sexual permissiveness, rape, pornography, social approval of homosexuality, indebtedness, bankruptcies, and suicide. We've seen the consequences of wickedness in the rise of personal despair, crimes, AIDS and rampant venereal diseases.

Increasing Wickedness

Two primary causes of growing wickedness in our world are (1) civil governments' insistence that they be "secular," i.e., that they not be guided by biblical precepts of justice and righteousness; and (2) communication mediums such as radio, television, recordings, internet, etc. — which also consider themselves not governed by biblical precepts.

Inasmuch as God destroys people when they become wicked, then we may assume that the end of the world will come only when people have become excessively wicked, as they were in the days of Noah. As our world is becoming exceedingly wicked, then we may wonder whether the end of the world may soon be coming, or whether we may do anything to stop the increase of wickedness in our world.

What Can We Do?

What can we do to overcome wickedness in our world? First, inasmuch as the Lord promised that God would hear and avenge his own "who cry out day and night to him," we must pray fervently and continually for deliverance from wickedness in our world. We must expect for God's justice to prevail. Second, we must do the same thing as the widow did? She protested. We must demand justice (righteousness) from our authorities. In order to get it we may have to "pester" them until they grant it. Third, we must warn the wicked, to turn him from his evil way (Ezekiel 3:17-21; Matthew 28:18-20). Finally, we must not lose heart. Believe in God.

Conclusion

The Lord concluded his parable by asking the question, "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" Applied to you and me,

that means that in the midst of wicked times, will the Lord find us faithful, as was Noah?

In order for us to be found faithful, we must be protesting against wickedness, praying for righteousness,

warning the wicked, and not being discouraged as we live in a world that seems to be increasing in wickedness.

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Baptized Into Christ

Stephen R. Bradd

Jesus, the Master Teacher, used illustrations frequently and effectively (e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount He illustrated His points by referring to salt, light, sheep, trees, construction, etc.). Illustrations can be great tools to help people better understand the word of God, but they are only tools. They should only be used to complement God's word; that is, they should not be ends unto themselves.

Good preaching centers on the word of God and uses illustrations and examples when appropriate. Jesus did this and so should we. Herein, let us briefly state a biblical truth and then attempt to complement the point by using an illustration.

The biblical truth we shall consider centers on Galatians 3:27 which states, "For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ." I believe the Bible teaches that one who is not in the church (i.e.,

in the body of Christ) is lost; one who has not believed and been scripturally immersed is condemned (Mark 16:16). However, once a penitent believer is **baptized into Christ**, he has put on Christ and is saved, for salvation is **in Christ** (Romans 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:10)!

I believe these truths are easily seen in the New Testament. However, most of the religious world does not believe what I've just stated. Most believe that a person is saved the moment they believe and that baptism isn't really all that important. Many hold the position that belief (all by itself) is what puts a person into the body of Christ. I believe this is false doctrine, and a simple illustration, coupled with what we've already seen from the Scriptures, exposes it as such. This illustration pertains to marriage and has eight progressive points:

1. A man and woman meet for the first time--are they married now? Of course not.
2. They become friends--are they married now? Not even close.
3. They go on a date--are they married now? Absolutely not.
4. They start spending a lot of time together--are they married now? Nope.
5. Over a period of time they fall in love--are they married now? No.
6. They stop dating other people--are they married now? Negative.
7. They become engaged--are they married now? They're getting close, but still not yet.
8. They go through a wedding ceremony -- are they married now? **Yes, now they are married!**

It is obvious that this couple was not married until the wedding ceremony was performed. They were not married when they fell in love even though they had **faith** in each other as potential spouses. They were not married when they **turned** their back on dating other people because of their love for each other. They were not married until they took vows and **confessed** their faith and love for each other in a **wedding ceremony**. The wedding ceremony was the occasion in which they were **converted**

into husband and wife. No one will deny these physical truths, will they?

The same can be said spiritually regarding a person who decides to "marry" Jesus! Baptism is the act (or ceremony) which adds a person to the body of Christ (cf. Galatians 3:27); it is at that point when the relationship changes! Belief and repentance are vitally important, but they do not change the relationship in the sense of putting the person into Jesus (cf. John 3:5; Acts 2:37-47; 22:16, etc.)!

The same illustration could be modified for use with the subject of citizenship. Becoming a citizen of a country requires a change in **beliefs and behaviors**, but the actual change from a **non-citizen** to a **citizen** only occurs at the **initiation ceremony**. Spiritually speaking, that ceremony is baptism; it is the point where one goes from being a non-citizen to a citizen in God's family!

Friends, these analogies should be helpful when studying with those who feel that mental belief is all you need to become a Christian. Of course, in addition to the passages of Scripture we have examined, there are dozens of other related Bible passages. But, don't just depend on the illustrations. Use them as a teaching tool--that's what Jesus would do.

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DENOMINATIONAL FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Andy Erwin

Denominational forms of church government can be categorized as (1) Episcopal (or hierarchical); (2) Presbyterian; (3) Congregational;¹ and (4) the Erastian system, which is operated upon the premise that it is the function of the civil state to govern the church, even to the point of financing it and exercising discipline.²

Episcopal

The episcopal or hierarchal form of church government is that which is used by Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Episcopalians, to name a few. In the Episcopalian system of church government, an archbishop has authority over many bishops.³ Accordingly, each bishop oversees one certain area or diocese comprising a varied number of parishes. A rector is responsible for the daily activities of

the local parish. The vicar is seen as an assistant to the rector and occasionally substitutes for him. In this system, the archbishop, bishop, and rector are ordained as priests.⁴

Episcopalians and Roman Catholics differ in their understanding of the role of a priest. Catholics consider the priest to have the same function as the Levites in the Old Testament. Accordingly, the priest has authority to offer prayers, pronounce judgment, and represent the people to God. Episcopalians view their priests as presbyters, without any such powers of intercession.

To understand the episcopal form of government, we must go back to the Second Century AD. Presiding elders became common practice. The presiding elder sought to have the preeminence, or be the principal elder among the eldership in which he was to serve. Jerome argued that the practice of presiding elders was a neces-

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 923-36.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 579.

³ The meaning of "bishop" in this sense differs from the meaning of the word in the New Testament. In the New Testament a bishop was one of the elders, pastors, or overseers of a local congregation (cf. Acts 14:23). Qualifications for this office are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

⁴ The meaning of "priest" is also different from the New Testament meaning. According to the New Testament, the church as a whole is a priesthood of believers in Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 2:5-9; Revelation 1:6).

sary expedient to still strife in the church.

The doctrine of apostolic succession also began being taught in the Second Century. Some felt because of the close relationship they or their congregation had with various apostles in times past that they had a greater role or prestige in the church.

One historic example of this theory in practice was Clement of Rome's letter to the church at Corinth, *1 Clement*. He felt because he was the presiding bishop of Rome that he had succeeded the apostles Peter and Paul and, therefore, had the authority to admonish the quarreling church at Corinth.

The Third Century saw a priesthood begin to be patterned after the Old Testament pattern for the Jewish priesthood rather than after the New Testament pattern for the church. The office of priest began to be viewed as a mediating office just as the Levitical priesthood of the Jewish covenant. Ordaining ceremonies began to be held for the purpose of consecrating a propitiating priest.

The practice of confessionals came into existence because of this doctrine. The priest began to sit in judgment over the people, discharging the office of Christ. Moreover, it was deemed necessary that a confession must be made at least once a year.

This doctrine is the result of the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the Council of Lateran (1215), and the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

By the Fourth Century, elderships began to take on the pattern of the Roman magistrates of the day. A Roman magistrate would be responsible to the emperor for the region of communities (or diocese) under his control. Presiding bishops in the congregations were already common by this time. The next step was to make one presiding bishop over the presiding bishops in that area. Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem were the five main dioceses in which each had presiding bishops over their areas.

It was also during the Fourth Century that Constantine began to take on more ecclesiastical control and exude his influence in church affairs as Emperor of Rome. Thus, by the Fifth Century the way had been paved for Valentinian III to issue an official decree (445) which declared Rome's bishop Leo the Great (440-461) supreme over the Western Church.

Although various men had claimed the title of universal bishop, it was not recognized until 606 when Boniface, the Bishop of Rome assumed the title. It is claimed that Boniface is just one successor in a line of bishops dating back to Peter. However, one of Boni-

face's predecessors, Gregory I, denounced the idea of a universal bishop and past bishops of Rome who claimed the title, like Victor I (190 AD), were never recognized by their peers.

The universal bishop is known today as the Pope or "Holy Father" – a title never found in the Bible, never assumed by Peter or any of the apostles, and never recognized until nearly 600 years after the church's beginning. Contrariwise, Jesus instructed us not to call any man "father" but God (Matthew 23:9).

In the Fourth Session of the Vatican Council⁵ it was declared: "...that the Roman Pontiff...by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority...is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed..." It should be noted that his infallibility is limited to the occasions he speaks officially while seated upon his papal throne.

The doctrine of papal infallibility raises the following objections: (1) if these men are infallible, why did it take 1800 years to recognize it? (2) If the office of the Pope is from God, why has it been so vehemently protested by devout and God-fearing souls since its inception? And (3) how is it that such infallible men have

committed so many atrocities against man and God throughout the history of this office?

Space should also be dedicated herein to the influence of Augustine of Hippo (354-430). It was said by B.B. Warfield that Augustine is the "founder of Roman Catholicism."⁶ Warfield was especially referring to the influence of Augustine's teaching pertaining to the complete and total authority of the church. Augustine believed even the Scriptures owed their authority to the church. In time, it was concluded that the church was the divinely appointed custodian and interpreter of the Bible.

A Bible Answer

To answer the doctrine of denominational hierarchies, one must go back to the First Century and learn how the church was organized. Concerning the churches of Christ as they existed in the First Century AD, the overwhelming testimony of church history has been succinctly stated by the venerable church historian John Lawrence Mosheim.

"The churches of those early times were entirely independent; and none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each was governed by

⁵ July 18, 1870

⁶ B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), 313.

its own rulers and its own laws. For, though the churches founded by the apostles had the particular deference shown them, that they were consulted in difficult cases, yet they had no juridical authority, no fort of supremacy over the others, nor the least right to enact laws for them. Nothing, on the contrary, is more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among primitive churches; nor does there even appear, in the first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial churches, from which councils and metropolitans derive their origin.⁷

“There reigned among the members of the Christian Church, however distinguished they were by worldly rank and titles, not only an amiable harmony but also a perfect equality...Nor, in this first century, was the distinction made between Christians of a more or less perfect order, which took place...The rulers of the church were called either presbyters or bishops, which two titles are, in the New Testament, undoubtedly applied to the same order of men.⁸

“Such was the constitution of the Christian Church in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither numerous nor splendid. Three or

four presbyters, men of remarkable piety and wisdom, ruled these small congregations in perfect harmony, nor did they stand in need of any president or superior to maintain concord and order where no dissensions were known...Let none, however, confound the bishops of this primitive and golden period of the church with those of whom we read in the following ages...A bishop during the first and second centuries was a person who had the care of one Christian assembly, which at the time, was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house.”⁹

The resemblance to God’s church has changed so dramatically that even the sense of the word “elder” or “bishop” has changed. The change in the meaning of the word could not be more clearly stated than in the Philippians and Colossians volume of the *Pulpit Commentaries*.

Philippians 1:1 reads, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons...” The comments on this verse in the aforementioned commentary are as follows, “St. Paul is addressing the elders of the church at Philippi, not bishops in our sense of the word.”

⁷ John Lawrence Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol.1, (Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 86.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85-6.

Concerning Augustine's doctrine of the church serving as the custodian and interpreter of the Scriptures, one can see the destructive tendencies of such a doctrine with the advent of the many denominations, as this is a doctrine which has been maintained throughout the Reformation. Instead of having one denomination interpret the Bible for him, man now has many denominations interpreting the Bible for him.

Presbyterian

When studying the Presbyterian form of church government, we find at the top of this organizational structure a group known as the "General Assembly." Rather than an archbishop overseeing the body, this form of government relies on a group of bishops.

Studying this form of government from the bottom to the top we find the local church on the bottom. Elders are elected from each local congregation to serve in a session. The session includes the pastor¹⁰ serving with equal authority to the other elders. The members of the session join with other sessions in the area to form a presbytery. The presbytery in turn has authority over the churches in that area. Some of the members of the

¹⁰ The word "pastor" is used by various denominations when referring to the minister or evangelist in the local church.

presbytery are also members of the General Assembly, which has authority over all the churches in that region or nation.

Attempts to defend the Presbyterian form of church government are quite telling. It is acknowledged that,

"Reformed Churches do not claim that their system of Church government is determined in every detail by the word of God...and are quite ready to admit that many of its particulars are determined by expediency and human wisdom."¹¹

It is maintained that these denominations have been endowed with power from Christ to determine their pattern of government. Moreover, it is believed that this form of government prevents apostasy from creeping into the local church. It is also believed that exceptional leaders must not be kept exclusively to the local congregation, but should be able to oversee multiple congregations according to their outstanding ability to govern and make wise decisions.

A Bible Answer

In answering the reasons stated in support of the Presbyterian form of church government, we must begin and end with the word of God. Believing that the foolishness of God is

¹¹ Berkhof, 581.

greater than the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 1:25), we cannot help but observe the lack of biblical precedent for such an organization. Moreover, seeing it is readily admitted that such churches "do not claim that their system of church government is determined in every detail by the word of God, and are quite ready to admit that many of its particulars are determined by expediency and human wisdom," we cannot help but reject such an organization on this basis alone.

It is in our attempt to return to the word of God as the only rule for faith and practice that we look to the Bible and find exactly the organization for church government provided by God. Such an organization consists of independent local congregations being overseen by a group of elders. The minister facilitates in the teaching of the gospel, and the deacons assist in serving the congregation. Each congregation is made up of men and women who have obeyed the gospel, and have been added to the church by God Himself.

To believe that such an organization as the Presbyterian form prevents apostasy appears to be short-sighted. According to the wisdom of God, apostasy is limited by congregational autonomy. Let it be observed that in the case of the Presbyterian hierarchical form of government, Satan needs only to corrupt the head in order to corrupt

the entire body. Yet, in the biblical form of church government each congregation stands alone. Some congregations may apostatize while others may remain true. The decisions of one do not necessarily affect the decisions of all.

In addressing the notion that outstanding leaders must not be limited to the oversight of one congregation, let us say that any person, regardless of how outstanding that person may be, can be corrupted. If such were to occur on the local level, one congregation is affected. If such were to occur in the Presbyterian form, multiple congregations would be affected. Truly such a notion places too much confidence in man. Let us determine to place our confidence in God.

Congregational

The congregational form of church government varies widely among the denominations. In the Baptist denomination, the congregational form has the pastor at the head of the local congregation. An elected board of deacons usually serves in an advisory role to the pastor.

In some denominations, the pastor serves alongside the deacons on a deacon board. In others, the pastor serves alongside elders, on an elder board. In some instances where an associate pastor or staff is hired, they are held accountable by the senior

pastor. The senior pastor would then be accountable to the elder board for their supervision.

In recent years among evangelical churches an executive board has taken shape. In this form, the executive board hires the pastor to work for them. He then oversees the congregation, of which they are members. Yet, they remain in oversight of him.

In some denominations a pure democracy is the trend. As such, there are no elders, no leaders, but everything is decided by congregational votes. Some of these evangelicals believe their churches are governed solely by the Holy Spirit, similar to the Quakers of old. Church members are instructed to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and thus any votes taken would be guided by Him.

Concerning the Congregational system, and its many forms, it is argued that the New Testament does not require a plurality of elders.¹² It is also argued that the single pastor system enables rapid church growth.¹³

A Bible Answer

Let us now offer the following New Testament passages in an attempt to prove that the will of God is

¹² A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1907), 914-17.

¹³ C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984), 73.

for a plurality of elders¹⁴ to oversee each local church.

- “And when they had ordained them **elders** in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended **them** to the Lord, on whom **they** believed” (Acts 14:23).
- “Take heed therefore unto **yourselves**, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).
- “And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the **elders** were present” (Acts 21:18).
- “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the **bishops** and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).
- “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders** in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Titus 1:5).
- “Remember **them** which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose

¹⁴ In the biblical sense of the word *pastor* the words *elder*, *bishop*, *overseer*, and *shepherd* or synonymous. The pastor and the evangelist clearly had two different positions in the early church.

faith follow, considering the end of **their** conversation” (Hebrews 13:7).

- “Obey **them** that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for **they** watch for your souls, as **they** that must give account, that **they** may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).
- “Is any sick among you? let him call for the **elders** of the church; and let **them** pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).
- “The **elders** which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1).

Concerning whether or not the single pastor system is conducive to rapid church growth, it is merely a matter of opinion, not Scripture. Strong leadership in general is conducive to church growth. No reason exists to suggest that a strong leadership cannot exist from within the biblical framework.

Realistically speaking, the pastoral system has many drawbacks which could hinder church growth. For instance, if a tyrannical single pastor had sole rule of a congregation he could do more harm than good.

State Operated

In the matter of the state-operated system of government, this practice can be traced back to men like Constantine, Calvin and his followers, the followers of Luther, and King Henry VIII of England. The consequences of such an organization can become evident in the outbreak of war, and the occupation of foreign sovereignties. In such cases the borders of the church are spread through military might, as occupied sovereignties soon become oppressed by the religion of the conqueror. Roman Catholicism, for example, is full of such conquests.

A Bible Answer

The borders of the Lord's kingdom are not to be spread through the state or through any manmade system of government, but by the preaching of the gospel. No one can force another to become a Christian, and becoming a Christian is not dependent upon one's nationality (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4).

The kingdom of God is comprised of free citizens from every nation, kindred, people, and tongue of the earth. The church is above every nation and every state. It supersedes politics and the machinery of civil government. It is funded by the freewill offerings of the saints, not the tax dollars of the people, or the spoils of a conquered people. Its head is Christ, not the

king, or a president. Its law is the New Testament, not a constitution.

In Conclusion

Such subjects as the organization, worship, and work of the church are surface issues. The enormous issue which lies beneath the surface is one of respect for the authority of the Bible. Either we have to obey God, or we do not have to obey God.

Why do people believe they can replace the biblical organization of the Lord's church with a manmade organization? In short, they do not believe the Bible is to be obeyed on this subject.

Denominationalists have been indoctrinated to believe that they do not have to obey God. These souls have been led to believe that as long as they are sincere and feel satisfied with what they are doing that God will accept them, their agenda, and their decisions.

However, when we study the Bible from the Garden of Eden to the celestial Eden of Revelation, we find that those who are accepted of God are those who obey Him. Those who keep His commandments have right to the tree of life and may enter the gates into the city (Revelation 22:14). All others will be left outside of the city (Revelation 21:27; 22:15).

When we study our Bible we find that elders (also called bishops, presbyters, pastors, and overseers) are to be ordained in every congregation (Acts 14:23). The qualifications for elders are also found in the Bible (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). The work of the elders is also found in the Scriptures. These men are to feed and oversee the flock (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:2-3). They are to guard against "wolves" and "gainsayers" – shepherding the flock as examples and not as lords of God's heritage. They are to look to the Chief Shepherd, Christ Jesus, as an example in all things (1 Peter 5:4).

When qualified men are willing to serve in this capacity, no church, creed, or council of men has the authority to do otherwise. This is the Lord's pattern for the organization of His church. To honor His word is to honor Him. To dishonor His word is to dishonor Him, and ultimately to be judged accordingly (John 12:48).

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"That It Might be Fulfilled"

John T. Polk, II

Fulfilled Bible prophecy is a powerfully convincing argument for the living God, for it is the tapestry throughout time and the Bible that proves (1) God is; (2) God lives; (3) God communicates; (4) God knows all; (5) God rules in earthly affairs; (6) God loves sinners who will repent; (7) God is timeless. Without fulfilled Bible prophecy to hold its text together, the Bible might indeed be considered "a good book of fables!"

Fulfilled

"Fulfilled" simply means "to render full, i.e., to complete, specifically, to bring to pass, ratify, accomplish (*Thayers Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 518). When used in the New Testament to show what events God had in mind when He inspired the prophecy, it clarifies and ends all speculation.

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by

the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21, NKJV).

Fulfillment of the Birth of Christ

The formula sometimes is used in Matthew, "that it might be fulfilled" (Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:35). Concerning the birth of Christ, let the Bible speak:

"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.' So all this was done **that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet (cf. Isaiah 7:14, *emphasis added*), saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, God with us' (Matthew 1:19-23).

Christ from David

What had been done to fill this prophecy full? In the first place, Jesus' genealogy connecting Him to David was given (Matthew 1:1-17). Jesus' genealogy showed He deserved David's throne:

"Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. [1] 'When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and [2] I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and [3] I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [4] I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. [5] If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. [6] But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you'" (2 Samuel 7:11-15).

[1] How long David would "rest" is not specified [Acts 2:20; Romans 1:3];

[2] Solomon's "kingdom" was not "established," but Jesus' church is [1 Timothy 3:15];

[3] Solomon's "kingdom" was not "forever," Jesus' kingdom is [Luke 1:30-33];

[4] Only Jesus could say, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30) [Hebrews 1:5];

[5] While Jesus certainly did not commit any iniquity, He was "chastened" for all sinners who repent (Hebrews 2:9) [Hebrews 5:8-9; 1 Peter 2:24];

[6] Jesus' throne is "forever and ever" (Hebrews 1:8).

When God prophesied to David through Nathan, God was looking past Solomon to Jesus. God knew what He meant when His prophet said it, and God knew when His particulars were met, so He called our attention to it through Matthew.

David's throne was not inherited on earth, but in Heaven, as the apostles of Christ preached on Pentecost in the book of Acts:

"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne. 'He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.' This Jesus God has raised

up, of which we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:29-32).

Jesus' genealogy qualified Him, and Him alone, to sit on David's throne in Heaven!

The Virgin Birth

A virgin was specified and the Holy Spirit made a Son of God (Matthew 1:18-21). Never before had God been "with us" ("Immanuel") in this manner, by becoming a fleshly person, until this birth of Jesus. The only prophecy of the virgin birth lay dormant for centuries.

"The virgin" (Hebrew *ha almah*) means one, specific virgin. All females begin life as "virgins," but lose "virginity" by copulation and/or receiving male seed. *Almah*, a feminine form, occurs six other times in the Old Testament: Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8.

According to these other passages, it never refers to a married woman. Matthew (1:22-23) quotes Isaiah 7:14 as fulfilled in Jesus' birth.

Matthew's Greek "*parthenos*" ("the virgin") is used for *ha almah*. *Parthenos* always means "chaste, virginal, unviolated" in the New Testament (see Matthew 25:1, 7, 11; Luke 1:27; Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 7:25, 28, 34-36; 2 Corinthians 11:2). Mary was "virgin" (Luke 1:27) because she

conceived "before they came together" (Matthew 1:18). Mary confessed "I do not know a man" (Luke 1:34). Joseph "did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son" (Matthew 1:25).

The word "betrothed" (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5) in Greek is *mnasteuo*. Interestingly the word for "fasting, abstinence" is *nasteuo*. The subtle word similarity is not lost. Betrothal (today called "engagement") was the period from a couple's commitment to each other till their wedding ceremony, and was (and still should be) a time of sexual abstinence.

(3) Mary was "the virgin" because never before had the angel Gabriel designated who it would be (Luke 1:26-38). Isaiah 7:14 been announced as "fulfilled" (Matthew 1:22-23); and a "virgin" been "with child" (Matthew 1:18, 20), nor since!

The "Son" was "only begotten" (John 1:18) because Mary was betrothed to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-20). She conceived, not by a man, but "of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). This Child "will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). *Never before or since was Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled!*

The book of Matthew was written for and from the Jewish perspective, and appealed to those with a back-

ground in and respect for God's Holy Word.

The Man of Sorrows

If Messianic prophecies had been "dually fulfilled," as many commentators state, the conversation between the eunuch and Philip would never have happened.

"So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.' So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:30-35).

The eunuch was reading the prophecy in Isaiah 53:7-8, and he knew the importance of it lay in its fulfillment. Hence, his question "of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" needed an answer. If Philip had been a

"dual fulfillment" advocate, he could have replied: "The prophet, himself, his son, another son in King Ahaz's day, the Israelites, the Levites, or the priests under Moses." Any such notion is purely a speculation without an endorsement from God!

Philip, however, showed there was only One Person to whom God intended this prophecy to point. For Philip, "beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him." There was only one answer to the eunuch's question and the purpose of the prophecy in Isaiah.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist also understood the specific, singular nature of the fulfillment of prophecy.

"Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?' He said: 'I am "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the LORD,"' as the prophet Isaiah said" (John 1:19-23).

John was not the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah ("Christ"); nor the actual person, Elijah, the Prophet; nor "the Prophet," described by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. But, he was doing the work of the only specified person of Isaiah 40:3-5. John knew "who" he was and which prophecy he, alone, fulfilled.

In Conclusion

Confusion about the fulfillment of Bible prophecies comes, not from God, but from men who don't believe in God's Word! "For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

God knew what He meant when He inspired a prophet to speak on His behalf, and He certainly knows when events have met all His requirements ("fulfilled").

"So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

Faith in God's Word leads to faith in Jesus Christ!

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Remembering A.W. Dicus

James R. McGill

A. W. Dicus (1888-1978) was born in Missouri, but the family moved to Indiana when he was still a child. It was in Indiana that Dicus was baptized into Christ, where he began preaching, and where he married. They have three sons.

Dicus received his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Indiana. He then taught at the university for several years.

He was committed to using his education to advance the cause of Christ. Throughout his life, he continued to make preaching his highest priority.

Dicus the Inventor

Brother Dicus interrupted his formal education for a time when he formed a partnership as an inventor. He is credited with several inventions, including the automobile directional signal, an electric pencil sharpener, and an automobile speed control governor.

There is some controversy regarding the directional signal, partly because he lost his patent when his part-

nership ended. And there were others, both before and after Dicus, who had claims to the invention. As early as 1911 a man in England had developed a simple directional signal, and others followed Dicus' invention with different features.

Moving to Tennessee

In 1930, at age 42, Dicus moved to Cookeville to head the physics program at Tennessee Technological University. (Earlier, the university had been called the Tennessee Polytechnic Institute. Before that, it was Dixie College – a Christian college to be headed by T. B. Larimore. That didn't work out. The college encountered difficulties and was taken over by the state.)

A couple from Huntingdon, Tennessee, spoke of their experience at the university during the 1940's. They said, "We were both chemistry majors, but we had the opportunity to hear brother Dicus lecture in physics. He was so good that we were tempted to change our major!"

It was said that more Oak Ridge physicists received some of their training from Dicus than from any other professor.

Along with his teaching, he always continued to preach. This included a

couple of years with the Ridgedale church of Christ in Chattanooga.

The Need in Florida

After twenty successful years at Tennessee Technological University, at age 62, Dicus moved to Florida to become the academic dean of Florida Christian College in Tampa.

The Freed-Hardeman College vice-president, James R Cope, had left that position to become president of Florida Christian College, then a 4-year-old school, located in the Temple Terrace suburb of Tampa. When he accepted that position in 1949, he was just 32 years old. He was the youngest college president in America.

When he persuaded brother Dicus, with his tremendous academic background and maturity, to become the college dean, it filled a great need.

A Great Helper

When the Temple Terrace church of Christ began in 1950, it was brother Dicus who designed their building and helped with the construction. Even more importantly, he helped to strengthen the congregation. He would attend there when he was not away preaching at another location.

Students who had the occasion to come to him at the college for assis-

tance with their curriculum found him to be very helpful.

A Sad Loss

After a successful marriage, Dicus experienced the death of his wife in 1950. He also began having health problems. Particularly troubling was glaucoma affecting his eyesight.

Dicus remarried. His wife was a helper for him even in his song writing. Of all his accomplishments, this is the contribution to the cause of Christ for which he is most remembered.

Of the thirty-five songs he composed, he is better known for one of them than for all the rest: "Our God, He is Alive!" It is such a majestic expression of faith!

Our God, He Is Alive

The fourth line...

"Our God, whose Son upon a tree, a life was willing there to give, that he might set man free, and evermore with him could live.

"There is a God, He is alive, In Him we live, and we survive; From dust our God created man, He is our God, the great I AM"

I was part of a large group of Christians that once gathered for a dinner on the campus of Tennessee

Technological University. David S. Hill, the president of Tennessee Bible College (also in Cookeville) led the group in singing.

It was so fitting that he chose the song composed by the professor who had meant so much to the university and who had so long and humbly served the Lord.

Death

Brother Dicus continued to live in Florida, and continued preaching, as he was able, until his death. A. W. Dicus died in Tampa September 2, 1978. He was 90.

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Understanding the Bible

Jimmy Clark

The Scriptures are very explicit in declaring that the Bible can be understood. Paul wrote to the Ephesians concerning the revelation given to him for the brethren to know, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4, KJV).

Again, Paul wrote, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

Jesus himself said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).

Again, John recorded what Jesus said concerning truth, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

How to Read the Bible

How one reads the Bible has everything to do with his understanding. Prejudice, self-righteous motives, etc. influence the way a person reads the Bible. An open, common sense approach is always the best way of read-

ing, whether it be the Bible or any other written material.

Consider three particular systematic approaches to understanding the Bible that would help anyone:

Gathering All the Facts

It is unwise to jump to a conclusion about a passage without searching and finding all the facts. Think about doing such in a court of law. Think about a doctor developing a treatment without all the facts. Such could be and would be catastrophic.

The Bible is to be treated with such care as a judge or doctor would deal with the facts. This principle of having all the facts is clearly exemplified by Jesus himself.

Luke records concerning the discussion of Jesus with the two men who were traveling to Emmaus, "Then he said unto them. O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). Jesus gave all the facts from the Scriptures to help

them to see because partial knowledge is not profitable. It can even lead to confusion and a misinterpretation of the facts.

It is clearly stated in the book of Psalms, "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever" (Psalm 119:160). The American Standard Version translates this same passage, "The sum of thy word is truth; And every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever" (Psalm 119:160).

The sum of anything is the total conclusion to all of the pertinent parts. If a person added the first five numbers (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), the answer of that problem is 15. If one added only one through four and left out five, the answer would not be fifteen, even if the number five were listed in the problem. One does not take out or ignore any number of that listing and get the correct answer of fifteen.

Herein is a basic problem of some who would draw conclusions from the Bible. One may take faith and repentance and confession and leave out baptism and believe that such is God's plan for salvation. Such is not the case with the words of the Lord from the commission given to his apostles (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47) nor is it true with the teaching done by faithful brethren

as recorded in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 2:37-41; Acts 8:35-39; Acts 9:6-18; 22:16; Acts 16:30-34). There is a lack of spiritual integrity about a person who will not seek the whole truth.

All of the Facts Must Harmonize

Truth, by definition, is not self-contradictory. Jesus said of the Bible, "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

The Bible is not a fragmented set of things that do not harmonize. Skeptics try to discredit the Bible by trying to pit one passage against another to try to make it contradictory. Truth will always be free of contradiction between all aspects of a given subject.

The source of the Bible is God himself. He is characterized by truth (cf. Deuteronomy 32:4) and must communicate only in truth (cf. Hebrews 6:17-18; Titus 1:2). He is not the author of confusion (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:33). Rightly dividing the word of truth (cf. Second Timothy 2:15) is essential to proper understanding.

Supposed contradictions are explained once all of the facts are seen. For example, certain Jews could not see how God would establish the Old Testament as his will to be followed and then change that to the New Testament that was proclaimed by the

apostles and first century prophets. The book of Hebrews is an important study in this regard. It is written in the eighth chapter of the book, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Hebrews 8:7-8).

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold that God was going to change the covenant. There is no contradiction between the Old Testament and the New Testament in regards to the will of God. The old served its purpose and now is set aside for the new (cf. Heb. 8:13; 9:9). Those who would go back to the Old Testament to authorize current practices (i.e. instrumental music, burning of incense, etc.) do not see the truth that is found under the new covenant.

Jesus gave the fundamental truth about worship when he said to the woman of Samaria, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:22-24).

All other passages on the subject of worship come back to this fundamental truth. Any approach in worship that does not harmonize with these words cannot be the will of the Father for man. Such would then be of man and not of God making such worship vain (cf. Matthew 15:9).

A simple illustration about the importance of harmonizing the Scriptures is seen in the temptation of Jesus. Matthew wrote, "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:5-7).

Satan attempted to place an interpretation upon Psalm 91:11-12 that was a perversion of the meaning. Psalm 91:11-12 is true but the interpretation of Satan was false. Jesus showed from another Bible passage that the interpretation that Satan gave to the quote is not true in view of the statement made in Deuteronomy 6:16.

Similarly, those who attempt to teach that justification with God is by faith alone in Romans 5:1 is denied by other passages: namely, James 2:24.

While Romans 5:1 does teach the truth that faith is involved in justification, James 2:24 shows that faith without the works of an obedient faith does not justify.

The Bible is filled with examples of faith being obedient to the clear instructions of God in order for that faith to be pleasing to God (cf. Hebrews 11).

Statements Must Be Kept in Context

Today, sound bites and quick quotes can often be used to make broad conclusions that are not warranted. The context of a statement has everything to do with its meaning.

There are statements recorded in the Bible that are not true. For example, Moses wrote of the words that the serpent said to the woman, "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

While the Bible is true in the accuracy of the words given, the content of these words is a lie since it clearly contradicted what God had actually said.

Statements taken out of their contexts have brought very erroneous conclusions. One must approach a reading of the Bible by asking some

basic questions. Who said it? To whom was it said? What was actually said, not just what do I think was said? What was the purpose of the statement?

There is a trend among some to look at the Scripture and ask the question, "What does that verse mean to me?" not "What does that verse actually mean?" Truth is objective and not founded on human imaginations.

An example of such an abuse of context is found in the words of Jesus to his apostles in the gospel of John chapters fourteen through sixteen. There have been times when certain preachers have cited passages on the work of the Holy Spirit that was true for the apostolic work during the miraculous age as though such applies equally true today.

For example, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

This verse specifically has to do with the work that the apostles would do through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Some hold these verses to teach that the Holy Spirit guides separate and apart from the Bible for conversion and sanctification. One today would not even know that there is a

Holy Spirit without divine revelation in the Bible (cf. Acts 19:2).

The “Comforter” gives comfort through the word of God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:18). The Holy Spirit does not do today what Jesus said would be done for the apostles.

Again take note, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

This passage teaches that the Holy Spirit would give the apostles instant recall of all that Jesus had said. Man must study the Bible and remember those words in order to have such knowledge today. There is no such thing as miraculous knowledge today.

There are so many common sense principles found in the Bible to help any student understand the truth. The writer of Psalms 119 truly declared, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalms 119:130). It is truly the “honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15) that finds the benefits from the word.

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Who Caused Division?

Answers for the Christian Church

Ron Thomas

In a recent article, printed in the periodical *The Restoration Herald* (April 2017), author Marshall Leggett called into question the hermeneutical method (or term), “no approved precedent” (*Where the Scriptures Speak, We Speak. Where the Scriptures are Silent, We are Silent*, pp. 4-6, 23). The thrust of his argument is this: if the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship assembly is prohibited because of a lack of an “approved precedent,” then so also must our television programs, song books, and church buildings be prohibited. Based on this hermeneutical application we are to understand the wisdom of this approach to be mistaken.

The criticism of “no approved precedent” is misplaced.

Television Programs

As far as comparisons go, this is an “apples to oranges” comparison or, to state it differently, a comparison of unequal items of consideration. A religious television program is designed to reach the lost in the community in which the program is running. We are commanded to preach the gospel. The television program helps us to do so without altering any of God’s commands.

Song Books

The command and exhortation from the Lord is to sing. With the use of a song book, the command to sing is not altered, and neither is there anything added or subtracted from the command to sing.

A supposed problem hinges on the meaning of a Greek word: *psallō*. The word "*psallō* has the sense to *sing* hymns of praise" (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3. p. 672, emphasis added).

It does not have the "sense to play." A songbook, by its very nature is a book of words (hymns) to make up musical tunes; whether one sings the words of the Psalms or manmade tunes of praise, there is no altering of the command to sing.

The *command* is to *sing*, but is there a *command* to *play*? No, there is no command to play. A song of praise with or without a hymn book does not alter the command to sing. The songbook is not an addition to the express command or exhortation to sing, while *play* is an addition, just as the definition of the word illustrates.

Church Buildings

How about the use or non-use of church buildings? Again, the command is to *sing*, the use or non-use of a building does not alter the command at all. It does not impede or add anything to God's command to sing. Neither is a building an aid of any sort

comparable to the songbook. The use or non-use of a building is only a matter of practical convenience.

Christians can obey God by assembling on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25) with or without a church building. Nothing is changed in regard to this commandment. With regard to instrumental music, an entirely new, unauthorized form of music has been added to the worship of the New Testament church.

Crux of Problem

"That is not the point!" one might counter. "It is the hermeneutical method employed that if there is no approved precedent to use instrumental music, then there is no approved precedent to use a songbook or a church building."

This is where the crux of the problem rests. The New Testament speaks of God's exhortation to sing; and this is what New Testament saints are to do.

For centuries, this is all New Testament saints did. To illustrate the above point historically, note these words from a church historian: "It is quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, employed in the public worship of the church. Recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books. It was perhaps as late as the

tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service" (*A Cappella Music*, Everett Ferguson, p. 82).

About 200 years ago, during the Restoration Movement in this country – a movement that put emphasis upon doing Bible things in Bible ways, speaking where the Bible speaks, and being silent where the Bible is silent – some wanted to make use of a mechanical instrument and bring it in to the worship assembly to aid the singing. The problem with such an effort is that it is not an aid at all, but a divisive addition and innovation.

The mechanical instrument is not anything more than man's desire to improve the singing for the human ear. It is nothing more than that! It was not commanded by the Lord. It was not used by the church in the first century.

Instruments of music supposedly make music "better" to the human ear. Therefore, it is assumed, instrumental music will also sound better to the Lord! Such is a misguided notion to say the least. Simple New Testament worship is less about the ears, eyes, and sounds of the people and more about adoration of the Lord.

All contributions made by human ears, eyes and the voice should be made in accordance with what the Lord expressly said. When one thinks and operates in this way, then one can *know* he/she is correct in the form of the worship offered to the Lord. Oth-

erwise, the best that someone can offer in a discussion is to say, "I think the Lord will accept it." But we should know, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Conclusion

The form of worship is not to be dismissed. Jesus said, those who come to the Father (that is, worship) must do so in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). The word "truth" corresponds to that which the Lord expressly said. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32, KJV).

Buildings have no direct impact on the worship of the Lord Almighty. Song books have no direct impact on the worship of the Lord Almighty. Playing on an instrument does have a direct impact on the worship of the Lord. It is an entirely different form of music which is introduced to tickle the ears and it has been notorious for dividing brethren.

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Service Times

Sunday Bible Study
9:30 am

Sunday Worship
10:30 am

Sunday Evening Worship
6:00 pm

Wednesday Evening Worship
7:00 pm

Andy Erwin, Minister

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The
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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

“The Churches of Christ Greet You” (Romans 16:16)

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ is pleased to bring you the *Gospel Gleaner*. Are you familiar with the churches of Christ? Have you ever attended our services before?

Faithful churches of Christ desire to return to the New Testament and to be the church of the Bible. In the Bible, we find that the church is the assembly of all those who have been called out of the darkness of sin by obeying the gospel. These souls are added by God to the spiritual body of Christ, which is His church (Acts 2:42, 47; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church belongs to Christ. It is His church. We, therefore, seek to honor Christ as our Lord in our worship, teaching, and daily walk.

One can be added to this sacred assembly and spiritual kingdom by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:17); believing the facts concerning Christ as revealed in the gospel (John 8:24); repenting of sin (Luke 13:3, 5); and by being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-13; Galatians 3:26-27) to wash sins away by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7).

For more information about the church, or God’s plan of salvation, we offer free Bible Correspondence courses and personal Bible studies. Call or write to us.

The Gospel Gleaner

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Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. The West Fayetteville Church of Christ reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

The Gospel Gleaner is free to all while supply is available.

"Apostles of Tolerance"

Mel Futrell

"Apostles of tolerance" was the phrase used some years back, by then TV Guide columnist Harry Stein, to describe many of those who wrote criticizing him for being intolerant toward those who promote a morally bankrupt agenda via television. In that article he was critical, and rightly so, of ABC's airing of "the lesbian kiss" episode of Roseanne which was shown on March 1, 1994.

Just think how far we have gone in the wrong direction morally since then - think Friends, Ellen, Will & Grace, The L Word, Modern Family, Orange Is The New Black, etc. All of these programs and many more openly and actively promote the homosexual agenda.

Homosexual characters and themes on television and the movies, though not unknown, were still the exception not the rule just twenty years ago. Today, however, it is the exception, not the rule, to find a program of just about any sort that doesn't contain homosexual characters and a homosexual or other LGBTQ theme. "Top-sy-turvy" may be the best way to describe the moral landscape today. Truly, the prophet Isaiah was correct when he wrote:

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20)!

Tolerance

Let's take a moment and critique the much-abused term and concept of "tolerance" that is currently and forcibly being pushed upon us. In my judgment, the ungodly and immoral in our society have again stolen from us a legitimate word — that word being "tolerance." Philosopher Paul Copan correctly notes:

"Many are surprised to learn that tolerance implies a close relationship to truth. Contrary to popular definitions, true tolerance means 'putting up with error' - not 'accepting all views'. We don't tolerate what we enjoy or endorse...By definition, we tolerate what we don't approve of or what we believe to be false. Tolerance does not celebrate or embrace or accept as legitimate all perspectives...If disagreement didn't exist, then tolerance would be unneeded...The contemporary tolerance-as-acceptance view is simply misguided." ¹

Pluralism

What society calls “tolerance” is really and properly referred to as philosophical and religious pluralism. Pluralism is the idea, at least in part, that all ideological, moral, and religious views are equal. It claims that no viewpoint can be said to be superior to any other—or to flip it over, one couldn’t say that any religious or moral claim was inferior to any other. Talk about irrationality run amok! And, as we will demonstrate, it is self-refuting as well.

We are faced with a society that does not recognize as legitimate any objective standard of morality (John 8:31-32). A society that cries out for personal rights, freedom, and liberty, yet attempts to deny the same to those of us who would make our voices heard in opposition to what they are saying and doing.

We are in a society where political correctness has become the preeminent concept of the day. It is a society where those depicted as abnormal and out of touch are those who believe homosexuality, and all other LGBTQ immoralities are abnormal, unbiblical and unnatural (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Jude 7).

Our society has spent decades “normalizing” homosexuality via entertainment media and increasingly

tells us that one’s gender identity and biological sex are not necessarily the same. Our society believes that there is a gender spectrum and that some folks are gender fluid or pan-gender rather than just male and female (Matthew 19:4).

Thus, we have a society that is “tolerant” of everyone and everything except those who are intolerant of sinful conduct and wrong ideas. The “tolerant” become quite intolerant, all the while claiming they are the most tolerant people in the world.

Enough Is Enough!

God-forbid that someone should stand up and say “Enough is enough!” I wish it were not so, but people seem to be more concerned with “offending” someone or “imposing” their value system on another than with promoting what is right and cannot be wrong. If the latter is classified as intolerance, then I am happily intolerant.

The next time someone approaches you and accuses you of being religiously or morally intolerant, ask them how they would define intolerance. If they respond that religious and moral intolerance is the refusal to accept other people’s moral and religious views as necessarily true; let them know that by not accepting *your* moral/religious viewpoint, they must themselves be intolerant.

Finally, make an effort to inform them of the true definition of tolerance. But know this: even if you lead them to the evidence, you can't make them think. Not every effort will be successful.

Let's face facts: one cannot be morally neutral and be right and pleasing to God. While our society, in one form or another, continues to bombard us with pluralistic messages, we must insist that there is a standard of right and wrong that governs the conduct of all men (1Timothy 2:4).

God's Biblical/moral standard will abide forever (1 Peter 1:23-25). Some today will continue to call for their version of "tolerance," but God calls for repentance (Luke 13:3).

¹ Copan, Paul, *True For You, But Not For Me: Deflating the Slogans That Leave Christians Speechless*, 2009, p.44-45

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DARK PLACES

Andy Robison

Christ started His ministry in tumultuous times and in dark places. In the fifteenth year of the monster Tiberius Caesar's reign, when the Herod who would behead John the Baptist was reigning in Galilee, and the conniving high priests Annas and Caiphas (the latter was officially high priest and the former was popularly regarded as such) were heavily-handedly and hypocritically ruling the religious arena of Jerusalem, the forerunner of Christ started his preaching (Luke 3:1-2).

Christ followed shortly thereafter. He came to John for baptism and then was tempted in the wilderness.

When John was put in prison for standing against Herod's unlawful marriage (Matthew 1:12a; 14:1-12), Jesus returned to Galilee and started preaching (Matthew 4:12-17).

Galilee

Galilee was regarded as a dark and dismal place, and thus Jesus' preaching there was regarded by inspiration as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew records it this way:

"And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be ful-

filled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned'" (Matthew 4:13-16 NKJV).

Galilee was regarded as "the region and shadow of death" partly because of their position. Most battles in the region took place because invaders came from the north (cf. Jeremiah 1:14ff.), leaving the tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali the first and hardest hit by the marauders.

Galilee's location also made for the temptation of intermingling among the Gentiles, for which the rest of the Jews would despise them as "Galilee of the Gentiles."

Also, the people of the region of Galilee were regarded lowly for not being as socially cultivated as those of the cities of Judea. Remember Nathanael's cynical question, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)?

Recall that the crowd accusing Peter of being with Jesus was very sure of themselves because they could tell Peter was a Galilean and his speech (perhaps his accent) gave him away as such (Mark 14:70).

These people were regarded, unfairly and derogatorily as backwoods good-for-nothings. Christ came to them first. That is beyond significant; it is monumental.

The Ministry of Jesus

The whole story of Christ is about Him going to despised people first. Think of the surroundings of His birth: He was born in a little town because His impoverished parents (Mary, his mother, and Joseph, his supposed father) had to travel there to pay taxes to the king. If man were inventing a Messiah, He would be born in the king's palace! Instead, there wasn't even room for Christ at the equivalent of a shabby motel; He was born and laid in a feeding trough (manger) (Luke 2:1-7). The royal authorities did not receive the announcement of the King of Kings; shepherds did (Luke 2:8-14). Christ came in the midst of people who were not regarded by society and would otherwise be forgotten to history.

Christ continued to go to people of low estate. He would eat with tax collectors and sinners, and be harassed by the religious leaders for it (Matthew 9:9-13). When He did eat at the house of a Pharisee, His attention was captured by a sinful woman who sought forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50). Christ came to people in the darkness; He came to bring them light.

The Gospel Message

The message of the gospel is to bring people out of dark lifestyles into saved circumstances. Paul was to preach to Gentile cities (laden with gross immorality) "in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

I cannot help but evaluate myself. Am I reaching out effectively enough to people who are despised by socie-

ty—the outcasts, the weary, the overworked and underpaid, the forlorn, the desperate? If Jesus were by my side, these would be the people He would instinctively seek.

Moreover, I cannot help but to consider my brethren. Are we seeking out the hungry, the cold, the hated, the sick who need a physician, the sinners who need salvation?

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The Danger of Being Comfortable with Error

Ronald Bryant

Error (though it is only embryonic, though it is marked out by only a few unrefined tenets) if taught, is not only heretical but destructive. Error may be set forth in the flow of conversation, and offered as merely opinion, but its influence becomes stronger as its direction and strength stands against the truth of the word of God.

Error, no matter its origin, has seductive power and produces sentiments which develop a hold on the convictions of those deceived by it. Some that teach and practice error have been foolish enough to claim that God led them to the error which they now believe and practice. One person declared in a news interview

that the error she practiced was the result of God's leading. No matter the success or the popularity of the proponent, they that reject the will of God, that do that which He has never authorized, and then boldly say, "God led me to this," are deceived, and must be exposed and opposed.

The Church at Colossae

The errors of the church at Colossae which arose within that church were the product of a combination of influences. The character and the intellectual leanings of both the philosophers of the Gentiles and of the Jews worked to the detriment of that body of people. Paul identified those

influences in specific terms. He warned them not to be deceived by persuasive words (Colossians 2:4), and then: "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" (2:8).

Again, he warned, "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God" (2:18-19).

A Departure from God

The departure from God was not in denying Christ, but in dethroning Him. They did not deny the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection; they devalued Him and those events; even His work in redemption.

They claimed spiritual status and purity by means of ceremonial distinctions and ritual requirements. That which they embraced was not the gospel in its simplicity, but was wrapped up in false distinctions, and mystical concepts.

They set the gospel of Christ aside, and placed their emphasis upon the

mystical and magical. Paul identified their teaching – their error – as empty philosophy and vain superstition, especially their practice of adoring angels instead of God, and their distorted application of selected portions of the Law of Moses.

The teachers of error at Colossae practiced circumcision as a means of securing spiritual benefits. Their distinctions of meats, observance of feasts and holy days, were to the same end. Paul said their false practice was in fact, "The show of wisdom and false humility in will worship, in the neglecting of the body;" all being regarded as an effective means to spiritual elevation; and accepted as superior to the gospel.

A segment at Colossae sought spiritual elevation and security. They longed to come to know the unseen and to climb to spiritual heights via homage to philosophy, and mystical and metaphysical concepts.

As the Pharisees that became Christians tended to become "Judaizers," the Gentiles (especially those steeped in the philosophies of the Essenes) tended to become mystics. The Pharisees, by long practice, had been rigid rule-keepers; the Essenes tended to be mystics and theorists. One group sought to restore and bind certain parts of the Law; the other group sought to ascend into the unknown,

even to experience the presence of God. The Pharisees were exacting in their efforts to systematize certain rituals and ceremonial days. The Essenes worked to obtain spiritual experience through such efforts as meditation and rigorous disciplines of self-denial. These Paul labelled: "*philosophy and vain deceit*."

Application for Today

It is intriguing to observe how these two contrasting groups merged in Colossae. It is also intriguing to consider how the error in the church at Colossae was slow in developing. Yet, it is a matter of record that their error paved the way for Gnosticism and for other errors.

With this as background, consider the following question: What will evil men turn to and embrace to show their contempt for God? What will they embrace in their rejection of the Son of God?

Answers may prove to be elusive, but it is imperative to embrace the following truth: God will not be mocked! He can be relied upon to act always in accordance with His eternal purpose and His revealed will. No one can afford to show contempt for God, by minimizing the danger of rejecting or perverting the word of God. The directives of the will of God are to be honored by all who

would be one with God (Galatians 1:6ff; 2 John 9-11).

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THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH ALONE

RON THOMAS

The doctrine of "faith alone" is a cornerstone of Protestant theology. This cornerstone, however, is put in place by inserting into Scripture a term that does not exist and building on it a man-made theology, such as the sinners prayer, God's sovereign choice of salvation apart from one's free-will, and interpreting the word "works" to refer to either God's commands or to anything that a person might do (otherwise).

One advocate of the *faith alone* theology wrote, "I won't defend the truth of justification by faith alone in detail, but it's clearly taught, for example, in Romans 3:28: 'A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.' Or, as Paul teaches in Romans 4:5, 'God justifies the ungodly.' Both Abraham and David were justified by faith and not by works (Rom. 4:1-8; Gal. 3:6-9)."¹

It is my intent, in this article, to address these passages, noticing the context, and how it does not support to teaching of "faith alone." Finally, I wish to give some attention to James chapter 2, as this is no small matter.

The Use of the Word "Works" in Romans Chapters 3 and 4

How does Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, use the word "*works*" in Romans 3 and 4? One needs to start with his use of the word in 3:20, where Paul makes clear what he means by the word.

The word "*deeds*" in the KJV is the "*works*" in the ESV, and it is here that Paul shows that he means, "...by the deeds [works] of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight..."

What law? The answer: the Law of Moses, as Paul demonstrated in 3:9-19. Thus, the word "*works*" is properly understood to mean the Law of Moses.

As Paul continues with his point, he shows the Law of Moses was not designed by God to justify anyone who lived under its authority, because it was through the law that knowledge of sin came to be understood (Romans 3:20; cf. Acts 13:39). This knowledge of sin was not merely academic, but this knowledge had a quality of teaching that was to motivate a proper re-

sponse. In other words, since God's Law of Moses could not save, then what was a person to do to be right (justified) in God's eyes?

Paul writes, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Romans 3:21-22).

We learn: 1) the Law of Moses was not designed by God to save; 2) God's system of justification (or righteousness) is "by faith of Jesus Christ."

Paul then concludes, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (3:28)? Justification is by the *system of faith* (as revealed in Jesus) in contradistinction to the system of the Law of Moses, and the remaining three verses of Romans 3 bears this out.

"Faith alone" proponents contradict themselves on this passage and their practice of a "sinner's prayer." According to their interpretation of the text, obeying God's *commands* will not bring salvation (even if the Lord expressly states it), but obeying the *teachings* and or *traditions* of man such as their so-called "sinner's prayer" will! How can salvation be by "faith alone" when a prayer is re-

quired? Is a prayer not also a deed? The irony can't be missed.

The sinner's prayer is false for two reasons: first, there is no such teaching or example in Scripture where the "sinners prayer" is found; second, a manmade doctrine (faith only) has to be established in order for the first (sinner's prayer) to be put in place.

Romans 4:5

How does Romans 4:5 work into this doctrine? With the context of Romans 3 clearly before us, Paul writes, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

What is the meaning? Paul brings Abraham into the picture to illustrate how he was justified by God long before Moses was given the Law for the Israelite nation.

The way in which Abraham was justified before God, Paul writes, is the way in which one under the authority of the New Covenant will be justified today.

Abraham believed God and God accounted it righteousness to him. In other words, the "works" (4:4) in the context in which Paul writes, is in relationship to the previous chapter. Paul illustrates that Abraham was justified by God before and without

the works of the Law of Moses. And, if Abraham could be justified that way, so also could people be justified by faith apart from the Law of Moses today.

What kind of faith did Abraham have? "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8).

It is a complete misunderstanding of Romans 3 and 4 except to understand Paul's contrast of two systems of justification – the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. Of those two systems, only one could justify a person (the faith of Jesus), even though some still argued it was the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:1; Galatians 2:1-5).

The Use of the Word "Works" in Ephesians Chapter 2

As we looked at Romans 3 and 4, the word "works" is narrowly focused. In Ephesians 2, the word needs to be understood in a broader sense.

The church in Ephesus might have had a Jewish influence (cf. 2:11-22), but it appears to be of little force or influence in the letter. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul writes about salvation, and how redemption is in Christ. He teaches that God's grace and these

words were to those recipients who were already saved.

In this setting Paul writes, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Unfortunately, manufactured from this passage is a teaching that Paul says nothing about, and neither would he endorse. "*Faith only*" advocates will look at Ephesians 2:8 and rewrite what Paul said, saying, "for by grace are ye saved through faith alone..." They will continue with their rewrite in 2:9 by saying, "Not of God's commands, any commands, lest any man should boast."

What does Paul mean by the word "*works*" in 2:9? He means exactly that which he wrote in 2:8. In other words, when Paul said one is saved by God's grace "and that not of yourselves," he was saying there is nothing that originates in a person that he can do to generate an acceptable response from God.

Jeremiah wrote there is nothing in man by which he can direct his own steps (10:23). Man must rely only on the Lord for his salvation.

Albert Barnes, Presbyterian minister in the nineteenth century had it right when he wrote, "salvation does not proceed from yourselves."

A.T. Robertson writes, "Paul shows that salvation does not have its source (*ex humōn*, "out of you") in men, but from God." This is all the phrase means. It does not mean, and never has meant, that God's commands are to be understood in the word "*works*" – it's just not there!

The Use of the Word "Works" in James Chapter 2

The word "works" in James 2 is that which springs from a heart of faith. It is not merely a claim that "I believe," but a claim that "I believe and I have been created unto good works" (cf. Ephesians 2:10).

As James makes clear, without works of this kind, one's faith is dead. The basis for this kind of faith and these kinds of works (of which James speaks) is found in the Lord Jesus. Every man builds on a solid foundation if he wants the structure he built to be sustained through tumultuous weather (Matthew 7:24-28). Paul wrote, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other founda-

tion can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11).

The basis (foundation) of one's justification is in the actions of the Lord Jesus; not only the life He lived, the words He taught, but also the death He died and His subsequent resurrection. This is the basis upon which salvation from sin is built (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

With the foundation of God in place, man must respond by faith but not by "faith alone." Faith is the belief that God exists, and requires diligently seeking Him. Faith is having conviction and assurance that what the Lord said will come to pass (see Romans 4:21-25; Hebrews 11:1, 6).

Faith manifests itself in obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9). Acts 2 illustrates for us the principle of faith and obedience conjoined in man's response to God's word. When those in Jerusalem asked Peter and the other apostles *what they needed to do*, Peter replied they had to repent and to be baptized for (with a view to receiving) the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). This is what it means to be saved by faith!

The good works of James 2 is not the basis of justification, that is, salvation from sin. However, the Holy Spirit does speak of the essentiality of good works in direct relation to justification. Thus, it's a mistake of great

proportion to minimize "works" and "justification" in James 2 to support the false teaching of "faith alone." James used the scenarios of Abraham/Isaac and Rahab/Jericho to illustrate this truth effectively enough.

Conclusion

"Faith alone" is not a teaching of Scripture either expressly stated or even implied. It's a teaching which has originated with men. It has its basis *only* in the mind of men. Neither is the word "*works*" to be understood as a replacement term for any of God's "*commands*." Those guilty of doing these things are guilty of not properly handling the Scripture (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15).

[1] Thomas Schreiner (James Buchanan Harrison professor);

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dopaul-james-disagree-on-justification-by-faith-alone> (4/21/2017)

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“YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.”

Robert L. Waggoner

The first of the Ten Commandments – “You shall have no gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3) – is as relevant today as it was during Israel’s early national history. While the gods of ancient times differ from those of our day, the fact that idolatry, in different forms, exists in our society cannot be denied. Idolatry may be defined as “the religious worship of idols,” and as “excessive or blind adoration, reverence, devotion, etc.” (*Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*).

Idolatry in the Old Testament

During Old Testament times, idolatry was generally associated with images made of gold, silver, stone or wood that represented various gods. The gods of other nations that plagued ancient Israel were known by various names. The most common was the Canaanite male fertility god Ba’al, and his female consort Asherah. Among other frequently mentioned Canaanite gods were Dagon of the Philistines, and Chemosh of the Ammonites. Moloch was a Canaanite god that required parents to give their children as burnt sacrifices.

Notable instances when Israel fell into idolatry were when Aaron made the golden calf at Mt. Sinai, when Solomon permitted his wives to build temples to their idols, when Jeroboam erected golden calves at the cities of Bethel and Dan, when Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, led the northern kingdom into idolatry, and when the Judean king Manasseh filled Jerusalem with idolatry.

Graven Images and Values

Images are not themselves gods. They only represent gods. In addition to images, ideals or philosophies are associated with gods. These concepts about gods can exist either with or without images.

Ideals and values, themselves, may even be characterized as gods. Thus, Paul referred to a covetous man as an idolater (Ephesians 5:5) and covetousness as idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Jesus taught that “you cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Following the definition of idolatry given above, modern idolatry may be recognized as “excessive or blind adoration, reverence, devotion, etc.” to

some philosophy or value. All modern forms of idolatry are primarily philosophical. Applying this understanding of idolatry, the First Commandment could rightly be stated as "You shall not adore, revere, or devote any value or philosophy before Me."

God Must Be Put First

While the first commandment is stated in a negative form (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7) it is also stated many times in positive ways. Moses wrote, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always" (Deuteronomy 11:1).

Jesus also noted the commandment in a positive manner. "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30; see also Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27).

Both negative and positive statements convey the message that God must be first in our lives. Whenever we put any aspect of creation before our Creator, we become idolatrous. People may worship various aspects of nature, history, money, humanity,

or power instead of their Creator. These are the forms of idolatry in our present world.

Such idols may be more specifically identified. Many are thoroughly discussed by Herbert Schlossberg in his book *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society*. We may perceive the nature of idolatry in our contemporary world by noting a few of these.

Idols of History

Idols of history include those of the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and of the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882). While the Christian view of history is that God created the world, operates within it, directs its affairs and will someday bring history to an end, Hegel and Darwin declared contrary views.

Hegel gave a dialectical view of history, saying that every situation (thesis) has an opposite (antithesis) and that these two situations clash, producing a synthesis which becomes the next thesis, etc.

This view of history became a foundational perspective for Marxism and Communism. This view of history removes God from originating, operating within or directing history.

Darwin gave an evolutionary view of history that denies God's creative

activity in originating all things, removes God from historical activity, and implies that the universe will exist forever. These idols are traceable to particular individuals and are easily recognizable. Other modern idols are not so easily recognized.

Idols of Humanity

Idols of humanity include such things as the philosophy of humanism, antinomianism, pragmatism, egalitarianism, and secularism.

Humanism removes God from reality and makes humanity the supreme ruler.

Antinomianism is the rejection of law. Because God's law is rejected, then all ethical considerations are founded only upon human thinking.

Pragmatism is the belief that whatever works is best whether or not it is consistent with godliness.

Humanistic egalitarianism requires that everyone have equal opportunity and material prosperity, not the Christian understanding that everyone has equality before the law.

Secularism is the belief that life should be lived only in view of whatever is temporal and of this world. It therefore contends that religion should not enter into public affairs of the state, such as politics and education.

These idols of humanity have produced abortion, divorce, pornography,

gambling, and many other anti-Christian practices in our culture.

Idols of Nature

Idols of nature include beliefs that nature is all there is (denying the existence of the supernatural), that whatever can be known must be based upon reason (not revelation from God), and that nature (neither God nor humanity) determines human activity.

Idols of Power

Idols of power – all related to civil governments – include beliefs that the state (not God) is the savior of its people, and that the state (not God) is guardian or father of its citizens.

Idols of mammon, often associated with idols of power, include state regulation of inflation, and the state's right to redistribute wealth.

Idols of Religion

Idols of religion take many forms, including what is often referred to as civil religion. Modern idolatry thus exists in many forms.

The prophet Hosea declared that Israel's idolatry led to their destruction. "With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction" (Hosea 8:4, ESV). Their ruin came because they rejected God. Moses told Israel, "But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them . . . you shall surely

perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:17).

Joshua gave the same warning, "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good" (Joshua 24:20).

Other prophets declared the same. These warnings proved true. God eventually brought the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to ruin because of their idolatrous practices (2 Kings 17:6-41; 21:1-16; 23:26; 24:1-4; 2 Chronicles 34:24-25; 36:15-21).

An Application for Today

Will it not also be the same with us? Although our society once respected God, Christ, the Bible, and the church, many have given themselves over to idolatrous philosophies and practices. God seems no longer to be first in our culture. If this continues, can we hope for anything but the destruction of our nation also?

Therefore, should not we who seek to serve God do whatever we can to destroy modern idolatry that is all around us? Should we not strive to build a culture wherein only the God of the Bible is served? To turn our nation back to God, we must attack and destroy these idols.

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The Rainbow

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How many times have you seen a rainbow in the sky? Still, you stop and stare, don't you? It is a wonder that never gets old!

Some memories we will treasure for all our days. I once saw a gigantic rainbow on the Great Plains, the ends stretching out and down to the endless, flat horizon. I will never forget the double rainbow hanging over Jericho and stretching out into the Dead Sea. And, let me tell you that Rocky Mountain rainbows may be the most spectacular of all!

The rainbow has forever been a source of bewilderment to the pagan, inspiration to the poet, and assurance to the believer. Although we know today a rainbow is caused by the refraction (or bending) of light rays that enter raindrops, spray or fog in the atmosphere, primitive peoples invented many imaginative and fanciful theories to account for the bow in the skies.

The Greeks believed the rainbow was made by Iris, the messenger of Hera, the queen of the gods. When sent to earth from Mount Olympus to deliver a message, Iris flew so quickly her many colored robe left a brilliant trail behind.

The Norse believed the rainbow was a heavenly bridge that connected the worlds of gods and men.

Of course, the book of Genesis reveals the true origin and significance of the rainbow. Following the destruction of the world by the flood, Noah and his family stepped out of the ark to begin a new and different life. The Lord God made a covenant with Noah's family and his descendants and placed a bow in the sky as a symbol of His promise (Genesis 9). Even today the sight of a rainbow should cause the viewer to reflect on several scriptural principles.

God Is True to His Word

In all the passing centuries since Noah there has not been a flood to destroy "all flesh." While terrible and destructive floods occur somewhere in the world with almost every passing year, we need not fear another universal flood. God has promised there will *not* be another.

God Will Again Destroy the World – with Fire

Peter declares that "the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men...But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and

the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:7, 10).

In the words of one old song, "God gave Noah the rainbow sign: No more water, the fire next time!"

The Indescribable Glory of God

In Ezekiel 1:28 the prophet compared the brightness of the Lord's glory to the bow set in the clouds.

John's vision of God Almighty on His throne is recorded in Revelation 4. Verse 3 speaks of a "rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

The rainbow surely declares the glory and majesty of the Creator of our universe.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE CHRISTIAN

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At one time in his life Alexander Campbell believed religious reform could be best accomplished from within an existing religious group. The Baptist denomination was very impressed with Campbell's defense of immersion as the only scriptural mode for baptism, and seemed like the group with which he shared the most in common.

However, friction with the Baptists and specifically the Red Stone Baptist Association soon became apparent for Campbell and a break was inevitable. The controversy centered on Campbell's conviction that Christians were no longer bound to keep the Law of Moses. The Baptists believed that one could refer to the Old Law just as easily as the New Law in matters of doctrine and practice.

Many denominations take the same approach to the Bible today. For instance, the Baptist Church still maintains that the Lord's Day is the "Christian Sabbath,"¹ and attempt to bind Sabbath-type laws in their

churches.² The Disciples of Christ and the Christian Church will attempt to use the Old Testament as their basis for using mechanical instruments of music in worship.³ The Church of the Nazarene uses the Old Law to bind tithing in their creed.⁴

Moral and Ceremonial

A more common argument is urged by Methodists, Presbyterians, and Seventh-Day Adventists in that they divide the Old Law into moral and ceremonial laws. It is believed that the moral laws of the Old Law remain binding and were never nailed to the cross.

The Adventists and Baptists believe the Ten Commandments belong to the moral aspect of the law. Thus, Adventists "keep the Sabbath" and Baptists keep the "Christian Sabbath."

¹ O.C.S. Wallace, *What Baptists Believe*, (Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1934), 105.

² In some instances members are urged not to work on Sundays, or do any sort of physical labor.

³ Historic examples of this argument can be found in such debates as Stark-Warlick, Otey-Briney, and Boswell-Hardeman.

⁴ *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, (Kansas City: MO, Nazarene Publishing House, 1968), 47.

The Scriptures teach us that the Law of Moses was given specifically to the nation of Israel and none other. When God spoke to Moses on the mountain, it was to be directed unto "the house of Jacob and the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:3, 5-6). Certainly this included the Ten Commandments, which served merely as the preamble to the Old Law.

The Bible teaches us that the law has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) – including ceremonial laws such as the Sabbath (Colossians 2:17). By His death and the coming of the New Testament, Christ made the Old Testament "old" (Hebrews 8:13).

Christ took away the first so that He could establish the second (Hebrews 10:9). God caused the Law of Moses to be done away and abolished in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:6-18).

Adventists have maintained that the terms "Law of God" and "Law of Moses" distinguish the moral from the ceremonial. However, the Law of Moses and the Law of God are one and the same law. God gave the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:6). Moses gave the Law of God (2 Chronicles 34:14).

Whether referred to as the Law of God, the Law of Moses, or simply the law, in the context of the Old Testament, the text is speaking of that

which was given by God to Moses at Mount Sinai.

"Everlasting"

Moreover, Adventists point to terms such as "everlasting" which were used to describe the old covenant. At times in the Old Testament, you will find the law described as an "everlasting" covenant or statute with Israel.

To those Jews who died under the law, it was eternally significant. By that law their faithfulness to God was and will ultimately be judged. "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law..." (Romans 2:12).

The Purpose of the Law

We can also observe on the part of many a failure to understand the purpose of the law. The law was given to Israel because of Israel's transgressions in the wilderness.

Listen to what Paul said in Galatians 3:19, "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator."

That little word, "till" or "until" is very important. It tells us that the law was never intended to be eternal, but

that it was given for a purpose "until" that purpose was fulfilled.

What was that purpose? Paul writes, "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made..." That seed was Christ; and the promise mentioned was the one made to Abraham some 2,000 years before the birth of Christ, that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Another purpose of the law is likewise stated in Galatians chapter three in that it was given to serve as a schoolmaster, or tutor, to Israel to bring them to faith in Christ, that they might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Paul then adds, "But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (v.25).

In the eyes of God, in the Christian age, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29).

Thus you see how God kept His promise in Christ and all nations of the earth are blessed by the Seed of Abraham - Christ - Who died for the sins of the world.

God's intent from the beginning, as seen in His promise to Abraham, was

to bless every nation with the opportunity of salvation and have a covenant relationship with Him, thus bringing every nation to faith in Christ Jesus.

The law served as a means of teaching and keeping Abraham's seed holy until the promise made in Genesis 12:3 would be fulfilled in Christ. Israel was blessed to have all of those wonderful prophets preaching unto them and the watchful eye of a loving God upon them. This is the meaning of Paul's statement in Romans 3:1-2, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God."

Israel had the word of God directing their steps, serving as their moral and civil law, to bring them unto the Christ and His gospel. The law has served that purpose; and yet it still has a purpose for us today.

A False Accusation

Members of denominations have falsely accused the Lord's church for "not believing in the Old Testament." Christians usually offer the rejoinder, "We believe in the whole Bible. But we are not bound to keep the Old Testament."

As Christians, we gladly accept that the things written beforehand -

the Old Testament – were written for our learning (Romans 15:4). Through the Old Testament we can learn more about God, His character, and His dealings with man.

This is what Paul meant when he said, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

We have many lessons to learn from the Old Testament, but the gospel of Christ, not the law of Moses, is meant for our *keeping* (see Matthew 28:20; John 12:48). Even Moses said of Christ’s words, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear...” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Moses was telling Israel that the time was going to come when they would have to stop living by the law given at Sinai and begin living by the law of Christ.

Man must now obey the gospel of Christ – not the Law of Moses – if he is to be saved. Paul said, “Imitate (*follow*, KJV) me, just as I also imitate (*follow*, KJV) Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are to follow Paul as he

followed Christ, not as he followed Moses.

God made a promise to Abraham that from his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The law, that came four hundred years after this promise, could not disannul the fact that all nations of the earth (the Gentiles) would be blessed.

The law was added to *Israel* because of Israel’s transgressions, to serve as a tutor, to bring them unto the time of Christ. The law offered life to anyone who could keep it perfectly, but no man could, save one – Jesus Christ.

The law, therefore, became a curse to the Jews because of their failure to keep it perfectly and find justification therein. But Christ, who kept it perfectly, took the curse of the law away by His sacrifice for our sins, “hanging on the tree” (Galatians 3:13), bringing redemption and justification for the sins the law could not touch.

The law was given to Israel and to make any part of the law binding on men today is to leave anyone but a Jew outside the doors of fellowship with God. Moreover, it is to leave the Jew under the curse of the law without any possibility of ultimate forgiveness.

As Christians, we know this is not the case. Christ is now the High Priest

over the house of God (Hebrews 4:4-16), which is the household of faith (Galatians 6:10), His church. "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law" (Hebrews 7:12).

The Limitations of the Law

The law has been fulfilled. It existed for a time as God's covenant with Israel. But it was limited in its recipients, its purpose, and its duration.

The law was not perfect (Hebrews 7:18-19), nor was it intended to be. The law could not perfect the conscience (Hebrews 9:9), because it

could never fully satisfy our sin debt (Hebrews 10:1; Isaiah 53).

We now have a better covenant, which has been established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6-7). Man is saved by the gospel (Romans 1:16-17).

God has promised and given a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:15-17). The law of the Spirit of life in Christ has freed us from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). Let us serve Him in newness of the Spirit rather than oldness of the letter (Romans 7:6).

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Eating in the Church Building

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Question: Is it scriptural for Christians to eat a fellowship meal in the church building, even if it offends some brethren?

Answer: Yes. And the answers are in Scriptures by way of reply.

Whoever says eating a fellowship meal in the church building is unscriptural must prove that:

1) The Church building itself is sacred and for one purpose only;

2) Social meals are carnal in nature and cannot be spiritual;

3) The Bible specifies everything for which church contributions may be used;

4) The only reason for church buildings and assemblies is for worship sacrifices.

None of these may be established according to the Word of God. In fact, most assemblies of early Christians involved a "temple" (which was

borrowed space) or houses (which certainly had kitchens in them). Moreover, it was "with gladness and simplicity of heart" (spiritual unity) the church of Christ "ate their food" according to Acts 2:46.

Where, in Scripture, can a church pay for a baptistry, a water fountain, restrooms, cleaning supplies, electricity, computers, paper, Bible class books? If the prohibition comes from specifics in Scripture, then produce the prohibiting passage! The Jerusalem church had set up "tables" for a "daily distribution" to widows (Acts 6:1-4). What, specifically, were they giving away to these widows, and who paid for it?

Jesus Christ sanctified Himself (John 17:19) and is sanctified in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15); Christians are sanctified by the second will (Hebrews 10:10) in the offering of Christ (Hebrews 10:14; 13:12); the church is the sanctified (Ephesians 5:26; 1 Corinthians 1:2); and food should be sanctified (1 Timothy 4:3-5); but, *WHERE ARE THE COLLECTION PLATES AND THE CHURCH BUILDING SANCTIFIED?*

In the only miracle Jesus did that is recorded in all four gospel accounts (apart from His resurrection), Matthew described thusly: "When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, 'This is a deserted place, and

the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.' But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' And they said to Him, 'We have here only five loaves and two fish.' He said, 'Bring them here to Me'" (Matthew 14:15-18).

It was the disciples in their ignorance who thought it best for "the multitudes" to have to go home to eat ("into the villages and buy themselves food"). Jesus expressly stated they did not have to leave the place where He had preached to them in order for them to eat a meal. And, Jesus challenged His disciples to buy food for the multitude out of their "treasury" (John 6:5-6), which they had used for their own food (John 4:8), and understood could be spent for "the poor" (John 13:29).

The account in Luke makes it clear that Jesus "spoke to them about the kingdom of God" (9:11); offered food from the disciples' treasury (9:13); and fed them in the same place they had heard Him preach (9:14-17). Would this have become sinful if there had been a building in which this occurred?

Following His example, the church of Christ began by the Apostles' preaching Jesus Christ (Acts 2:13-41), setting up a treasury (Acts 2:44-45),

and eating common meals with spiritual growth (Acts 2:46). There is a strong parallel of language between the established practice of the church of Christ on Pentecost and the growing church in Jerusalem: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46); and, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

The first disciples (later called "Christians," Acts 11:26) taught and preached Jesus and then ate in the same facility. If they broke bread from house to house, then they taught and preached Jesus the Christ in every house! They were teaching and preaching Jesus in the same places where they "ate their food!"

An Offended Brother

But what if a brother or sister is offended by eating in the building? Then they are free to go home at meal-time!

According to Paul in Romans 14:1-15:3: *The weak brother should not be permitted to:* "make the rules" (Romans 14:1); create lines of fellowship over such matters (Romans 14:2); but should give God thanks for what his conscience will allow (Romans 14:6).

The strong brother should: not be intimidated (Romans 14:3-5); be considerate of the weak brother's conscience and not force the eating upon the weaker brother (Romans 14:12-15); bear the weak brother's infirmities as Christ has done (Romans 15:1-6).

The usual verse that is thrown into this discussion is: "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?" (1 Corinthians 11:22).

The context of this verse is that the church was maintaining "divisions among" them and had turned the occasion of The Lord's Supper into a common meal (1 Corinthians 11:17-21). Some were eating according to their own provisions and desires with no regard for their needier brethren.

Paul reminded them that the Lord's Supper must be eaten exactly with the elements and for the expressed purpose set forth by Jesus "on the same night in which He was betrayed" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26);

Paul re-stated that the Lord's Supper is for self-examination and to "judge ourselves" (1 Corinthians 11:31-32), and a reminder that Christ died for each Christian with no distinctions to be drawn.

In fact, since eating common meals can be done with spiritual fellowship, Christians are forbidden to eat with willful sinners (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 9-13; 2); meat sacrificed to idols if a brother's conscience was weak on this point (1 Corinthians 8:1-13); meat sacrificed to idols if offered it, but a brother conscientiously raises the point of its origin (1 Corinthians 10:23-33); and divisive church meals if they encouraged divisions (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

Does any of this contradict or condemn the practice of Jesus Christ and the Jerusalem church? No, but it adds further considerations for the practice.

It is not the place, but the purpose under consideration. If the church meal promotes division, encourages willful sin, or goes against the ignorantly misguided conscience of a brother, then our liberty allows us to forgo the privilege. Church fellowship meals are not to be forced upon anyone, but they remain a right with the proper understanding and for the edification of the church.

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Remembering "Raccoon" John Smith (1784-1868)

Jackson Erwin

"Raccoon" John Smith, was one of the most well-known and unique characters of the early Restoration Movement. Smith was born on October 15, 1784 in East Tennessee in the area which is now known as Sullivan County. He is supposed to have earned this nickname because he had once identified himself as living where "the raccoons make their home."

Smith was raised in a heavily Calvinistic Baptist church in which his

parents, George and Rebecca, were members. He grew up as a strong believer of Calvinism. This doctrine, being planted in his mind, caused a young John Smith to seek for God to call him as one of the elect and for the Holy Spirit to give him a sign. He became depressed and faced many emotional struggles because of this.

He even went before his church to ask if these struggles he had faced were a sign of salvation. The moderator of the congregation then asked the

audience to raise their hand if they believed that these struggles were a work of grace. The show of hands was in his favor, and Smith was then voted into the Baptist church that night and baptized the next day. At this time, however, Smith had no intention of preaching, though he was encouraged by Isaac Denton, the preacher who taught him a great deal about Calvinism, to take up the ministry.

Education

Smith never received any form of college education, but took advantage of what education was available to him. He would study and read next to the fireplace of his teacher, Robert Ferrill, every night after a day of working on the farm.

Alexander Campbell said concerning Smith's education, "John Smith is the only man that I ever knew who would have been spoiled by a college education." Due to this lack of education, Smith had the ability to reach out to the more uneducated people in his preaching, which made him much more powerful in saving souls and converting many men and women with his unique ability of delivering the gospel.

Early Life

On December 9, 1806, Smith married Anne Townshend. It was around

this time that Smith decided to become a minister for the Baptist Church. Remaining under the Calvinistic influence, Smith believed that he had to receive a divine sign which would show him that God had called him to preach. He never received such signs but wondered if two life-threatening situations which he had faced earlier in life were signs of this calling.

His Baptist friends insisted that he should become an ordained minister and in May of 1808 Smith took the ordination exam to preach. He was then ordained as a Baptist preacher at the age of twenty-four. Not long after his ordination in July of 1810, Smith and some fellow Baptists organized the Bethel Baptist Church in Parmleysville, Kentucky. About two months after the church was formed, Smith became the preacher at age twenty-six.

He moved to an area near Huntsville, Alabama called Hickory Flats on November 2, 1814. One evening, while he was out of town preaching, two of his children were burned alive in a cabin fire. This event made him wonder about his children and whether or not they were among the elect. He and his wife became greatly distraught over their deaths and whether two innocent children who had never done any wrong could be eternally punished.

It would not be long after this that his wife, Anne, would die due to depression over the loss of her children. This would become a long and dark period for John Smith.

Return to Kentucky

John Smith returned to Kentucky with a broken spirit, having lost two of his children, his wife, and his fortune. Once again he found himself doubting the tenets of Calvinism.

Smith married Nancy Hurt on December 23, 1821. She was a very religious woman who cared for Smith's children while he was away preaching.

Struggling with Calvinism

Soon after marrying Nancy, Smith would come to the light regarding the false doctrines of Calvinism. In March of 1822, after a long period of studying the Scriptures, Smith began to realize the many problems associated with the doctrines he had been preaching.

While he was preaching at Spencer's Creek, Kentucky, and pleading with his audience to repent and believe the gospel of Christ, he became silent. He realized that his belief in predestination made no sense. He wondered within himself why a man would need to repent if God had already decided whether he was to be saved or lost.

His final words of that sermon began his walk into the light of the true gospel: "Brethren, something is wrong, I am in the dark; but how to lead you to the light, or to find the way myself, before God, I know not."⁵ He walked out of the meeting house after these words, wondering about the doctrines he had believed and taught for so long.

Influenced by Campbell

Not long after this, Smith began reading from Alexander Campbell's paper *The Christian Baptist*. This journal helped Smith to see the falsehood of Calvinism. Not only that, but Smith would begin rejecting all manmade doctrines and traditions in order to follow the New Testament faithfully.

John Smith united with Campbell and became a part of the Restoration Movement or as they were then called, "Reformers." The Baptist Church branded Smith as a heretic. But, along with other men who came out of the Baptist Church, such as Jacob Creath, Sr., Jacob Creath, Jr., and John T. Johnson, he took part in a ministry through Kentucky which led thousands of people to be baptized for the remission of their sins and to fol-

⁵ V. Glenn McCoy, *Return to the Old Paths* (Yorba Linda, CA: McCoy Publications, 1998), 162 ff.

low the Bible as their sole authority in religion.

Unity between Stone and Campbell

Probably the most well-known single event of John Smith's life is his speech from the unity meeting between Barton W. Stone's group, the "Christians," and Alexander Campbell's group, the "Reformers." One must remember that before this time, many who held the restoration plea within their hearts did not realize just how many others there were who held the same beliefs and ideas. By this time, however, men began to hear and learn of others who saw the need to go back to the Bible, and the movement spread like wildfire. This unity meeting between the two groups was an extremely important assembly in lighting this fire.

There were two main speakers for this meeting. The first to speak was John Smith, while the second would be Barton W. Stone. Smith's most notable words in his address were his concluding words, "*Let us then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us all come to the Bible, and to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the Light we need.*"⁶

Smith's speech consisted of Christ's prayer for unity, and how this unity can only be accomplished by throwing out all man-made creeds, doctrines, and names, and by following one creed, the Bible. After this speech, Stone spoke of his appreciation of the words which were spoken and how similar the two groups were and that unity was needed within the two groups.

As a result of these meetings and speeches, Stone and Smith came together and shook hands. The brethren did the same. Many wept at what they had just witnessed and the church sang praises to God.

Final Sermon and Death

On February 9, 1868, Smith preached his last sermon at the age of eighty-three, almost a month before his death. He became very ill due to walking later that night to his daughter's house in the cold. He remained in bed for three weeks before passing away.

He told his daughters of his one regret, that his sons-in-laws were not Christians. After singing a hymn of heaven, he spoke to his loved ones of his preparation for death and readiness to die.

He died on February 28, 1868 at 8:30 p.m. His body was sent to Lex-

⁶ McCoy, pp.93-95

ington, Kentucky and was buried next to Nancy. His grave reads:

In memory of John Smith, an elder of the church of Christ. Born October 15th, 1784. Died February 28, 1868. True, genial, and pious, the good loved, and all respected him. Strong through affliction and wise by the study of the Word, he gave up the creed of his fathers for the

sake of the Word. By its power, he turned many from error; in its light he walked, and in its consolations he triumphantly died. In all his sacrifices his companion was precious in his sight. Nancy Smith was born November 15th, 1792 and died November 4, 1861.

7 Brown Creek Dr.
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THE DOOR IS OPEN

Tom McLemore

There was a time when, if you knocked on someone's door, you would hear a cry from within, "Come on in. The door is open!" That is God's message to us as we approach the task of spreading the gospel. Paul was busy spreading the gospel in Ephesus, so he wrote the Corinthians that he would stay there until Pentecost. He explained, "for a wide door for effective work has opened to me; and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9).

The Door of Opportunity

The fact that today we are acquainted with souls who are lost and need the gospel of Christ provides access to a wide door. It is a door of direction, leading us to identify people who need to hear the gospel and to

hear God's call to preach to them (2 Corinthians 2:12, 13). The door that was opened to Paul in the Lord at Troas was identified by the vision reported in Acts 16:8-10, in which he saw a man requesting help.

That door was a door for the word preached, an opportunity for the mystery of Christ to enter into the hearts of men (Colossians 4:3). That door was a door for faith, an opportunity for people, having heard the word, to believe it (Acts 14:27; Romans 10:17).

In the case of the Gentiles, the barrier of exclusivism had been removed. Today many barriers have been removed. There are millions of copies of the Bible in many languages. We

live in a free country in which the gospel may be proclaimed without government suppression. Many are becoming more receptive.

What Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16:9 emphasizes the providence of God and cooperation with God (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:12). Paul does not say, "I have opened myself a door." The door is opened unto him by someone else. God is the opener of the door and ultimately the doer of what is done. He does it with and through His people.

New Testament Christians could report what *God* had done *with them*, and that *He* had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:27; Colossians 4:3; cf. Acts 16:14). Now, as then, God's people rightly pray for Him to open the door, and when they see him opening the door, they approach the entrance into the door prayerfully, trusting in God.

Opposition Is Expected

Paul spoke of *much opposition*. Just because God has opened the door does not mean that no struggle will be necessary in order for it to be entered. This is reinforced to us by the story of the entrance of Israel into the promised land. God had promised it to the fathers. He said to the children of Israel, "I have given it to you." Yet,

that did not mean that the people who lived there were just going to step aside and say, "Take it, it's yours." Israel would have to *possess* it.

Likewise, Jesus declared, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33), yet He did not mean that the world was going to give up without a struggle. In that same verse, He stressed that in the world His disciples would have to face persecution (cf. Mark 10:30). So it is with the great, wide door God opens for the gospel today. It is a wide door for *effective work*. Our work is cut out for us. There are many adversaries who will be working against the gospel and truth and right. Many are attempting to close the door, to keep people from passing through it, and to keep the work from being effective work.

Overcoming Opposition

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he was in the midst of his great work in Ephesus. The story is recorded in Acts 19 (with Paul's reminiscences on it in chapter 20). He had a tremendous opportunity. Ephesus was a center of travel and commerce. There, many people could be introduced to the gospel. "All Asia heard the word" (Acts 19:10). The lives of many, including purveyors of magic, were radically changed by the gospel (Acts 19:18, 19).

The word grew and multiplied (Acts 19:20). Yet, all of this success and progress occurred in the midst of *extreme* opposition. Many were hardened and disobedient (Acts 19:8-9). Perhaps these were the "beasts" to which Paul referred (1 Corinthians 15:29b-32; 2 Corinthians 1:8).

As in Paul's day, the adversaries are many today. There is much opposition still. There is the devil. He is THE adversary, THE opposition; all other adversaries are tools of his evil opposition to the progress of the gospel. He blinds minds to the truth of, and the need for, the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). He snatches the word from hearts as birds eat seeds on a path (Luke 8:11, 12).

There is greater love of pleasure than love of God (2 Timothy 3:4). There is lack of love of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). There is everything that is exalted against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). There are discouragements and distractions, including the cares and concerns of life of one kind or another (Luke 8:14; Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17). There are many others.

Consider Paul's response and how it should be ours. Did Paul say,

"Well, since there is so much *opposition*, let us forget about the *opportunity*." No, he struggled on.

Though Paul makes passing reference to the opposition to the gospel, his tone is one of full faith and confidence in the gospel. He was optimistic and excited about the prospects. He believed in the power of the gospel with all his heart (Romans 1:16; cf. Hebrews 4:12).

Though there was much opposition and were many adversaries, he knew that through God, his work would be effective. The divine power would prevail. Remember what John wrote: "Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

In Conclusion

So what do we do? Give up? Conclude that it cannot be done? Call off the work? No. Rather, let us speak and respond as Paul did. God is the one who opens and no one can shut and shuts and no one can open (Revelation 3:7, 8). He says, "The door's open. Come on in."

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Life Is Too Short

Stephen R. Bradd

As people get older they often remark about how time flies. Of course, literally, time is the same for young and old alike, but the older we get, the more conscious we become of the swift passage of our lives.

Job declared, even in the midst of great suffering - "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job 7:6). Asaph observed - "For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again" (Psalm 78:39). James wrote that life is like "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14).

Yes, life is short, though from the perspective of a faithful Christian, it is difficult to say that life is too short. The struggles of this life and the glory of a heavenly abode ought to make dedicated disciples think that life on Earth is too long, if anything. Paul seemed to share this view - "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Paul was ready to die and be with the Lord, but he would serve God with all his might in the meantime.

However, there is another view to consider on this subject. It could accurately be said that life is too short for one to neglect truly important opportunities. Please consider the following points on this theme.

TO NEGLECT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR JOY

It's not so much that others deprive us of joy. Typically, we deprive ourselves. Numerous folks miss so many of the simple joys of life because they are too busy with trivial matters. This is tragic. Philippians 4:4 - "**Rejoice** in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

TO NEGLECT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR BETTER FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

No matter how close one is to his family, there are always certain ties that could use strengthening. We have a duty to our families that cannot be fulfilled without significant contributions of time. "...Let each one of you in particular so love his own **wife** as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her **husband**. **Children**, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'...fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 5:33-6:4).

TO NEGLECT THE OPPORTUNITY OF FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRISTIANS

The public and private occasions God's people have to be together ought to be precious time indeed. These are times we share interests, laughter, encouragement, and even constructive criticism. Acts 2:42 - "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship..."

TO NEGLECT THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD FOR OTHERS

The building blocks of a meaningful life are kind words and helpful deeds. There are so many in the world who could benefit from what we can offer. Our own selfishness can rob us of great blessings. Galatians 6:9,10 - "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith."

TO NEGLECT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

One who feels he can live a consecrated life without continual spiritual enrichment either does not understand the Christian life or is self-deceived. Bible classes, gospel literature, and private study are crucial for spiritual growth and success. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

TO NEGLECT TO SPEAK ABOUT THE SAVIOR

Too many are lost, and you can help some to be saved! Romans 1:16 - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, for everyone who believes..." May we never be ashamed of the good news of Jesus Christ, and may we leap upon every opportunity to share the blessed gospel message with others! They need the gospel, and the Lord expects us to teach it to them (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Friends, life is too short to neglect vitally important opportunities such as these. May the heavenly Father "...teach us to number our days [and balance our priorities], that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

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Service Times

Sunday Bible Study

9:30 am

Sunday Worship

10:30 am

Sunday Evening Worship

6:00 pm

Wednesday Evening Worship

7:00 pm

Andy Erwin, Minister

Be Our Honored Guest!

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The
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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

“The Churches of Christ Greet You” (Romans 16:16)

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ is pleased to bring you the *Gospel Gleaner*. Are you familiar with the churches of Christ? Have you ever attended our services before?

Faithful churches of Christ desire to return to the New Testament and to be the church of the Bible. In the Bible, we find that the church is the assembly of all those who have been called out of the darkness of sin by obeying the gospel. These souls are added by God to the spiritual body of Christ, which is His church (Acts 2:42, 47; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church belongs to Christ. It is His church. We, therefore, seek to honor Christ as our Lord in our worship, teaching, and daily walk.

One can be added to this sacred assembly and spiritual kingdom by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:17); believing the facts concerning Christ as revealed in the gospel (John 8:24); repenting of sin (Luke 13:3, 5); and by being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-13; Galatians 3:26-27) to wash sins away by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7).

For more information about the church, or God's plan of salvation, we offer free Bible Correspondence courses and personal Bible studies. Call or write to us.

The Gospel Gleaner

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Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. The West Fayetteville Church of Christ reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

The Gospel Gleaner is free to all while supply is available.

Gospel Gleaner

Vol. 29 ♦ No. 4

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Christians Who Are Blessings

Gerald Cowan

Most people want to be blessed by God, by the government, by other persons, etc. Receiving blessings is their major concern. Many are not concerned about being a blessing to others. Expect a stock answer to, "How is the world treating you?" "OK, but not as well as I'd like." Then ask, "How are you treating the world?" Expect some blank looks. "How are you treating others?" – is a more important question than, "How are others treating you?"

Can we ask the same questions about God? "How is God treating you? Is He blessing you?" And, "How are you treating God? Are you blessing Him?" When asked about it, Martin Luther said, "If I were God and the world treated me as it does Him, I'd kick it to pieces." If God treated you the way you treat Him – and others – would you be happy and consider yourself blessed?

Can we actually bless God? What does Psalm 103:1-2 mean? "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name... forget not all His benefits." We can acknowledge that we are blessed by Him. We can thank Him for his blessings. But is there any way we can be a blessing to the Lord himself, or to His

kingdom? How can we bless others? How can we be a true blessing to others?

A FEW NEGATIVE CONCERNS

It is not only the rich, famous, and powerful who can bless others. Perhaps they are better equipped to bless, and have more to share in blessing others. "Much is required from him to whom much is given" (Luke 12:48). But this does not mean those with little cannot use it to bless others, if they so desire (see Mark 14:7: "The poor are always with you. You can help them when you want to.")

It is not only men who can bless others. Men and women are not treated as equals in the world or the church, but should be. There have been great women in business, politics, literature, and sciences, etc. Obviously men and women do not have the same role and function in the home or in the church. But that does not mean either one is inferior to the other.

The feminist movement has hurt the cause and condition of women in some areas more than it has helped. The church does not always treat women properly, but that is not the question here. Can only men bless the church, or can women bless it too? 1 Peter 3:1-7 has often been misunderstood and misapplied. Women are not "weaker" physically, mentally, morally, or spiritually. They are weaker in the marriage relationship because God has placed the man at the head of the

family and the woman as submissive to his authority and headship. But notice that the husband must consider his wife as an heir of grace and life from God together with himself (verse 7). Women do not have the same roles as men in the church. But there is no spiritual distinction between them.

There is a distinction in role and function, in works. Women cannot have authority over men in the church. Therefore they cannot serve as elders, deacons, or preachers and teachers of men (1 Timothy 2:8-12). But women are spiritually equal to men. There is no spiritual difference (Galatians 3:28). In most congregations the women are generally more "spiritually minded" than men, and are more likely to become and remain Christians than men are. Men and women have different roles or works. Both are blessings to the church. Physical, material, emotional, and social blessings are not the only ones – certainly not the most important ones we can give.

A SAMPLE LIST OF CHRISTIANS WHO ARE TRUE BLESSINGS

- Those who instruct us in the ways of God are a blessing to us.

That certainly includes preachers and teachers of Bible classes. It also includes faithful Christians who teach, either directly or indirectly by word and example, the ways and will of God. Not everybody can be a teacher in the pulpit or in the classroom (James 3:1), but every Christian can set an example in attitude and conduct

that others can follow, and give glory to God because of it (Matthew 5:14-16, 1 Timothy 4:12).

➤ Those who encourage us are a blessing to us (Hebrews 10:24-25).

We generally try to avoid people who discourage us and make us feel bad. Somebody I know once claimed to have a talent for “speaking my mind and letting the chips fall wherever they may.” There is a *talent* that should be buried! God bless those who reassure us that our mistakes do not have to be final. God bless those who look for something good even while pointing out the bad. Discouragers say, “The way is too hard, the work cannot be done, no need to try” (Deuteronomy 1:21-28). Encouragers give us reassurance, courage to try, the will to keep going and win.

➤ Those who correct us are a blessing to us.

Thank God for those who love us and care enough to correct us and warn us when we stray from the truth and the path of God. Those who love us will not discourage or destroy us with harsh words. They will help recover and restore us with firmness and kindness (Galatians 6:1-2). Proud persons have difficulty getting accepted by God, because He tells them what is wrong and insists on repentance and correction (Acts 17:30). Most reasonable people appreciate being told what is wrong if it benefits them to know it. That applies physi-

cally and it should apply socially, morally, and spiritually as well.

➤ Those who lead us are a blessing to us.

This certainly includes elders, preachers, and teachers (Hebrews 13:7). But it also includes all who lead us by their example of faith, dedication, and service. They do not drag us kicking, screaming, and resisting. Nor do they stay at the back to push and prod us. You find them at the front, leading by word, example, and encouragement. We should not be jealous of those who can lead. We should not resent the fact of their ability and influence just because we ourselves do not have it (1 Timothy 1:7).

➤ Those who listen to us are a blessing to us (James 1:19).

They freely give us their time and their attention, something that is often more precious than money or physical things. Nobody can advise us properly without really listening to us. Those who listen and advise us build our sense of personal worth, our self-esteem.

➤ Those who protect and defend us are a blessing to us (James 1:19).

All of us should be like Paul, ready to defend the gospel. We should be glad that people who know the truth have prevented error from being taught to us (Philippians 1:16-17). But we are also blessed by those who come to our defense, take our part, and try to protect us when we are at-

tacked personally, especially by gossips or jealous persons.

➤ Those who work with us and for us are a blessing to us.

It is always encouraging to have people help us with what we are doing. It is even more encouraging when other persons do what we are not able to do, things that benefit us and others too. That is true fellowship (Philippians 2:4, Ephesians 4:12-16).

➤ Those who stand by us and stand with us are a blessing to us.

One person alone is vulnerable. Two or three or more together are not so easily overcome (Ecclesiastes 4:12, Philippians 1:27-28). You know who your real friends are by noticing those who stay with you when you are in trouble or difficulty – when you need them for something.

➤ Those who love us are a blessing to us.

They actively seek our well-being and do what is good for us – that's what love does. This may include correcting us when we are wrong as well as giving needed instruction. Christians have learned how to love God and love themselves, so they know how to love others the way the Lord loves (Mark 12:38-31, John 13:34-35).

➤ Those who pray for us – not just pray about us, but for us – are a blessing to us.

The apostle Paul asked other Christians to pray for him, that he

would be able to speak effectively for the Lord (Ephesians 6:18-20). One generally feels safe in the hands of those who pray for him. One is less likely to mistreat or neglect a person he is praying for.

➤ Those who have gone before us are a blessing (Hebrews 11).

Of course we include those we read of in the Bible, who have shown us the way of the Lord and delivered His word to us. We also include those who established the church of the Lord among us and taught us the way of salvation. We include family members and friends who died in the faith.

➤ Those who serve as role models are a blessing to us (Matthew 7:12, 1 Timothy 4:12).

It may be by great deeds they have done or are doing. We love heroes! It may also be meek and quiet persons working without recognition or reward. Thank God for all who inspire us to be Christians, and to be better Christians.

I have given a list of twelve examples – we could easily add to the list – of Christian brothers and sisters who are a real blessing to us, to the church, to the world, and – indirectly – to God. Dear reader, how many times did you find yourself on the list?



Miracles and Laborers

A Study of Matthew 9:27-38

Andy Robison

Matthew 9:27-31 records an incident in which two blind men sought healing. It looks a lot like the more famous incident recorded by Matthew (20:29-34), Mark (10:46-52), and Luke (18:35-43), and indeed has the outcome of restored sight. It segues into another specific miracle and then to a summary of many healings which leads to a powerful statement by Jesus.

The two men sought the “Son of David” to have mercy on them. Christ, of course, was the promised descendant of the great Israelite king (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4; Luke 1:32-33). Upon entering “the house,” Jesus asks them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They do, and He does. Their eyes were opened. He then told them, “See that no one knows it.”

Why Keep Secret?

Speculation runs rampant about why Jesus sometimes told the healed to keep secrets about the miracles (cf. Matthew 8:4; Mark 5:43). Suffice it to say, Jesus did not want a wide telling of the incident, which does display quite a difference between the real miracles of Jesus and the counterfeit “miracles” produced today. Modern workers

call for a great “miracle-working assembly” and parade their supposed talents before applauding audiences. They want their charms widely known. Christ, while always doing his miracles publicly, never did them just for show. He knew exactly how much publicity was needed to confirm the word (Mark 16:20; John 20:30-31; Hebrews 2:3-4), and engaged in no sensationalism. The blind men, though, in their excitement, disobeyed his explicit command (Matthew 9:31). They went and they told.

No Denying

Jesus then healed a man who was “mute and demon-possessed” (v. 32). While most people marveled, the cynical, self-serving Pharisees accused Jesus, “He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons” (v. 34). It is a charge they would later repeat, at which time Jesus would address it (Matthew 12:22-37).

The implication of their charge is significant. They do not deny—they CANNOT deny—that a great miracle has been done. They cannot discredit Jesus’ power, so they attack His motivation and His pow-

er source. Stubborn people will often resort to anything to remain sternly stuck in their proud unbelief.

In Acts 4, the Jewish high council saw the boldness of Peter and John, and knew they had healed a lame man (Acts 3). They could not deny it and admitted they could not deny it (Acts 4:16). Still, they would not do the most logical thing and become believers; they would only threaten the disciples and command them not to preach in Jesus' name. O' the willful ignorance often begotten through the protection of power!

A Call for Workers

After these events, Jesus went on another Galilean tour, teaching and healing as He went (Matthew 9:35). He distinguished Himself again from fake religious leaders, because He did not seek glory, riches, and fame from the people, but compassionately aimed to serve them (v. 36).

That compassion caused Him to utter to His disciples those famous, and challenging words, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (vs. 37-38).

The Lord knew how to help people. Knowing that His time was limited, and with a grasp of the world's hurting population, He uttered this distressed plea.

An Application for Today

Christ's words are as true today as they ever were. Laborers today can help no one with miraculous healings. Those passed with the passing of the apostles and those on whom they laid their hands (Acts 8:14-17). Laborers today can help people with the teaching of Jesus, which was always the real point. The miracles served the purpose of confirming who He was and how powerful He was spiritually. Here was a Man who could make the lame walk and could forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-8)!

The path to the forgiveness of sins is what needs to be taught to the masses today. The miraculous cures only lasted for a time; forgiveness is for eternity. The blind could see and the dumb could talk (cf. Isaiah 35:5-6), but they would also die one day. Most of all, they needed to know the way to eternal life!

Laborers today are needed to teach the way to eternal life. Some will listen and benefit; others will stubbornly dodge the force of truth as did the Pharisees. Nevertheless, those in the potential harvest need the chance to hear and obey.

We therefore labor to train the laborers, hoping that in their lifetimes, they will be able to touch many weary and scattered souls with the message of the compassionate, good Shepherd.

Judgment – Past, Present, and Future

Ronald Bryant

Sinful men sat in judgment of Christ. In a series of illegal trials they condemned Him to death. In reality, those men and all mankind, not Christ, were judged by the cross. In His last public sermon, Jesus declared, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31).

Past Judgment

In His death on the cross, and in the most exacting judicial fashion, Jesus judged the world and the evil one. This judgment was not the judgment of the final day, but the judgment that determined who shall rule the world. The long conflict between God and the evil one was dealt with in the most decisive fashion. In that crisis—that judgment—the power of the evil one was broken, and the victory over sin was won (Hebrews 2:14ff).

The cross disclosed the true moral condition of mankind, and secured for mankind deliverance from the slavery of sin. With that event in view, Christ said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). He knew that in His death the Father would be glorified, and that deliverance from sin would be secured for mankind; that His pur-

pose in coming would be fulfilled (Galatians 4:4-6).

In the cross Satan, not Christ, was judged. The gospel is the declaration of Christ's victory. It is the message of the judgment, i.e., the condemnation of Satan and of sin, and of deliverance from sin, via God's judgment. It declares the necessity of man choosing to follow Christ. It states the fact of a judgment that has taken place, that judgment accomplished by the greatest person, via the manifestation of the greatest love, in order to possess the greatest victory (John 12:32).

Christ came to save! He came not to pass sentence upon man, but to reveal the process of judgment. He distinguished between good and evil, between truth and error. He brought light and exposed the darkness with two distinct results: (1) that those "who do not see;" who are bereft of spiritual insight may come to know and embrace the truth; and (2) that those "who do see;" who lay claim to knowledge of the light but do not walk in it (cf. Romans 2:11), may continue in their spiritual blindness. (They that refuse to respect and live according to God's will are destined to embrace greater darkness). "Jesus said, 'For judgment I

have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind” (John 9:39).

It seems vital to grasp the significance that there is a judgment that has already occurred, for in the most exacting fashion it is that judgment that gives moral significance to our conduct. With that judgment in view, we can give attention to the one that is taking place in the present.

Present Judgment

In an intriguing and compelling fashion, the apostle Paul wrote of a “present judgment.”

In writing of the Lord’s Supper he spoke of two judgments; of man examining (judging himself), and of God also judging man in the present.

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He

comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:23ff).

To come to the Lord’s Supper is to come to that which demands of us a reverence and humility that is to define our lives. In partaking of the Lord’s Supper we are to engage in a judgment – to examine ourselves, with an awareness that we are also being judged by the Lord. Apparently, Paul viewed this judgment not as something to be dreaded, but as an incentive to careful self-examination and toward greater fidelity. This present judgment serves to give dignity and meaning to all of life. It provokes correction where necessary.

The writer of the book of Hebrews also sets forth the fact that “whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6). He then adds that the chastening of the Lord “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (He-

brews 12:11). The language is not the same, but the subject matter fits with that of 1 Corinthians 11:23ff.

God chastens believers to produce in them the character He desires, and His actions (judgments) are not arbitrary. They arise out of and have to do with their nature and their development. They are "corrective." Peter stated that the Father, "without respect of persons judges according to each man's work" (1 Peter 1:7), and that He "judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). God's chastening of men and of nations can often be discerned in the judgments which come upon them in their nature and history.

In a definite sense all are involved in a "present judgment" according to their response to Christ. In the here and now the sifting of history is taking place, and yet, there remains the revelation of the final judgment of God; the revelation of His acceptance or rejection.

Future Judgment

Though often ignored and readily dismissed, there is a "present judgment." Mankind is daily being judged by God. This judgment is in fact created by mankind's response to Jesus Christ. There remains a "future judgment," yet, in the here and now, the sifting of history is on-going, while the revelation of the final judgment of God, of His acceptance or rejection remains to take place. The New Testament has a great deal to say

of that event, and of the great need to prepare for it.

The designation, "the Day of Judgment" stands for the final judgment. That event; the last judgment places all human judgments in perspective. And, although most people view it as a difficult, even unpleasant subject, for the believer, that day is one of great consolation.

On that day the Judge will be the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He is omniscient, there will be no need for the presentation of evidence, or the presentation of a personal defense. The Lord will preside with perfect knowledge of both the character and the history of each person who comes before Him.

On that day the final sentence will be published and executed. The Lord's judgment is not, and can never be arbitrary, nor is it optional (Romans 3:5f). Only by setting aside His own moral order could He dispose of this event, this final judgment (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). If God be God, if His will is right and just and truth, He must judge all mankind.

This world has ever been the scene of a divine drama. Life is in reality a time of decision and preparation. In life each person is confronted with the reality of God, of life, and of eternity. Categorically, the will of God for man has been revealed in the New Testament, in and through His Son (Galatians 4:4-6).

In Christ's work of redemption; in His death, burial, and resurrection, a right relationship with God has been made possible. Furthermore, it is established in the New Testament that the Lord God of heaven longs for man to come to Him in faith and love, and live for Him. It is also established that He will judge the world in righteousness by that one whom He has ordained (Romans 2:6). The revelation of Christ and of His messiahship is ruled by the reality of the final judgment and the promise of life eternal in Him. The final judgment is a future historical event, albeit the final one (John 5:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

While Jesus was on the earth, men could ignore and reject Him. Now that He has returned to heaven, it remains possible for men to resist and reject Him. But when He comes again, it will not be possible for anyone to ignore Him. In that hour "every eye shall see Him..."

He will be fully manifest in His glory and power. "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14-15).

He will come, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not

obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

John wrote of that day, and the appearance of, "a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

Paul wrote of that day, (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Jesus Himself spoke of it (Matthew 25:31-46).

That day is called "the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12), "the day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:12), "the day of the Lord

Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:8), "the day of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:5), "the day of Christ" (Philippians 2:16), "that day" (2 Thessalonians 1:10), "the last day" (John 6:39), "the great day" (Jude 1:6), "the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5), "the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30), "the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12), "the great day of His wrath" (Revelation 6:17), "the great day of God, the Almighty" (Revelation

16:14), "the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17).

These terms establish the significance attached to that day in the view of the inspired writers of the New Testament. The emphasis of the New Testament ought to come to rule in our hearts, to the obtaining of the consolation it provides.

THE GENDER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Robert Clark

"But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth..." The preceding line is the translation of John 16:13 as printed in the NASB. As you're probably already aware, the New Testament was originally written in the Koine Greek language of the first century. But, what you may or may not be aware of is the fact that Koine Greek and modern English are two languages that are so drastically different from one another that a completely "word-for-word" translation is impossible to produce, as sometimes there are details that get lost when translating from Greek into English.

This fact has resulted in many discussions about the gender of the Holy Spirit. Even though the NASB is overall, a good English translation of the New Testament, John 16:13 is not

translated in a way that accurately conveys the real meaning of the original text. In fact, due to the differences in Greek and English, no English Bible does a very good job with this passage of scripture.

Questions

What is the gender of the Holy Spirit? Should the Holy Spirit be referred to as He or as It? Or in other words, is the Holy Spirit masculine or neuter?

There seems to be much discussion these days concerning the gender of the Holy Spirit. This discussion comes about mainly because the 1611 King James Bible uses in a few places the pronouns "It" and "Itself" when referring to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this subject is discussed from a philosophical viewpoint and since the New Tes-

tament was originally written in Koine Greek the subject is sometimes discussed with emphasis on Greek grammar.

Grammatical Gender

All Greek nouns are of a particular grammatical gender. The Greek noun for Spirit (Gr. Pnuema) is neuter in gender and as far as Greek grammar is concerned, there is nothing to indicate that the Holy Spirit is anything other than neuter in gender. On occasion you'll hear someone say that there is grammatical proof from the standpoint of Greek grammar that the Holy Spirit is masculine and they'll usually point to John 16:13 and say that the "He" in this verse is masculine in the original Greek so this proves that the Holy Spirit is masculine.

Unfortunately, this is typically done by someone who has studied Greek briefly without ever learning to read the Greek New Testament. This person will very often resort to using a Greek/English interlinear New Testament, which has the Greek text with an English word either above or below each Greek word.

This interlinear text is useful for being able to look up the definition and parsing of each individual Greek word but since Greek grammar and English grammar are so different from one another, this type of text does little to help a person have any real grasp on the Greek that underlies our English translations. In fact, since Greek grammar is so different from

English, the scholar with good intentions is often lead astray by this method of studying.

So you're saying "It" is correct?

By now you're probably starting to think that its about to be suggested that we should be calling the Holy Spirit "It" instead of "He." Well actually that's not the case. Even though there's nothing wrong with referring to the Holy Spirit as "It," it is entirely proper to refer to the Holy Spirit as "Him" or "He" as well.

One of the jobs of the Bible translator is to be sure that a person who reads the Scriptures in English (or any other receiving language) is able, as much as possible, to understand the concepts that are present in the source language. In other words, the translation has to be done in such a way that the concepts fit properly into the mind of the reader. For example the differences in one language as compared to the other language must be taken into account.

In regard to gender, it must be mentioned that all Greek nouns have grammatical gender, which is either masculine, feminine, or neuter and we must be keep in mind that just because a Greek noun carries a particular grammatical gender, does not mean that that particular noun is actually an object that is of that particular gender.

For example the Greek noun for "rain" (Gr. Huetos) is masculine in gender. So the Greek pronoun that would be used in reference to that

particular noun would be the Greek equivalent of “he” or “him.”

Likewise, the Greek noun for “language” (Gr. *Dialektos*) is feminine in gender. So the Greek pronoun that would be used in reference to that particular noun would be the Greek equivalent of “she” or “her.”

An English-Only Concept

Notice how this way of thinking doesn't fit properly into the mind of the person who's native language is English, because in English any inanimate object is referred to as an “it.”

An English speaker would never refer to the rain that falls from the sky as he, or to a spoken language as she. For similar reasons the English speaker typically refers to the Holy spirit as a “He” because in the mind of the English speaker, the neuter gender pronoun “it” is typically used for inanimate objects and lower forms of life, like rodents or insects for example.

Therefore, we feel that if we refer to the Holy Spirit as an “it” we are being disrespectful. With this being the case, and since the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead, and since Christ and God the Father are both masculine in gender, and since the Holy Spirit has all the personal attributes of Christ and God the Father, we naturally feel like the Holy Spirit should be masculine as well. Otherwise, we feel like we are not giving Him the reverence that He deserves.

It must also be mentioned that this is only a topic of discussion because of our modern English way of thinking. It would never have occurred to a first century Greek speaker to even consider this subject, much less, be concerned about it.

He = Helper/Comforter

As far as John 16:13 is concerned, it is obvious to the student reading the Greek New Testament that the antecedent that the “He” is referring to in John 16:13 is the Helper/Comforter (Gr. *Parakletos*) way back in verse 7 of this same chapter. The “He” in verse 13 is masculine in gender because the Helper/Comforter in verse 7 is a Greek masculine gender noun and in Greek, pronouns must “agree” with their antecedent in gender (among other things). This is how the student who can read the Greek New Testament knows where to find the antecedent of any pronoun.

Although this is a fairly simple matter for one who can read New Testament Greek, this is one of the characteristics of Greek grammar that sometimes makes it difficult to achieve an accurate English translation.

So what would the student reading John 13:16 in the original Greek understand this verse to say? It would be more like this: “When He (the helper) comes, (who is) the Spirit of truth, He will guide you into all truth...”

Jesus is saying that the Helper and the Spirit are one and the same. In Greek, Spirit is a neuter gender noun while Helper/Comforter is a masculine gender noun. Since the Helper and the Spirit are the same being and Helper is masculine, some who do not have a grasp of Greek grammar have argued that this is grammatical proof from the standpoint of Greek grammar that the Holy Spirit is masculine in gender.

Using this reasoning it would be possible to make almost anyone in the New Testament almost any gender one desires. For example, in Ephesians 5:23 the scripture says that "Christ is the Head of the church." In Greek, the noun for "Head" is a feminine gender noun, but that obviously doesn't change the fact the Christ is masculine in gender.

A similar example can be found in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where Christ is being referred to as the "Spiritual Rock." You may be surprised to find out that in Greek, "rock" is a feminine gender noun. Again, this does not change the fact that Christ Himself is masculine in gender.

Apposition

In Greek, when two nouns are in apposition with one another (apposition, not opposition), as is the case with Spirit in John 16:13 and Helper/Comforter in John 16:7, one noun is used to describe a trait or characteristic of another noun. In apposition, the nouns do not have to be of the

same gender. In grammatical terms two nouns in apposition do not have to "agree" in gender. The fact that Helper/Comforter is masculine doesn't make the Spirit masculine any more than Head and Rock being feminine would make Christ feminine.

So Which Is Correct?

As English speakers, it is more natural for us to refer to the Holy Spirit using masculine pronouns but the fact is; it makes no difference whether we refer to the Holy Spirit in English by using either masculine or neuter pronouns. It is a non-issue. Either way is correct and neither way is wrong.

Remember the Holy Spirit inspired words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:14; "Remind them of these things, warning them before God, not to quarrel about words in which there is no useful purpose, which leads to the ruin of those who hear."



Instrumental Music in Christian Worship

SEVEN ARGUMENTS EXAMINED

Andy Erwin

Arguments used to support the practice of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship include: (1) Old Testament usages of instrumental music; (2) the New Testament does not expressly forbid its usage; (3) it is an expedient to singing; (4) there will be harps in heaven; (5) the Greek word *psallo* permits it; (6) there is no pattern for worship in the New Testament; and (7) Paul worshipped in synagogues where the instrument was used.

Old Testament Usage

Concerning the use of the instrument of music in Old Testament worship, the argument follows accordingly: seeing that God permitted the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to Him in the Old Testament, and that God's nature has not changed, He must also allow the use of mechanical instruments in New Testament worship.

In answering this argument, it is acknowledged that, "From creation until now, God has clearly informed His people about how to serve Him."¹

While, "Worship, under God's guidance, has changed at various points of sacred history. What has

never changed is the fact that God guides and wants to be followed."²

Moreover, "The constant factor of approved worship music is neither the presence nor the absence of instruments in worship, but the presence of a revealed will of God for worship and God's expectation that His people would do what He said to do."³

In summary, "God has consistently and constantly revealed His will for pleasing worship and has expected His people to obey."⁴

Thus, we must not look to the law or the patriarchs for guidance in worship. New Testament worship is going to be exclusively based upon the New Testament, as God has directed us in this covenant. What has God commanded to be the style of music in New Testament worship?

In passages speaking of worship and praise to God we read of the church or of individual Christians singing hymns in eight different passages.⁵ We do not have one passage which authorizes the use of mechanical instruments in the church or Christian worship.

² *Ibid.*, 148

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Romans 15:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13

¹ Richard E. Wolfe, *Songs, Cymbals, and Tambourines: The Music of Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: 21st Century Christian, 1998), 146.

God has commanded us to sing. He has commanded us pertaining to the types of songs we are to sing – psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He has commanded us concerning corporate worship – teach and admonish *one another*. Thus, God has provided every instruction necessary to accomplish pleasing worship in the music of the church, and instrumental music is not included.

Not Expressly Forbidden

The second argument follows that mechanical instruments of music are not forbidden in the New Testament. This is perhaps the most common argument used. The answer to this argument is very simple actually.

“If God makes a choice, He does not need to forbid everything else that might be done...God did not have to give a list of all the things Christians were not to do in worship. After stating what He wanted included in worship, He only needed to state that nothing was to be added to it or be taken away from His list.

“Most of us understand this principle when we order in a restaurant, from a catalogue, or from the Internet. We say what we want without mentioning everything we do not want. We know that those who fill our order will realize that we only want what we order, which is all we

have given the authority to bring or send.”⁶

Expedient to Singing

The third argument in our study is that the use of mechanical instruments of music is an expedient to singing, similar to a pitch pipe, tuning fork, or song book.⁷

The distinction to be made is that a pitch pipe, tuning fork, or song book does not change the type of music taking place. The music remains *a capella* – literally, “the music of the church.” No other form or style of music has been added. However, such is not the case with the addition of mechanical instruments.

With the addition of mechanical instruments, an entirely new and different form of music is occurring. Granted, it may help someone’s singing, and then again it may not. That is not the point. The point remains, what type of music is authorized in Christian worship. The answer remains – “singing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs.”

Harps in Heaven

The fourth argument we shall examine follows that there will be harps in heaven. In answering this argument, several different answers may be given.⁸ We can argue that it is

⁶ Owen D. Olbricht, *A Cappella Music, Why?* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 2009), 163.

⁷ This argument was raised in G.K. Wallace’s debates with Julian Hunt and Burton Barber.

⁸ For an example of the different answers that can be given see James D. Bales, *Instrumental*

unclear whether or not these instruments are literal or figurative. It can be argued that by opening the door to instruments based on Revelation, we open the door to altars, tabernacles, incense, and such like. However, the point remains that, "no angel, apostle, or prophet, has testified that instrumental music should be used in New Testament worship."⁹

Psallo

The fifth argument we shall examine is that the Greek word *psallo* permits the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship. The argument follows that the word *psallo*, which is found in Ephesians 5:19, mean to pluck the strings of an instrument. Therefore, "to sing" should be translated, "to sing and play."

Advocates of this doctrine fail to realize that words can change meaning over a period of time. In his definitive work on this issue, the lamented gospel preacher and scholar M.C. Kurfees noted the work of Sophocles, citing:

"...himself a native Greek and for thirty-eight years Professor of the Greek Language in Harvard University, covers all of the Roman period and the Byzantine period down to the end of the eleventh century, in all more than twelve hundred years'

history of the language from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100.

"As the basis of his monumental work, this profound and tireless scholar examined, as we have found by actual count, 146 secular and 77 ecclesiastical authors of the Roman period, and 109 secular and 262 ecclesiastical, modern Greek, and scholastic authors of the Byzantine period, a grand total of 594 authors and covering a period of more than twelve hundred years, and he declares that there is not a single example of *psallo* throughout this long period involving or implying the use of an instrument, but says that it meant always and everywhere "to chant, sing religious hymns."¹⁰

By the time of the New Testament, and in the language of Koine Greek, the word *psallo* had changed in its meaning from "to pluck" to "to sing." Thus, the argument based upon *psallo* in Ephesians 5:19 is without merit.

No Pattern for Worship

The sixth argument we wish to examine used by those who advocate instrumental music in New Testament worship is that the New Testament contains no pattern for worship. Such an assertion renders Christ's admonition to worship in spirit and truth, and Paul's instruction for decency and order, nonsensical. Why would we

Music and New Testament Worship, (Searcy, AR: James D. Bales, 1973), 255-58.
⁹ Bales, 258.

¹⁰ M.C. Kurfees, *Instrumental Music in the Worship*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1999), 147.

find such instructions if no pattern existed?

Clearly a pattern can be seen in 1 Corinthians 11, pertaining to the Lord's Supper. Paul quotes from Christ on the night the Lord's Supper was instituted and made an application for the church at Corinth to do exactly as Christ – the pattern – did on that night. Moreover, Paul taught the same principles of the faith in all the churches he visited (1 Corinthians 4:17) – including matters pertaining to the assembly of the church (1 Corinthians 11:16; 14:33).

Paul in the Synagogues

The seventh and final argument we wish to consider for the use of the instrument is that Paul worshipped with the instrument in the synagogues where he preached. As more is learned about Jewish social and religious life in the first century, the present argument appears to be more of an assertion.

According to this argument, instrumental music was used in the temple in association with sacrificial ceremonies. However, "The Jews had developed an alternative form of worship independent of the temple and animal sacrifice. It was the rational worship of prayer and Scripture instruction practiced in the synagogue."¹¹

After studying the testimony of Jewish historians from that period, Everett Ferguson writes:

"The conclusion drawn from the New Testament texts and from linguistic evidence was that instrumental music was not present in the worship of the New Testament church. This conclusion has further support in the contextual setting of New Testament times. Jewish practices and attitudes (both Rabbinic and Hellenistic) furnish strong presumption against the presence of instrumental music in the early church."¹²

In Conclusion

Having examined the arguments used to support the use of mechanical instruments of music in New Testament worship, we find no basis for using them in Christian worship. Such instruments are certainly not commanded by God, and therefore, cannot be introduced on the basis of obeying Him.

A man once told me, "I know the Bible doesn't say we can use them, but I like them." Herein is the real issue. Are we seeking to honor God and please Him in our worship? Or, are we seeking to please self? Who is the *real* object of our worship?

¹¹ Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, revised ed., (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1972), 32.

¹² *Ibid.*, 42.

Must One Know the Purpose of Baptism?

Andy Erwin

In the 2017 edition of *Christian Studies*, a journal produced by the Austin Graduate School of Theology, an article on "Re-Baptism" appears which was written by Keith D. Stanglin. In it we find the assertion that one does not have to know that baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) in order for his baptism to be scriptural.

Stanglin believes that a person does not need to be "re-baptized" if they have already been baptized, albeit not for the remission of sins. Theoretically, one could have been baptized for another reason, but as long as they had penitent faith in Christ, the baptism should be accepted as scriptural and that person should not need to be re-baptized in order to become a Christian. Stanglin believes the person is already a Christian.

The author eventually argues from conversions in Acts, that "penitent faith in Jesus is the only prerequisite for baptism" (p.65). However, he makes no mention of the first century preachers who preached on the kingdom prior to baptism (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31). Moreover, we ask, why was the remission of sins even mentioned, if the purpose for baptism did not matter?

The author alleges that the practice of baptizing such a person for the remission of sins is unscriptural, seeing that the person has already been immersed. We believe the practice to be entirely scriptural. When God has stated the reason for the action, the action must be

done for that reason. To change the gospel to another gospel is forbidden (Galatians 1:6-9).

Let us give the example of the Lord's Supper. The reasons are clearly stated (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). If the Supper is taken for another reason, it is taken incorrectly (vv.27-30). Let us also give the example of divorce. If divorce occurs for the reason of fornication, it is permitted. If the divorce occurs for a reason other than the one specified by Christ, it is adultery (Matthew 19:9-10).

If baptism is done for another reason than the remission of sins, it is done incorrectly, and must be corrected. There is one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). Indeed, there are many ways to be wrong on this subject, but there is only one way to be right.

It is because people are rebellious and ignorant to the stated purpose for baptism that baptism is diminished among the denominations. For many, baptism is nonessential to the forgiveness of sins. Yet, the Bible states this to be the exact purpose for baptism. Brother Stanglin's reasoning, if practiced, would only further diminish the role of baptism and continue to disguise its purpose in the plan of salvation. Accordingly, a person could continue in error without making any effort to make corrections. If someone is in error, we should attempt to save that soul from death (James 5:20), not merely assist in them in ignoring the truth.



Christian Parenting Workshop

November 5-8, 2017

www.westfayetteville.net

Sunday November 5, 2017

- 9:30 - Bible Class: The Christian Home: Its Morality and Purpose**
 - 10:30 - AM Sermon: Maintaining Godly Homes in a Wicked World**
 - 7:30 - PM Sermon: Responsibilities of Christian Parenthood**
- Speaker: Bill Dillon**

Monday November 6, 2017

- 5:00 – 5:50 - Supper is Provided**
- 6:00 – 6:50 - MEN: The Father's Duty to the Family**
Speaker: Artie Collins
WOMEN: The Mother's Duty to the Family
Speaker: Maggie Colley
- 7:00 – 7:50 - Keynote: The Husband and Wife as a Team**
Speaker: Gary Colley

Tuesday November 7, 2017

- 5:00 – 5:50 - Supper is Provided**
- 6:00 – 6:50 - MEN: Helping Your Child Increase in Faith during Adolescence**
Speaker: Jimmy Clark
WOMEN: Helping Your Child Increase in Faith during Adolescence
Speaker: Wanda Robinson
- 7:00 – 7:50 - Keynote: Developing Christian Habits and Practices in the Home**
Speaker: Clarence Deloach

Wednesday November 8, 2017

- 5:00 – 5:50 - Supper is Provided**
- 6:00 – 6:50 - MEN: Teaching the Fundamentals of Faith to Your Children**
Speaker: Hugh Fulford
WOMEN: Teaching the Fundamentals of the Faith to Your Children
Speaker: Renee Galloway
- 7:00 – 7:50 - Keynote: Why Are We Losing Our Children? How Do We Prevent This? How Do We Reclaim Them?**
Speaker: James W. Boyd

Bible Classes and childcare will be provided for children of all ages during the workshop. Lodging is provided in Fayetteville at the Hampton Inn (931) 433-3355 and at Best Western (931) 433-0100.

The Human Conscience

Owen Olbricht

In Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, when Hamlet was considering suicide, he stated in one of his soliloquies, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all."

Conscience is our inner judicial system that judges us by what we think and do – that "pats us on the back," when we do what we think is right, but "kicks us in the seat of our britches," when we do what we think is wrong. It judges us by our own standards. Our conscience will not bother us if we do something we think is right even though it is absolutely wrong.

Paul's Example

Before the Jewish council Paul said, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). He told Felix, "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and man" (Acts 24:16). His effort was always to do what he thought was right so that he would not offend his conscience.

Paul's conscience approved his killing of Christians because he thought he "must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Probably based on Deuteronomy 17:1-5, he was in

agreement with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1).

Paul wrote that his conscience bore witness to his honesty (Romans 9:1) and testified to his sincerity (2 Corinthians 1:12). He thought he was right in persecuting Christians, but he was very wrong in what he was doing, even though he did it in all good conscience.

A Working Conscience

When we come of age, we develop a consciousness of right and wrong (Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 7:16), but we must be taught what is right or wrong for our conscience does not tell us what is right. It bothers us based on what we think is right or wrong. It was the judicial system in the Gentles that witnessed (Romans 2:14, 15), while their thoughts accused or excused them based on what they learned from natural processes. Our conscience will remain good if we will respond to it, but it will become inactive and evil if we continually ignore it.

Kinds of Consciences

Seemingly, we begin with a good conscience. As we mature, we can retain a good conscience or corrupt it.

The following are kinds of conscience we can have:

- ◆ Good – Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16, 21.
- ◆ Pure – 1 Timothy 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3.
- ◆ Weak --1 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12.
- ◆ Seared – 1 Timothy 4:2.
- ◆ Defiled – Titus 1:15; Hebrews 9:14.
- ◆ Evil – Hebrews 10:22.

Our type of conscience is our inner moral judicial system. We can keep our conscience good and pure or we can defile and sear it and make it weak by doing what we know is sinfully wrong. It does not tell us what is absolutely right or wrong but judges us as we react to what we think is right or wrong.

Conscience in Baptism

Our conscience is associated with baptism. 1 Peter 3:21 is translated that baptism is “not the putting off the filth of the flesh” but is the “answer of a good conscience” (KJV; NKJV), “pledge of a good conscience” (NIV, TNIV), and “appeal for a good conscience” toward God (NASB; ESV).

If Paul is an example, “appeal for a good” conscience can be dismissed for his conscience before and after baptism was good. When instructed

by Jesus to go to Damascus to be told what do (Acts 9:6), he went and fasted and prayed three days (Acts 9:9, 11), most likely grieving over his sins against Jesus. In response to Ananias asking him to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16), he immediately arose and was baptized (Acts 9:18). His good conscience (Acts 23:1) motivated his quick response.

The Greek Text and 1 Peter 3:21

“Answer” (KJV, NKJV), which is a translation of *eperotema*, is a noun appearing only here. Its cognate verb, appearing 61 times, is translated “asked” almost exclusively in the sense of seeking for an answer. Thus, in baptism our conscience is asking us to answer by being baptized as we make an appeal toward God to be saved (Acts 22:16).

“Good,” *agathes*, is a genitive adjective expressing “of” instead of “for” a good conscience. “For” is not found or implied in the Greek. In baptism we are not asking for or making an appeal for a good conscience.

In baptism our conscience is not making a pledge. We make our pledge when we obey from our hearts (Romans 6:17, 18). At Pentecost the people were not asking for a good conscience, for their good conscience caused their hearts to be touched by hearing of the sacrifice of Jesus (Acts 2:36, 37). Thus, they asked what they

needed to do. The urge to make such a request was not from the Holy Spirit, but from a good conscience.

When we learn the truth to be baptized to be forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16), if we have a good conscience, it will ask us to respond and we will answer by being baptized. As Peter wrote, "...baptism now saves us...the answer of a good conscience toward God though the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

Conclusion

Our conscience judges and stirs our inner feelings toward what we think is right or wrong. It can witness and testify to our reaction to right and wrong, but cannot accurately tell us what is right or wrong. We need correct information.

We must continue in Jesus' word to learn the truth (John 8:31), in order to determine what is right or wrong. A good conscience will help us honestly and sincerely draw the right conclusion and act according to the truth.

WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

ROBERT L. WAGGONER

Who is a Christian? The best way to answer this question is to determine what the word *Christian* means.

The word *Christian* occurs only three times in the Bible. Acts 11:16 declares that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. In Acts 26:28 "Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.'" Lastly, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:16 that "if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. In each of these passages something is obviously meant by the name *Christian*, but none of these passages specifically defines the term.

"Christian"

Currently, the word *Christian* is variously used in three different ways – ethically, legally, and philosophically. The ethical use of the term *Christian* relates to whether an individual acts like Christ, i.e., whether one's conduct is consistent with the character and teachings of Jesus Christ. The legal use of the term *Christian* relates to whether an individual is in Christ, i.e., whether one has "put on" Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27). The philosophical use of the term *Christian* relates to whether one believes like Christ, i.e., whether one's beliefs are consistent with concepts associated with the term *Christ* in the New Testament.

The suffix "ian" (meaning "like") after "Christ" makes "Christian" mean "Christ-like." The question is whether being like Christ (in Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16) relates to ethical, legal, or philosophical meaning.

People will generally associate the idea of being "like Christ" with being like the person of Jesus Christ — ethically speaking. People will also associate the idea of being "like Christ" with being legally in Christ.

However, a careful examination of concepts associated with the term "Christ" may indicate that the meaning primarily intended for the term "Christian" in Scripture is more philosophical than either ethical or legal. In other words, the term Christian, in these scriptures, may have more to do with being Christ-like in belief than Christ-like in behavior or in belonging.

"Christ"

The word "Christ" (meaning "anointed") comes to us from the Greek translation of the Hebrew term for Messiah. Jesus and His apostles taught many concepts related to Christ. Basic to these beliefs is the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ (Acts 2:36). Jesus so regarded Himself as Christ (Matthew 16:13-16; Mark 14:61-62). His miracles declared it (John 20:30-31); His resurrection demonstrated it (Acts 1:22; Romans 1:3-4); and the apostles and

others used prophecies to prove it (Acts 9:22).

Matthew uses over forty prophecies in his gospel to prove that Jesus is the Christ. Only those who believed that Jesus is the Christ were added to the number of those being saved on Pentecost (Acts 2:41, 47).

Belief that Jesus is the Christ is foundational to being designated a Christian. Belief in New Testament concepts of Christ also includes belief that Jesus of Nazareth, as Christ, was crucified to pay for our sins (1 Corinthians 1:23; 15:3); that He ascended to the Father's right hand (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; 7:55; Romans 8:34); that He has a spiritual kingdom, the church (Matthew 16:18; Romans 16:16); that he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings (2 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 19:16); that He is the only begotten Son of God (Acts 9:20); that His name is above every name (Philippians 2:9); that He has all power in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18); that He will come again (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:23) to judge the world (Matthew 7:21ff; 25:31ff; John 5:23); and that to be "in Christ" an individual must be baptized (Galatians 3:27).

Belief in Christ means that He has "unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8); that He gives newness of life (Acts 2:33; Romans 6:4); that He is our mediator bringing the knowledge of God to man and mediating our prayers to God (1 Timothy 2:5); and

in order to be “in Christ” an individual must be baptized (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-12) into Him.

Since these beliefs are all associated with the term Christ, are we not correct in thinking that individuals who believe these concepts can biblically be designated as Christians? Conversely, does it not follow that those who do not believe these concepts cannot biblically be designated as “Christians?”

Moreover, in each of the three biblical passages where the term “Christian” is used, is it not possible that the primary meaning intended by the word “Christian” is a philosophical one? Thus, when disciples in Antioch were called Christians, the term related primarily to the fact that they believed certain concepts about Christ. When Paul asked Agrippa about the teaching of the prophets concerning the Christ, he was inquiring about beliefs. When Peter declared that people could suffer as Christians, he recognized that when they suffer because of their beliefs, they should not be ashamed.

“Christian” Churches

There are multitudes in various churches calling themselves Christians who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ or that Jesus is the Son of God. They do not believe in the literal miracles of Jesus, in the resurrection of Jesus, in Jesus’ sacrificial atonement for our sins, in baptism into Christ, or in the Lordship of Jesus

Christ. They do not believe that Jesus will one day judge the world, and that one’s eternal destination will be either in heaven or hell, etc. They are like anti-Christ! Because their beliefs do not conform to biblical teachings about Christ, can we not therefore rightly deny that such individuals are Christians?

Conclusion

While the word *Christian* was apparently intended primarily as a philosophical term, it can (by implication) also have legal and ethical meaning. Since baptism (i.e., immersion in water and spirit, John 3:5) is necessary to get into Christ (Romans 6:3-4), i.e., to put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), then it follows (logically and legally) that people who have been baptized into Christ are Christians, and, conversely, that those who have not been baptized into Christ are not Christians.

Moreover, since people act according to the way they think (Proverbs 23:7), it follows that if people think and act like Christ taught, then they are Christians in their thinking and behavior, and, conversely, that those who do not think and act like Christ taught are not Christians.

To be genuinely Christian, individuals must be so philosophically, ethically, and legally. Individuals are not Christians in the full sense of the term, as presented in Scripture, if they are lacking in any sense of the term, or in any combination of these senses.

Respect for Godly Parents

Raymond Elliott

One of the great needs in society and in the church today is for faithful Christian parents to train their children (Proverbs 22:6) and raise them in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Both society and the church mirror the teaching which occurs in the home.

GODLY FATHERS

One of life's greatest blessings and challenges for a man is fatherhood. This relationship involves the greatest joys, and demands the best one has to give, and often will include many sorrows. A godly father loves his wife and is loyal to his marital vows (Ephesians 5:25). He desires the best for his children. A father is industrious. He labors to provide for his family and the needs of others who lack the material things of life (1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 4:28).

The greatest contribution a father can make to his family is leadership in spiritual matters. In every age, the head of the family has been required of God to provide the proper direction regarding religious training. Modern fathers are most likely to leave this responsibility to the wife and mother. However, Paul exhorted: "And you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). It is a tremendous

requirement to make sure one's children are taught of God, but the rewards are everlasting.

A Christian father may not be able to give very much materially to his children, but the legacy of having a father who loved his family and the Lord surpasses everything else. The greatest inheritance a Christian father can leave is one that is rich in faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should never underestimate the love that a father possesses in his heart for his children. His emotions may not be as noticeable as the mother; yet, the feelings are just as deep. Most fathers would give their lives on behalf of their families.

Their hearts are filled with deep gratitude when they witness their children succeeding in life. The Christian father rejoices greatly when his children obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My father will be remembered for being a fine Christian gentleman. Also, the legacy of having a good name has meant more to me than all the riches of this world. It was the wise man of old who wrote: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1); and, "A good name is better than precious ointment..." (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

Godly fathers are rare in this modern society, and we should always be thankful for the ones who are. Truly, you are blessed indeed if you have/had a Christian father who placed Christ first in his life. His influence in your life and even in the lives of his grandchildren will be felt for many years to come.

GODLY MOTHERS

It is always good to remember a godly mother. Jesus while on the cross of shame and suffering thought of His mother and instructed John to care for her after His death (John 19:26, 27). One of the sweetest words in any language is "Mother." A dictionary is not necessary to possess an understanding of such a meaningful term.

Not all mothers are wives, but they should be. Not all wives are mothers, but God permitting they can be. One of the primary purposes of marriage is the propagating of the human race (Genesis 1:27). The role of motherhood should never be taken lightly nor should the status of being a mother be made light of in this modern age. There is no greater relation for a woman to sustain in this life than being a Christian mother.

Perhaps the crowning act of creation by the Lord God was the forming of woman from the side of man. God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, thus He gave to him a help suitable for him. Adam later named this woman "Eve" because she was

the "mother of all living" (Genesis 2:18-25; 3:20).

The wise man taught that "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing" and that "a prudent wife is from Jehovah" (Proverbs 18:18; 19:14). In the bringing forth of a child, the husband and wife truly become "one flesh." There is a binding together of the two.

Motherhood is the highest honor given to woman. No matter what else she may do in life it should be secondary to her being the kind of mother that God desires.

A mother is greatly responsible for the spiritual training of her children (Proverbs 22:6). Her influence is great – for good or bad. Abraham Lincoln said of his mother, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." An old Spanish proverb states that "An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy." Most of us have heard the old saying that "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

We must always show our respect and honor our mothers whether they are living or have died (Ephesians 6:1, 2). We can do this by living for the Lord and being the proper influence for good among our peers.



The Little Foxes

Matthew Crosswhite

“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes” (Song of Solomon 2:15).

Some of the little things in life have the most importance. Jesus emphasized these things when talking about a cup of water in Matthew 10:42.

As we take a moment to examine the passage in the Song of Solomon we notice the little foxes. Things that are small we deem harmless for the most part. For instance, the small puppy, the crack in the sidewalk, the flower seed, the little boy, and maybe even an idea. Things that we think are trivial, we almost think nothing about. Give the puppy time and it will grow, water that seeps into the crack will cause it to get bigger, a seed will sprout and grow, the boy becomes a man, and the idea can become reality.

The word translated in Hebrew here for “take” means to *seize* or *catch*. Emphasis on this word should be noted. We are to catch the little foxes. Why? They not harmless; they spoil the vine.

The word translated in Hebrew here for “spoil” means to *pervert* or *damage*. Even though the foxes are small they can still do a great deal of damage to the vine. They cripple the roots. Crippled roots will affect the

proper growth of the vine. The roots can even be crippled to the point of killing the vine.

A Modern Application

Oftentimes, that which seems harmless is allowed to continue, without even thinking of the effects.

Are we teaching our children the Bible at home or relying solely on Bible class lessons from the church each week (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). If the seemingly little act of home Bible study is neglected, children may lose their faith when attending college.

Do we place titles on sin? Do we say, “Oh this is just a ‘white lie’”? Or, “I can’t find a specific verse that condemns this or that.” We may say, “If it doesn’t affect anyone then is it too little to worry about.” Or maybe, “No one would care about this little thing that I have done,” or “no one would even know.”

What does Romans 6:23 have to say about sin? Is the wages of “big” sin death? No, the wages of *sin* is death. That means *all* sin. “Little” things carry as much weight as the big.

Liberalism has been making its way into churches for decades now. How did it creep in? – Little by little. Things that seem small to some: children’s Bible hour, praise teams, reli-

gious holiday observation, Sunday night small groups, contemporary services – these things didn't happen overnight. We watched them grow.

“Little” changes eventually affect an entire generation. That generation then becomes comfortable with their “little” changes, until you have a generation that is not rooted and grounded in the faith. A generation that doesn't know the difference between

denominationalism and the Lord's church will arise – and has arisen (Judges 2:10, 1 Corinthians 5:6).

Ignorance is not an excuse. In 2 Kings 4:38-41 there was “death in the pot” as a result of ignorance. The gourd looked harmless, like the little fox, but appearances can be deceiving. Good intentions can still lead to bad mistakes. Let us be watchful for the little foxes lest they spoil the vines.

“Flying Under False Colors”

E. Claude Gardner

It is still called the Fourth Avenue Church of Christ in Franklin, Tennessee, but it is clearly “flying under false colors.” It is no longer teaching what the Lord's church believes and practices.

From a sermon by the preacher, and sanctioned by the elders, their doctrines show how the church is patterned after a “community church” and teaches very much the same as Baptist theology.

Here are their key positions as stated in a sermon which is now in print, and also by one of their “shepherds.” These men agree on different “kinds” of baptism and even non-baptism. From the sermon we find their basis for accepting those of the Baptist Church into fellowship:

“Believers immersed in other traditions because of their faith in

Christ Jesus, therefore, are welcome to join us and be part of our family.”

From one of the elders we find the following:

“Here is what we think about those who've come baptized as infants or sprinkled, and we've had many of these. If they choose not to be immersed, we welcome them on their journey as a part of this family.

What about those who have never been baptized? We will also welcome you. We will not ignore or reject our commitment to teach and practice immersion of adult believers, but we will not make this issue the line in the sand.

‘So, you're saying that somebody not baptized by any method will be accepted by us as part of our

family and joining us in this journey?' Yes, that is what we say as shepherds."

The preceding statements are stated to justify their practice of open fellowship. Here is the initial statement which lists several scenarios in which they have applied their doctrine in practice:

"We had a young child that wanted to be baptized about the age of 6 or 7 and the question of the parents was — 'Are they ready? Do they know enough?'

There was a woman who was baptized by immersion in another tradition and she wanted to place membership here at Fourth Avenue, and she wanted to know, 'Well, we they accept me?'

What can I do at Fourth Avenue if I have been baptized, let's say, in a Baptist Church somewhere?

We had a man who was sprinkled as an infant, but felt rejected by a church of Christ friend who found out about his method of baptism.

And then we finally finished with a lady who had never been baptized but was trying to make sense of how baptism fits into this whole picture and she regarded baptism as a work and she thought it was an attempt to earn salvation."

History of Fourth Avenue

From the 1960 edition of *Churches of Today* by Batsell B. Baxter and M. Norvel Young, the entry gives the founding of the Fourth Avenue con-

gregation as 1833. This is a congregation that is 174 years old. They state that, "The gospel was first proclaimed in Franklin by Alexander Campbell in 1830. A congregation was established in 1833 as a result of preaching by Absalom Adams and Tolbert Fanning."

In 1960, the church had 800 members and 11 elders.

A Case Study

Old and well-established congregations can be infiltrated by compromisers, false teachers, and unfaithful leaders. This can and does happen, again and again.

During the Freed-Hardeman College lectureship of 1943, brother Hardeman invited J. Leonard Jackson, the preacher at Fourth Avenue, to be a chief speaker. I recall that this oratorical speaker declared, as he dealt with fundamental teaching, "David Lipscomb, we need thee now." He then repeated it, which made a deep impression on me as a student.

Because of Fourth Avenue's apostasy, we could ring out, "Leonard Jackson, we need thee now!"



Is Jesus Christ Your Lord?

Philippians 2:11

1. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is something that everyone should be willing to acknowledge. Romans 10:9
2. He was put in this position by God the Father. Acts 2:36.
3. He is to be confessed with sincerity. Luke 6:46; Matthew 15:7-9.
4. Before answering in the affirmative, consider that the word means.

I. It is a word that denotes OWNERSHIP.

- A. Some think what they do with body and soul is nobody's business but their own. They can do as they please.
- B. The Christian has been bought with the blood of Christ. 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; Ephesians 1:7; Acts 20:28.
- C. Christ is not your Lord unless you have come to His blood.
 1. His blood cleanses. Hebrews 9:14; Revelation 1:5; 1 John 1:7.
 2. When? Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27.

II. It is a word that denotes MASTER.

- A. One either serves a wicked or a righteous master. Matthew 6:24.
- B. Jesus himself became a servant. Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:7
 1. The servant does the master's will. Luke 22:42
 2. The servant owns no property. Luke 9:28; 2 Corinthians 9:8.
- C. We are to become the servants of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:5.
 1. We must do His will. Matthew 7:21
 2. We are His stewards. Psalm 24:1.

III. It is a word that denotes KING.

- A. Jesus is King. 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; Revelation 7:14.
- B. To be His subjects we must be in His kingdom. Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:16.
- C. Subjects must obey the king's decrees. Matthew 6:33; Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46; John 14:23; Colossians 3:16; 3:23.

IV. It is a word that denotes A NEED FOR REVERENCE.

- A. There is a great contrast in the attitudes of men. Romans 3:18; Revelation 5:12.
- B. Notice carefully the consequences of reverence. Ecclesiastes 12:14; Proverbs 1:7.
- C. Some Bible examples of reverence. Acts 9:31; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:11.

1. Now, Is Jesus Christ your Lord? (Review the four main headings.)
2. Or, are you like those of whom Jesus spoke in Luke 6:46
3. Make Him your Lord before it is too late. Philippians 2:9

-Mike Kiser

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ

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The
Gospel Gleaner



Vol. 29

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Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. The West Fayetteville Church of Christ reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

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Gospel Gleaner

Vol. 29 ♦ No. 5

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Is the NASB the Most Literal Translation?

Jackson Erwin

It is not uncommon to hear or to read someone who believes the New American Standard Bible is the most literal and most accurate Bible translation in English. Such appears to be a very accepted conclusion.

Recently, I decided to make a little study out of this theory and in this article I have given you what I found when comparing the NASB to the NKJV. I studied the footnotes in the books of Mark, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter. I am not a Greek scholar. I just took what the Greek scholars provided in the footnotes. These are *their* words, not mine.

The Gospel of Mark

In the gospel account of Mark, the NASB states that a more literal/accurate meaning of a word is to be found in its footnotes (not in the text) 86 times. Of these 86 more literal meanings, the NKJV provides 75 of these in the text, not the footnote.

Galatians

In the book of Galatians, the NASB says there is a more accurate word 43 times in six chapters. The more accurate word is placed in their footnotes. In the NKJV the more ac-

curate word – as stated by the NASB – is provided in the text 34 of the 43 times.

Ephesians

In the six chapters of the book of Ephesians, the NASB says on 42 occasions in their footnotes that a more accurate word could be used than the one they selected in their text. Of these 42 words, 40 times the more accurate word is used in the text of the NKJV.

Philippians

The book of Philippians contains four chapters. In these four chapters, the NASB admits that a more literal translation could have been provided for 31 words. Of these 31 words, the NKJV provides the more accurate translation (according to the NASB) 27 times.

1 Thessalonians

In 1 Thessalonians, the NASB states that a more accurate translation could have been provided for 19 words in five chapters. Of these 19 words, the NKJV provides the more accurate translation (again, according to the footnotes of the NASB) 17 times.

2 Thessalonians

In the three chapters of 2 Thessalonians, 18 times a footnote appears in the NASB which offers a more accurate/literal translation. Of these 18 words, the NKJV corrects 16.

1 Peter

In the five chapters of 1 Peter, the NASB states 27 words could be translated more accurately. Of these 27 words, the NKJV more literally translates 24. Once again, the more literal word appears, not in the footnote, but in the text of the NKJV – 24 out of 27 times.

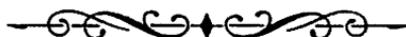
2 Peter

In the three chapters of 2 Peter, 10 times the NASB cites a more literal translation in their footnote. Of these 10 admittedly more literal options, the NKJV selected 9 of them.

Conclusion

Again, I am no Greek scholar, and have written no books on the subject. Out of curiosity, I entered this study. Using the evidence provided by the translators of the NASB, I have found in this random sample of New Testament books that the NASB admits that a more literal/accurate word could have been chosen 276 times. Of these 276 words, the NKJV selected what the NASB translators believed to be the more accurate/literal word 242 times, or 87.6% of the time.

Is the NASB the most literal translation? I will let you be the judge.



Mormonism and Baptism for the Dead

Mel Futrell

One of the most outrageous and yet intriguing doctrines [heresies] of Mormonism is their belief in and practice of “baptism for the dead.” Popular author and lecturer, Dinesh D’souza, correctly stated a few years ago that, “Mormon theology is, at least for us non-Mormons, very strange.”¹ I couldn’t agree more and am fully convinced that their practice of “baptism for the dead” is another strange aspect of Mormon theology.

It should be remembered that the Mormons are promoting “baptism for the dead” not of the dead; and this practice traces back to Joseph Smith himself—the founder in 1830 of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Smith said:

“If we can baptize a man in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Ghost for the remission of sins it is just as much our privilege to act as an agent and be baptized for the remission of sins for and in behalf of our dead kindred who have not heard the gospel or fullness of it.”²

Later, the Mormon “apostle” Bruce McConkie offered this assessment of the deed:

“Indeed, so varying is the eternal law which states, ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’ (John 3:5), that this holy baptismal ordinance must be performed vicariously for accountable persons who depart this life unbaptized but who would have complied with the law had the privilege been afforded them. Hence we have the doctrine of baptism for the dead.”³

This “baptism for the dead,” which is also known as vicarious baptism or proxy baptism, is an essential Mormon doctrine for the following reason stated by Bales:

“Supposedly the gospel is preached to them in the spirit world where they can hear, believe, repent, and confess but since they are not in the body someone on earth has to be baptized for them.”⁴

Of course such a position is in clear conflict with the Bible’s testi-

¹ Blog, August 13, 2007

² As quoted in *Mormonism Explained*, by Andrew Jackson, 2008, p. 169.

³ As quoted in *The Mormon Puzzle* by Michael Reynolds, 1997, p. 46

⁴ James D. Bales, *Latter-day Saints??*, 1982, p. 85.

mony that one's state is fixed at death and cannot be changed following death (Luke 16:19-31; Hebrews 9:27). Yet, "Mormons are taught that they have a primary obligation to 'redeem their dead'"⁵

The Mormon belief is, "that baptism for the dead was an early Christian practice that was lost with the early apostasy of the church and restored by Joseph Smith."⁶

This practice is defended by Mormons primarily but not exclusively on the basis of what we would view as a misinterpretation of Paul's words found in 1 Corinthians 15:29: "Else, what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

It is interesting that this is one of the few practices that Mormons attempt to defend using the Bible rather than their volumes, *The Book Of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. And even then they must twist the Scriptures to get their desired interpretation. So let's take a brief look at some facts we know about Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:29.

First, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is not discussing baptism—but rather the bodily resurrection. Some in the

church at Corinth were affirming the resurrection of Christ but denying their own future resurrection (v. 12). The apostle corrects this by showing how this is contradictory and listing for them the consequences of denying the resurrection (vv. 13-19).

Second, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the apostle puts forth an *ad hominem* argument. In this case, the argument draws on the inconsistency of a group of men who were baptizing people "on behalf" of the dead (v.29).

The point of the argument being: why practice such while at the same time denying the resurrection of the body? Note that Paul doesn't say, "What shall 'we' do or 'you' do which are baptized for the dead—but what shall 'they' do. It should also be remembered that Paul nowhere endorses the practice of vicarious baptism.

Paul is only illustrating the inconsistency between what some [once again notice the third person plural pronoun "they"] were saying and what they were practicing. "He simply mentions the practice as taking place, and asks what meaning it can possibly have if the dead do not rise."⁷

On a purely emotional level, Mormonism's "baptism for the dead" doctrine may have a certain appeal. We all have loved ones who died not hav-

⁵ Ed Decker, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, Harvest House, 1995, p. 68.

⁶ Richard Ostling, *Mormon America*, 1999, p. 189.

⁷ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, IVP Academic, 1985, p. 21

ing been baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). It would be nice to think they had a second chance at salvation through our efforts here on their behalf; but emotions are not our standard of authority.

The truth is, the practice of “baptism for the dead” is not grounded in Scripture. *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* is the zealous promoter of many outlandish heresies—this is just one of them.

Freemasonry: A Guise of False Advertising

Steve Gibson

While the Masonic Lodge promotes itself as a charitable fraternity, comparable to secular clubs or service organizations, it also offers to enhance the religious experience of its adherents, regardless of what their personal beliefs might be.

Packaging itself as a generic aid, the Lodge sees itself is a handmaid to all religions, and a competitor with none. Such claims remind one of the fuel-additive STP. No matter what “model” your religion, or what “brand” of doctrinal gasoline you are using to drive it, freemasonry guarantees that it will help your belief system run better. However, adding Masonic “blasphemy” to Christian truth, only results in a broken engine and a “wrecked” faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

Bible believers have long been suspicious of the Lodge’s secrecy, blood-oaths, and quasi-religious rites. They have also challenged its teachings about the nature and name of God, sin and salvation, Jesus and Scripture, and the church’s destiny to assimilate all world religions. Howev-

er, the one criticism that seems to encompass and surpass all others is the charge that the Masonic Lodge has cleverly disguised the false religion of ancient pagan Egypt.

Before the time of Moses, Egyptians believed that human beings held the potential of being “exalted” to godhood, based on a spark of divinity that lay dormant within them. By heeding the admonition “Know thyself!” a neophyte could discover his true nature.

In the chambers of an Egyptian temple, he could then learn secrets to fan the spark and perfect his divine nature. Using geometry to transform stones into temples became a metaphor for the “building” of gods out of human beings, which is essentially what goes on behind the walls of the Lodge today. Masonic Lodges are little Egyptian temples, passing on the secret rituals of how to become an Egyptian god!

Here is how the geometry of literal construction work became a cover for

the ancient “science” of constructing gods. In ancient Egypt, Ptah, the creator-god, was the ultimate “Craftsman.” As the patron deity of temple builders, his High Priest held the title “Overseer of Craftsmen” (Lucia Gablin, “Creation Myths,” *The Egyptian World*, p. 307).

The beliefs of these ancient Egyptian craftsmen were preserved in their hieroglyphic vocabulary: HER EB (Man’s Undiscovered Divine “Center”; UABT (Temple’s Chamber of Secrets); REKH (Secret “Knowledge,” what the Greeks later called “Gnosis”); NEBU-TA (“Master” of spiritual Masonry); HEKAU (“Passwords” needed to pass through the “netherworld”); KHAW (“Exaltation” to godhood); HERU (“gods,” ascended men) (Dr. Ramses Seleem, *The Egyptian Book of Life*, Ancient Glossary, p. 200ff).

The spirit-building geometry of these ancient “craftsmen” was clearly “science, falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20)! Yet, such supposed construction-to-deification is the same “work” performed by “Master Masons” today. The “G” on Masonic symbols stands not for “God,” but for “Geometry” in this same pagan sense.

Ever since Greeks like Plato and Socrates were initiated into the mysteries of ancient Egypt, the secrets passed along in their temples have been known by the Greek word for knowledge, “Gnosis.” Thus, scholars trace schemes for human deification

back to ancient “Egyptian Gnosticism.” There are at least three good reasons for regarding Freemasonry as modern Gnosticism.

(1) Avowed Gnostics insist that Freemasons follow their doctrines. Hear Stephan A. Hoeller, President of the Gnostic Church of America. “Prior to the Enlightenment, the Gnostic Church enjoyed the protection of the secret orders, conducting its services in Masonic Lodges and similar places. Today in the United States we no longer need to disguise our Gnostic interests and dedications by locking them behind sealed portals of lodges and temples” (“Position Paper on the Relation of the Ecclesia Gnostica and Secret Initiatory Orders,” retrieved from www.gnosis.com).

(2) Degreed Freemasons admit that the Masonic Lodge follows Gnostic teachings. British Freemason and Masonic lecturer Walter L. Wilmshurst, has stated: “The ‘height’ of the Lodge (‘even as high as the heavens’) implies that the range of consciousness possible to us, when we have developed our potentialities to the full, is infinite. Man who has sprung from the earth and developed through the lower kingdoms of nature to his present rational state, has yet to complete his evolution by becoming a god-like being and unifying his consciousness with the Omniscient—to promote which is and always has been the sole aim and purpose of all Initiation” (p. 94).

At the "second" or "fellow-craft stage of self-building," the initiate encounters "the gnosis of self-knowledge, which, pushed to its limit, the candidate is told 'leads to the throne of God Himself,' and reveals the ultimate secrets of his own nature" (p. 120).

"Popular religion . . . cannot produce divinized men endued with the qualities of Mastership, for it is ignorant of the traditional wisdom and methods by which that end is to be attained. That wisdom and those traditional methods of the Mysteries have, however, never been without living witness in the world, despite the jealousy and inhibitions of official orthodoxy. Since the suppression of the Mysteries in the sixth century, their tradition and teaching have been continued in secret and under various concealments, and to that continuation our present Masonic system is due" (p. 212) (Walter L. Wilmshurst, *The Meaning of Masonry*, London, 1938).

Hear Masonic Scholar, Jean-Michel David of Victoria, Australia: "Theosis' remains, after all pure and simply a word that points to a metamorphosis into God: the 'deification of man' – to use a common rendering . . . Theosis becomes the end goal towards which humanity, both as individuals as well as collectively, reaches forth. To continue the biblical reference, it's as if theosis allows for that which was forewarned and forbidden in Genesis 3:22 and for which Adam and Eve were cast out of Para-

dise. . . . [Ancient theosis involved a] threefold 'initiation' [and] these three stages have their reflection in the three degrees in Freemasonry. . . .

"Geometry, which is aggrandized above the other arts and sciences, is to be used not only as the main basis of understanding the building craft, but also used towards the perfection of the architect and, indeed, the workman.

"Symbolically, then, and with the progressive move away from the trade of building towards an ever increasing allegorical and symbolic understanding of the craft, there has inevitably simultaneously been a rapprochement towards an inner work that brings one ever more closely back towards the concept of Theosis. Rudolph Steiner, writes: In individual man there lives a drop of Divinity; he is evolving to the Divine through the expression of his deepest, innermost nature. Without this longing being present in its allegories, its symbols, its ritual acts, and its works, it [Freemasonry] would become but the shell of what it is: a wellspring for the inner life' (from the journal *Speculative Freemasonry*, published by The Victorian Lodge of Research, No. 218, Victoria, Australia, Vol. 24, Fall 2010, available online).

(3) Independent modern researchers trace Masonry back to Gnosticism. Investigative British Journalist Jack M. Driver agrees with Georgian Attorney Reginald C. Haupt, Jr. "In the

twelfth-century, the Cathars and Templars welcomed “various Gnostic and Dualist heresies that had gone underground to escape persecution by the Church There are cogent arguments for believing that Freemasonry is a modern school of gnosticism.” (Jack M. Driver, *Freemasonry: An Illustrated History of the Once Secret Order*, London, 2006, pp. 60, 162).

“Masons love to depict the Lodge as a charitable organization seeking only to promote brotherhood and good works. But Reginald Haupt, Jr., a Savannah, Georgia, attorney, explodes this seductive, carefully crafted fairy tale. In *The Gods of the Lodge*, Haupt uses the Masonic Lodge’s own documents to prove that Freemasonry is not only a secret society, but also a pagan religion based on ancient Egyptianism” (Reginald C. Haupt, Jr. *The Gods of the Lodge*, 1990, back cover).

Truly, Masonic Lodges are little Egyptian temples! The secret knowledge taught therein is nothing short of pagan Gnosticism. The influence of the Lodge is not a can of spiritual STP to help our belief in God flow more smoothly. To the contrary, it is a tank of “bad gas” that would try to convince us that we are potential “gods” ourselves!

When my father, Curt Gibson, obeyed the gospel in 1972, he instinctively left the Masonic Lodge. “There are just things that go on there that a Christian should not be involved in,” I

remember him telling me, as he replaced the symbol on what had once been his cherished Masonic ring. Based on once-secret materials that have been exposed with the advent of the Internet, there is every reason to believe that my father’s personal impression was accurate. The Masonic Lodge has nothing to offer but false advertising!



The Work of the Lord

Tom McLemore

The phrase, “the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58) indicates two things. First, the work of the Lord is the work that the Lord himself does. Second, when Christians are engaged in the same work that the Lord does, we are doing the work of the Lord. Christians must recognize that evangelism is the Lord working in and through us. We must also recognize that we work in cooperation with the Lord so that our work may be called “the work of the Lord.”

The prominence of “the name of the Lord Jesus” and similar ideas in the book of Acts emphasizes that the story of the early church is one of the Lord’s activity in and through his disciples. Though the Jews had put Jesus

of Nazareth to death, God raised him up, he sits on David's throne at God's right hand, and he is still at work among Christians through the Spirit. The Jews did not get rid of him at all! Even though he can no longer be seen walking among men, even though his audible voice is no longer heard as it was before, and even though he is not physically present, healing and helping as he had during his ministry, he is still here in his body, the church. His work continues.

Luke emphasized the name of Jesus in connection with what went on in the early days of Christianity. This is particularly evident in the healing of the lame man in Acts 3, with emphasis upon the name of Jesus. Jesus is present with his people. His saving power is still here during the time between his ascension and his second coming. He is with his people unto the end of the age, just as he promised (Matthew 28:20).

Luke said at the beginning of his second book, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus **BEGAN** to do and teach" (Acts 1:1, emphasis supplied). This may suggest that in Acts we will find what Jesus **CONTINUED** to do and teach. He lets us hear the name of Jesus and see what goes on in connection with it.

Jesus is still active, still doing, still teaching. His cause continues to move onward and outward. The use of his name brings this fact into sharp

focus. The point of the miracle is not the miracle itself, but *the name of Jesus who was doing the miracle!* So, the speaking of the name of Jesus was, to the early church, a testimony that Jesus was alive, present with them, active, and doing.

When we look at the rest of Acts, we can see how important this is. When the sick were healed, the name of Jesus was spoken (Acts 4:7, 10). When signs and miracles occurred, the name of Jesus was heard (Acts 4:30). When people were baptized, Jesus' name was spoken (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:1-5; 22:16). When the disciples taught and preached, the name of Jesus was spoken (Acts 5:28, 40; 8:12; 9:15, 27, 29). The name of Jesus was praised (Acts 19:17). People called upon the name of Jesus (Acts 9:14; 22:16). When people suffered for being Christians, and they were prepared to die, it is clear that it was for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41; 9:16; 15:26; 21:13).

When we baptize someone today, that person confesses the name of Jesus. When we pray, we say, "In Jesus' name." Not because saying the name of Jesus is a matter of mere ritual, but because it conveys a message! It says, "Jesus is alive to cleanse this person who is being baptized! He is alive to bear our humble prayers to the throne of the Majesty on high! He is alive, he is with us, and he is saving and acting!" The good work and worthy accomplishments among his people are *his* doing! This applies espe-

cially when we are engaged in the work of evangelism, for in a unique way, “this is the work of the Lord.” The Lord is teaching his word *through us*.

Paul aptly reinforces a similar and related idea in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

How is “the work of the Lord” possible? The resurrected/exalted Lord is the source of strength for doing the work of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2:16, 17; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:8). Numerous passages stress the Lord’s being at work in us (Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 4:12; Philippians 1:6).

Paul depended upon this strength in doing the work of the Lord. God’s grace enabled him (1 Corinthians 15:10; Ephesians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Everything Paul did in the work of the Lord he did “in the Lord,” i.e., in fellowship with the risen Lord, under his direction, and enabled by him (1 Corinthians 9:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Galatians 5:10; Ephesians 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; Philippians 2:19, 24; 2 Thessalonians 3:4; Philippians 4:10).

“In the Lord,” the church can do everything that the work of the Lord requires. We can abound, labor (work hard), be steadfast and constant in it, and be unmovable in it. “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20, 21).



Notes from My Debate with Steve Baisden

AD 70 Doctrine Answered

Drew Leonard

On August 4-6 (2017), this author engaged in a three day debate with brother Steve Baisden of Ludington, Michigan. The debate was held at the Ludington church of Christ building and consisted of things pertaining to the end times.

Baisden is a well-known advocate of the A.D. 70 theology. He believes that all of the “end times” things spoken in the Bible came in the last days of the nation of Israel, thus being completely fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

In totality, the debate was 7.5 hours long, thus this review is only a

fraction of everything that transpired. (I strongly encourage you to view the full debate, titled “Leonard/Baisden Debate,” which can easily be found on YouTube.)

Each day, there were three 20-minute speeches delivered by each disputant. After each day, there was a 30-minute “Q & A” session. Brother Holger Neubauer was seated at Baisden's table and served as his moderator. I took no moderator to the debate. Both sides were exceedingly kind and accommodating during the course of the debate; both sides acted gentlemanly, yet pressed their points with vigor. It was refreshing to see disagreement on a mature level instead of childish mudslinging.

The propositions that were debated were the following: Steve Baisden affirmed: “Jesus has returned the second time in the first century for the judgment and the resurrection.” This author denied that proposition. I affirmed: “There is yet to be a future, bodily resurrection of the dead at Jesus' second coming.” Steve Baisden denied that proposition.

Baisden's Assertions

The following is the list of things that were crucially asserted by Baisden.

1.) Baisden asserted that the language (e.g. coming of Christ, Satan's fall, new heavens and earth, books opened, white throne judgment, resurrection of a cause)

of Revelation was exclusively Second Coming language.

I went to the prophets and demonstrated how each of those figures expressed – not a single one excepted – had occurred at the fall of nations during the O.T. era with the prophets. Christ came representatively against Egypt (Isa. 19:1); Satan fell when Babylon fell (Isa. 14:12); A “new heavens and earth” were introduced as a vindication of God's kingdom over Babylon (Isa. 13:13; 65:17,18; 66:22,23); Books were opened during the fall of the 4th, Roman beast (Dan. 7:9,10); A “white throne judgment” occurred at the fall of the fourth beast (Rome) (Dan. 7:9-12); Resurrection of a cause occurred when Israel returned back to her land after the Babylonian fall (Eze. 37:1-14).

All of that shows that the book of Revelation, while completely fulfilled, does not need to be associated intrinsically with the Second Coming of Christ, the final resurrection, and judgment.

Baisden's assertion neglects the prophets and how they spoke of the fall of nations. This author is persuaded that Revelation paints the picture of Rome's fall in the same way that the prophets did.

2.) Baisden asserted that the phrase “by the word of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 must mean that Christ spoke the same thing in His personal ministry, attempting to connect the Thessalonian

passage with other passages spoken by Christ about A.D. 70.

I demonstrated from 1 Kings 13 how the same phrase was used before Christ ever came to this planet, thus proving that the phrase does not demand such.

3.) Baisden asserted from Hebrews 9:28 that Christ (the High Priest) had to leave the most holy place in order to complete the atonement, thus arguing that if Christ hasn't returned, then His atonement is still incomplete for us today.

I asked for proof that either testament proved that. Such went unanswered. Furthermore, Hebrews 10:10-12 clearly demonstrates that the atonement was completed before A.D. 70, and in order to prove such, Christ contrasted Himself with yet-ministering priests by sitting down to indicate the completion of the sacrifice. That occurred at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:29-35).

4.) Baisden asserted that the quotation of 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 is taken directly from Hosea 6:2 because it is the only O.T. passage that speaks of a three-day resurrection and refers to the body of Israel, nationally. Baisden was attempting to get 1 Corinthians 15 to speak of the resurrection to Israel, as a nation, in A.D. 70.

This author asked for proof, received none, and demonstrated from

Matthew 12:40 how Jonah served as a prophet about the three-day bodily resurrection of Christ and not a forty-year resurrection of Israel.

5.) Baisden asserted that Christ's resurrection was a sign for the forty-year resurrection of Israel. This author stated that Christ's resurrection was a sign, but demanded proof that it was a "sign" for what Baisden suggested.

Acts 2:22 and Romans 1:4 demonstrate that the resurrection of Christ was a "sign" that He was the Son of God. There is no passage that says that His resurrection was a sign for a forty-year resurrection of the nation of Israel (from 30 to 70 AD).

6.) Baisden demanded that the word "we" in 1 Corinthians 15:51 indicates that the Corinthians would be alive at the Second Coming of Christ. This author asked how the word "we" of 1 Thessalonians should be understood when it included Paul, who would die before even the A.D. 70 "coming" in judgment of Christ (cf. 1 Thes. 4:16).

The word is editorial, allowing Paul to identify with the saints. Paul's point is that the "we" (Christians) would not all sleep; Paul's point is not that he and the Corinthians and Thessalonians would be physically alive at the second coming.

7.) Baisden asserted that all prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70. This au-

thor brought up Zechariah 14:3, demonstrating that Zechariah 14:1, 2 discusses the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but something must come after A.D. 70 per verse 3 because it says that the destroyers of Jerusalem would then be destroyed later by the Lord.

Additionally, the theorists hold the 1,000-year reign of Revelation 20 to end in A.D. 70, but see Revelation 20:7, which says, "After the 1,000 years are expired . . ." Whatever Revelation 20:7-ff. speaks of, it's after A.D. 70 by their own admission.

8.) Baisden asserted that Romans 5:12 meant the same as 1 Corinthians 15:22. He means to do this to prove that Adam only died spiritually, thus the redemption of Adam's curse was exclusively spiritual and fully accomplished in A.D. 70.

This author asked for proof that they were the same and provided argumentation to demonstrate how 1 Corinthians 15:22 discusses a physical death, whereas Romans 5:12 speaks of the spiritual aspect.

9.) Baisden asserted that Paul preached every aspect of his resurrection doctrine from the O.T., using Acts 26:22, 23 and Acts 24:14,15 to bolster the theory. Such is done because they view the O.T. as never speaking of the general resurrection of physically dead people. They believe we

have blundered in thinking that Daniel 12 is about the bodily resurrection at the end of time.

This author is persuaded such is not the case. Baisden had already argued that the resurrection comes via baptism. This author asked for O.T. passages to demonstrate that even that aspect (baptism for resurrection) was preached from the O.T. Baisden provided Romans 6:3, 4. The idea that Paul only preached O.T. resurrection is not what was being conveyed in the Acts passages.

10.) Baisden asserted that the word "soul" in Isaiah 53:10-12 demonstrates that Christ died (i.e. was separated from God) spiritually in order to redeem the souls of men. (He does that to try to show that Christ's resurrection was spiritual, which is what the 1 Corinthians 15 resurrection is modeled after, so he says.)

This author demonstrated from Leviticus 5:2 that "soul" is often used to speak of a human being rather than the spirit exclusively. Additionally, Hebrews 10:10, Colossians 1:21, 22 and 1 Peter 2:24 look mighty clear as to whether it was Christ's body or spirit/soul that died as the sacrifice to redeem men.

11.) Baisden asserted that Christ was actually forsaken and separated spiritually from God for three literal days.

This author suggested that Matthew 27:46 quotes from Psalm 22:1 as

Christ's way of saying, "David felt forsaken. Think of how David felt as a human. That's how I feel in the Gethsemane experience!" This author demonstrated how John 8:29, John 16:32 and Psalm 22:23, 24 to indicate that the Father never forsook Christ in actuality, but the quote was a proof-text by Christ to get the people to think of the entirety of Psalm 22.

Baisden's Problems

The following things are things that were found to be extreme problems for Baisden in the debate:

1.) Baisden admitted to several "comings" of the Lord of a personal nature before A.D. 70 and said that the A.D. 70 coming was a personal coming.

Hebrews 9:28 limits the final coming of Christ as the "second time." Hebrews 9:28 demands that there have only been two personal "comings" of the Lord: 1) when Christ came to earth and 2) a second, future coming (cf. Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 9:28).

Other "comings" of the Lord occurred at the falls of nations, but those were representative and impersonal (cf. Isa. 19:1; Mic. 1:2, 3). The fact that Hebrews 9:28 calls the "coming" the "second" demands that it is not the A.D. 70 coming lest the ones before (like Isaiah 19:1 and Micah 1:2,3) make it not the "second" but the "fourth" or "fifth" or something of that ilk.

Shockingly, in the second day of the debate, Neubauer admitted that Isaiah 19:1 was a personal coming of the Lord! Baisden agreed at the time. On the same day, Baisden later "craw-fished" and said in the "Q & A" that the Isaiah 19:1 "coming" was an impersonal coming of the Lord! Either way, they have too many comings for the A.D. 70 coming to be the "second."

The way one ought to see it is that the "second" coming has not yet occurred because there has only been one personal coming of the Lord before (cf. John 1:14). The others have been impersonal (cf. Isa. 19:1; Mic. 1:2,3). The one yet anticipated is the "second" personal coming of Christ (cf. Heb. 9:28).

2.) Baisden had the problem with affirming the resurrection of a non-dead body. They affirmed that Israel was in progress of dying from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 while the church was resurrecting from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 out of Judaism's grave.

In other words, that doctrine demands two bodies. Incidentally, that also doesn't qualify as "resurrection." Resurrection is a "standing again." It is a "coming alive again."

They have Judaism (as a corporate entity) resurrecting in A.D. 30 when it hadn't even died yet (which they say would be in A.D. 70). Paul hotly branded the view in 1 Corinthians 15:36 by saying, "Fools, something

that hasn't died can't be quickened or resurrected!"

3.) Seeing that the AD 70 proponents deny the physical resurrection from a physical death, this multiple choice question was posed to Baisden: Select which of the following is true according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: a) Physically dead people are resurrected out of spiritual death before physically living people, b) Physically living people are resurrected out of spiritual death before physically dead people or c) Physically dead people are resurrected out of spiritual death at the same time as physically living people.

The question poses a problem for their view (that only spiritual resurrection is in view) because of the following: If (a) is selected, it begs the question why the Colossians were explicitly stated as being resurrected out of sin-death when the theorists say such couldn't occur until A.D. 70 (cf. Col. 2:11-13).

Incidentally, those were Gentiles being resurrected out of sin-death before A.D. 70, but Baisden's camp has strenuously argued that Gentiles were not promised resurrection and couldn't be resurrected – even provisionally! – until A.D. 70, yet Paul argued otherwise.

If (b) is selected, it begs the question why individuals like the Colossians were said to be resurrected while Paul said that he (a first-fruit Jew,

class of converts who, so we're told, were to receive provisional resurrection in order to provide spiritual life to people after 70) had not yet attained the resurrection (cf. Phil. 3:10-21)!

If (c) is selected, it begs the question of why Paul bothered saying that the physically dead people would "rise" (out of sin-death, as the theorists see it) "first!" What would the meaning of the word "first" be if (c) were selected? Baisden's problem is that he has limited the N.T. characters (and saints today) as only experiencing one type of resurrection: spiritual. But, you see the problems created with the thinking.

Incidentally, Baisden answered the three-pronged question submitted in the following way: "None true." Later in the debate, he "crawfished" and selected (b), at which point he was caught on the problem listed above.

Why was his answer so bad though? In answering "none true," he affirmed that resurrection out of sin-death never occurred! Do you catch that? If resurrection out of sin-death occurred – even in A.D. 70 – then one of the three answers to the question must be true!

By answering that none of the options were true, he implicitly states that people were never resurrected out of sin-death, while trying to argue that Christ, the first-fruit Jewish converts, and Christians post-70 were resurrected!

Baisden later (in the “Q & A” of the first day) argued that Christ was the first ever to resurrect out of sin-death, but his answer to this question implied that nobody had ever resurrected out of sin-death. The question was set up as a strong disjunction (in a way, although a third option “c” was provided. In other words, (given the premise that resurrection occurs), at least one of the options (between options “a” and “b”) must be true.

Either Christ, (since He was the first to resurrect out of spiritual death, as Baisden argued) was physically alive and the first to resurrect out of spiritual death or Christ was physically dead and the first to resurrect out of spiritual death. Baisden's answering of the question was that neither option was true and thus implicitly stated that Christ never resurrected, while Baisden constantly argued that Christ was the first to resurrect.

He was in a mess and was led to self-contradiction. One of the options to the three-pronged question must have been the case if resurrection out of sin-death was affirmed. Baisden was both affirming and denying resurrection out of sin-death.

4.) Baisden made Christ contradict himself on the time indicators. Baisden affirms that the Greek “mello” when used with the infinitive demands imminence and is a temporal equivalent to “at hand.”

Matthew 16:27-28, per Baisden, speaks of A.D. 70, and “mello” with

the infinitive is used there, indicating that A.D. 70 is “at hand” as Baisden thinks Christ suggests. Sadly, Christ would later say that A.D. 70 was not “at hand” when He said that the fall of Jerusalem would not be “at hand” until the signs began to manifest themselves (cf. Luke 21:28, 31).

In other words, Christ said early in His ministry (per Baisden's view of “mello” in Matthew 16:27, 28) that A.D. 70 was not “at hand,” but later, in Christ's ministry, He would recant and say that it wasn't. This author also holds Matthew 16:27, 28 to speak of the vindication of the kingdom of God over the Jerusalem state in A.D. 70, but the theorists' usage of “mello” is nonsense. (The phrase “at hand” needs to be understood to express imminence, however.)

5.) Baisden has the problem with saying that the only kind of resurrection (which he holds to be the same as 1 Cor. 15) was already occurring before A.D. 70 per John 5:24, 25, but Paul disagreed with that idea (cf. 2 Tim. 2:17, 18).

This brief review only skims the surface of the problems that this doctrine has and its radical reconstructing of the Scriptures.

I strongly encourage you to watch the debate and examine the evidence for yourself.

The Man Who Was Born Blind

A Study from John 9

Bradley S. Cobb

An entire chapter in the book of John is dedicated to relaying the time when a man was healed of his infirmity. While that might not seem like such a notable thing to point out, it is notable that though the entire chapter (forty-one verses) deals with this man, we are never told his name. He is called “the blind man” (John 9:6), “him who formerly was blind” (John 9:13), and “the man who was blind” (John 9:24). Though we don’t know this man’s name, we know that he was a man of great courage.

When you think of people in the Bible (or anywhere else, for that matter) who exhibited great courage, you generally think of people who have accomplished great things in the face of adversity and overwhelming odds. You might think of Gideon and his small band of 300 soldiers taking on an enormous Midianite army. You might think of little teenage David who ran out to meet a nine-foot tall armored soldier named Goliath in one-on-one combat. Events like these are what cause people to be viewed as heroic. But I want you to stop and consider the amazing amount of courage exhibited by a blind man who was healed by Jesus Christ.

Blind from Birth

The story of this courageous blind man begins with him almost being seen as an afterthought. “Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth” (John 9:1). However, this was no “chance” meeting. There was a reason that Jesus saw this man, and a reason that He took notice of him, and a reason that He healed him.

The disciples were like the typical Jews of that day – and much like many people are today as well. They assumed that if something bad had happened to someone, it had to be the result of that person’s sinfulness. The disciples asked Jesus whose sin was to blame for this man being born blind, “this man or his parents?” (John 9:2).

Stop to consider how deeply ingrained this belief was in the disciples. They actually asked Jesus if this man sinned in the womb, causing himself to be born blind. This event which is recorded for us by the apostle John serves to put this false belief to rest, because Jesus said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3).

What was the purpose of this man being blind from birth? It wasn't because of sinfulness on his part, nor his parents', but it was so that the power of God and His Christ could be revealed!

It is very important to remember that this man was indeed born blind. Had Jesus healed a man who developed blindness later in life, it might have been touted as a medical marvel, reversing something that had happened. But the impressiveness of this miracle of Jesus is seen later when it is said, "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind" (John 9:32).

Healed by Works

This man was healed through an obedient faith. Jesus spit on the ground and made a mixture, which He then put on the man's eyes. But that didn't heal the man. Jesus told the man to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. This blind man walked to the Pool and did as he was commanded (John 9:6-7). Before you simply gloss over this fact, try blindfolding yourself and see how easy it is for you to walk very far without being able to see.

If this man had simply stayed put and said, "Sir, I have faith that you can heal me," he would have remained blind until the day he died. Jesus required works from this man in order to achieve the healing that was being offered. This doesn't

mean at all that somehow the blind man earned his sight, but he did that which was required to receive it.

In the same way, Jesus requires us to put forth effort in order to receive the spiritual healing that He offers. It is not by faith only. Instead, Jesus commanded that we "arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). It isn't that we somehow earn our salvation, but we still have to do what is required to receive it.

It was only after the blind man went to the Pool of Siloam and washed that he "came back seeing" (John 9:7). He was healed through faithful obedience.

The Courage of the Man Who was Born Blind

Many lessons can be learned from John chapter 9, but the one on which we will be focusing here is his great courage.

He showed courage by taking an unpopular stand. It was most likely earlier that same day that the religious leaders took up stones to kill Jesus with (John 8:59). It was before these same people that the formerly blind man was brought to answer questions about Jesus (John 8:13, 9:13). They had already shown willingness to try to kill Jesus, so standing up for Christ wasn't exactly a popular thing to do.

While the Pharisees argued amongst themselves about Jesus, some saying "This man is not from

God because He does not keep the Sabbath” and others saying “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” the blind man responded with “He is a prophet” (John 9:16-17). This proclamation did not sit well with the Pharisees. In fact, they began to accuse this man of lying about having ever been blind in the first place (John 9:18).

How does this make the man who was born blind courageous? Imagine yourself in front of a group of people who just tried to kill someone. How easy would it be to stand up for the person they wanted to kill? It would have been much easier to do what some others did and claim ignorance, or to say, “I don’t know.”

So many people today, when faced with questions about Jesus, simply say, “I don’t know” or they look for other ways out of giving an answer because they fear what the other person will say or do. It takes real courage to stand up for Jesus and state the truth about Him. Even when it is unpopular, we still need to stand for Jesus.

He showed courage by not being like his parents. This man’s parents were called to speak before the Pharisees, and it was insinuated that they were liars as well. The Pharisees said “Is this your son, who *you say* was born blind?” (John 9:19). The parents did indeed state the truth that they knew he was their son and that he was born blind, but because they

were afraid, they refused to say how he was healed (John 9:20-22).

They were afraid of being cast out of the synagogue for speaking up for Jesus, so they faked ignorance. They were more interested in social standing and the approval of people than they were in standing up for the truth. This is seen even more clearly when you realize that they were more interested in this approval than they were in their own son. When they were asked, they pushed all questions off on him (John 9:21). They knew that if he stood up for Jesus, he would be kicked out of the synagogue (which is what happened – John 9:34), but they seemed okay with that so long as it didn’t happen to them.

This is much like King Hezekiah who was told that his descendants would be taken captive and many of them killed. His response was “at least there will be peace and truth in my days” (Isaiah 39:7-8).

Because he spoke the truth, the man was kicked out of the synagogue. As such, his parents would not speak to him, lest they be labeled as “Jesus sympathizers” too. But this man showed great courage, even though it likely cost him his relationship with his parents. He was more interested in following God than pleasing people.

He showed courage in correcting religious error. The Pharisees began again to chastise the man. In

their demands upon him, they implied that he was giving glory to a sinner instead of God (John 9:24). They then re-questioned him on how he was made to see, and he was fearless in his response: "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" (John 9:27).

In their anger, the Pharisees reviled him, and treated him like he was worthless. They mockingly said to him, "**You** are His disciple, but **we** are Moses' disciples. We *know* that God spoke to Moses. As for this fellow, we do not know where He is from" (John 9:28-29).

The constant accusations which are implied against this man are incredible. They had accused him of lying about having been born blind, they accused him of giving glory to a sinner instead of God, and now they are accusing him of rejecting the Law of Moses.

In the face of accusations like this, many people would back down and simply be quiet, or perhaps say the things necessary to appease the accusers (like Peter did in John 18:15-18, 25-27). Instead, this man who was unable to see until that very day stood firm and pointed out their hypocrisy and contradictions. He said very plainly, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet he has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a

worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. *If this man were not from God, He could do nothing*" (John 9:30-33).

Courage is seen in someone standing up for what is right in the face of those who are against it. These Pharisees were supposed to be the religious experts and leaders. But this man – who had been able to see for only a few hours – could see that they were wrong. And he did not hesitate to tell them so to their faces. As a result, he was accused of being a sinner from birth (something that Jesus said wasn't true – John 9:3), and kicked out of the synagogue (John 9:34).

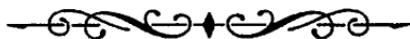
These Pharisees didn't care for the truth. They cared only for their own prestige and power. But even with being kicked out of the synagogue, the man whose name was never given to us proudly proclaimed to Jesus, "Lord I believe!" and worshiped Him (John 9:36).

Are You Courageous?

It is easy to imagine ourselves doing what is right when we have lots of people watching us as we face overwhelming odds. We know what the right thing to do would be in those circumstances. The true test of courage is this: will you show courage in the normal, day-to-day aspects of your life?

When someone says something against Jesus, will you stand up for your Savior or will you remain silent? When a crowd of people makes fun of Christianity, how will you respond? If you own parents give you an example of trying to appease others, will you still stand up for the truth? Even if it means social rejection and being called a liar, will you stand up for Jesus Christ?

It takes courage to do what is right. Follow the example of the unnamed man who was born blind. If you are not a Christian, proclaim your belief in Jesus Christ and follow His command to go to the water where your spiritual ailment (your sin) will be washed away!



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INFANT "BAPTISM" and ORIGINAL SIN

Andy Erwin

The reader will observe that we have listed infant baptism before original sin in the heading. We have done so because the practice of infant baptizing⁸ actually preceded the idea of original sin. Everett Ferguson writes, "It was actually the growth of the practice of infant baptism which led to a changed view of the spiritual condition of the infant."⁹

Infant baptism is now practiced among the Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians to name a few. Such baptismal ceremonies involve a parent or god-parent making a confession or denouncing sin by proxy for the child. In the case of the Episcopal Church, whatever the parents choose for the child to obey, when the child reaches maturity, he must obey.

The practice of baptizing infants started when parents began baptizing sick children just before their death, wanting to be sure that they were born again, without understanding that they were never lost. The practice then gave rise to the doctrine of original

⁸ Infants are not literally baptized or immersed in water in this practice. Water is sprinkled or poured upon them.

⁹ Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 3rd ed., (Abilene, TX: ACU Press), 57.

sin. After all, there had to be a reason for these children to need a new birth, and since it was not because of *their* sins, Adam's sin would have to do. By the Fourth Century the practice of infant baptism was commanded in the churches, and by the Fifth Century it was a general practice.

Ferguson also points out that it was Tertullian (200 AD) who made the first "explicit" reference to infant baptism, and that it was a rebuttal to the practice. Tertullian wrote:

"What is the necessity if there is no such necessity...Let them become Christians when they are able to know Christ! ...Let them learn to ask for salvation so that you may be seen to have given 'to him who asks.'"¹⁰

Original Sin and Augustine

Augustine is in large part responsible for the doctrine of original sin. As stated, by the time of the Fourth Century, infant baptism was already being practiced, but without a reason (other than parents knew a person had to be baptized to enter the kingdom on the basis of John 3:3-5).

Augustine explained that children needed to be baptized to receive remission for the original sin they had inherited stemming all the way back to Adam. The doctrine of original sin became a stepping stone to the doc-

trine of total hereditary depravity and inability.

Against Infant Baptism

Our argument against the practice of infant baptism is two-fold. In the first place, we argue that no sin exists to remit. We believe, and shall later argue with greater depth, that man is born into this world in the light of Christ (John 1:9), not the darkness of sin. Seeing that no sin exists to blot the soul of a child, why then would the child require baptism which is for the forgiveness of sin (cf. Acts 2:38)?

Moreover, some very practical matters pertaining to baptism cannot be maintained by the practice. For instance, a person must be a penitent believer before they can be baptized (see Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). A person must also be able to call upon the name of the Lord in public confession (Acts 22:16; Acts 8:36-37). A person must know what they are doing and why they are doing it (Acts 16:30-31; Acts 19:3).

In which of these cases can an infant be qualified? Such commands cannot be done *for* you. These are decisions an individual must make personally and freely from the heart (Romans 6:17)

In the second place, infant baptism is not a baptism, but a pouring or sprinkling of water. The Greek word *baptisma* is transliterated *baptism* in English. The root for *baptisma* is

¹⁰ *Treatise on Baptism*, 18.4

bapto, which means “to dip, to dip in, to immerse.”¹¹

Paul defined baptism as a burial (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12-13). Had the inspired writers desired to command the sprinkling or pouring of water, rather than an immersion in water, two perfectly acceptable words could have been chosen – *rhantizo* (to sprinkle), and *cheo* (to pour). Furthermore, of the many times Hebrew words for “pour” and “sprinkle” were translated into the Greek for the Septuagint, why can we not find one instance in which a representative for the family of *bapto* is used? If *bapto* could also mean to pour or to sprinkle, why did these seventy Greek scholars not recognize it?

Baptism and Circumcision

It is also argued that baptism is to the Christian as circumcision was to the Jew. Attempts to parallel baptism and circumcision appear very early in church history. The argument follows that infants are baptized to enter the new covenant just like the male infants were circumcised to enter the Jewish covenant.

The writer of Hebrews answered this supposed parallel in Hebrews 8:11 by saying: “And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from

the least to the greatest.” Accordingly, a male child entered the old covenant when circumcised on the eighth day – regardless of the fact that he did not know why. He was taught to know the Lord after he had already been sealed with the seal of that covenant – circumcision.

The new covenant does not work that way. According to the new covenant, one must be taught before entering this relationship with God. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The gospel must be preached and obeyed for a person to enter the new covenant. Therefore, “all shall know me,” is to say, all those in this covenant will know the Lord and why they are in this covenant. Such knowledge will not come after the covenant has been entered, but before.

It should also be noted that the purpose for circumcision and the purpose for baptism are not the same. Circumcision identified a child with Israel, and was the seal of their covenant with God. While baptism can and does identify a person with the Lord’s church, this is not the only reason one should be baptized. As we have noted, baptism is for the remission of sins. On this point, any comparison between the two actions must end.

Suffer Not the Children

Another argument in support of infant baptism is Christ’s reception of

¹¹ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 95.

children in Matthew 18:1-6. The argument follows:

“Christ has commanded that little children should be brought to him and we obey this command by baptizing them and teaching them... They (children) have inherited a sinful heart, and the germs of sin in them will soon grow.”¹²

Three obvious errors can be found in this conclusion. (1) As we have shown, the Bible never teaches that a child has inherited a “sinful heart.” In fact, the Bible teaches the exact opposite, for unless we “be converted and become as little children,” i.e. with the faith, humility, and sincerity of a child, we will not enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3). (2) Christ never commanded that children come to Him through baptism. (3) Teaching comes both before baptism and after baptism, rather than “baptizing them and teaching them.”

Thomas Campbell met a similar argument in his early restoration preaching in America. In 1808, a special meeting was called at the house of Abraham Altars, and at this meeting Campbell declared his conviction that the word of God as revealed in the Bible was all-sufficient as a basis of union and cooperation for Christians. Of course, this condemned all creeds. Campbell then

stoutly urged all to abandon everything in religion for which there could not be produced the word of the Lord.

He announced the famous statement: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” Campbell’s words have become a maxim for all who have given up creeds and have taken the Bible alone as their rule of faith and worship in the service of God.

During this meeting a Scottish bookseller named Andrew Munro said, “Mr. Campbell, if we adopt that as a basis, then there is the end of infant baptism.” Campbell answered, saying, “Of course, if infant baptism be not found in the Scriptures, we can have nothing to do with it.”

Thomas Campbell’s answer brought a very emotional reply from another attendee, Thomas Acheson. Acheson rose to his feet and cried out, “I hope I may never see the day when my heart will renounce that blessed saying of the Scripture, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’” To which James Foster would reply, “Mr. Acheson, I would remark that in the portion of Scripture you have quoted, there is no reference whatever to infant baptism.”

Let us teach our children about Christ and His church. Then, when they are ready, let us baptize them according to the New Testament.

¹² Joseph Stump, *An Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism*, (Philadelphia, PA: The United Lutheran Publishing House, 1935), 146.

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Christian Parenting Workshop

November 5-8, 2017

West Fayetteville Church of Christ

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(931) 433-6542**

Sunday November 5, 2017

- 9:30 - Bible Class: The Christian Home: Its Morality and Purpose
10:30 - AM Sermon: Maintaining Godly Homes in a Wicked World
7:30 - PM Sermon: Responsibilities of Christian Parenthood
Speaker for All Services: Bill Dillon

Monday November 6, 2017

- 5:00 – 5:50 - Supper is Provided
6:00 – 6:50 - MEN: The Father's Duty to the Family
Speaker: Artie Collins
WOMEN: The Mother's Duty to the Family
Speaker: Nancy Hixon
7:00 – 7:50 - Keynote: The Husband and Wife as a Team
Speaker: Mike Hixon

Tuesday November 7, 2017

- 5:00 – 5:50 - Supper is Provided
6:00 – 6:50 - MEN: Helping Your Child Increase in Faith during Adolescence
Speaker: Jimmy Clark
WOMEN: Helping Your Child Increase in Faith during Adolescence
Speaker: Wanda Robinson
7:00 – 7:50 - Keynote: Developing Christian Habits and Practices in the Home
Speaker: Clarence Deloach

Wednesday November 8, 2017

- 5:00 – 5:50 - Supper is Provided
6:00 – 6:50 - MEN: Teaching the Fundamentals of Faith to Your Children
Speaker: Hugh Fulford
WOMEN: Teaching the Fundamentals of the Faith to Your Children
Speaker: Renee Galloway
7:00 – 7:50 - Keynote: Why Are We Losing Our Children? How Do We Prevent This?
How Do We Reclaim Them?
Speaker: James W. Boyd

Bible Classes and childcare will be provided for children of all ages during the workshop. Lodging is provided in Fayetteville at the Hampton Inn (931) 433-3355 and at Best Western (931) 433-0100.

www.westfayetteville.net

Self-Justification

Job 40:8

1. Self-justification is when one pronounces one's self free from guilt, or blame. Some would claim they are acceptable to God, pass judgment on themselves, and get a clear verdict.
2. Our text are not the words of God. Would Job rather blame God than to blame himself? Study his earlier words. Job 9:20.
3. Think of Paul's words. Romans 3:4. No one can say they are without sin. To say such would be to condemn God. 1 John 1:8,

I. Bible Examples of Self-Justification.

- A. Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:12, 13. Blame passed around.
- B. King Saul. 1 Samuel 15:11-21. He insisted he had obeyed.
- C. The Lawyer. Luke 10:25-29. He tried to change the subject.
- D. The Pharisees. Luke 16:14, 15. Take any position to evade.
- E. The Judgment Scene.
 1. Claim many works to their credit. Matthew 7:21-23
 2. Claim failure out of reverence. Matthew 25:25
 3. Claim ignorance of opportunity. Matthew 25:41

II. The Reason for Self-Justification.

- A. To satisfy our own conscience.
 1. Proverbs 12:15; 20:6; 30:12.
 2. Laodiceans. Revelation 3:17
- B. To receive man's approbation.
 1. True of the Pharisees.
 2. Looking for a commendation. Matthew 23:27, 28.
- C. To Avoid God's Condemnation. (Look again at those Bible examples: Adam and Eve; Saul; the judgment scene.)

III. Modern Sayings of Self-Justification.

- A. "I really don't believe that is what it means."
- B. "There are so many opinions, how can we know what is right?"
- C. "What is to be, will be!"
- D. "Everyone else is doing it."
- E. "I was made to do that when I was a child."
- F. "I have a weakness in that direction."
- G. "He really means well over all."
- H. "I am as good as the next fellow."

1. It is better to accept God's measurement. 2 Corinthians 10:18.
2. The only way to be justified: Romans 5:1; 5:9; James 2:21, 24.

-Mike Kiser

Remembering Leslie G. Thomas

James R. McGill

Leslie G. Thomas (1905-1988) was born in northwest Tennessee, just outside of Rutherford, on July 6, 1895. His father died when Leslie was just a young child. He had a sister who died during the flu epidemic of 1918, and he had a younger brother, C. B. Thomas. Like Leslie, C.B. devoted his life to preaching.

At age ten, while at worship, he witnessed his mother's making the confession of her faith in Jesus as the Son of God and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of her sins. He dedicated one of the books he authored to her, as "the first member of our immediate family" to obey the gospel and be added to the church.

Laird's Role

After Leslie's mother remarried, her brother, gospel preacher James E. Laird and his wife, took Leslie and C. B. into their home. Laird was only twelve years older than Leslie. Leslie did his first preaching at Gibson, Missouri, in 1913, arranged by Laird.

When America became directly involved in World War I in 1917, and a military draft was implemented, Leslie received a deferment as a preacher. But he wrote to the draft board and told them he was not preaching regularly. (He was in college at Thorp Spring.) They changed

his classification, and he was drafted into the army.

Shortly after returning home following his discharge, he moved to Detroit in response to auto industry ads hiring workers at five dollars a day. He was active in the church as soon as he arrived and was often invited to preach. It was there that he met and married Metta. They were married on Leslie's 26th birthday, July 6, 1921. J. W. Shepherd officiated at their wedding.

Shepherd's Encouragement

Shepherd meant much to Leslie G. Thomas through the years. He said it was Shepherd who encouraged him to build a good library.

The federal government conducted a religious census in the sixth year of every decade. The government turned to David Lipscomb at the *Gospel Advocate* for help in conducting the 1906 census. Then, in 1916 and again in 1926, that task went to J.W. Shepherd. For the 1936 census of churches of Christ, the job passed down to Leslie G. Thomas.

Last Census

That was the last federal religious census ever taken. Only a fraction of members responded, and the church of Christ was misrepresented as being

a small religious group. Thomas said the only support he got from the government was for the salary of one secretary plus unlimited stationery and postage.

Another time when the U. S. Government turned to Leslie G. Thomas as its liaison person was when a selective service military draft was implemented again in World War II as it had been when Thomas was drafted in World War I.

His job was to represent members of the church of Christ who were conscientious objectors or who had applied for non-combatant military service.

Author of Many Books

During his long life Leslie G. Thomas wrote many books and preached many sermons. Any book that bears the name of Leslie G. Thomas is readily identified as the work of an outstanding author, a thorough and reverent Bible student, a gospel preacher of many years of effective labor in the kingdom of Christ, one who respects the word of God as the only authority in religion, and one who loves the Lord supremely.

"The Only Thing..."

One evening, when the Brainerd church in Chattanooga was having a special series of Bible classes each evening, Leslie G. Thomas, already in his late eighties, was teaching a small class at his roll-top desk in his office. The class was for men who were sev-

enty years old or above. He said to the class,

"If I knew that I was going to die tonight, the only thing I would like to be able to do before leaving would be to tell Metta goodbye."

As it turned out, she preceded him in death. Leslie G. Thomas died October 17, 1988. He was 93.

News & Notes

NEW HIRES

Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University has hired **David Shannon** as their new president. David has a good reputation for soundness and we are pleased that the university decided to return to having a gospel preacher serve as its president. This formula has been very successful for FHU throughout their history.

Also, the university has hired **Rick Brumback** to teach in their Bible department. Rick has been the director of the Southwest School of Biblical Studies for the past few years. It is good to see the school hire someone who is known for training gospel preachers to join their faculty. May every school seek to employ faithful gospel preachers on their Bible faculties!

Austin, TX: **Don Walker** is returning to the Southwest School of Biblical Studies to serve as its director. Don

had previously served as an instructor for this school (10 years) as well as the Memphis School of Preaching. **Steve Lloyd** has also joined Don on the faculty at SWBS.

Memphis, TN: **Tom Wacaster** is joining the faculty of the Memphis School of Preaching. Tom is an outstanding student of the Scriptures as his many books reveal.

Each of these schools appears to have made home run hires!

Upcoming Events

Memphis, TN: The Getwell church of Christ will be hosting the 42nd Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship from **October 15-18**. The theme is "Pressing Toward the Mark."

Moundsville, WV: On **October 22-26**, the West Virginia School of Preaching will be hosting their annual Bible lectureship. The theme is: "When I Study the Psalms" (Vol. 2).

Fayetteville, TN: The West Fayetteville church of Christ will be hosting its first ever Christian Parenting Workshop from **November 5-8**. Supper will be provided each evening as well as classes for children.

DISASTER RELIEF MINISTRY

The West Fayetteville congregation is beginning a disaster relief ministry. We are collecting goods to have on hand in order to expedite our relief efforts. If you would like to contrib-

ute to this ministry, please contact the West Fayetteville church of Christ, 24 Boonshill Rd. Fayetteville, TN 37334. (931) 433-6542

Landmark in Montgomery

The preacher for the Landmark congregation, **Buddy Bell**, recently preached a sermon advocating the use of instrumental music in worship. He used the same old, worn-out arguments that have been answered a thousand times over. It so happens that our last issue dealt with these arguments, though unintentionally.

If you are planning on sending your children to Faulkner for an education, or visiting Montgomery for a vacation, know that there are still several good congregations in the area. For example, the Panama Street congregation and **Frank Chesser**, the faithful minister of this good church, would welcome you.

Tremper Longman to Lecture at Lubbock Christian University

Colleges and universities associated with churches of Christ continue to use denominational professors in these one-day lectureships. They believe a unity with denominational preachers can be reached through academics. LCU is bringing in **Tremper Longman** for such a lectureship. Longman is a noted denominational author, and professor at Westmont

College in Santa Barbara, California.

We are troubled by this trend because it is only one step away from having denominational preachers and professors on the Bible lecturerships and faculties of these schools. Once this occurs, any hope of maintaining the restoration plea among these institutions will be lost.

AD 70 Rif-Raff

The 70 AD doctrine began troubling the Lord's church when Max King, a preacher in the church from Warren, Ohio became the chief proponent back in the early 1970's. He began expounding his views through preaching, debating, and in written form.

The essence of this theory teaches that when the destruction of Jerusalem took place in September of 70 AD, all Bible prophecy was fulfilled including the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the end of the world (or age).

A few preachers hold tenaciously to this doctrine and want to debate. Perhaps their zeal has cooled since **Drew Leonard** recently handed them their hats in a debate with Steve Baisden.

A couple of their preachers also recently disrupted the Power Lectures in Southaven, Mississippi.

Bill Lockwood is also scheduled to debate Holger Neubauer on this issue. Neubauer is also in this AD 70 camp.

Deaver to Debate Simons

Mac Deaver, a professor at Tennessee Bible College, will be debating Wesley Simons, the director of the Tri-Cities School of Preaching on the subject of the plan of salvation.

Wesley Simons will be affirming "The Scriptures teach that one must hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized in water, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins in order to be born again." Mac Deaver will be denying this proposition!

Brother Deaver will be affirming "The Scriptures teach that one must hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and be baptized with the Holy Spirit in order to be born again."

Gospel Preachers Wanted

Getwell church of Christ in Memphis, TN is looking for a preacher. Call (901)743-0464 ext. 302

Springer church of Christ in Hohenwald, TN will be looking to hire a preacher in the coming months.

Emerald Beach church of Christ in Panama City, FL is looking for a preacher. Call (850) 235-7992.

Cane Creek church of Christ in Petersburg, TN is looking for a preacher. Call Ellis Pinkston (931) 659-9571.

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ

24 Boonshill Road
Fayetteville, TN 37334

www.westfayetteville.net

(931) 433-6542

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Sunday Worship
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Sunday Evening Worship
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Wednesday Evening Worship
7:00 pm

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The
Gospel Gleaner



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November – December 2017

No. 6

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

“The Churches of Christ Greet You” (Romans 16:16)

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ is pleased to bring you the *Gospel Gleaner*. Are you familiar with the churches of Christ? Have you ever attended our services before?

Faithful churches of Christ desire to return to the New Testament and to be the church of the Bible. In the Bible, we find that the church is the assembly of all those who have been called out of the darkness of sin by obeying the gospel. These souls are added by God to the spiritual body of Christ, which is His church (Acts 2:42, 47; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church belongs to Christ. It is His church. We, therefore, seek to honor Christ as our Lord in our worship, teaching, and daily walk.

One can be added to this sacred assembly and spiritual kingdom by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:17); believing the facts concerning Christ as revealed in the gospel (John 8:24); repenting of sin (Luke 13:3, 5); and by being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Colossians 2:11-13; Galatians 3:26-27) to wash sins away by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7).

For more information about the church, or God’s plan of salvation, we offer free Bible Correspondence courses and personal Bible studies. Call or write to us.

The Gospel Gleaner

PO Box 456
Fayetteville, TN 37334

www.gospelgleaner.com
(931) 433-6542

Andy Erwin, Editor

Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. The West Fayetteville Church of Christ reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

The Gospel Gleaner is free to all while supply is available.

Gospel Gleaner

Vol. 29 ♦ No. 6

WRITERS FOR THIS ISSUE

Stephen R. Bradd

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Gerald Cowan

Marion, Illinois

Raymond Elliott

Prattville, Alabama

Andy Erwin

Fayetteville, Tennessee

Jackson Erwin

Elizabethton, Tennessee

E. Claude Gardner

Henderson, Tennessee

Mike Kiser

Sylacauga, Alabama

Tom McLemore

Selma, Alabama

Andy Robison

Moundsville, West Virginia

Robert Waggoner

Montgomery, Alabama

Polarizing the People of God

Raymond Elliott

It was during my second fulltime work with a congregation that I heard a brother say concerning a church in a small town where he preached on occasions that it should either be a "rich church or a poor church." That statement made approximately fifty years ago has remained in my thoughts.

Just a few years ago I had a young brother to say that the congregation he was a member of used to be a "young people's church but now it is an old person's church."

I have considered these statements made by two different brothers in Christ and I have often wondered why the church of Jesus Christ should be a rich or poor church, or a young person's church or an old person's church. These statements have also motivated me to think more seriously concerning the probability that we do have a tendency in the body of our Lord to separate one another as members of a congregation.

One definition given in Webster's New World Dictionary of *polarize* is "to separate into diametrically opposed, often antagonistic, groups, viewpoints." Here are some of my

thoughts regarding this problem that exists in various congregations.

Group Divisions

You can simply observe in church bulletins the listing of various gatherings by differing age groups in the congregation. There is the Golden Agers, the Youth Group, the Young Adults, the Over Fifty Group, etc. having social gatherings and/or taking trips somewhere. While such is not inherently wrong within itself, there is the probability of dividing the church into various groups to the point where there is not the togetherness as there should be among the membership. I can't help but to think of what Luke wrote concerning the church in Jerusalem during its infancy, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44).

There is a tendency to separate rather than bringing all members, regardless of age, social standing, racial background, educational level, etc. closer together. In Jesus Christ we are all one. The apostle Paul expressed it in this manner, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

We should avoid having continuing group separations that might foster a spirit of divisiveness rather than one of closeness. While I am in favor of our class system, I am not in favor of separating older adults from younger adults all the time. There is a definite

need for the two to be together. The zeal of youth needs to influence the aged saints and the wisdom and experience of the older Christians should be shared with the younger members. Personally, I do not desire to live in a community where there are no children. Being around young folk makes me feel younger in heart. And when I was young I enjoyed being in the presence of elderly brothers and sisters. It was a privilege to seek the advice of mature preachers of the gospel. Oh, how I miss many of my seniors who have gone to be with the Lord.

Multiple Assemblies

There are some congregations which have multiple assemblies of worship on Sunday morning. Now I understand that some congregations have enjoyed numerical growth and their auditorium cannot seat all the people present for the morning assembly. That is a positive problem for the leadership to deal with as they contemplate future plans for the congregation. Sometimes this is simply a temporary arrangement while a new building is being erected. Other churches have had this arrangement for years and will continue to do so in the future.

The negative side of this arrangement is that you have a couple of congregations meeting in the same building without the membership knowing one another. In this situation, efforts should be made to bring the entire

congregation together on occasions so that all the members can become better acquainted with one another. This might involve renting a larger facility that would seat the entire membership. In years past the remedy for this problem would have been for a segment of the membership to move to a different location and begin a new congregation with the blessings of those Christians left behind to carry on the Lord's work. Come to think about it, that remains a most desirable decision in many cases. However the autonomy of the local congregation must be respected in dealing with this particular problem.

Differing Worship

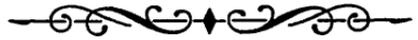
It is prevalent among many congregations to have multiple assemblies on Sunday morning for the expressed purpose of engaging in different styles of worship experiences. There is no scriptural basis for such. Paul, in writing to the church of God in Corinth, mentioned this, "Therefore when you come together in one place..." (1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20). The church in Corinth came together in one place to partake of the Lord's Supper and to worship God.

The use of "*contemporary worship*" and "*traditional worship*" is jargon that is foreign to the teachings of the New Testament. The question could be raised as to the difference between a *contemporary worship* and a *traditional worship*, and why have the two different assemblies?

What is meant by a *traditional* worship? Does it mean that the various avenues of worship are always done in a certain manner? Does the *contemporary* worship include being less formal, the singing of only praise songs or perhaps including a praise team? Some congregations now are using musical instruments while singing hymns and songs of praise in the contemporary worship.

In Conclusion

Our Lord prayed earnestly that we might all be one (John 17:20, 21). In matters of opinion and tradition we must be flexible. But when it comes to doctrinal matters we must stand firm (2 Timothy 1:13; Ephesians 4:14). We must love our brethren (1 Peter 2:17). And we must endeavor "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).



Honoring God through Our Worship

Ronald D. Bryant

Some want to experience God. Not a few hold to the view that worship is to the end that man may be able to experience God. What are we to understand regarding worship?

What Is Worship?

Biblically speaking, the worship of God stands at the center of our existence. Whatever else the church does, it worships. In the deepest sense, the local congregation is a worshipping community.

Worship is adoration of God. In worship, the people of God call to mind and proclaim God's love and mercy, power and purpose. At the heart of Christian worship is the Lord's Supper, which unites the redeemed in remembering Christ's sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection. In partaking of the Lord's Supper, each believer acknowledges and submits to the presence and rule of Christ, the head of the church.

Christian worship is God-centered, not man-centered. If it is self-centered and self-serving it is not worship, for worship of God subordinates our hearts and minds, our feelings and concerns, to Him and to His claims upon our lives. God-centered worship delivers us from being ruled by our own limited abilities and emotions, and delivers us from human illusions about reality.

Worship instills the awareness that we cannot place our faith in ourselves or in things we can manage. Our faith and our hope are in God, not in our intellect, our efforts, or our experiences. It is evident that God-centered worship delivers us from preoccupation with these things.

False Worship

Historically, true worship has mutated into false worship in two ways: (1) people have chosen to use worship for other than the purpose God intended. Some have endeavored to use God, to manipulate His power for personal benefits (e.g. financial, political, etc.). In reality they see God as useful, but not sovereign. (2) They approach God as a being that is to be "experienced." They confuse seeking to know God with seeking to experience God.

Undeniably, such a course of action inevitably draws attention back to the "worshiper" – to his thoughts, feelings, and emotions. To evaluate worship on the basis of the experience of the worshipers is to make them the center of worship, not God. Worship then becomes an effort to use God, and a means of manipulating Him, of making Him serve man.

Predictably, when attention is given to what happens to the worshipers, it will turn to seeking that which stim-

ulates and pleases them. A multiplicity of devices will be sought out and used to stimulate the worshipers, and for the purpose of producing excitement, feelings, and mood. The point of worship will be enabling them to have a “good feeling,” or to be “inspired.” With this mindset comes the desire to be entertained. Who does not know that religious entertainment is presently being called worship?

The Purpose of Worship

The purpose of worship is the paying of tribute and homage to God. The focus of worship is to give honor and glory to God. This does not mean that worship does not affect our attitudes, dispositions and emotions. Certainly worship may evoke a wide range of emotions, including gratitude, awe, humility, sorrow, and joy. However, it is not to be used as an effort to arouse or manipulate these emotions. Biblically defined, worship does not aim at producing such experiences.

Additionally, not everything that stirs or arouses these emotions is worship! Feelings do not prove anything, except the emotional makeup of a person. Most certainly one’s emotions do not validate one’s experience – nor do they validate worship. Experiencing emotions in worship is not a means of experiencing God!

In truth, it is to be insisted that it is only when we take our attention off of ourselves and stop asking: “What does this do for me? How does this make

me feel? Am I enjoying this?” that we are in a position to receive that which God intends. To worship God truly means to lose self in that which is greater and grander than self.

True Worship

True worship actually frees us from any thought or preoccupation with self by centering our hearts and minds upon God. As worship is directed toward Him, our needs are made clear and our great need to know and honor Him becomes paramount. In this manner, true worship frees us from the false gods of this world and from the modern idols of comfort, success, and fun. True worship frees us from the tyranny of the of personal preference and desire, and finally it fits us for service to the Lord.

In Conclusion

It seems evident that all popular attempts to make worship “relevant” should be approached cautiously. In truth, to make worship “relevant” is to adapt it to our own wants and our preferences and to the demands of our culture, variously described as media-dominated, entertainment-saturated, self-indulgent, and sensational.

To make worship relevant to most of the people of our day and time would require a “worship technology” – trained “worship technicians” and special performers. Even the terminology is often inflated: “maximum sensory experience,” “thrilling theater

and drama,” or “exciting, entertaining, emotionally intense and personally fulfilling,” and above all else it will be spoken as “culturally relevant and fulfilling. While it is accepted that in a self-centered, entertainment-seeking, media-dominated society, some may confuse religious entertainment with worship, this hardly makes it less damaging.

Some church leaders, under enormous pressure to appear “open” and “progressive,” need courage to resist the relentless pull of the present cultural demands. One thing that may serve them well is to realize that the demands of culture are known to be fickle beyond measure and what is demanded today will be rejected tomorrow. Fads and trends reflecting our culture, and driven by little respect for God, may make “praise time” more fun, but they also trivialize the faith and impoverish the life of the disciple.

All need to heed the admonition given in the book of Hebrews. “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).



Are the Animals also “Beyond He and She”?

E. Claude Gardner

In the transgender issues, the liberal view is that lines have been erased between male and female. *Time* magazine (March 27, 2017) had a revealing statement on a recent front cover which stated, “Beyond He or She.” It states that this new generation is defining gender.

Of course, in the Creation, God made us male and female (Genesis 1:27); and this distinction will stand until the end of time. God also created the animals with different genders (Genesis 7:2, 9; 8:9). Animals have not changed. Will these modernists take the same position on the gender of animals as they do for the gender of humans? Will the elite declare there is no distinction between a rooster and a hen; a bull and a heifer?

The article in *Time* claims: “A growing number of young people are moving beyond the idea that we live in a world where sexuality and gender come in only two forms (p.49). And, “Every type of identity that exists should be supported” (p.54). Thus, “I am not a “she.” I am not a “he.” I’m you. I’m me. I’m we” (p.5).

Can a Christian believe the Bible while believing these pronouncements?

The Confrontation between Christianity and Secularism

Robert Waggoner

God's people have always conflicted with their society. Christian battles are not just individual battles between the flesh and the spirit, they are also within cultural and communal arenas. In our times, Christian beliefs and behaviors conflict especially with a vast assortment of beliefs and practices related to secular humanism. In order to understand this conflict, we need to define some terms – secularism and humanism – and then recognize a few things about the confrontation now raging between Christianity and secularism.

Secularism

Secularism is that which pertains to this world. A secularist is one whose outlook on life is limited to that which is temporal and worldly. Secularists understand the world only by what can be determined from nature, scientific experimentation, and human reasoning.

While secularists may not openly deny the existence of eternal or heavenly things, they reject divine authority and revelation, and generally act as though such does not exist. Their ethical standards and values change with the passing of time to comply with contemporary standards of their particular cultures. Individuals who are

committed to the secular philosophy strive to build a world wherein the concept of God has absolutely no influence.

Humanism

Humanism is focused on humanity. Humanism may be understood as being either Christian or secular. Christian humanism recognizes God as creator of all mankind. Everyone is considered as being made in the image of God, subject to and dependent upon God. Whenever people consider themselves made in the image of God, they are more inclined to imitate God in morality, in workmanship, in knowledge and wisdom, etc. Christian humanism produces a culture that aspires for excellence in all things, whether in the fine arts of any other professional endeavor.

Christian humanism existed at the beginning of the Renaissance, at which time most European cultures believed in the existence of God, deity of Christ, inspiration and authority of the Bible, etc. During this time, classical music, art, architecture, etc. were produced and learning was revived. That was in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

However, that changed as societies began to think and act like humanity

is independent from God. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the so-called period of the Enlightenment emerged. It was called Enlightenment because people started thinking that they could be enlightened in knowledge and wisdom apart from God. Slowly but increasingly, God began to be considered as less and less relevant. Human reasoning began to replace revelation from God as the standard of human authority and conduct. People increasingly accepted an understanding that they existed apart from God and were directed only by their own thoughts and aspirations.

Without God, humanism became secular. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the theory of evolution replaced the biblical concept of creation as the means by which humanity and all other things originated. Then, from a Christian viewpoint, the social conditions of humanity tended to deteriorate as workmanship tended toward acceptance of the mediocre, families began to break down, cultural morals and manners deteriorated, and public safety decreased as violence escalated. Now, in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, secular humanism has become so strong that most people are not aware that Christian humanism can exist.

Secular or Religious

The current tendency in our society is to categorize various endeavors as either secular or religious. However, this practice of distinguishing between

what is considered to be secular from what is considered to be sacred is a comparatively modern social phenomenon, unknown in ancient human history.

The modern concept of the secular implies that there are some areas of human life and activity which may legitimately be separated from religion. These areas are now generally presumed to include civil governments, politics, education, industry, science, medicine, journalism, business, transportation, commerce, entertainment, law, economics, ethics, foreign affairs, environmental issues, etc. As the process of secularization continues, more areas of life will come to be considered by our culture as secular while the realm of the religious or sacred may become much more restricted.

The idea of the secular, as contrasted to things sacred or holy, however, is not a biblical concept. The practice of contrasting secular things to holy things never appears in the Bible. It is true that in scripture things temporal are contrasted to eternal things (Mark 10:30; 2 Corinthians 4:18), things fleshly are contrasted to spiritual things (Romans 8:1-9; Galatians 3:3; 4:29; 5:16-26), and things evil are contrasted to good things (John 5:29; Romans 7:19-21; 13:3-4; 16:19; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Peter 3:11). However, in scripture, things which are contrasted to holy things are said to be profane, not secular (Leviticus 21:6; 22:2, 32; Mal. 2:11).

Secularists often argue that religious people should confine their religion to matters of worship and attending to the spiritual needs of individuals in their private lives. Since they think religion is a private matter, they contend that religion should have nothing to do with public life. Hence, preachers and other religious leaders are not generally welcomed in those areas of life most people now consider secular. The Bible, however, knows no area of life which should be separated from religious principles. The Bible declares, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17).

The Battle over Education

Although the battle now raging between Christianity and secular humanism is multifaceted, there are some professional and philosophical battle fronts that are more significant than others, such as education, media, and law. They are more significant because they have greater influence upon the general public. Of these, public education is probably more significant than any other because it is the means by which secular humanism and other philosophies infiltrate all other professions and thereby impacts the thinking of everyone in our society.

Notice how the values and policies of public education frequently conflict with biblical teaching. Whereas the Bible teaches creation, public educa-

tion promotes the theory of evolution; whereas the Bible focuses on God, public education focuses on humanity; whereas the Bible requires knowledge of God, public education rejects biblical knowledge, whereas the Bible declares that everyone is a sinner, public education considers everyone as basically good; whereas the Bible teaches about both the natural and supernatural worlds, public education teaches only about the natural world; and whereas the Bible emphasizes preparing for eternal life in heaven, public education focuses only on preparing for a temporal life on earth.

Education in colonial America was generally private education. The Bible was its primary textbook. When public education began in Massachusetts with Horace Mann in the early 1800's, it necessarily continued with biblical values but slowly and gradually changed. In the late 1800's, John Dewey, a secular humanist, became the architect of American public education. He initiated a system of public education that slowly, but increasingly for over more than a century now, demonstrated itself to have done more to destroy Christian values in America than any other profession.

After 1910, public education became compulsory, and then gradually but increasingly turned away from biblical values. Now, public reading of the Bible and public prayer, for all practical purposes, appears to be legally forbidden in America's public schools. Since public education im-

pacts every major professional and business endeavor, anti-God and anti-biblical values taught in public education effect legal policies and procedures within a vast majority of major professions and many businesses.

In a world of denominationalism, secularism has often portrayed itself as being neutral, but it is not. It is anti-God, anti-Christian, anti-biblical, anti-church, and anti-family. Moreover, it is anti-human in the sense that it denies the spiritual nature of humanity. Although many very fine Christian individuals are themselves excellent public-school administrators and teachers, they have generally been unaware of the secular philosophies and procedures inherent within public education.

Moreover, whenever Christian parents put their children into this compulsory public educational system, they often discover too late that their children have either lost their Christian faith or have had it greatly curtailed. Moreover, inasmuch as a system of secular education produces a secular society, then evangelism is much more difficult because the society as a whole and most individuals with it are not focused on preparing for eternity.

What Should We Do?

Under these circumstances, the question arises, "What should Christians do?" I do not have all the answers, but here are a few thoughts for

your consideration. First, in order to avoid secular humanist ideals being thrust upon their children, Christian parents should seek alternatives to compulsory public education. Moreover, Christian parents must become more diligent in teaching their children about the great doctrines of the Bible.

Second, inasmuch as public education is the means by which secular values are taught to children who grow up to work in all professions, then all professions become secular and operate by those values rather than by Christian values. Some major professions, such as public education, media, sociology, psychology are now dominated by secular values while other professions, such as law, medicine, and many scientific enterprises, etc. are experiencing much tension between Christian and secular values. Our nation once operated predominately by Christian values, but now operates predominately by secular values. Whereas our society once derived its values from the Bible and the church, it now operates on values derived primarily from public education, and those values are mostly secular in nature.

Recognizing these factors, would it not be strategically advantageous for Christians to destroy the monopoly that secular humanism has in public education? That would be done if all public education were privatized.

Private education would grant

greater possibilities for people to consider biblical values inasmuch as it would not be dominated by secular humanism. If our nation's professional workforce came from private education, then new personnel entering into major professions would be able to work with a greater sense of personal freedom regarding their understanding of God and eternal realities.

Changing from public to private education and bringing a society back to a Christian worldview will require a considerable amount of time. Even so, we should remember that our present situation is the result of what has been developing for several centuries. Our task is to start a process which may bring greater blessings to ourselves and to others in the future.

"Rest a While"

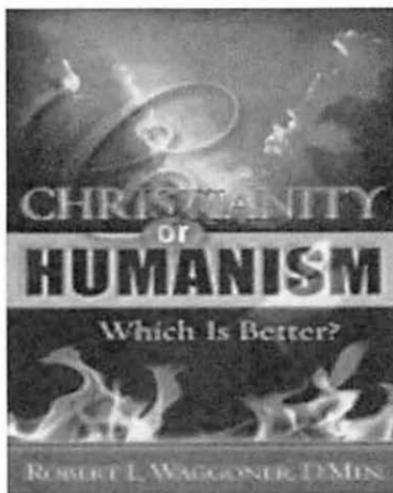
Stephen R. Bradd

"Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves" (Mark 6:30-32).

The apostles had fulfilled the mission on which Jesus had sent them (cf. 6:7ff). They returned to Jesus to give Him a report of their good works and teachings.

Jesus then encouraged them to come with Him for a period of rest where they could be alone. It appears that their work in the cities of Galilee was highly successful due to the amount of people who were coming to them at this time. They were so busy they didn't even have time to eat! The people were evidently making so many requests for healing and teaching that it was almost overwhelming. Jesus and the apostles intended to get some rest by departing by boat to be alone.

There is a valuable lesson that should be gleaned from this passage. **It is proper for followers of Christ to take brief periods of rest from hard and continuous labor in His kingdom.** It is good to rest periodically and simply get away from the rapid pace of life. In order to do this,



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it is sometimes necessary for us to say "no" to certain requests and opportunities to serve. This is not wrong. Of course, it is possible to have too much rest and leisure, and this is not good, just as it is not wise to constantly labor without ever resting. The former will generally lead to poor stewardship and entanglement in sin and the latter will often lead to burn out and discouragement.

Jesus invited His apostles to rest a **while**. In other words, the rest would not go on for a long span of time. They would rest for a while and then get back to work.

Christians must seek the proper balance in this area, and such will be different for each individual.

Some disciples require less sleep than others and are able to work diligently in God's kingdom with little rest. They are able to stay focused for long spans of time and are generally not subject to discouragement. Others, however, need more frequent periods of rest to remain positive and focused. God has blessed different servants of His in different ways (cf. Matt. 25:15), and it is not our duty to judge our brother regarding the amount of rest and relaxation he may or may not require (cf. Rom. 14:10-13).

It is our duty, however, to encourage one another to faithful living to the best of our ability, including resting and recharging as needed. A servant who rests continually will not be of any use to the Master. Likewise, a

servant who works so hard that he neglects himself (or his family) will certainly not maximize his potential for the Lord.

Dear friends, may we work diligently for the Lord and rest when we need to. May we never forget that there remains "a rest for the people of God"--the glory of heaven (Heb. 4:9), which is a much better rest than anything we can enjoy in this life.¹

¹ As a side note in the context of Mark 6, it is quite possible that the disciples were not simply getting away to rest from their physical labors and travels. It would appear that they had just learned of John the baptizer's death (cf. Matt. 14:13).

Certainly there would be much excitement stirred up by this event (as Herod had originally feared), and it is very likely that John's disciples delivered the message to Jesus with the expectation that He do something about John's wrongful death.

The people knew that Jesus was a friend of John and that He intended to set up a kingdom. They also believed (mistakenly) that this would involve overthrowing Herod. They appear to be more than willing to revolt and make Jesus their physical king with the hopes of obtaining revenge (cf. John 6:1,2,15).

Jesus had no intentions of establishing a physical kingdom. Thus, it was wise to seek to be alone for rest from their labors, to mourn John's death, and to calm the people.

The Kind of Preachers this World Needs

Jackson Erwin

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14; NKJV).

God has revealed His gospel to mankind, and has also left us *“this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”* (2 Corinthians 4:7). God has not only given the good news to mankind, but has also commanded us to teach it to others.

In order for this duty of preaching the gospel to be as effective as possible, God has authorized in the Scriptures for His church to use preachers to spread His word throughout the world.

Every man who decides to preach the gospel must preach on God’s terms, and minister as God has commanded. How does God desire His servants to proclaim His word? What has been entrusted to them to preach? What must one do in order for his ministry to be fully effective and pleasing in the eyes of his Lord?

Preach the “Whole Council of God”

As Paul would bid the Ephesian elders farewell in Acts 20:27, he would exhort them saying, *“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole council of God.”* In the church

today, many congregations seem to welcome “feel good preaching.” They desire to hear about the joys of Heaven, but not the horrors of Hell. They want to know about the love of God, but forget that we must also have the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31). They want to learn about the freedom found in Christ, but not the bondage found in sin (Romans 6:17).

In order for our ministry to be acceptable to God, we must focus on both. The same Bible reads of Heaven and of Hell. The same gospel reads of salvation and of condemnation.

We cannot solely focus on Hell and sin, or else there is no joy in our salvation. However, we cannot solely focus on Heaven and love, or else there is no fear of the Lord.

Preach Sound Doctrine

Paul would once exhort the young minister Timothy, saying, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).

We must return to the preaching the fundamentals of the faith. As liberalism is attacking the basic beliefs and practices found in the New Testament, we must be ready to give an answer (1 Peter 3:15).

Subjects such as mechanical in-

struments in worship, denominationalism, the Lord's Supper, New Testament Christianity, church discipline, etc., must be preached. If we rarely preach the fundamentals, we will become like the children of Israel who, in Hosea's time, had "Forgotten the law of your God" (Hosea 4:6).

We must not only stress sound doctrine, but we also must refute the things that are "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:10). In the ministry of Paul, he wrote letters such as Galatians, Colossians, Romans, First Corinthians and Ephesians, in which he would not only teach the oracles of God, but also refute the false doctrines and practices that they were either encountering or practicing.

Preach Biblical Morality

In times such as this, when the world has been given over to things such as homosexuality, transgenderism, abortion, premarital sex, etc., we must be ready to give an answer. If we refuse to preach on these widely accepted topics, some members of the church will be given over to them.

Not only must we stress these moral issues in the world, but also such subjects such as brotherly love, unity, edification, and admonishment. Too many congregations today are so busy fighting one another that they have no room for unity. Too many congregations today are splitting and making void Christ's prayer for unity (John 17). We strongly need preachers who will bring the morals of Christianity

into the pulpit, so that our love for one another might be strongly knit together.

We Need Preachers Who Will Visit

While this must be the practice of all Christians, it is especially true for those who preach the gospel. Not only does the well-being of our souls depend on visiting people (Matthew 25:43-46), but the effectiveness of the pulpit depends on this as well.

A man once visited a congregation and heard a lesson that was very poor in its delivery. However, the members of the congregation thought that the sermon was excellent. Curiously, the visitor asked one of the members why they thought the sermon was so good. The member simply said that the preacher visited him every week and truly cared about his soul. While this isn't to say that we are free to preach poor lessons, it does show that when a preacher has a personal connection with the members, it makes a great impact on the pulpit.

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). The members of every congregation need to know that the preacher (as well as the elders) cares about them. If they do not feel as if we do, then we are failing them.

If we have the mentality that, "I wasn't hired to visit" we are hurting

not only the effectiveness of the pulpit, but also neglecting the very commandments of God.

In Conclusion

We must preach the whole council of God, stress the doctrines contained therein, teach the morals which so many today teach against, and visit our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we will do this, the pulpit will be strong, powerful, and acceptable in the eyes of God.

However, if we neglect these things, the gospel of Christ will be weakened, as well as members of His church. We must follow God's master plan of evangelism completely and with love for each and every recipient of the good news. As Paul would say, we must, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching." (2 Timothy 4:2).

COMPASSION

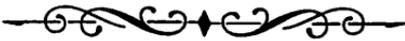
Andy Robison

The apostle Peter wrote, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:8-9).

Christians all too often receive a negative caricature that they are mean-spirited, hateful souls, out to do nothing but impose their will forcibly upon all of society. It is true that, indeed, many who call themselves Christians would fit such a caricature. However, rather than judging the religion by the misguided steps of some claimed adherents, should not one judge the character of the religion by the intent of its authorized message?

The New Testament teaches that Christians ought to be people of compassion and kindness, not only toward one another, toward others. Benevolence is to be shown toward all men (Galatians 6:10).

The criteria of judgment in the great judgment scene described by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 is whether or not the individual was involved in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and giving drink to the



thirsty. Compassion on human needs must be at the center of the Christian life.

Many times, to be sure, professional beggars take advantage of this kindness, and caution must be exercised. Even then, compassion, not enabling bad behavior, must be the order of the day for the Christian.

Indeed, compassion is not always what one would expect. In the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus' reaction to seeing the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd was to have compassion (Matthew 14:14; Mark 6:34). In Matthew's account, His compassion prompted His healing of their sick. Interestingly, in Mark's account, His prompted action is to teach them. Of course, neither author is wrong and there is no contradiction; He did both. It is just interesting that Mark chose to connect compassion with teaching. That is not what some would expect.

Some expect that compassion is always geared toward physical needs. He had compassion, so He healed. That fits the modern psychological and sociological mold. Many charities are formed based on compassion. Compassionate people want to help raise money for the fight against cancer and other diseases. Tenderheartedness causes people to want to do something about hungry children in the United States or overseas. Compassionate people want to persuade even one mother

not to have an abortion. Compassionate people want the elderly treated with dignity.

When is the last time you thought of compassion resulting in teaching? People are lost in a sea of lies in this postmodern world. People believe doctrines that are harmful to their spiritual health, their emotional health, and even their physical health. Societies function on foundational values and mores that just are not true.

One of the most compassionate things one can do is teach. Yet, this compassion requires some courage. People might not be as open to receiving a particular teaching as they would a sandwich given in love. That teaching, if indeed correcting a lie, may just stir the ire of those who prefer the lie. Many people, because of their own selfish pleasure, will choose the lie over the truth (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; Romans 1:24-28).

It would behoove each Christian to ask himself or herself, "When is the last time I showed compassion on someone by teaching, or at least making the attempt to do so?" It is a challenging question drawn from a challenging concept. Have compassion. Give what people need physically. Show them what they need spiritually. We cannot force them to accept the message and bear fruit, but we can lovingly sow and water (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:6).

The Heart the Lord Opened

Acts 16:11-15

Discuss: The importance of conversion. The second missionary Journey. Lydia's distance from her home. (Study: *Sermons* by J. W. McGarvey)

I. What Is The Heart That The Lord Opened?

- A. Certainly not a reference to the physical organ in our chest.
- B. The Bible heart is defined as the:
 - 1. Intellect. Matthew 13:15; Romans 10:9, 10
 - 2. Emotions. Matthew 22:37; 2 Corinthians 2:4
 - 3. Will. Daniel 1:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7
 - 4. Conscience. Acts 2:37; 1 John 3:19-21
- C. The part of man only God can see. 1 Samuel 16:7; Luke 16:15.

II. Why Does The Heart Need To Be Opened?

- A. Not because of hereditary total depravity. Study Lydia's character.
- B. The heart is compared to something that is contracted and closed. To open the heart is to fill it with grandeur and nobler things.
- C. Her defect of heart no doubt was the false view of the Messiah.
 - 1. Jesus was far different from Jewish expectations.
 - 2. This feeling would cause a rejection of the gospel.

III. How Does The Lord Open The Heart?

- A. Not by a direct operation without means.
- B. God has an instrument—His word. Ephesians 6:17
- C. God uses preachers and preaching. I Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:10-17; Acts 26:16-18; Acts 16:13.
 - 1. There was no preacher upon the continent of Europe.
 - 2. God did not send an angel.
 - 3. Follow the Hand of Providence from Troas to the river side.

IV. What Are The Results of Hearts Being Opened?

- A. For Lydia a change of heart. She obeyed the Gospel.
- B. Notices how the heart is changed.
 - 1. Gospel facts change the intellect. I Corinthians 15:1-4
 - 2. Belief changes the emotions. Romans 5:5
 - 3. Repentance changes the will. John 14:15
 - 4. Baptism changes the conscience. I Peter 3:21; Hebrews 10:22
- C. Will you not let the Lord open your heart? Acts 2:41

The heart can also become hardened. The same sun that melts the snow hardens the clay. It takes a long time, but a sponge can become flint. The cares of the world and the practice of sin can petrify the heart. Don't let this happen to you!

-Mike Kiser

Paul: A Model and Pattern for Evangelism

Gerald Cowan

A few self-styled “evangelists” in recent years have claimed to have converted multiplied thousands, or have such claims made in their behalf. The claim is made for a certain popular (and still living) though not very active “evangelist” that he and his association have converted more than 12 million people, and that perhaps as many as two billion have “heard the gospel” from him. He would probably have instant name recognition in much of the world.

However, there is a significant difference between this man and Paul the apostle and evangelist of the Lord Jesus Christ. All who heard from Paul heard the full truth of God – “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). If the public and published words of the other man alluded to are the accepted criterion by which determine the message he delivered – we have nothing else by which to judge – then nobody ever heard from him the full truth about salvation in Christ and how it is attained.

If he knew God’s plan of salvation by obedient faith and works there is no extant evidence that he ever taught it to anybody. He is therefore not to be accepted as an evangelist from Christ or for Christ. He was a highly successful evangelist for his

denomination, but not for the cause of Christ.

Paul used no magic way of evangelism. He did not save anyone by spiritual hocus-pocus or supernatural intervention. Paul’s way required hard work – sometimes thankless, sometimes gratefully received; sometimes accepted and followed, sometimes rejected. But, it was always the same in some remarkable ways.

He did not forget it or vary it or “try something different” at various times. Since he was not result-oriented, he did not resort to pragmatic trial and error until he found what “worked for him.” If he preached the truth of Christ he felt successful, whether or not anybody followed him and obeyed the truth.

Let us look at several qualities that made Paul a truly great evangelist from and for Jesus Christ.

Paul the MODEL

He was an example, a pattern others could safely follow (TYPOS, Phil. 3:17; DEIGMA, Heb. 8:5). He encouraged others to follow and imitate him as he followed Christ, (1 Cor. 11:1, cf. Phil. 3:15-17). He could say, “Say what I say and do what I do. I do not say one thing but do something different. My words and my example

are the same always – each one proves and supports the other.” How he wanted to be followed and why are made clear by Paul himself, through his words and example.

Paul’s MEETING with Jesus

He was disabled and rendered relatively helpless. He was confronted by Jesus who identified himself as the one Paul/Saul was persecuting – not just the people and the church but the Lord himself. Jesus took it personally and accused Paul personally. Through Jesus, Paul had a painful confrontation with himself, a look backward and forward as well as a clear revelation of his present.

Paul’s MEMORY

He had always been sincere, devoted to what he thought was the truth. He was a tireless worker for what he believed in. He assigned himself the mission of removing the threat against traditional Judaism. But he was misguided, misunderstanding both the scripture and his rabbinical teachers.

He had been a murderer of the innocent, ignorantly persecuting and trying to destroy the church of the Lord and those who preached and practiced the Lord’s truth. He had been an enemy, not only of Jesus but of God. In his own mind he was “chief of sinners.”

Paul’s MANDATE

He wanted to know from Christ what the Lord would have him do –

what his work for the Lord would be. He learned it first from Ananias and then more fully by revelation from the Lord himself. Acts 22:12-21, Acts 23:11, Acts 26:12-19, Gal. 1:11-20. He was given a message to preach, a commission to preach and apply it everywhere. He was determined that he would not be disobedient to the heavenly vision. Acts 26:19.

Paul’s MESSAGE, the EVANGEL

He was given a message of good news and was sent to deliver it. It was “words of the Lord” (Gal. 2:8-11). It was “words taught (to us) by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Cor. 2:13 It was words of hope, words of life, words of God – never the words of Paul or the words of other men, even other apostles. It was consistent, never varied. 1 Cor. 7:17 It was Christ-centered, not self-centered or other-person-centered, not a socialist uplift for the community but an effort to lift up Christ as the one mediator between God and man. 1 Tim. 2:5

Paul’s MIND-SET

His desires and attitudes were inflexible. He was fully persuaded and fully determined to carry out the Lord’s will and instruction. He refused to be intimidated by his enemies, enemies of God and Christ.

Even the threat of death did not move him away from Christ or distract and deter him from the mission set for him by Christ (Acts 20:24). Maligning, mistreating, or murdering

the messenger does not change or justify changing the message. Only the sender can change the message.

Paul's MOTIVE

His reasons for doing what he did in the way he did it were well thought out. He considered not only the Lord and his church and other people to whom he was sent, but also the effect it would have on himself personally.

Pauls' motivation was to **save** some, win them for Christ (1 Cor. 9:22 ff.). Paul was motivated to **serve** – not to serve himself but to serve Christ by serving others in the name of Christ (2 Cor. 12:15). He was also motivated to **show** – to present Christ, exemplify discipleship in Christ (1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:13-17). Paul was determined to **sanctify and seal** (Acts 26:15-18, 1 Cor. 9:2), to **secure** his prospects and his hope (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Paul was willing to **sacrifice** himself (2 Cor. 12) – to **spend and be spent** (2 Tim. 4:9, cf. Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 9:16 ff.). Above all, he desired to **save** himself by cooperating with Christ (Acts 9:4; 22:16).

Paul's METHOD

Paul used teaching and preaching, proclamation and publication (Acts 11:26, 15:35, 18:11; Col. 4, 1 Cor. 7:14). He said, "What I write (and speak) are the commandments of the Lord."

We could also talk about how Paul chose strategic centers and radiated

outward. Paul did not rely on drama or entertainment, not excessive emotional singing – just preaching the gospel of God (1 Cor. 1:17 and 21, 2 Thess. 2:1-19, esp. 13).

Paul used personal one-on-one conversations, talks, home studies, public discussion and debates (among many witnesses (2 Tim. 2:2), reasoning (Acts 17:2-3), and mission journeys. Paul also wrote letters – publications to be circulated to others than the initial addressees (Col. 4:16, 1 Cor. 7:14). He made use of others, and did not try to do everything solo. He trained others to continue and extend his teaching, ministry, and outreach (2 Tim. 2:2).

Paul did not discount the miraculous element. But, neither did he expect it to continue. As an apostle of Christ, he was gifted by the Holy Spirit in ways that no one is today (2 Cor. 12:12).

Paul was a master "swordsmen," using the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Eph. 6:10ff). His mind-set and motive formed his method and his manner of presentation of the gospel message he had received from Christ.

Paul's MANNER

Though he had authority to be harsh, confrontational, and even punitive he avoided that approach whenever he could. Instead he chose to be:

- Gentle, kind – like a father, like a nurse (1 Thess. 2:7)

- Strict, no “plus or minus” approach to the gospel.
- Corrective, constructive, never compromising or coercive.
- Non-traditional, unconventional. Like Jesus he stood in stark contrast to the scribes, even of the Pharisees of whom he was one.
- Reformative – he would reform the Gentiles – lead them out of their man-made religions – and restore the Jews to their rightful place as co-heirs with the Gentiles and make them into members of the new order of things in Jesus Christ, making of the two one new body of fellowshipping believers in Christ.

He was not afraid to “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:16), both the Jewish world and the non-Jewish world.

Paul’s MASTER

Everything we have mentioned about Paul so far is because of the identity of his Master, Jesus Christ.

It began when Paul asked, “Lord (Master), what do you want me to do” (Acts 9:4). He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). He followed Christ as directed (1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:15-17).

He was doing what the Master required of him, delivering the Lord’s message in a way and with a demonstrated attitude that would accomplish the Lord’s purpose, the task assigned to him.

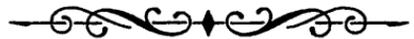
Paul’s MISSION

Paul’s mission was the same as that of Jesus. He was trying to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). “Woe to me if I do not preach gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16) – not woe to me if I do not preach but woe to me if what I preach is not *the gospel of Christ*.

Compare Mark 16:15-16. Jesus did not say “Go and baptize everybody in the world.” That would be impossible. He didn’t even say, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every person in it.” That too would be impossible.

To paraphrase him, He said, “As you are going through the world you will meet people and be involved and interactive with people, so be preaching the gospel to those you meet – assuming they will allow it and listen to you. If they believe and are willing – if they make the choice and the request – baptize them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then continue to teach and encourage them to obey all the things the Lord himself has commanded and now commands.

That is completely possible. We can do that. That was Paul’s mission and it is our mission too (Mark 16:15-16; Mt. 28:18-20).



Library Page

The King of Preaching Needed Today by
Hugh Fulford

"Here is a book which issues a strong call for preachers to return to clear and balanced preaching. The kind of sermons in this book were preached when the church in America experienced tremendous growth... Gospel preachers everywhere are challenged to return to a balanced proclamation of the word of God, including the kind of fundamental teaching set forth in this volume."

This book contains both sermons and chapters on the subject of gospel preaching. It would be a valuable addition to any library, but especially preachers and elders in the Lord's church.

Brother Fulford's book is available from Hester Publications in Henderson, Tennessee (931) 989-6652. \$9.⁰⁰ plus shipping

The Exceptional Church by E. Claude Gardner

This book contains 34 articles which stress the importance of the church. The book includes studies of the fundamentals of the church, problems that can occur within the church, roles in the church, the restoration of the church, and Christian living as a member of the church.

This book is also available from Hester Publications for \$10.⁰⁰.

Men of Influence According to God's History by Owen D. Olbricht

Here is a book suitable for a men's class especially. 13 chapters also make the book suitable for a quarterly study.

Brother Olbricht begins with Adam and continues through the OT heroes to Christ to the apostles. If you enjoy Bible character studies, you will find this to be very edifying material. Chapters 10-13 address contemporary concerns for men of God. These chapters include our work within both the body of Christ and the home.

This book is available from Gospel Light in Delight, Arkansas for \$11.⁹⁵. Call: (870) 379-2412.

Select Studies in Restoration History by Andrew D. Erwin

Gospel Gleaner editor, Andy Erwin, has recently published his latest book and it is a study of the Restoration Movement in America. The book is intended to be a "Reader's Digest" of the Restoration Movement.

The book is formatted into 13 chapters, making it suitable for class studies. Also, the book brings the reader down to the present-day of the Lord's church in America.

Order from Gospel Gleaner Publications in Fayetteville, Tennessee. \$12.⁹⁵ plus postage; call: (256) 627-3215. Also available on Amazon.com

The Growth of Gideon: From Fear to Faith and from Weakness to Strength

Andy Erwin

In the sixth and seventh chapters of Judges we find the biblical account of the life of one of God's great champions – Gideon. We will see that Gideon did not begin his life as a champion of the faith. His life depicts for us the growth which must occur in each of us: from fear to faith and from weakness to strength.

The Midianites

The children of Israel are found facing a formidable foe in the Midianites. Midian was a son of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:2). True to his name (*strife* or *contention*) the Midianites are best remembered for their strife with the children of Israel. Dwelling in the wilderness of Arabia, south of Canaan, they were once defeated by Moses during the wilderness sojourn (Numbers 25). By the time of Gideon, the Midianites allied themselves with the Amalekites and the *Bene-Kedem* (the people of the east). In Judges 6, The Midianites are once again portrayed as the aggressor and as seeking to subdue the Israelites.

The Midianites were a nomadic people. They were fierce warriors, skillfully implementing camel warfare. They oppressed Israel for seven long years. They would arrive during

the harvest seasons and plunder the crops of the people, leaving Israel without food and being forced to live in caves (Judges 6:4-5).

“As a numberless eastern horde they entered the land with their cattle and their camels. The imagination shows us the green plains of Palestine sprinkled with the black goat's-hair tents of this great Arab tribe, their flocks and herds and camels let loose in the standing corn, and foraging parties of horsemen driving before them the possessions of the Israelites; for ‘they came like locusts.’”²

Why was it that God's people were made to suffer these seven years at the hands of Midian? To put it succinctly, God would not help His people to live sinful lives. He used this coalition of enemies to chasten His people. As so the text reads, “...the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian” (6:1).

God allowed their sins to defeat them. He simply withheld His power and without His help, the Israelites were easily subjugated. Israel without God was like Samson without his hair.

² *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, volume 3, “Midian” p. 1926

So too is this true of the church without Christ. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). But with Him, we can do all things (Philippians 4:13).

Israel was being punished not only *for* their sins, but also *by* their sins. Once again, the book of Judges describes the Israelites as doing “evil in the sight of the Lord” (6:1).

Consider their encounters with the Midianites. When Israel was following the Lord and His Word, they easily defeated Midian. The Lord fought for His people. He strengthened them. He empowered them. But Israel turned from the Lord and His word. The very people they brushed aside with ease a few years prior have now conquered them and made them prisoners in what was supposed to be their land of Promise.

In the conscience of this great people, however, lingered their remembrance of God and an acknowledgment of His righteousness. “The children of Israel cried out to the Lord” (6:6). Having heard their cry, God sent a nameless prophet to Israel, rebuking them (6:8-10). The cycle found repeatedly in Judges is this: (1) Israel would forsake God; (2) Israel would be defeated by an enemy (usually one they had previously defeated); (3) they would pray for God to rescue them; (4) God would raise a deliverer – a judge – to lead His people to victory; (5) a generation or so

would pass, and the cycle would be repeated all over again.

Gideon

To deliver His people on this occasion, we might think God chose a most unlikely man to become a hero. God did not go to an army general or captain. He did not seek some great warrior, reputable to all. He did not find a person who was protesting or raising an army. Instead, God sent His angel to a man who was threshing wheat in a winepress so as to remain hidden from the Midianites.

A winepress would have been a dug-out hole in the ground which varied in depth and circumference. Gideon could go down into the hole and remain unseen by the Midianites who passed by in the valleys below. He was hiding from them. God was going to take a man who was hiding from his enemies and turn him into a “mighty man of valor” (6:12).

Just as when David defeated Goliath, God used a most unlikely person as a mighty instrument to achieve His victory. The instrument is not the source of strength. The strength is found in the Hand who wields the instrument. God turns to a man who is full of fear and doubt and says, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?” (6:14)

Naturally, Gideon was not so sure that God was speaking to the right

man. Gideon was not up to the magnitude of the work when God called him. He was far from the athlete who announces "I'm the greatest!" or the celebrity who desires to raise awareness to some social issue. Gideon was a quiet and peaceable type. He was also unsure of himself.

He answered the angel by saying, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (6:15). Gideon was looking at the task as though he was going to have to depend on his own skill and courage to succeed. The Lord assured him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man" (6:16).

Gideon lacked self-confidence. But self-confidence was not required in order to defeat the Midianites. He only needed to trust in God. God was going to secure the victory. While Gideon saw the weakest clan in Manasseh, and the least in his father's house, God saw a mighty man of valour able to lead His people.

Gideon was going to have to learn to trust in the strength of God. This crippling doubt in self was going to have to be converted into a resolute trust in God. He was going to have to learn to live and think and react according to God's strength rather than his weakness. He was going to have to see things as God saw them. Thus begins the growth of Gideon from fear

to faith and from weakness to strength.

Destroy and Build

In order for Gideon to grow from fear in self to faith in God, he would first have to destroy that which needed to be destroyed, and build that which needed to be built.

The first task given to Gideon was to tear down of the altars of Baal, and the image of Asherah (6:25-32). After these were destroyed, he was to build an altar to God and offer his sacrifice.

There was one small catch, one possible contingency, however – this altar belonged to his father. His father was a powerful man and his ideals represented those of the men of the city. It would be no small task to destroy the altar to Baal and to build an altar to the Lord. It is never easy to stand against a popular sentiment. It is even harder to stand against a religious icon or beloved tradition.

How would Gideon respond? Would he obey the Lord? Would he obey the Lord even if it meant destroying something sacred to his father? The Bible tells us that this is exactly what Gideon did. And, in the process, he even managed to teach his father a valuable lesson. Joash realized that if Baal was indeed real, he could take care of Gideon himself (6:31-32).

In order for a spiritual restoration to occur among the people, idolatry had to be wiped out. The altar of God could not stand beside the altar of Baal. It had to stand in place of it.

This same principle is restated pertaining to the reforming works of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:10).

For reformation to occur in any religious society, all things contrary to true worship and faithful obedience to God must be torn down and rooted out. Built and planted in their place must be the seed of the kingdom and the foundation laid by God and not man – and let every man take heed how he builds on it (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-11)!

In order for a true reformation to occur in a person's life, one must destroy those things which need destroying, and build those things which need building. An altar to mammon cannot stand beside our altar to the Lord. Covetousness and worldliness must be uprooted. Lust, anger, and envy must be destroyed. Evil speaking, evil thinking, and evil doing must be torn down.

May God help us to destroy every unkind word and un-Christian deed! Let us build love, mercy, and kindness in their place. May we have more forbearance, pity, and sympathy! God help us to stack truth upon truth as blocks are joined together in the walls of a mighty fortress!

To destroy this altar to Baal required a great exercise of faith. Gideon was being equipped for greater service. God was proving him and preparing him to defeat his enemies. When Gideon was inactive, threshing wheat at the winepress and hiding from his enemies, he was filled with doubt, his trust was low, and he was conquered by his enemy. But, the more he did for the Lord, the more he was able to do for the Lord. He came to believe that with God's help and power, he could lead his people to victory.

Conquer Fear and Doubt

Secondly, the last tinge of fear and doubt would have to be conquered before the battle could be won. God would not allow anyone who was "fearful and afraid" to join in the battle (7:3).

Allow Gideon to tell us how hard it is to climb over those mountains known as fear and doubt! Here was a man who was growing in his faith, but still had his doubts. He had already witnessed one sign when the angel consumed the meat and unleavened bread on the stone (6:17-22). He had been selected by the Lord who told him "Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die" (6:23). Yet, he still needed another sign – that of the fleece (6:36-40).

Gideon needed to make sure of something that was already certain.

Why do we do this? Why is it that we feel the need to question things which God has already settled? Why can we not simply be confident in His word?

With this fleece, not only did God make His presence and His assurance known, but He also revealed His patience and His pity. God is an understanding and merciful God to His people. He knows how weak we can be. How knows our doubts and our fears better than we know them ourselves. And yet He says to each of us, "Peace be with you." And, "I shall be with you."

Gideon could not encourage the others if he was still discouraged. A fearful man cannot encourage another. In order to be a leader and an example to the others, Gideon had to know the victory is at hand.

Israel always needed great leaders, but how often they found them lacking! Here was a leader who could say before the heat of battle, "Look at me and do likewise." God used Gideon and his little band of 300 hundred men to route an army of 135,000 in one day! The Midianite coalition suffered over 120,000 casualties (7:10).

As with many victorious military leaders – Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower – the people wanted Gideon to rule over them. Such leaders are often more than happy to take credit for their victories and revel in their glory.

Gideon, however, never lost his humility. He knew that the only way for peace to be sustained in the land was for God the rule over them (7:23). He understood for there to be any lasting peace with God or with man, God must rule. Gideon understood that no man could lead God's people other than Him. No man could take God's place. What a tremendous lesson for us to learn today!

For there to be any lasting peace in society, the home, the church, or the human heart, the tyranny of the devil must be replaced altogether with the righteousness of God. God's scepter must ever wave over us and our hearts must ever be under His dominion.

We will never be able to achieve peace without the Prince of Peace. We will never be able to have peace within except Christ is found in us. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Gideon also understood that no man was qualified to step into a position of leadership that belonged to God. No one could ever supplant Him or take His place. Beloved, this is true today. No man, council, or creed as the right to usurp the authority of God over His people.

In Conclusion

Gideon teaches us that we must learn to live in God's strength, rather than our weaknesses. Our self-confidence is not nearly as important as our confidence in God. Let us take courage in realizing that we are instruments in the hand of God and that the power is not in the instrument, but in the hand that wields it. Our confidence in God can and must overcome our doubt in self.

Only after we conquer our doubts and fears are we prepared to face the

enemy in battle and suited to serve as examples to our brethren. "Be strong and the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10). Let us not question the things which God has settled. Let us have faith and courage to obey His will.

Let us destroy that which needs to be destroyed, and build that which needs to be built. For true reformation to occur, we must clear away any obstructions or rivals to honoring God. God and God alone must rule in our hearts. This is the way to victory and the way to lasting peace.

Preaching as New Testament Preachers Preached

Tom McLemore

One occasionally hears and reads criticism of thematic or topical preaching. Those who offer such criticisms sometimes characterize this type of preaching as "book, chapter, and verse" preaching. They suggest that preaching be more expository or textual (although, even expository and textual preaching usually provides the "book, chapter, and verse[s]" for the passages for exposition or textual analysis).

They point out the difficulties listeners experience trying to make notations of all the Scripture references and suggest that listeners are overwhelmed by the volume of Scripture quotations and citations.

Critics may not realize that they are criticizing the method of *Jesus, Peter, and Paul*. Where in the Scripture records is there one example of their employing the expository or textual approach to preaching? Do not the inspired writers of the New Testament prove the ideas that they communicated by citing and quoting select passages of Scripture? Read the Gospels. Our Lord quoted the Old Testament in his teaching. Read the great speeches of Peter in Acts 2 and 3. Peruse the great speech of Paul in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13. They did the same.

One might note also, that even though critics sometimes refer to this

approach as “book, chapter, and verse” preaching, these preachers *hardly ever* gave the Scripture references to the passages they quoted. Sometimes the author’s name is mentioned. Sometimes, the book in which the quotation is found is mentioned.

I know of only one recorded speech in which the “book and chapter” were mentioned (Acts 13). Actually, the Bible was not divided into chapters until the thirteenth century A.D. The Old Testament was not divided into verses until the fifteenth century A.D., and the New Testament was not divided into verses until the sixteenth century A.D.

The Lord cited and quoted selected passages that addressed the theme he was seeking to emphasize. Peter and Paul cited and quoted selected passages that proved their point. Indeed, we must never use the words of Scripture to teach what they do not actually teach, and this pitfall is avoided by careful study. Yet, it would seem that the practice of our Lord and his apostles and the inspired writers of the New Testament shows that, when properly wielded, selected passages should be used to prove the principles and imperatives they teach.

It might be observed in passing that it is perfectly legitimate to preach only one passage. Philip the evangelist preached Jesus from one passage of Isaiah (chapter 53), or at least, we are not informed explicitly of any

other passage he utilized. And even then, the chapter and verses were not mentioned in the report, but only the author.

Quite frankly, it is high time that the listeners be held accountable. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews (and he is probably the closest thing we have in the New Testament to an expository preacher) lamented that his listeners had grown dull of hearing. He exhorted them to put forth effort to hear and not to be sluggish.

I never cease to be inspired by the example of the Bereans. “These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). This was their response to the preaching of Paul, who presented quite a few Scripture passages for them to search out and examine. When preachers today give “book, chapter, and verse” they are making it very convenient for listeners to examine the scriptures to see whether these things are so!

It is high time for listeners, especially Christians in assemblies, to take responsibility for listening and for preachers to stop making excuses for them and catering to their dullness of hearing and enabling them to continue in their sluggishness. After all, it is the word of GOD that is being presented!

Pat Boone Never Left?

Andy Erwin

In the November, 2017 edition of the *Christian Chronicle* Bobby Ross, Jr. wrote an article in which he appeared to attempt to invoke sympathy for Pat Boone. To accomplish his apparent agenda, Ross cites John Mark Hicks, who has also left the church to begin his own denomination in Nashville!

Pat Boone declared in the article that he never left the church. However, history clearly tells a different story. The Inglewood, California congregation withdrew from Pat due to his attempt to bring Pentecostalism into the church. Pat subsequently entered the Pentecostal movement and remains there today.

The article states that he has even served as an elder of “The Church on the Way” in Los Angeles. Ross refers to this church as a Spirit-filled congregation. We ask: *Congregation of what?* It is not a congregation of the Lord’s church. Why doesn’t Ross tell us what kind of congregation it is? Perhaps that information would not fit his false narrative?

Ronald Bryant, a writer for the *Gospel Gleaner*, rebukes this attempt to garner sympathy for Boone, writing:

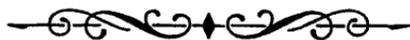
“The sad but true story of Pat Boone’s apostasy, in the 1970’s, has been glossed over in an article in *The Christian Chronicle*. The author of

the piece apparently has no respect for the truth, for the work of many to restore Pat to the faith, or for the fact that he did in fact become an active member in the Pentecostal movement.

He did leave the church! He did turn away from the truth! He was not ‘black-balled,’ he was disciplined by the congregation of which he was a member. He has not turned from his error.

Whatever may have been the writer’s objective, his article is a revision of history, and an attempted vindication of Pat in his apostasy. To say the least the writer does a disservice to the cause of Christ.”

James Bales exposed Pat’s error in his book, “Pat Boone and the Gift of Tongues” in which Boone claimed to have a special “prayer language” among other things. You can order a copy of this book from Clyde Woods’ Bargain Book Finders for \$5.⁰⁰ plus shipping – (731) 989-4954.



Church Shooting

Antioch, TN: A shooting occurred at the Burnett Chapel congregation on September 24, which left one dead and six wounded, including the minister, Joey Spann.

Joey and his wife Peggy were both hospitalized as a result of gunshot wounds. Peggy was shot in the leg and Joey in the chest.

Melanie Crow, 39, was killed in the parking lot as the shooter was walking into the building. The other victims are: Linda Bush, 68; William Jenkins, 83; Marlene Jenkins, 84; Katherine Dickerson, 64; and Robert Engle, 22, the usher who stopped the gunman.

Christian Parenting Workshop

Fayetteville, TN: The recent Christian Parenting Workshop at the West Fayetteville church of Christ was a tremendous success! We would like to thank all of you who attended and all of our speakers as they did an outstanding job. CDs are available upon request.

Plans are currently being discussed for another workshop in 2018.

Moundsville, WV: The West Virginia School of Preaching is one of the fine schools we have which is dedicated to training faithful gospel preachers. Andy Robison, the school's director, also writes for the *Gospel Gleaner*. He writes:

"The West Virginia School of Preaching is in the northern panhandle of West Virginia (near Wheeling) trying to serve the Northeast area in the hopes that graduates will stay and help the area that is comparatively weak in numbers of Christians.

It started in 1994 in better economic times. The school seeks to provide a tuition-free education to faithful men desiring to preach the Gospel.

Due to economic problems in our area, funding has taken a hit over the last several years. If any readers might be interested in helping, please contact us for more information. Andy Robison, Director. (304) 845-8001; dirwvsop@aol.com; Thank you!"

Laborers Together with God Lectureship

Pensacola, FL: The 26th annual lectureship of the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies will be conducted from February 18 - 22, 2018. Theme: An Examination of Religion 33-1500 AD

Challenge Youth Conference (CYC)

Dallas, TX: January 12-14 at the DoubleTree by Hilton 4441 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, TX 75063

Pigeon Forge, TN: February 23-25 at the LeConte Center 2986 Teaster Lane, Pigeon Forge, TN 37863

Annual Preachers Retreat

Kosciusko, MS: March 11-15, Sunday evening through Thursday Morning, on the campus of the Magnolia Bible College. Lodging, meals, and materials are provided. For more information, call: Al Franks (601) 668-3344.

Great Things Happening at Little Mountain

Winchester, TN: The Little Mountain church of Christ has been doing wonderful things with their camp facilities. Each year they provide a future preacher training camp. The camp is free to all from 10-100 years old. Applications are available through Little Mountain church of Christ. Also call (931) 247-9572.

They hope to offer camps for church leadership and Christian women as well. We will keep you posted on the events they have planned for 2018.

CHURCHES LOOKING FOR PREACHERS

Mt. Vernon, IL: The Mt. Vernon church has about 140 members with 4 elders and 6 deacons. Contact: Gale Evans Email: roevans@charter.net Phone: (618) 246-6742
<http://mountvernonchurch.net>

Livingston, TN: Livingston Church of Christ is seeking a sound gospel preacher. Duties include Sun. Morning Adult Bible Class Plus morning preaching. Wed. Night Class. Applicant please send resume plus two references to Livingston church of Christ, 215 East Main St. Livingston, TN 38570. livingstoncc@comcast.net

Panama City, FL: The Emerald Beach church in Panama City is looking for a new Preacher.

You can learn more about them at <http://www.emeraldbeachchurch.org> and email if you have any interest. David Stevenson:
dsnflorida65@gmail.com

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Thank you to all of our supporters for your help with the 2017 edition of the *Gospel Gleaner*.

To our subscribers, please feel free to use the paper to advertise your events in 2018. We want to help every good cause in the brotherhood – free of charge.

The West Fayetteville Church of Christ

Service Times

Sunday Bible Study: 9:30 am

Sunday Worship: 10:30 am

Sunday Evening Worship: 6:00 pm

Wednesday Evening Worship: 7:00 pm

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