

Great New Testament Questions

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2004 Bellview Lectures

Great New Testament Questions

Michael Hatcher, Editor

Twenty-Ninth Annual
Bellview Lectures

Pensacola, Florida

June 12-16, 2004

Great New Testament Questions

Copyrighted © 2004 Bellview Church of Christ
4850 Saufley Field Road
Pensacola, FL 32526

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the publisher.

Other Bellview Lectureship Books

Great Old Testament Questions
Beatitudes
Encouraging Statements Of The Bible
Sad Statements Of The Bible
Worldliness
Christian Fellowship
Leadership
Preaching God Demands
The Doctrine Of Christ Versus The Doctrines Of Men
Changes In The Church of Christ
God's Pattern For Christian Living
Current Crises Challenging The Church
The Church Triumphant
What Does God Authorize In Worship?
In Hope Of Eternal Life
Are We Moving Away From The Cross Of Christ?

IT IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL
TO DUPLICATE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL.

The material in this study represents a considerable investment of effort, skill, time, and finances from both the authors and the publisher. If this material is photocopied and circulated to avoid buying a book for each student, the publisher does not sell enough copies to support the publication.

DEDICATION



Harrell and Carrie Davidson

Harrell Davidson

Harrell Davidson was the third son born to O. G. and Ruth Davidson on May 4, 1940 in Bradford, Tennessee. Brother Davidson grew up in a home which had a love for the church and for Gospel preachers (O. G. being an elder in the church and a preacher). This love was instilled in brother Harrell at an early age. When he was twelve years old, Harrell began leading singing for meetings in the area, then in 1955 he preached his first Gospel sermon (both of his brothers are also Gospel preachers). When he was eighteen years old (October 1958), Harrell began preaching every Lord's day. He entered Freed-Hardeman College in 1958 and later studied at Harding College and Alabama Christian School of Religion to further his knowledge and ability to preach God's Word. Through the years brother Davidson has been a powerful preacher of the Truth, and has worked with congregations in Abingdon, Virginia; Russellville, Arkansas; Midwest City, Oklahoma; Adamsville, Alabama; and Hohenwald, Tennessee. Then in 1981 he moved to Obion, Tennessee (which is about twenty miles from where he was born) and continues to work with the church there.

Brother Harrell is a fine example of a family man. He and "my Carrie" (Carrielyn Spurlock) were married on March 27, 1964. To this union was born four children (Van, Laminda, Vondal, Philip), all faithful members of the Lord's church. They also have six grandchildren.

Brother Davidson is one who loves the truth and the church of our Lord. This love has been uppermost in his mind throughout his life. He has used his time and influence to further the cause of Christ in the world (having preached in most states along with mission work in Europe, Asia, and Africa). In addition to his regular preaching duties, he has authored a book on the home (*Marriage and the Christian Home*), and recently finished a biography of brother Guy N. Woods (*Over the Vast Horizon: Authorized Biography of Guy N. Woods*). He has also been working on a commentary (Davidson's Notes) covering the Bible. For the past several years brother Davidson has also been teaching year round in the Online Academy of Biblical Studies. He is called upon to preach in several Gospel meetings every year along with speaking on numerous lectureships.

Brother Harrell is one who has been a good friend of this congregation. The elders of this congregation know that if they should ever need anything, all they would need to do is to call upon brother Davidson and he would be there for them. He has supported the congregation and its works through the years, both financially and by words of encouragement. He is, in fact, a good friend to all those who love the Truth.

Brother Davidson is a man who will stand. He will stand for and defend the Truth. He is not one who will stick his finger in the air to see which way the wind is blowing. Even though he has often been attacked by various ones, brother Davidson has remained faithful to the Lord and His church, as such he is one who can be depended upon. Harrell is one who will stand for the Truth in spite of friendship, family, or anything else.

Harrell Davidson is also a man of great feeling. He is a kind and gentle man. He is one that exemplifies the Christian graces in his life. As such, Harrell is a joy to be around and to be with. He is truly a trusted friend.

Because of our great love for brother Harrell Davidson, it is our great pleasure to dedicate this book of the 29th Annual Bellview Lectureship, *Great New Testament Questions*, to Harrell Davidson for his years of faithful service to God, and his friendship with the Bellview congregation.

PREFACE

With 3,297 questions in the King James translation of the Bible, we decided to divide a study of these questions into two years. This year's book is a complimentary work to *Great Old Testament Questions* which we studied in 2003. This book covers a myriad of subjects, all teaching great lessons for us to learn. Jesus often used questions to teach and also used them to answer questions from others. It is our prayer that this 29th Annual Bellview Lectureship book of *Great New Testament Questions* will be of value to each one who comes into contact with it.

Appreciation is extended to so many in both the making of this book and the lectureship itself. First to the good and godly elders of this congregation: both past and present. They realize not only the need to watch over this congregation, but they realize that each person has a responsibility to the church universal. This lectureship was designed to help not only this congregation, but the church everywhere.

Without the sacrifice of godly preachers, this book and lectureship would not exist. These men willingly give of themselves to spend the time to write chapters for this book and come to speak on the lectures. They do this because of their love for the Lord and His beautiful bride. We appreciate their labor of love and treasure each of these men for the willingness to spend and be spent for the greatest cause on earth.

The Bellview congregation loves the Truth. She has supported sound men through the years and continues to do so. She lovingly follows the lead of her overseers as they lead her in doing the Will of God. Because of her support, this lectureship continues. The members here give financially to the work of the church, but they also give their time and efforts to make this lectureship a success—it is a team effort.

In publishing this book, valuable assistance has been given by Gary Summers. He willingly spends his time to proofread all the chapters. While the editor makes all changes, his keen eye catches many grammatical errors helping to make this book as error free as possible.

Denise Mowery, the secretary of this congregation, provides great help in this lectureship in too many ways to name. She spends a great deal of time in working on this book as she formats it along with reading all the chapters and checking all the Scripture references.

It is our prayer that this book will be a great resource for years to come and will bring our Master glory and honor.

Michael Hatcher, Director and Editor; March 13, 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Where Is He That Is Born King Of The Jews?”; Mat. 2:2 Keith A. Mosher, Sr.	1
“Why Are Ye Fearful, O Ye Of Little Faith?”; Mat. 8:26 Wade L. Webster	13
“Who Are My Brethren?”; Mat. 12:48 B. J. Clarke	22
“What Shall A Man Give In Exchange For His Soul?”; Mat. 16:26 Lester Kamp	38
“Who Is The Greatest In The Kingdom Of Heaven?”; Mat. 18:1 David B. Jones	46
“Is It Lawful For A Man To Put Away His Wife For Every Cause?”; Mat. 19:3 Kent Bailey	59
“Why Stand Ye Here All The Day Idle?”; Mat. 20:6 Larry Powers	70
“By What Authority Dost Thou These Things?”; Mat. 21:23 David P. Brown	86
“Which Is The Great Commandment In The Law?”; Mat. 22:36 Loy Hardesty	101
“What Think Ye of Christ? Whose Son Is He?”; Mat. 22:42 Bobby Liddell	110
“Carest Thou Not That We Perish?”; Mark 4:38 Terry Hightower	127
“How Shall This Be, Seeing I Know Not A Man?”; Luke 1:34 Curtis A. Cates	147
“Son, Why Hast Thou Thus Dealt With Us?”; Luke 2:48 Kenneth E. Ratcliff	163
“Why Call Ye Me, Lord, Lord, And Do Not The Things Which I Say?” Luke 6:46 Eddy Gilpin	173
“Suppose Ye That I Am Come To Give Peace On Earth?”; Luke 12:51 Jerry Murrell	186
“Lord, Are There Few That Be Saved?”; Luke 13:23 Steven E. Yeatts	194
“Why Sleep Ye?”; Luke 22:46 David B. Watson	203

“This Is An Hard Saying; Who Can Hear It?”; John 6:60	
Lee Davis	221
“To Whom Shall We Go?”; John 6:68	
Gregory K. Lewis	235
“What Is Truth?”; John 18:38	
Eddie Whitten	249
“Lord, Wilt Thou At This Time Restore Again The Kingdom To Israel?”; Acts 1:6	
Clifford Newell, Jr.	261
“Understandest Thou What Thou Readest?”; Acts 8:30	
Randy L. Mabe	271
“What Must I Do To Be Saved?”; Acts 16:30	
Harrell Davidson	279
“Have Ye Received The Holy Ghost Since Ye Believed?”; Acts 19:2	
Editor	288
Personal Indwelling	
Brian R. Kenyon	289
Representative Indwelling	
Wayne Price	299
“Shall We Continue In Sin, That Grace May Abound?”; Rom. 6:1	
Jerry C. Brewer	306
“If God Be for Us, Who Can Be Against Us?”; Rom. 8:31	
Paul Vaughn	320
“But Why Dost Thou Judge Thy Brother?”; Rom. 14:10	
Tom Wacaster	328
“Is Christ Divided?”; 1 Cor. 1:13	
Michael C. Shepherd	349
“O Death, Where Is Thy Sting?”; 1 Cor. 15:55	
Michael McDaniel	362
“What Fellowship Hath Righteousness With Unrighteousness?” 2 Cor. 6:14	
Tim Smith	380
“Wherefore Then Serveth The Law?”; Gal 3:19	
Michael Hatcher	392
“Am I Therefore Become Your Enemy, Because I Tell You The Truth?”; Gal. 4:16	
Ronnie Hayes	405

“How Shall We Escape, If We Neglect So Great Salvation?”; Heb. 2:3	
Gary Colley	414
“For What Son Is He Whom The Father Chasteneth Not?”; Heb. 12:7	
Gary W. Summers	421
“Are Ye Not Then Partial In Yourselves?”; Jam. 2:4	
John West	431
“Wilt Thou Know...Faith Without Works Is Dead?”; Jam. 2:20	
Guss Eoff	439
“Who Is A Wise Man And Endued With Knowledge Among You?” Jam. 3:13	
Ted J. Clarke	448
“What Is Your Life?”; Jam. 4:14	
Lynn Parker	463
“Where Is The Promise Of His Coming?”; 2 Pet. 3:4	
David B. Smith	474
“Who Shall Be Able To Stand?”; Rev. 6:17	
Tommy J. Hicks	483

“WHERE IS HE THAT IS BORN KING OF THE JEWS?” MATTHEW 2:2

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.



Keith Mosher, Sr., and his wife Dorothy have been married for thirty-nine years. They have three children: Keith, Jr., Mark, and Karen, and five grandchildren.

He is a 1975 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has B.A., M.A., and M.Th. degrees from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has worked with congregations in Mississippi and Tennessee. Keith speaks at Gospel meetings and lectureships throughout the states, and has done mission work in Asia, Africa, and Russia.

He is a full-time instructor at Memphis School of Preaching and currently serves as Dean of Academics.

Keith has written two workbooks on Romans and Acts, a tract entitled “Can One Trust His English Bible?” and articles for various publications. He is a staff writer for Bible Light and has recently finished his second volume on the theme: *The Book God “Breathed.”*

PREFACE

There are any number of questions in the Bible, and all, of course, are important. However, to **know** where the Christ can be found is of vital, eternal consequence to every person who has or will exist on this earth. Brother Michael Hatcher, the beloved and most capable director of the Bellview lectureship series, showed me a list of topics for this year’s (2004) discussions, and my eyes fell immediately on the theme of “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (Mat. 2:2). At the time I could not imagine a more needed discussion, and I still cannot.

INTRODUCTION

The God of Israel is a promise-keeping Deity, **and** He is also holy, just, and almighty (cf., Isa. 43:11; Deu. 6:4). Some, who are obviously misguided souls, ignore the “Jewishness” of Jesus and conclude that the God of the Old Testament is harsh, demanding, and punishing, but the “God of Jesus” is loving, nice, and tolerant of all sin! Nevertheless, Jesus, as the One “born king of the Jews,” upholds the goodness **and**

severity of God (Rom. 11:22; Gal. 4:4) and the love of God (John 3:16). There are not two Gods, one of the Old Testament and one of the New. Deity does not tolerate sin under any covenant.

Jesus was born into the human family and His love and forgiveness are wonderful, but said foregoing fact does not mean that unrepentant, disobedient sinners can be saved (cf., Heb. 5:8-9). Jesus is the Savior, but He is also the Judge (John 5:22; 12:48). The "king of the Jews" came the first time to bring actual remission of sins to the world (Mat. 1:18-25; John 1:29; Heb. 9:15, 22), but that same "King" is coming the second time to judge the world in justice (2 The. 1:6-9). The New Testament teachings of Jesus' second coming in judgment are, therefore, synonymous with Old Testament prophecies to Israel of a King who would reign in justice (cf., Zec. 6:12-13; Dan. 2:44; 2 Sam. 7:11-12).

When the magi (*may'ji*) came near Jerusalem, they inquired of the scribes: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Mat. 2:2). Their question was based on the Old Testament Scriptures and a star that those ancient astrologers ascribed as "his star" (Mat. 2:2a). This study of their inquiry will involve asking: (1) Who are these magi? (2) How and when did the Gentiles know of a "king of the Jews"? (3) Where is this king? (4) How can He be my King?

WHO ARE THESE MAGI?

The following from Robertson is succinct and revealing about those ancient astrologers called "Magi" by Matthew:

The etymology of *Magi* [sic] is quite uncertain. It may come from the same Indo-European root as (*megas*) *magus* [sic], though some find it of Babylonian origin. Herodotus speaks of a tribe of Magi among the Medians. Among the Persians there was a priestly caste of Magi like the Chaldeans in Babylon (Dan. 1:4). Daniel was head of such an order (Dan. 2:48). It is the same word as our "magician" and it sometimes carried the idea as in the case of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9, 11) and Elymas Barjesus (Acts 13:6, 8). But here in Matthew the idea seems to be rather that of an astrologer. Babylon was the home of astrology, but we only know that the men were from the east whether Arabia, Babylon, Persia, or elsewhere. The notion that they were kings arose from an interpretation of Isa. 60:3; Rev. 21:24. The idea that they were three in number is due to the mention of three kinds of gifts (gold, frankincense, myrrh) but that is no proof at all (1:15-16).

Evidence of magic has been discovered in cave art and in the primitive practice of the covering of corpses in red pigment—the attempt

being to bring the bodies back to life (Wright 2:552). Frazier suggests that religion was characterized then by the attempts of man to control the forces of nature:

A savage hardly conceives the distinction commonly drawn by more advanced peoples between the natural and supernatural. To him the world is mostly worked by supernatural [superstitious] agents, that is, by personal beings acting on impulses and motives like his own.... In a world so conceived he sees no limit to his power of influencing the course of nature to his own advantage (8-9).

However, even in those times when *magic* (astrological superstition) dealt with “spirit as personal agents,” those agents were thought of as inanimate in the sense that the magi (plural form) could constrain the force. In other words, the primitive magician thought that he could control his gods.

Common features of ancient magicians were spells (set formulas of utterances), rites (set actions), and taboo (the magician’s code of conduct). Magic also abounds in Greek mythology, and Latin poets spoke of witchcraft (Wright 2:552). If the magi came from the Chaldean world, which is east of Jerusalem (the Greek text has “from the risings” which is **east**—Mat. 2:2), that world, too, knew of spells and rites and taboos. The magic arts could well have been a mixture of Greek, Latin, Babylonian, and Persian superstitions.

The Old Testament Law categorically forbade such astrological magic (Deu. 8:10-14).¹ Diviners, soothsayers (one who raises spirits—e.g., Lev. 19:26), augers (omen seekers), sorcerers (who used drugs—Exo. 7:11; the Greek term for such is *pharmakos*, from which comes pharmacy), spell binders or “charmers” (Psa. 58:6), mediums (Lev. 19:31), wizards (Lev. 20:6, 27), necromancers (those who inquire of the dead—Isa. 8:19; 11:10; 19:3) are all forbidden to the children of God. It is worthy of note here that sorcery is mentioned in the Code of Hammurabi (1728 B.C.), and those who practiced such were to be put to death (Wright 2:555). Old Testament Law also pronounced a death penalty on those who took part in magical rites (Exo. 22:17-18; Lev. 19:26; 19:31; 20:6, 27; cf., Mic. 5:12). How is it then that the magi were seekers of Messiah and claimed to follow “his star” (Mat. 2:2)?

According to Matthew, the magi followed the star from east to west having seen the object at first in the east (Mat. 2:2). There has been much speculation as to whether the magi witnessed a miracle or a natural combination of bright stars (or a comet perhaps), and those

superstitious magi read into that natural phenomenon a supernatural event. Some early church fathers, especially John Chrysostom, argued for a miraculous astronomical object—that is a real new star (Bruce 70). Chrysostom reasoned that the star “appeared in the day time” and “descended down to the house where the child lay” (qtd. in Bruce 70). Modern commentators, laboring under scientific constraint, argue for a **rare** combination of the planets or a comet that was seen in China about the time of Jesus’ birth (Bruce 70). A third view concerning the star is from students of comparative religion who like to stress the idea that stars were said to appear at the births of all great men of that ancient time, and, thus, Matthew is perpetuating a myth (Bruce 70).²

Bible students, who love God and believe in the miraculous, will note that a sign was given to **Gentile** astrologers who had a false view of God to lead them to the Messiah. The whole system of astrology was/is a delusion, yet God could, providentially, use such men to show His power. Bible students will also note that the magi must inquire of Holy Writ **before** they actually find the infant Christ (Mat. 2:4-6). Miracles, of themselves, cannot be the final sources in finding Jesus. One must eventually seek Him in His Word! Wright insists that:

The magi were clearly not crude practitioners of the occult arts, nor were they ordinary astrologers. They believed that God showed signs in heaven and that a certain heavenly body, whether planet, star, comet, or supernova, indicated from its appearance and position that God had fulfilled the royal promises, of which they had doubtless heard from Jews in the east (2:558).

How did those ancient magi know of a Messiah and “his star?” They came to worship a newly born Jewish baby (Mat. 2:2)! Why?

THE GENTILES AND A JEWISH KING!

Two facts must be kept in mind when studying the Gentile and his relationship to God during Old Testament times. First, there was a “law of God” which phrase was used interchangeably with “the law of Moses” (1 Chr. 16:40; 22:12; Jos. 1:8; 8:31; Neh. 8:1, 8; et. al.). Second, *law* and *covenant* are not synonymous. The former is the biblical term for the commands, statutes, and justices which must be followed by those who would be counted righteous (Gen. 2:16; 6:18-22; Heb. 8:1-12; cf., Rom. 3:9-19). Those who were “under covenant” were those who were promised certain things by God **if** they kept the “law of God” (cf., Exo. 19:1-6).

All persons in **all** ages have been “under the law” to God (Rom. 3:19). However, not all persons in all ages have been “under covenant”; that is, not all peoples have received **special promises** from God as a consequence of keeping God’s laws. However, all men must obey God to have salvation (Rom. 3:9-19). These latter thoughts about *covenant* and *law* are especially relevant to any discussion about how the Gentiles knew about Jehovah **and** a coming Messiah. The Old Testament is **not** just a “Jewish” book, for that ancient history concerns God’s promise to Abraham for **all** nations (Gen. 12:3). The promise to Abraham extended beyond the borders of Canaan and beyond Abraham’s fleshly descendants. In other words, God made a **covenant** concerning **all** peoples (Gal. 3:16-29).

Several incidents in Abraham’s life seem to indicate that Abraham knew that God’s promise was more spiritual than physical. For example, at the time Abraham set foot in the promised Canaan there was a famine to remind that patriarch that the promise extended beyond the temporal (Gen. 12:10). Second, when Lot was captured by several “kings,” Abraham, Lot’s uncle, rescued the lad and defeated those kings (Gen. 14:1-16). However, unlike his contemporaries, Abraham did **not** declare himself king of Canaan. (Was he still thinking spiritually?) Third, a Canaanite priest and king of peace (Salem) was acknowledged by Abraham as worthy of tithes (Gen. 14:17-24). The account of Melchisedec and Abraham underscores the very core of what is required for redemption—priesthood: “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). Since Melchisedec served *El Elyon* and not Baal, the universal nature of the promise to Abraham is once more underscored. **All** the families of the earth were known to God and, through Abraham’s seed, all the families could eventually be at one with God (Gal. 3:23-29). God made a **covenant** with Abraham, but that covenant did **not** exclude nor negate Melchisedec’s work **nor** did God’s covenant with Abraham automatically save him (Jam. 2:21).

The apostle Paul updated the Abrahamic promise as inclusive of all the nations and as a **spiritual** covenant (Rom. 4:17; cf., Gen. 15:18). Abraham was promised to be the “father of many” nations (Gen. 15:5-6, 18). Paul insists that the idea of Abraham’s *fatherhood* of nations meant that all who found salvation would do so in Abraham’s “seed” who is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Abraham must have understood that the promise was also to the Gentiles for he begged God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if **righteous** men could be found in the city (Gen. 18:23-24). How did Abraham know that righteous men could be saved? God had promised such for all nations.

The astute Bible student knows that the idea of Gentiles and Jews was post-Sinai and that pre-Sinai no such distinctions could be made. Gentiles had a harder time after Sinai, in finding Jehovah (Eph. 2:12), but the Jews had the advantage of being custodians of the law of God (Rom. 3:1-2). The Jews, then, were to be witnesses to the nations (an obligation Israel generally disclaimed):

Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, *It is* truth. Ye *are* my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that *I am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me (Isa. 43:9-10).

The Gentile, Balaam, knew of Jehovah (Num. 22-24) as did Rahab (Jos. 2:8-11). The nations of Canaan knew Jehovah (Jud. 1-15), and the Philistines were especially aware of God and the exodus from Egypt by the children of Israel (1 Sam. 6:1-6). God used the Gentile king Cyrus whose heart was stirred by Jeremiah (2 Chr. 36:22-23), and Solomon prayed that "all the people of the earth" would know Jehovah **when** those people came to the temple to pray (1 Kin. 8:41-43). The widow of Zerephath was a Gentile who was tended by a Jewish prophet (1 Kin. 17:9, 24) as was Naaman the Syrian (2 Kin. 5:1ff.). Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jonah prophesied to Gentile nations because those nations needed access to God.

With all of the above, and given the fact that a foreigner (an *enosh-gur*) could live among the Jews and be a part of **all** of the offerings except for eating the Passover (Exo. 12:43; Lev. 22:5), it is not hard to surmise that Gentile astrologers from the Mesopotamian region would have knowledge of a Messiah who would be a King (Mat. 2:1-2). Some of the church *fathers*, especially Gregory the Great, were quite confused by these Gentile worshipers' arrival at the manger scene and wrote:

We must ask what it means that when our Redeemer was born, an angel appeared to the shepherds in Judea, but a star and not an angel guided the magi from the east to worship him. This was the reason: It

was a reasoning being, an angel, who preached to the Jews as persons capable of using their reason. But a sign and not a voice guided the Gentiles, who were not prepared to make full use of reason to know the Lord. Hence Paul says that “prophecy has been given for believers not for unbelievers, but signs have been given for unbelievers and not for believers.” And so prophecy has been given to the Jews as believers and not unbelievers, and signs have been given to the Gentiles as unbelievers and not believers. Not that the apostle preached our Redeemer to these same Gentiles when Jesus was already a grown man, but a star declared him to the Gentiles even when he was a small child, not yet able to perform the normal human function of speaking. It was surely reasonable both that silent elements should preach him when he was not yet speaking and that preachers should make the Lord known to us by speaking when he was already speaking (qtd. in Simonetti 1a:22).

Roman Catholicism also has met with confusion in attempting to ascertain the how of the magi’s knowledge of the infant Messiah and argues that

Herodotus...is our authority for supposing that the magi were the sacred caste of the Medes. They provided priests for Persia... (Jeremias 39:13 in the Hebrew original)...Cyrus completely conquered the sacred caste...but the magicians revolted and set up Gaumata [Smerdis] as King of Persia. He was, however, murdered (521 B.C.) and Darius became king. This downfall of the Magi was celebrated by a national Persian holiday (Drum).

The problem with the above Catholic information is that no early historian has ever concluded that the magi were kings except for Tertullian (331-332), who said they were “well-nigh kings.” The Catholic liturgy insists on applying the title *kings* without solid evidence.

Delling, in referencing Herodotus’ accounts of a Persian caste and the magi, notes that the Greeks had various opinions concerning such reports (356) and that the best that can be said about the Persian magi is that there may be a cultural “link” to Greek mystery cults (356).

Many commentators take the position of Robertson who writes, “These men may have been Jewish proselytes and may have known of the Messianic hope for even Vergil had caught a vision of it” (16). (Robertson is repeating a position that was announced in the *Journal of Theological Studies* of 1902 in which Moulton “‘refers to the Magian belief that a star could be the *fravashi*, [Persian for **counterpart**—KM] the counterpart or angel (cf., Matt. 18:10) of a great man”) (qtd. in Robertson 16). Since Moulton misused Matthew 18:10 and

since the historical accounts of the ancient period are ambiguous, one is not above dismissing these latter ideas as so much speculation.

Modernists reject the Matthew account as fiction, but such dismissal is without proof on their parts. Jesus was born and the magi are said to have visited. The Gentiles could know of Jehovah and, in fact, James (Jesus’ half-brother) deduced that the Gentiles in and around Palestine would not need to be taught the Old Testament to be brought to Christianity: “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (Acts 15:21). God did not forget His promise to all the nations, and the magi’s visit is proof-positive that God loved the whole world and not just the Jews (John 3:16).

WHERE IS THIS KING?

It may seem peculiar to the masses that just one person, born into a Jewish family and executed on a Roman cross outside the city gates of Jerusalem, could hold in His hand the eternal destiny of every human being living, having lived, or who would live on this planet (cf., John 14:6). Of course, it may seem strange that God chose the nomadic Abraham or the supplanter, Jacob, and others to achieve the purposes of Deity in saving man, and it may seem odd as to why God would use a nation of slaves (Israel) and make that nation the conduit of all spiritual blessings. Peculiar or not, God did send His Son as sole Savior of lost mankind (Luke 19:10) and sent that Son through that Israelite nation to save them **and** the Gentiles!

The infant Jesus was adored by shepherds and worshipped by Gentiles (Luke 2:8-16; Mat. 2:2). Since Jesus’ ascension to heaven, men and women from every part of the globe, from every nation, language, tribe, and race have found salvation in the “king of the Jews.”

The Old Testament prophets foretold of this king. Moses saw Him as the “seed of woman” and a prophet like Moses (Gen. 3:15; Deu. 18:15). The prophet Nathan foresaw His throne:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers,
I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels,
and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name,
and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

Some try to limit the above passage to Solomon because Nathan was speaking to king David. However, later biblical statements confirm that Nathan prophesied of an eternal throne. For example the psalmist wrote that God said: “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn

unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations” (Psa. 89:3-4). The throne of the Davidic covenant is where Messiah as King now reigns:

Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and *as* a faithful witness in heaven (Psa. 89:35-37).

Note that the throne Nathan promised is in heaven and not in Jerusalem, as the premillennial errorists teach and that David’s seed (Christ) would reign there in heaven and not on earth. This latter fact answers the question as to *where* the King of the Jews is at this very moment (Heb. 1:3). In fact, Jesus cannot reign on earth, for He is a priest now (Heb. 5:6) and He is a king now (Rev. 1:5) and according to Zechariah, Messiah was to be king and priest simultaneously:

And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name *is* The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zec. 6:12-13).

Jesus was born into the tribe of Judah and, as a Judean, cannot be an earthly priest: “For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest” (Heb. 8:4). Why? “For *it is* evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” (Heb. 7:14). Since Jesus can **not** be a priest on earth, He can **not** be a king here either **or** Zechariah’s prophecy is in error, for that prophet said Messiah would be king and priest at the same time (See Zec. 6:12-13 above). To be a priest and king **requires** that Jesus reign in heaven and not on some material throne.

Jeremiah, who is often called the “weeping” prophet, was instructed by God to write about the Davidic throne and its **earthly** kings. Jeremiah had to inform ancient Judah that **no** more kings from the seedline of Jechoniah would ever rule again in Jerusalem: “Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man *that* shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:30). Jesus is in the seedline of Jechoniah (Mat. 1:12) and, thus, according to Jeremiah, can **not** rule from Jerusalem. Those who teach that Jesus is coming back to sit on a throne **in** Jerusalem are stuck with the consequence of such

teaching that Jeremiah is a false prophet. However, Jeremiah is a true prophet, and the premillennialist is wrong (Mat. 16:14).

Daniel foresaw the king’s kingdom beginning during the time of the Roman Empire (Dan. 2:44), and since the Davidic throne is now in Heaven (Psa. 89:37) upon which King Jesus is now sitting, one might surmise that some prophet would have been given the exact moment that Messiah’s kingdom began. Daniel was privileged to receive such a vision:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and **a kingdom**, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed. I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of *my* body, and the visions of my head troubled me (Dan. 7:13-15).

Messiah’s kingdom rule began when He went back to heaven “with the clouds” (cf., Acts 1:10-11), and this latter scenario was the basis for the very first Gospel sermon (Acts 2:33-36).

HOW CAN HE BE MY KING?

One should begin thinking about Jesus as one’s King by realizing the fact that God is One and the Creator of heaven and earth (Deu. 6:4; Gen. 1:1). When Jesus was born, He did not come representing some new “god,” but came as the Son and representative of the true God, the God of Israel who promised to send a Seed to **all** the nations (Gen. 12:3). This Jesus was predestined to be the Savior of all men (Acts 2:23a; John 1:29).

God, the one true God, had a plan for the world that was one, continuous, unfolding whole (Eph. 3:11), and once God chose the Jews as the focus of His special revelation, God also determined that the Savior would be born **among** the Jews (Gal. 4:4) but **for** the world (John 3:17). Salvation was “of the Jews,” but not limited to the Jews (John 4:22; 10:16). The king of the Jews sits now in heaven having all authority there and on earth (Mat. 28:19; 1 Pet. 3:20; John 17:1-4).

For Jesus to be one’s personal King requires that one enter His kingdom (John 3:3-5). Entrance into Christ’s domain is called *translation* in Holy Writ, meaning that one leaves Satan’s arena (the “world”) through a process and enters a new, spiritual kingdom in which is found redemption: “Who hath delivered us from the power of

darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Since redemption is **in** and **through** Christ; and since the redeemed are in the kingdom—to be **in** Christ is to be **in** His kingdom. One enters Christ as a penitent person, having confessed the Christ as the Son of the living God and having been immersed in water at which point one’s sins are remitted. (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 10:9-10). Having entered the kingdom, one is also in the church of Christ (Mat. 16:16-18; Acts 2:47). As to government: God’s people are in a kingdom; as to spirituality: God’s people are called out (a church) of the world (1 Pet. 2:9; 2 The. 2:14).

CONCLUSION

God is awesome, amazing, and to be held in fear among all people. The God of heaven providentially used ancient magicians or astrologers to introduce His Son to the nations. That Son or Messiah had been promised for centuries and came to earth ignominiously, having been placed in a feed box, for there “was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). When the magi visited, they asked: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (Mat. 2:2a). The Holy Scriptures pointed those magicians to Bethlehem in Judah (Mat. 2:6). By the time the magi found Him, His family was living in a house (Mat. 2:11) and no longer in the stable. The quest of the magi should be everyone’s—not to find Jesus in a *house*, but like the magi—to *find* Jesus in a spiritual way by obeying His commands (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).

Where is He that is born King of the Jews? He is in heaven (Acts 2:33) and, as King, demands obedience of all who would be His subjects (Heb. 5:8-9). As with the ancient magi, He can only be *found* by following Holy Writ and its precepts and commandments (John 5:39).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Bruce, Alexander Balmain. “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, reprint, 1990. 5 vols.
- Delling, G. “magos.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed. Gerhard Kittel. Vol. 4. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1967. 10 vols.
- Drum, Walter. “Magi.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol IX. Transcribed John Szpytman. Online Edition 2003. Internet. 16 December 2003. Available <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09527a.htm>.
- Frazer, James G. *The Golden Bough* (2 volumes in One). New York: Avenel Books, reprint 1981.

- Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark*. Vol. 1. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930. 6 vols.
- Simonetti, Manlio, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001.
- Tertullian. “The Five Books Against Marcion” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986. 10 vols.
- Wright, J. Stafford. “Magic, Sorcery, Magi” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Ed. Colin Brown. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971.

ENDNOTES

¹See also Numbers 22:7; 23:23; Joshua 13:22; 1 Samuel 6:2; 15:23; 28:8; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 3:2; 44:25; Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 13:6, 9, 23; 21:26ff.; Micah. 3:6f.

²The progenitors of such modernism are DeWette, Strauss, and Holtzmann who are all German rationalists.

“WHY ARE YE FEARFUL, O YE OF LITTLE FAITH?”

MATTHEW 8:26

Wade L. Webster



Wade Webster is a native of Alabama. He is married to the former Jennifer Talley, and they have three children (a son and twin daughters). Wade is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching, North East Mississippi Junior College, Jacksonville State University (B.A. and M.A.).

Wade has done local preaching in Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. He served as an adjunct instructor for Jacksonville State University and Faulkner University. He speaks on various lectureships including Memphis School of Preaching, POWER, and Seek the Old Paths. Wade currently works with the Main Street Church of Christ in Crossville, Tennessee.

INTRODUCTION

At least four of Jesus' disciples (Peter, Andrew, James, and John), and likely more, were men of the sea, fishers by trade. No doubt, they were used to whistling winds and white-capped waves. In fact, they must have known the Sea of Galilee like the back of their hands. It was their fishing hole. They were accustomed to the quick and violent storms that could descend upon it from above. Likely, they had ridden their share of such storms out. However, three of the four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record a night when these hardened men of the sea were filled with fear and cried out to the Master for help. Since the text of Matthew has specifically been assigned for this study, we will use it as our primary text. However, as needed, we will compare the text of Matthew with that of Mark and Luke. Matthew records:

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, inasmuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the

men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! (Mat. 8:23-27).

Please notice that Matthew records that the ship was “covered with...waves” (Mat. 8:24). The situation sounds serious, does it not? Mark, in his biography of Jesus, spoke of how the waves “beat into the ship” until it was “full” (Mark 4:37), and Luke added that the disciples were “in jeopardy” (Luke 8:23). The record of Luke seems to best capture how storms generally came onto the Sea of Galilee. Luke records that “**there came down a storm** of wind on the lake” (Luke 8:23). The Sea of Galilee lies roughly 700 feet below sea level. When the cold air of Mt. Hermon, which sometimes is snow-capped, descends upon the warm waters of the sea, the results are sudden and severe. Since the Sea of Galilee is relatively small (13 miles long and 8 miles wide) and shallow (400 feet deep), the sea can be severely shaken by storms as you might shake a cup of water in your hands. The word that Matthew uses to describe the tempest calls to mind an earthquake (*seismos*), while the word used by Mark and Luke calls to mind a whirlwind (*lailaps*). If you combine both of these ideas, earthquake and whirlwind, you probably get a pretty good picture of what the disciples were facing. Add to the above information the fact that this storm evidently came upon the disciples in the hours of darkness since it was evening when they departed (Mark 4:35), and you can see how even hardened men of the sea, who had weathered many storms, would be scared to death. Our Lord described them as “fearful” (*deilos*) or “timid” (Mat. 8:26; Mark 4:40). They were showing cowardice rather than courage. They thought that they were perishing and awoke the Master (pilot) to save them (Mat. 8:25).

Interestingly, before rebuking the winds and the sea, Jesus mildly rebuked the disciples. You see, there was a fearful storm raging within their hearts as well. In fact, it seems clear that Jesus was more concerned with the fear that filled the disciples than He was about the water that filled the boat. Please note that in Matthew’s account that He spoke to the disciples before He spoke to the sea. He asked them why they were so fearful (Mat. 8:26; Mark 4:40) and within the same breath answered His own question—their faith was small. Obviously, Jesus did not ask the question for His own benefit but for theirs. As is evidenced by His answer, Jesus knew why they were fearful. He asked the question because He wanted them to see how small their faith was in comparison to their fear.

From studying what the Bible says about fear, it seems that there are three basic deficiencies from which fear flourishes:

- A lack of love (1 John 4:18).
- A lack of hope (Heb. 6:18-19; cf., 6:11; 2 The. 2:16-17; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rom. 5:5; 15:13).
- A lack of faith (Heb. 11:27; cf., 11:32-40).

Although the apostles on different occasions demonstrated deficiencies in each of these areas (love, hope, and faith), the text before us is highlighting a lack of faith. Because their faith was small, their fear was great. In the context assigned to us, the disciples seem to have had a lack of faith in three key areas relative to the Savior. They doubted the perception, pity, and power of the Savior.

THEY DOUBTED THE SAVIOR'S PERCEPTION... BUT HE WAS NOT IGNORANT

By comparing the Gospel records, we find that Jesus was asleep in the hinder part of the ship on a pillow when this storm arose (Mat. 8:24; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:23). No doubt, because Jesus was asleep, the disciples must have surmised that He did not know of the peril that they were in. In other words, they doubted His perception. They felt the need to wake Him up and to inform Him of what was happening. What the disciples did not realize was that Jesus knew all about the storm. While there was a part of Him that slumbered, there was a part of Him that never slept: He was both human and Divine. He was the God-man (John 1:14; Phi. 2:5-8). The human side needed sleep, but the Divine side did not. On the human side, He must have been exhausted from a long day of preaching and dealing with the public. Those who preach know how exhausting Sundays can be. On the Divine side, He was as alert as ever. In the long ago, the psalmist wrote:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: **he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.** The LORD *is* thy keeper: the LORD *is* thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore (Psa. 121).

Notice that the One who kept Israel would not slumber nor sleep. Furthermore, notice the references in the psalm to *the sun* and *the*

moon. The psalmist is making clear that the God that we serve is awake and at home twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (1 Kin. 18:27). What a great comfort this understanding could have been to the disciples on that stormy night that they spent on the sea of Galilee. Over time, they would come to accept and to understand the omniscience of their Friend and Master (Luke 5:22; John 2:25).

Peter, one of the fearful disciples in our text, later wrote:

For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil. And who *is* he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? (1 Pet. 3:12-13; cf., 2 Chr. 16:9; Psa. 139:1-18; Heb. 4:13).

Peter eventually found comfort, did he not? He learned that God is always watching over His people. In fact, the very hairs on our heads are numbered (Mat. 10:30). May we also learn that God is always watching over His people so we may enjoy the blessed assurance that comes with such a knowledge. If we will, then we will find it much easier to ride out the storms of life. This author is reminded of the old song, "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me," written by Edward Hopper and John Gould:

Jesus, Savior, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treacherous shoal.
Chart and compass come from Thee;
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

While th' Apostles' fragile bark
Struggled with the billows dark,
On the stormy Galilee,
Thou didst walk upon the sea;
And when they beheld Thy form,
Safe they glided through the storm.
Though the sea be smooth and bright,
Sparkling with the stars of night,
And my ship's path be ablaze
With the light of halcyon days,
Still I know my need of Thee;
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

When the darkling heavens frown,
And the wrathful winds come down,
And the fierce waves, tossed on high,
Lash themselves against the sky,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me,
Over life's tempestuous sea.

As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boisterous waves obey Thy will,
When Thou sayest to them, "Be still!"
Wondrous Sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

When at last I near the shore,
And the fearful breakers roar
"Twixt me and the peaceful rest,
Then, while leaning on Thy breast,
May I hear Thee say to me,
"Fear not, I will pilot thee."

Does the reader not find great comfort in knowing that Jesus, his Savior, is piloting him? This writer knows that he does.

THEY DOUBTED THE SAVIOR'S PITY... BUT HE WAS NOT INDIFFERENT

In his account of this event, Mark records that in the midst of the storm the disciples asked, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38). In their moment of fear, the disciples doubted the Master's pity. Of course, they should have known that Jesus cared. After all, consider what He had just done for others according to Matthew's record:

- He had just healed a leper (Mat. 8:1-4).
- He had just healed the nobleman's servant of palsy which was grievously tormenting him (Mat. 8:5-13).
- He had just healed Peter's mother-in-law of a serious fever (Mat. 8:14-15).
- He had just cast out devils that were tormenting individuals (Mat. 8:16-17).

How could they see the Savior's care for others and doubt His care for them? Are we not told to do good unto all men, and "**especially** unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)? If Jesus would do good to those who were strangers, the disciples could be assured that He would do good to them. Do you recall what Jesus taught on how much God loves us in the Sermon on the Mount? He said:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? **Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather**

into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof (Mat. 6:25-34).

If God was taking care of the birds and the lilies, the disciples could be assured that He would take care of them. However, with the waves crashing and the wind whistling, they doubted. Fear filled them and logic fled them. For a moment, they felt as if the Lord was indifferent to what was happening to them. Later, Peter who was in the boat on this occasion, would write, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). In that boat on Galilee, and in many other places, Peter learned how much Jesus cared for him (John 21:15-17). Perhaps, there has been a time in our lives when we felt as Peter and the other disciples in that ship did. If we have not felt this way ourselves, we have likely known those who did. Yet, the Bible assures us that Jesus does care. In fact, the Scriptures affirm that He is touched with “the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15; cf., 2:14-17). As the old song, “Does Jesus Care?” written by Frank Graeff and J. Lincoln Hall states:

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
 Too deeply for mirth and Song,
 As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
 And the way grows weary and long?
 O yes, He cares. I know He cares!
 His heart is touched with my grief.
 When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
 I know my Savior cares.

What a great comfort it is to know that Jesus cares.

THEY DOUBTED THE SAVIOR'S POWER... BUT HE WAS NOT IMPOTENT

It seems likely that the disciples struggled for some time on their own before waking Jesus up to help them. After all, they were seamen. When the storm hit, they must have busied themselves in the tasks associated with riding out a storm. However, at some point, it became evident that no matter what they did, it was not going to work. Therefore, the time came when they had to wake up Jesus. To their credit, they thought that there might be something that He could do. However, it seems clear that they never imagined Him doing what He did. When He stilled the waves and the wind with His voice, Matthew records that “the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Mat. 8:27). They saw a *great tempest* become a *great calm* (Mat. 8:24, 26). For sure, the faith of the disciples was small in comparison to the centurion recorded in this same chapter. As you recall, the centurion with the sick servant told Jesus to but “speak the word only,” his servant would be healed (Mat. 8:5-13). The centurion understood the authority or power with which Jesus spoke (Mat. 8:8-9; cf., 7:29). In contrast, in their moment of fear, the disciples failed to see the power of the Master’s voice. In a chapter that records many amazing things including the healing of a leper, the disciples seem to have been more impressed by the stilling of the storm than with any other miracle. Likely, there are two reasons why this made a bigger impression on them:

(1) **This miracle made a bigger impression on them because they were the direct beneficiaries of the miracle.** They were the ones in need of help. Although the miracles that were recorded earlier in this chapter of Matthew were amazing, they involved other people. The disciples were not lepers, afflicted with palsy, suffering from a fever, or tormented by devils. The storm touched them much deeper than the other miracles because they were the ones that were threatened by it. Let this scribe provide an example of how that what is happening to us affects us much deeper than that which is happening to other people. Surgery on someone else may be minor, but any surgery on us personally is major.

(2) **This miracle made a bigger impression on them because the miracle involved something that they knew about.** As already noted in this lesson, the disciples knew something about storms. They made their living on this very sea. As you know, individuals tend to be

more amazed by things that they know something about than by things that they know little or nothing about. For example, if you play golf, then you have a greater appreciation for the long drives and putts that professional golfers make than this writer does. After all, you have played the game. You know how hard it is to do those things. No doubt, when they drive the ball out of a sand-trap and roll it into the hole, you are amazed. In like manner, in the Gospel records, we find the disciples being amazed by different things depending upon what their background was. For example, the physician Luke was amazed by the Savior’s ability to heal diseases that the best doctors of the day could not heal (Luke 8:43). If you want to amaze a doctor, you heal incurable diseases. Consider also how that Peter, a fisherman by trade, was amazed by great catches of fish. Perhaps, you recall the occasion when Peter had fished all night and caught nothing but went back out and caught more than his nets or boats could hold at the command of the Lord (Luke 5:4-5). Luke records that Peter was so amazed by what had transpired that he fell at Jesus’ feet and cried out: “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). If you want to impress a fisherman, you help him catch a net full of fish after he has fished all night and caught nothing. In like manner, the stilling of the storm on Galilee was impressive to the disciples because they knew something about storms.

It seems clear that the disciples had never imagined Jesus stilling the storm with His voice. They lacked the faith to even imagine it. Perhaps, we sometimes do the same thing. We need to be reminded from time to time that the God that we serve “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). Things that are impossible with men are possible with Him (Mat. 19:26). In the long ago, Jeremiah declared, “Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, **and there is nothing too hard for thee**” (Jer. 32:17). On this night, and on succeeding occasions, the disciples learned to believe in the omnipotence of God. May we do the same. I believe that the words of the old song: “Master, The Tempest Is Raging,” written by Mary Barker, well capture the omnipotence of God:

Master, the tempest is raging!
The billows are tossing high!
The sky is o’ershadowed with blackness,
No shelter or help is nigh;
Carest Thou not that we perish?

How canst Thou lie asleep,
When each moment so madly is threatening
A grave in the angry deep?

Master, with anguish of spirit
I bow in my grief today;
The depths of my sad heart are troubled
Oh, waken and save, I pray!
Torrents of sin and of anguish
Sweep o'er my sinking soul;
And I perish! I perish! dear Master
Oh, hasten, and take control.

Master, the terror is over,
The elements sweetly rest;
Earth's sun in the calm lake is mirrored,
And heaven's within my breast;
Linger, O blessed Redeemer!
Leave me alone no more;
And with joy I shall make the blest harbor,
And rest on the blissful shore.

Refrain

The winds and the waves obey Thy will,
Peace, be still!
Whether the wrath of the storm tossed sea,
Or demons or men, or whatever it be
No waters can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean, and earth, and skies;
They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,
Peace, be still! Peace, be still!
They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,
Peace, peace, be still!

Just as Jesus had the power to still the storm on Galilee, he has the power to still the storms that arise quickly and threaten us.

As fear gripped the disciples on Galilee, it grips many today. Although the fear may be caused by a lack of love or hope, it is in all likelihood caused by a lack of faith (Rev. 21:8). May we plead as the disciples did on one occasion, "Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WHO ARE MY BRETHREN?”

MATTHEW 12:48

B. J. Clarke



Bradley Joseph Clarke was born in Canton, Illinois. After graduating from high school in 1979 in Noblesville, Indiana, B. J. attended Freed-Hardeman College receiving his B.S. degree in Bible in 1983 and his Masters in 1997. B. J. is married to the former Tamela Hall of Marietta, Georgia. They have three children: Daniel, Holly, and Michael.

B. J. served as Youth and Associate Minister for the Etowah Church of Christ, Etowah, Tennessee from 1983 to 1985. In 1985, B. J. moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, to begin work as the evangelist for the Ault Road Church of Christ. He presently serves as a Gospel preacher for the Southaven Church of Christ,

Southaven, Mississippi.

B. J. delivered his first sermon at age 9 and has been involved in several youth rallies, Gospel meetings, and lectureships. In 1985, he was selected as one of the Outstanding Young Men of America. In 1987, he held a public debate on Baptism and Apostasy. He now serves as editor of POWER, published by the Southaven Church of Christ and directs the annual POWER Lectureship.

INTRODUCTION

It had been a very busy day in the life of our Lord. He had engaged the scribes and Pharisees in controversy after controversy. While He was still talking to the people, the record says that His mother and brothers stood outside wanting to talk to Him. Word spread quickly through the crowd until one finally interrupted Jesus to tell Him that His mother and brothers desired to speak with Him. Upon hearing this, Jesus asked the question that is the focus of our study: “Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?” (Mat. 12:8)

WHY DID JESUS ASK THIS QUESTION?

Years ago this author ran across a commentary which suggested that Jesus, because of the rigors of the day, literally suffered a memory lapse and forgot who His own family was. This suggestion is not even worthy of the dignity of a reply; perhaps that is why this scribe cannot even remember the name of the commentary he was reading at the time. Nevertheless, some may suggest that Jesus displayed a lack of respect for His mother and brethren, that His answer was rude and disrespect-

ful. However, Holy Scripture reveals Jesus to have been one Who truly loved, respected, and cared for His mother (Luke 2:51; John 19:25-27).

The foregoing speculations ignore the real intention of our Lord in asking the question. He was not crazy or out of His mind. He was not being rude, arrogant, or disrespectful. He was teaching a powerful lesson on the importance of having a spiritual relationship with Him and how to realize it. Simply put, Jesus was emphasizing that spiritual ties are far more important, binding, and sacred than even fleshly ties. It is far better to be spiritually related to Jesus than even physically related. Jesus was simply pointing out that He felt a closer tie to His spiritual followers than He did to His own physical brethren, who at this point of His ministry did not even believe in Him (John 7:3-5). Thus, the critical question of my life is: "Am I spiritually related to Jesus?" Could Jesus stretch out His hand toward me and acknowledge me as a member of His spiritual family? How can I know who my brethren are?

HOW DID JESUS ANSWER THIS QUESTION?

Jesus did not leave the question "Who are my brethren?" unanswered. Neither did He give a fuzzy and complicated reply. He clearly said, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mat. 12:50). Luke reports that Jesus summarized His answer by saying, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (8:21). A comparison of these two passages shows that "the will of my Father" (Mat. 12:50) is equivalent to "the word of God" (Luke 8:21). The will of the Father is not located in the written creeds of manmade denominations. Accordingly, if one obeys the doctrines and commandments of men, that does not make him a member of the family of God. The process of becoming spiritually related to Jesus involves hearing *the Word of God* and doing the *Word of God*. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

The question naturally arises, what must we hear? Well, what did first century people hear? First, we must hear that we are sinners (Rom. 3:10, 23). Second, we must hear that a Savior has come to atone for our sins through His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Third, we must know that salvation is a gift of grace (Tit. 2:11; Eph. 2:8-9). Fourth, we must recognize that our acceptance of salvation by grace involves trusting obedience (Heb. 5:8-9). Remember, it is he that does

the will of the Father in heaven who shall go to heaven (Mat. 7:21). We are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (Jam. 1:22).

What must we do? First, we must acknowledge our sinfulness and hopeless condition apart from Christ (Eph. 2:11-13). Second, we must believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be—the very I AM, the Son of God (John 8:24, 58). Third, we must repent of our sins in accordance with Acts 17:30. Fourth, confession with the mouth is essential to follow up our faith and repentance (Rom. 10:9-10). Fifth, we must be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Sixth, we must walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). This, in brief detail, is the methodology or process by which we become spiritually related to Jesus.

To put it another way, it helps to consider how we became members of our physical families. Of course, the answer is by the process of birth. Likewise, a birth process is involved in becoming spiritually related to Jesus. "Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5). Physical birth, in and of itself, does not make us spiritually related to Jesus. Therefore, we must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. To be more specific we must be born of water and of the Spirit to be born into the family of God.

One of the best explanations of what it means to be born of water and of the Spirit is to investigate the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. Philip was called away from Samaria to preach the Gospel to the eunuch. The eunuch was riding in his chariot and reading Isaiah 53. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Philip caught up with the eunuch and, at the eunuch's request, "opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). After hearing the message of the Holy Spirit, as preached by Philip, the eunuch said as they came unto a certain water, "See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (8:36). Philip ascertained that the eunuch did in fact believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and he baptized him in water (8:37-38). Thus, the eunuch was born of water and of the Spirit and became a member of the family of God. At the same moment he became a member of the family of God, he became Philip's brother in Christ. Likewise, anyone who has been properly born of water and of the Spirit has become my brother/sister in Christ.

HOW DO RELIGIOUS PEOPLE TODAY ANSWER THIS QUESTION?

One of the buzzwords of the day is *ecumenical*, which Webster defines as “promoting or fostering Christian unity throughout the world...including or containing a mixture of diverse elements or styles.” While no one should oppose promoting or fostering Christian unity, the ecumenical movement does not promote Christian unity. Rather, it promotes an interdenominational “agree to disagree” sort of *unity*. Although the ecumenical movement claims to promote undenominational Christianity, in fact it proliferates denominational sectarianism. Ecumenism answers the question, “Who are my brethren?” by saying, “Just about anyone who claims to be.” Even those who would not label themselves outright ecumenists have a much different answer to the question, “Who are my brethren?” than the one given by our Lord. Consider some wrongheaded answers to this question.

Merrill C. Tenney View Of Brotherhood

Denominational theologian Merrill C. Tenney writes:

Within the church of historic Christianity there have been wide divergences of opinion and ritual. Unity, however, prevails wherever there is a deep and genuine experience of Christ; for the fellowship of the new birth transcends all historical and denominational boundaries. Paul of Tarsus, Luther of Germany, Wesley of England, and Moody of America would find deep unity with each other, though they were widely separated by time, by space, by nationality, by educational background, and by ecclesiastical connections. Such unity was what Jesus petitioned in His prayer, for He defined it as the unity which obtained between Himself and the Father... This relationship lay in a common nature rather than in an identity of minds or of persons. Jesus did not pray for absolute unanimity of mind, nor for uniformity of practice, nor for union of visible organization, but for the underlying unity of spiritual nature and of devotion which would enable His people to bear a convincing testimony before the world (249).

This quotation is fraught with numerous erroneous assertions and gross misinterpretations of what constitutes brotherhood in Christ. In the first place, it is important to note that Jesus was not praying (in John 17) that people in all of the denominations would come together and be one. Rather, Jesus prayed for the unity of “them also which shall believe on me through their [the apostle’s] word” (John 17:20).

What about Tenney’s suggestion that “the fellowship of the new birth transcends all historical and denominational boundaries”? Let us

not forget that the new birth is only experienced by those who have been born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5), i.e., being baptized in water after hearing the Word of God, which came from the Spirit of God (Acts 8:26-40; Eph. 6:17). Yet, those who become members of denominations teach that the new birth can be experienced without being baptized in water. Such a suggestion is erroneous; therefore, since members of denominations have not truly experienced the new birth, they are not yet in the family of God. How, then, can we fellowship and share spiritual unity with someone who is not even in God's family?

Furthermore, no one who has believed on Christ **through the Word of the apostles** ever became a member of a denomination by so doing. When nearly three thousand souls gladly received the Word of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, by being baptized, they were added to the Lord's church, not a manmade denomination (Acts 2:41, 47). Those who were saved, during the time of the New Testament, did not divide into a multiplicity of religious sects and begin worshiping God in their own different ways from within those different sectarian groups. On the contrary, those who were saved became members of the body of Christ, the church of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23). Thus, it is absurd to affirm, as Tenney has done, that "Paul of Tarsus, Luther of Germany, Wesley of England, and Moody of America would find deep unity with each other." The apostle Paul is the only one on Tenney's list that has even obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation. How could the apostle Paul possibly find unity with those who have never even become members of the family of God? Moreover, Luther taught salvation by faith only; Paul taught that man is saved by grace through a faith "that worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Wesley and Moody never taught that one is baptized into Christ as did Paul in Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27. Furthermore, they never gave the same answer to lost souls seeking salvation as did Peter in Acts 2:38. How then could the apostle Paul have *deep unity* with men that did not even teach the truth on how to become a Christian?

William Barclay's View of Brotherhood

William Barclay, a well-known commentator, advances his view of unity in the following words:

Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way. They will never worship God all in the same way. They will never even all believe precisely the same things. But Christian unity

transcends all these differences and joins men together in love. The cause of Christian unity at the present time, and indeed all through history, has been injured and hindered, because men loved their own ecclesiastical organizations, their own creeds, their own ritual, more than they loved each other. If we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no Church would exclude any man who was Christ's disciple. Only love implanted in men's hearts by God can tear down the barriers which they have erected between each other and between their churches (218).

It would be difficult to find a quotation more in opposition to the nature of unity for which Jesus prayed. According to Barclay, we cannot expect, nor should we demand, complete unanimity of agreement on what the Bible teaches, provided we have a loving relationship toward our religious neighbors. Remarkably, he makes the statement that "Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way." Wait a minute! How could a man write a commentary on the entire New Testament and fail to observe that in the first century, under the guidance of inspired apostles, the Lord's church was organized in the same way (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)?

The same is true regarding the worship of the early church. Mr. Barclay avers that Christians will never worship God in the same way. Yet in the New Testament record of the early church, they did the very thing that Barclay says Christians will never do: they worshiped God according to the same pattern (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23ff; 16:1-2; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

If the Bible teaches anything at all, it teaches that God is concerned about our manner of worship. They that worship God **must** worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). If God is not concerned about our style of worship, then perhaps Mr. Barclay will explain to us why Cain's offering of worship was rejected whereas Abel's was accepted (Gen. 4:1-10; Heb. 11:4). If our style of worship is not a matter of significance to God, then why did Nadab and Abihu go up in smoke for offering strange and unauthorized fire (Lev. 10:1-2)?

Suppose one of the Jews in the Old Testament had decided to bring a cow to the priest to offer as a sacrifice instead of the unblemished lamb required by God. Would his style of worship have mattered to God? Could a Jew have faithfully observed the Passover by using leavened bread rather than the specified unleavened bread? Furthermore, what if someone's style of worship today moves them to substitute pizza and Coca-Cola on the Lord's table instead of unleav-

ened bread and fruit of the vine? Does not Paul's stern rebuke to the Corinthians concerning their manner of observing the Lord's supper prove that our style of worship matters to God (1 Cor. 11:17-34)?

Jesus condemned those who vainly worshiped Him by following the doctrines and commandments of men (Mat. 15:9). Paul indicted the Athenians with worshiping ignorantly (Acts 17:23) and charged the Colossians with "will-worship" (Col. 2:23). Peter admonished Cornelius for worshiping him (Acts 10:25-26). Angelic beings forbade John from worshiping them and instructed him to worship God and God alone (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11-12; 9:20; 11:16; Mat. 4:10). How could anyone read these passages and conclude that style of worship is an insignificant matter in determining religious fellowship?

As for Barclay's affirmation: "if we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no church would exclude any man who was Christ's disciple," we can only reply that if Mr. Barclay truly understood the Bible doctrine of how to become Christ's disciple, and what it really means to love Christ, he would never make such an outlandish statement. However, what does it mean to love Jesus? According to Jesus, to love Him truly is to keep His commandments. He said:

If ye love me, keep my commandments.... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).

To this the apostle John added:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

The implication of these verses is both startling and obvious. Our claim to love Jesus is verified by **obedience** to His commands. On the other hand, our claim to love Him is nullified by our disobedience. Mr. Barclay believes that loving Jesus is the only criterion for religious unity. Is he willing to follow this criterion to its logical end? If so, then he must refuse to fellowship all that refuse to obey the commandments

of Jesus, for to love truly Jesus is to obey His will. Therefore, if Jesus commands people to be immersed for the remission of sins, and certain people refuse to obey this command, then they do not really love Jesus. Hence, to be consistent with his own stated criterion, Mr. Barclay must refuse to fellowship such people.

The Promise Keepers' View of Brotherhood

Although the Promise Keepers movement is not as rampant today as it was a few years ago, the movement is not altogether dead. The movement suggests that unity may be achieved by reaching *beyond* denominational barriers. What precisely do they mean when they suggest reaching *beyond* denominational barriers? A survey of their writings makes it crystal clear that they mean we should overlook every doctrine upon which we disagree, except for the doctrine of the atonement. Consider the following quotations from the literature of Promise Keepers concerning their philosophy about unity and brotherhood:

A Promise Keeper is committed to reach beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of Biblical unity (Promise # 6 of the 7 Promises Of A Promise Keeper).

Almighty God wants to bring Christian men together regardless of their ethnic origin, denominational background or style of worship. There's only one criterion for this kind of unity: to love Jesus and be born of the Spirit of God. Can we look one another in the eye...Baptist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, Catholic, and so on—and get together on this common ground: "We believe in salvation through Christ alone, and we have made him the Lord of our lives?" (McCartney *Seven Promises* 161-162).

Brothers are the sons of a common father. If you are a child of God and I am a child of God, it is undeniable that we are brothers... I'm not out to change you and you're not out to change me (Gorsuch and Schaffer 13-14).

God is looking for men...who have set aside criticisms and judgments to join hands across racial and denominational lines (McCartney *Go The Distance* 9).

Only as we recognize we're going to spend an eternity together—black, white, brown, red, poor, rich, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Pentecostal—will we find the Spirit's indwelling courage to lay down our lives for one another (McCartney *Go The Distance* 11).

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 20, 1997, recorded the following statements made by attendees of the Promise Keepers' conference in St. Louis, Missouri, in July of 1997:

My practice of interfaith cooperation allows me to affirm Jesus even as I defend full religious liberty for my Jewish, Muslim or Ba'hai friends...whom I have come to love (**John Anderson, Pastor, Third Baptist Church, St. Louis**).

It's not made a difference to me. All religions believe in God (**Said Alshemisawi, Muslim**).

It is fair to ask whether Jesus would endorse the above statements. Even a casual acquaintance with the teaching of Jesus leads us to answer in the negative. Jesus never promoted an "interfaith cooperation," which would peacefully co-exist with Jews and Muslims. Jesus told the Jews, "If ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:21, 24). He also declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (14:6). Furthermore, when the disciples came to Him, inquiring as to whether He was aware of having offended the Pharisees, Jesus answered, and said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Mat. 15:13-14). That does not sound very ecumenical, does it?

The ecumenical views of the Promise Keepers have come under heavy fire, particularly because of the Promise Keepers' position toward fellowshiping Catholics. They have openly courted the Catholic church, and at several rallies they have spotlighted Catholic priest Jim Berlucchi as a speaker. In fact, a Catholic priest by the name of Michael Timmis prayed at the Washington D.C. Promise Keepers' rally and said:

Father, we recognize that we do have doctrinal differences and that they have existed since the first days of the church, but Father we will not let these differences destroy our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ, and we know, Father, that this applies to Protestants of all persuasions, it applies to the Orthodox church, it applies to Roman Catholics, of which I am one. It applies to all who truly believe and love the great creeds and confession of the church (Promise Keepers' rally).

Mr. Timmis says that the doctrinal differences between Catholics and others will not destroy their unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. However, a glance at just a few Catholic doctrines demonstrates how serious and far-reaching their departure from the Word of God is. Even though the Catholic *style of worship* motivates them to bow down to graven images of Mary, the philosophy of Promise Keepers is that they

can peacefully coexist with the Catholics on this matter even though bowing down to a graven image is directly and specifically condemned in God's Word. Remember the quote: "I'm not out to change you and you're not out to change me."

According to Promise Keepers, we need to quit criticizing the religious views of our neighbors and just come together as brothers. Hence, the implication is that, if a Baptist believes in immersion and a Methodist believes in sprinkling, the doctrinal difference that exists between them should make absolutely no difference as long as they both believe that salvation comes only through Christ. Forgotten in this whole equation is what God thinks about the matter. God's Word distinctly teaches and requires immersion (Mat. 3:13-16; John 3:23; Acts 8:35-39; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Yet, according to the unity-in-diversity philosophy, although the Methodist teaches and practices sprinkling, his direct opposition to God's teaching on the matter makes no difference whatsoever regarding his fellowship with someone who embraces God's teaching on the subject. Allegedly, the Baptist and the Methodist can believe the exact opposite about the matter and still be religiously united.

Moreover, the assertion that all religions believe in God is both inaccurate and insufficient as a criterion for determining the boundaries of Christian fellowship. The Jews who rejected Jesus were believers in the existence of God, but they were lost nonetheless because they did not accept the Son of God (John 8:24). Furthermore, there is no comparison between the doctrine of the God of the Bible and the Muslim doctrine about God.

Consider also some of the outlandish teaching about God propagated by the Mormons:

When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives with him... He is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do (Young 1:50).

As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become (Mormon "prophet," Lorenzo Snow).

Do the Promise Keepers really expect us to fellowship Catholics, Muslims, and Mormons (and other religious groups) when they teach such egregious error?

The apostle Paul expressed his concern that the Corinthians might accept someone who came and preached "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:3-

4). He was concerned about doctrine. It is typical for those with an ecumenical agenda to verbally claim that sound doctrine is precious to them, but when it comes to their actual practice, they are much more elastic than commitment to sound doctrine will allow. Yet, the Promise Keepers know that if they were to preach the truth boldly and identify false doctrine plainly at their Conferences, a sifting process would soon begin, and crowds and supporters would begin to dwindle. A look at the preaching of the apostles informs us that they continually exposed false teachers and battled against doctrinal deviations. We must follow their example by fighting for the truth and warring against error. Promise Keepers' leaders refuse to do so because they are a part of that error.

The aforementioned quote from McCartney asserts that God wants to bring Christian men together **regardless** of their denominational background or style of worship. In the first place, this author lovingly challenges Mr. McCartney to go to the Bible and point to even one example of **Christian** men in the first century who had different denominational backgrounds. There was no such monstrosity! In the first century, men and women were just Christians (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16). They were not members of denominations. Accordingly, when you read the New Testament, you do not read about *Baptist* Christians, *Presbyterian* Christians, *Assemblies of God* Christians, *Lutheran* Christians, *Pentecostal* Christians, and *Catholic* Christians! Yet, a Promise Keeper from the St. Louis area reported feeling the urging of God to attend a Baptist church in his community. Why would God urge a man to attend a church that is not even in the Bible? Where did God ever urge someone in the New Testament to become a member of the Baptist church? Whatever urge this man may have felt, it is certain that it did not come from God.

Even a denominational preacher by the name of Bill Randles wrote the following words in an open letter to Bill McCartney:

If a Mormon keeps all seven of your promises that could well make him a moral person, but that moral Mormon will go right to hell. Why? Because in spite of his morality, unity, good fathering skills, marital fidelity, he's still doomed because he doesn't believe the testimony God gave of His Son... Finally, Mr. McCartney, I am wary of P.K. because it seems to be such a broad, inclusive way. Catholics, Mormons, and even homosexuals are encouraged to be "included and welcomed in all our events." There are common denominators that anyone can stress that almost every human being can admit to. But

when the true God-ordained organization, the Church, upholds the Word of God, it divides people either onto the broad way that leads to destruction or the narrow way that leads to life (Open Letter).

It is tragic that Mr. Randles himself is a part of an organization that itself does not truly uphold the Word of God, but he is correct in his assessment of the Promise Keepers movement. In fact, Mr. Randles is not the only denominational preacher who has opposed Promise Keepers. Consider the following resolution, adopted by the General Association of Regular Baptists at their annual meeting, June 21st - 25th, 1997:

We express our opposition to the inclusive character of Promise Keepers, which minimizes doctrine and denominational distinctions in an attempt to achieve unity and fellowship. We voice our concern over the practice of using some speakers who are identified with denominations that are apostate or charismatic.

Brethren, it is a crying shame when denominational preachers appear to have a better grasp of what is wrong with the ecumenical philosophy of Promise Keepers than some of my own preaching brethren (and brethren in general). Some will admit that there are problem areas with Promise Keepers, but they argue that these problems pale in comparison to the amount of good being done by the organization. Would these same people drink a glass of water that was 90% water and 10% arsenic? After all, the glass has more good in it than bad! Rat poison has good things in it such as corn, wheat, and oats. However, these good things are laced with poison. It should be remembered that some of the most dangerous lies are those that are stuffed in the skin of truth.

Are we prepared to suggest that the promotion of family values is so important that God could care less about whether we propagate false doctrine in the process? Will God be pleased if we strengthen the American home—but rob souls of a heavenly home because of our erroneous teaching regarding the plan of salvation? The point is clear: While there are many good things about the intentions of the Promise Keepers, there is enough poison (false doctrine) associated with the movement to kill spiritually those who drink at the wells of Promise Keepers' conferences.

Max Lucado's View of Brotherhood

Consider the speech delivered by Max Lucado at the Promise Keepers' Washington D.C. rally on October 4, 1997. The following

excerpt comes from a transcript of that speech as broadcast by C-SPAN:

Max Lucado: I want you to think about where you attend or have attended for quite often. And on the count of three I want all of us to say the name of our religious heritage, denomination or name of church. Will you do that with me? On the count of three I'd like to hear it from you. One, two, three.

Crowd: (Noise)

Max Lucado: Did anybody understand anything that was said? Now on the count of three I would like for you to shout with me the name of the Savior that has redeemed your soul, Jesus Christ. One, two, three.

Crowd: Jesus Christ!

Max Lucado: We are...amen...(pause for applause)... We are at a very important point, and the reason we are here today and that is to ask the Almighty God to unite His church. We are asking this afternoon for the miracle of the millenium... The watching world has never seen the united church. The watching world has never seen God's people as one. The watching world has never seen us cooperate. But this matters to Jesus (Promise Keepers' rally).

Apparently, Lucado thinks that several hundred thousand people saying the name of Jesus in unison is proof of Christian unity. Has he forgotten the teaching of our Lord in Matthew 7:21? Our Lord affirmed that it is not just saying, "Lord, Lord," that will lead us to heaven, but rather, doing the will of the Father will grant us entrance into the kingdom of God. Moreover, according to Matthew 7:22-23, some religious people who called Jesus *Lord* will still be lost on the day of judgment. Jesus will look upon these religious people and declare: "I never knew you." Lucado complains that the watching world has never seen the united church. In reply, we affirm that the world never will see the united church if the ecumenical philosophy is embraced. We see a united church on the pages of the New Testament, and it most certainly did not include in its fellowship just any one who would holler out the name of Jesus at the count of three!

Lucado went on to say:

And we have come now this afternoon to repent of our sectarianism. We have boasted about the name of our church instead of the name of our Savior. We have taken pride in our denominations rather than pride in our Heavenly Father. We have been jealous and competed with the church across the street or across the city rather than be

jealous over the cause of Christ. We have focused on controversies that divide us rather than focus on the cross that unites us.

Evidently, Lucado believes that standing up for the existence of one true church is tantamount to boasting and sectarianism. He says that we have boasted about the name of our church instead of the name of our Savior. The church which this author is a member of wears the name of the Savior. Was the apostle Paul guilty of sectarianism when he referred to “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16) but never said anything about the names of modern sectarian churches today? It may be true that some have taken more pride in their denominations than they have in the Heavenly Father. However, it does not have to be either/or! Lucado leaves the impression that every religious person must of necessity be a member of some denomination. This is not true! First century Christians belonged to the Lord’s church, but they were not members of any denomination. The three thousand who were baptized on the day of Pentecost were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Whose church were they added to? Which denomination was it? Of course, it was the Lord’s church, and it was not a denomination!

Were first century Christians guilty of sectarianism when they evangelized and invited men and women to become members of the undenominational church of Christ? Was Paul guilty of boasting and taking pride in his denomination when he wrote, “There is one body” (Eph. 4:4)? Of course, the answer is no, because Paul was not a member of any denomination. He exalted the church of Christ, but not because it was his denomination of choice. He exalted Christ’s church because it was (and is) the one and only body wherein salvation could be found (Eph. 5:23). Paul’s unwillingness to proclaim salvation in a religious body other than the body of Christ did not make him arrogant, nor did it render him a sectarian. Likewise, when we affirm today that there is one body (church) and that one must be a member of that one body (church), such an affirmation does not mean that we are boastful sectarians.

Consider one more quotation from Lucado’s speech at the Promise Keepers’ rally in Washington D.C.:

Unity is not the work of men, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Almighty God. Harmony is not the result of persuasion, it is the result of a visit from heaven and that is what we are about to request. We are about to request an unparalleled, unprecedented visit from heaven that from this day on the church would have a new day and that the watching world would see a united church. Part of our

prayer must be confession, and we will have this confession. We will confess that we have not obeyed these words: "Accept one another then just as Christ has accepted you." I invite you in the next few moments as God surfaces incidents, situations, and people in your heart, to confess any time that you have not accepted a brother as Christ has accepted you (Promise Keepers' rally).

In reply, we point out that the Holy Spirit has already done His work to produce unity by producing the Word of God. What knowledge would a visit from heaven provide on how to achieve unity which we cannot find in the Scriptures? Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "speak the same thing" and to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). The Corinthians did not need some additional visit from heaven to equip them to be united. They simply needed to live in accordance with the revelation they had already received.

Likewise, we do not need a special visit from heaven to produce religious unity! All we need is for the religious world to "*speak* as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). God has already visited humanity and provided for us in the Scriptures all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Therefore, instead of requesting fanciful visits from heaven and falsely accusing those who love the truth with being boastful and sectarian, Lucado (and all other ecumenicists) would do well to investigate and obey the pattern for unity revealed within the pages of God's Holy Word.

What about accepting others as Christ has accepted us? In the first place, what are the terms upon which Christ accepts someone? Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9). Even Jesus refuses to fellowship those who will not obey His teachings. Hence, if one refuses to obey His plan of salvation, he will not be accepted by Christ. Can we accept those whom Jesus rejects?

Rubel Shelly's View of Brotherhood

About 100 members of the Woodmont Hills church in Nashville (where Rubel Shelly is the preacher) attended the October, 1997 "Stand In The Gap" Promise Keepers' rally in Washington, D.C. Their assessment of the rally, recorded in their weekly bulletin, *Lovelines*, is glowing, to say the least:

The final count tells us that a number approaching 100 of our members made it to Washington for the Stand in the Gap rally last weekend. What a sight! Men were spread across an area in front of the capitol building all the way to the Lincoln Memorial. Hundreds of thousands

were there to pledge their love for and obedience to Christ. They repented. They prayed. They promised to affirm their families and to work for racial reconciliation. They pleaded for God to tear down the walls we have erected in the body of Christ.

If the “hundreds of thousands” of men were truly there “to pledge their love for and obedience to Christ,” then they would have abandoned the “doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat. 15:9) to unite upon the “doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). That would have been true repentance. Furthermore, if one refuses to unite with someone spiritually because they refuse to obey the Word of God, that is not a wall that he has erected in the body of Christ—that is God’s own wall of separation (Mat. 7:21-23; 10:34-36; 12:46-50; Luke 12:51).

CONCLUSION

Therefore, from Matthew 12:46-50, 7:21-23, and Luke 8:21, we learn that we cannot have spiritual fellowship with someone who does not do the will of the Father which is in heaven. Furthermore, Jesus is not pleased with everyone who attempts to do a wonderful work in His name. He will not automatically welcome them to heaven on the basis of their wonderful works. The only ones who are my brethren, and the only ones going to heaven, are those who do the will of the Father Who is in heaven!

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John: Volume 2 (Chapters 8 to 21)*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975.
- Gorsuch, Goeff and Dan Schaffer. *Brothers! Calling Men Into Vital Relationships*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994.
- McCartney, Bill. “A Call To Unity,” *Seven Promises Of A Promise Keeper*. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on The Family, 1994.
- - -. “God Is Calling Us To A Higher Love.” *Go The Distance: The Making Of A Promise Keeper*. Ed. John Trent. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus On The Family, 1996.
- Promise Keepers. Washington D.C. rally transcript. 4 Oct. 1997. C-SPAN.
- Tenney, Merrill C. *John: The Gospel of Belief*. Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 1946.
- Young, Brigham. *Journal of Discourses*.

“WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?”

MATTHEW 16:26

Lester Kamp



Lester Kamp was born in Huntington, Indiana, in 1946. He is married to the former Lillian White, and they have two children: Leslie and Jason. He has a B.A. degree from David Lipscomb College (1965) and has done graduate work toward a MAT degree at Andrews University. He taught high school mathematics for five years. Lester began preaching full-time in 1973 and has preached for congregations in Indiana, Missouri, Louisiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, and Colorado. He has spoken on several lectureships and conducted Gospel meetings in 11 states. Lester has written for numerous brotherhood publications including: *The World Evangelist*, *Bulletin Digest*, *Gospel Advocate*, *The Christian Bible Teacher*, and *The Gospel Journal*. For several years he has written a weekly newspaper column and has spoken on a weekly radio program. He edited *In Word And Doctrine* for over three years and is founding editor of *Matters of THE Faith* since 1994. Lester was director of the School of the Bible and the College of the Bible in Madisonville, Kentucky, for three years and served on the faculty of the Spring Bible Institute in Spring, Texas.

Questions are often good teaching tools. Those learning ask questions that they might learn about things that they do not currently understand. When a teacher asks questions, it is to cause the students to think and to give them the opportunity to learn new things. Jesus, the master teacher, often used questions in His teaching. In Matthew 16 there are nine questions that appear in these 28 verses. In verse 24, Jesus begins to discuss what is involved in following Him. Recall that earlier in the chapter there had been that well-known discussion with His disciples regarding who Jesus is (16:13-20). Peter had made that great and good confession: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Others were saying various things about the identity of Jesus, but His disciples knew that He was deity—God’s only begotten Son (John 3:16). Peter had acknowledged this truth. His understanding had come from God (Mat. 16:17). He often was the first to speak and thereby reveal not only his thoughts but often the sentiments of the others. The time (of His ultimate crucifixion for the sins of the world)

was not right yet; so Jesus instructed the disciples not to tell others who He was.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (16:21).

This was a difficult lesson for these men to accept. Their preconceived notion of the mission of Jesus was that He would be an earthly king, establishing again the world dominance of the kingdom of Israel and exalting the nation of Israel to the height and glory of the days of David. This idea continues in modern times to be a popular belief. This was a misconception even among the Lord's disciples which Jesus dealt with repeatedly while with them. The wrong idea about the kingdom among the disciples lingered to the time of His ascension into heaven. Recall the question raised by His apostles in Acts 1:6: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

When Jesus spoke of being killed in Jerusalem at the hands of "the elders and chief priests and scribes," it was more than the disciples could accept or believe! Peter responded immediately and boldly with this rebuke: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (16:22). But, Jesus had come to die! This was part of His mission. His suffering and death had been clearly prophesied. Isaiah, for example, vividly described the *Suffering Savior*:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his

soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand (53:3-10).

The Lord again identified Peter's source of information. He was now delivering the message of the devil who was trying to tempt Jesus through the words of Peter to not obey God the Father. He sharply condemned Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Mat. 16:23). Peter was basing his advice to Jesus on the standards of men and not according to the Will of God.

Jesus now turns His attention to what was in the future for those who followed Him. Not only would the Lord suffer and die, but his disciples would also have to suffer many things. Following Jesus would cost them dearly. As surely as suffering would come to Jesus, suffering would also come to those who followed Him. Again, this is a lesson that Jesus frequently taught His disciples—it needed to be understood. Suffering would be part of discipleship. On another occasion Jesus stated it this way:

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me (John 15:20-21).

Paul would later write, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

This was also difficult for His disciples to accept. The text before us is one of Jesus' lessons on this subject. Jesus defines for these men (and for us) what is involved in discipleship. He stated here:

If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mat. 16:24-26).

Taking up the cross requires suffering. As Jesus anticipated His own death on the Roman cross at Calvary, He prepares His disciples for similar suffering. In modern times, the cross has taken upon itself anything but the horror and suffering involved in the reality of crucifixion in the first century Roman Empire. The glamorous polished gold and silver crosses do not conjure up in the mind the agony and pain of the rough-hewn, Roman cross. Shiny metal ones, embedded with glittering gems have taken away from the minds of many today the shame and

ugliness of the real cross. To appreciate what Jesus said here regarding those who follow Him, one must recognize the cruelty and inhumanity of this mechanism of torture and death. It is impossible to correctly comprehend the message of Jesus in these words without accepting the fact that suffering—often horrible suffering—is what is in store for those who follow Him. That suffering which the disciples would endure would not be easy and would sometimes bring death. Luke’s record of these words of Jesus includes *daily* (Luke 9:23). Following Christ **requires** taking up the cross **daily**! This is neither optional nor occasional, but daily.

The disciples of Christ who heard these words from the mouth of Jesus on this occasion would soon see their Master endure “the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2). They would soon see with their own eyes the pain, suffering, and sadness of the cross as they remembered these words and witnessed the horrible death of the Savior. As Paul would later write, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

Denying self is the only way that taking up the cross will be possible for the disciple. The faithful disciple no longer considers his own selfish desires to be primary; rather, he now is primarily concerned about serving his Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). The faithful servant of Christ is no longer concerned with what brings pleasure to himself, but rather what pleases his Lord. Moses in the Old Testament made the same choice: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).

Suffering in this life pales when compared to the glories enjoyed by the faithful in the life to come.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

These words were penned by the apostle Paul under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who later in this same book describes his own *light affliction*.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in

deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness....* Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (11:23-27; 12:10).

Those who do not follow Christ would certainly not describe these as “light afflictions,” but only those “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4-5).

In Matthew 16:25, Jesus spoke of the great paradox of life: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” This statement seems complex and contradictory until it is given more thought. One author has suggested our Lord’s profound meaning:

The Lord is saying that **whoever** lives only **to save his** earthly, physical **life**, his ease and comfort and acceptance by the world, will **lose** his opportunity for eternal **life**. But **whoever is willing to give up his** earthly, worldly life and to suffer and die, if necessary, for Christ’s sake, will **find** eternal life. Every person has a choice. He can “go for it” now and lose it forever; or he can forsake it now and gain it forever (MacArthur 51).

It is impossible to follow Jesus without letting go of the world. In the parable of the sower, Jesus described the thorny soil (a kind of human heart) upon which the seed (the Word of God) is sown as those who would not let go of the world. After receiving the Word, “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Mat. 13:22). The apostle John cautioned us:

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

The lesson is plain: one cannot live for this world, pursuing the things of this world, and spend eternity in heaven. It is an “either, or”

situation. We cannot be bound to this life **and** be heaven bound. Jesus emphasized, “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33).

Jesus reinforced this paradox by the use of the ultimate hyperbole in Matthew 16:26: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (It should be noted that *life* in verse 25 is translated *soul* in verse 26.¹ The meaning, however, is clear when the context is considered. *Life* in verse 25 and *soul* in verse 26 represent the inner person, one’s essence, in other words “the real you.”)

What would it be like to gain (possess) the **whole world**, to accumulate every material thing in the world and all the glory and prestige among men? Few, if any, have this as their goal—their goal is usually far less than the **whole world**. None could ever accomplish such a goal. If the accumulation of *the whole world* meant forfeiting eternal life, then there is **no real benefit**! MacArthur described such a person: “Such a person would be a walking dead man who temporarily owned everything, but who faced an eternity in hell rather than in heaven” (51). This is the problem of the “rich, young fool” who was asked at his death: “Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20). This reminds us of 1 John 2:17: “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” The things that belong to this earth will not be taken into eternity. One cannot love and serve God while pursuing the accumulation of material things (Mat. 6:24). “There are no pockets on a shroud.” “U-Hauls do not follow along behind a hearse.”

The ability to acquire all of this world’s goods will not be of any benefit in eternity. When Jesus returns for judgment, this world and all that is in it will be destroyed. Note Peter’s vivid description:

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. *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

The gain of the whole world will not be of profit then! Those material things though acquired during this life will no longer be of value then because they will no longer exist! If a person has worked all of his life

for these things, he is spiritually bankrupt—he is bankrupt of those things that really matter (spiritual things, eternal things)—the things that last.

“Or what shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?” (Mat. 16:26). The truth is that men are sometimes willing to give very little in exchange for their souls. Some men give just a few minutes (days, months, or years) of pleasure for their eternal souls. We have all known individuals who know that according to the Scriptures that they are living in adultery, but who are willing to give their eternal souls for “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).

We have all known others who in the pursuit of just a few *baubles and bangles* (e.g., boats, houses, cars, etc.) have worked so hard to obtain them that they have forsaken the Lord and His church. They have spent their time and energy in pursuit of material things that they think that they have no time for God.

Some have forfeited their souls for a promotion at work, for employment at a prestigious work place, for a college degree and its associated clout, for a few minutes of glory, for job stability (there are some preachers who would rather refrain from preaching the whole counsel of God and/or teach error than to lose their jobs and have to move), for the fleeting euphoria or titillation created by drugs like alcohol, for their children being able to participate in sports or other school related activities on Sunday or Wednesday nights, for the comfort of relaxation in their favorite *easy chair* instead of assembling with the saints, for the pleasures of the golf course or of being a spectator at a sports event instead of serving or worshiping God, or for a visit to Six Flags instead of assembling with the church. This writer has known some who have given their souls in exchange for free tickets to a professional football or basketball game.

We have known still others who, rather than to stand fast in the faith and against every false way, have failed to speak up or who have compromised the teaching of Scripture because they desired the approval of men (see Gal. 1:10). They have given their souls rather than to be embarrassed or persecuted by those who are around them. Some elders have stopped the preacher from speaking the Truth in love for fear of offending those worldly members who give large sums of money to the church and thereby have forfeited their souls and the souls of others under their care. The concern about a mortgage payment on a beautiful church building has caused some souls to be lost.

Similarly, we have known some who, because of their desire to please or appease their spouse or children, have espoused error and forfeited their souls. For example, early in Rubel Shelly's departure from the Truth he stated, "My children will not stay with the church I grew up in. They will not be a part of an irrelevance." As a result, he began his attack on the church as taught in the New Testament and attempted to change that church into something which appeals to his children. His efforts for such changes continue today. He once knew and taught the Truth about the church which belongs to Jesus and only in which there is salvation, but now he perverts the Gospel and creates through his liberal teachings and views a church which appeals to his children. He has forfeited his soul though he has become very popular and, no doubt, beloved by his children. Examples of this kind can be multiplied, but the idea here is clear. A person can give up his soul for far less than the *whole world*.

It is not accidental that the very next verse in Matthew 16 deals with the second coming of Christ. The realization of the accountability of man should deter us from forfeiting our souls for the temporal things of life. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (16:27).

How foolish it would be to give our souls in exchange for any or all of those things that are confined to this world. When Jesus comes, there will be no opportunity to alter what we have chosen to do in this life. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). If the soul is lost, there is nothing that can be given in exchange for it. There is no redemption in hell!

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicate. MacArthur, John. *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988.
Shelly, Rubel. Sermon. Missouri Street Church of Christ. West Memphis, AR: 20-21 Apr. 1990.

ENDNOTE

¹The American Standard Version reflects this in its translation of verses 25-26, "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?"

“WHO IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?”

MATTHEW 18:1

David B. Jones



David Jones is the evangelist for the church of Christ in Nesbit, Mississippi. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1986 and is also an instructor in the school. He is married to the former Kathy Louise Williams and has two children (Shelly Cates and Wayne Jones) and two grandchildren. Shelly is married to Daniel who is an instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching and works with the congregation in Nesbit, Mississippi. Wayne is married to Shana Kaye and works with the Southaven Church of Christ, Southaven, Mississippi. David has done local work in Cleveland, Mississippi, Henry, and Middleton, Tennessee.

He edits *Standing in the Gap* (a weekly publication from Nesbit) and directs the second session at Sardis Lake Christian Camp. David has preached the Gospel over the radio and television, along with making nine mission trips to Russia, and has also participated in campaigns in the states.

INTRODUCTION

Once again we esteem it a great honor to be included in the Bellview Lectureship program. We are always thankful to God for the good work which has gone forth from this place over the years. Many souls will populate heaven due to the untiring efforts of the brethren here at Bellview. Much emphasis has been placed on world evangelism and taking seriously the charge given by the Lord in Matthew 28:19-20:

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 always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

Sadly, stands against once godly brethren have had to be taken over the years which have not been popular, but which have been right, and for that example we are also grateful. The elders are to be commended for their faith and fervor as they oversee this fine congregation.

Our assignment deals with a serious and sobering question asked to the Lord. The disciples asked of Him: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom?” (Mat. 18:1). Their idea of greatness was based on a military

greatness. We must remember they were ruled by the Roman armies. Rome had achieved its world greatness based on its ability to conquer and rule with a military might. The Jews had at one time in their history been blessed by God with much power and might under the reigns of David and Solomon (1055-975 B.C.). However, because of the sins of Solomon, the kingdom was rent and divided into two parts. Both of these parts were taken into captivity because of their sins—chiefly their sin of idolatry. Under the hand of Cyrus, God allowed the Jews to begin their returns in 536 B.C. They struggled through the various world empires (Persia, Greece, and Rome) till the time of Christ. They had been promised a deliverer—a king to come and redeem them. Because so much of their world existed upon sheer power and might, they had a conception of the coming kingdom as one which would restore the Israelites to places of prominence, as once enjoyed by David and Solomon. The apostles even retained this idea past the crucifixion, the resurrection, and shortly before the ascension when they asked of the Lord: “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

Those who were *great* in such kingdoms occupied a place of power close to the king. On another occasion, James and John came to Jesus with a request:

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom (Mat. 20:20-21).

This mother had encouraged her sons to ask for the most powerful places in the kingdom—seats at the right- and left-hand side of the king. These places would have been composed of authority, prominence, and power. They desired to be elevated above the others and looked up to by everyone else.

So when they came to Jesus asking Him who would be greatest in the kingdom, they were looking for a physical, temporal greatness. However, Jesus surprised them greatly with His answer:

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 18:2-4).

Jesus called for a little child to be brought into their midst and he said that, if they wanted to be great in His kingdom, they had to become "as a little child." He did **not** say they had to *become* a little child, but that they had to become *as* a little child. The essential trait of humility was shown by Jesus as being that which would cause one to become great in His kingdom. Little children have so many traits of greatness within them. Jesus knew that (for He knows all things), and so he took this opportunity to teach His disciples a valuable lesson.

REVIEW OF THE TRAITS OF GREATNESS

First, little children **trust** those who are their parents. They depend on their parents and, thus, they trust them for everything. Little children do not worry from whence their next meal will come. They know their parents are there and will provide what they need when they need it. Jesus, likewise, taught that we should trust our Father in heaven. When He delivered the Sermon on the Mount, He taught, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6:33). In the context, He had cited several examples of how their Father cared for them: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (6:25). He went on to give specific examples of how God cared for the birds of the air and lilies of the fields and that His children were more valuable than these things. He emphasized that His children should not be overly anxious for these things, but they should seek the kingdom first and God would give them the necessities of life.

Once this writer read from the pen of the late and lamented Bill Jackson as he illustrated the idea expressed in Matthew 6:33. Brother Jackson cleverly pointed out *added* means to "throw in to boot." He used the example of trading cars and asking for "something to boot"—something thrown in to complete the transaction. Applying this idea to Matthew 6:33, God will *throw in extra*, the essential things of life, if we will just seek the kingdom first. The majority of mankind worry and concern themselves far too much with the day-to-day things of life and leave undone the more weighty matters of Christianity. God informs us, if we seek His kingdom first, He will provide our needful things of life. However, we must put forth an effort to work as Paul exhorted his readers to do: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him

labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28).

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (2 The. 3:10-12).

Little children trust their parents for the things needed to make it through life and those who will be great in the kingdom will likewise trust their Father. Little children *think* their parents own all things, but God’s children **know** God owns it all. God reveals that to us in His word: “The earth *is* the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa. 24:1).

For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof (50:10-12).

Those will be great in God’s kingdom will trust God for their life. God has well shown us He is capable of taking care of His creation; so we have no reason to doubt His ability. Only the “great” will trust *as* little children trust.

Second, little children will **forgive**, not holding grudges and hard feelings for a long time. Children will play and then get into an argument or a fuss. However, they will not stay mad long. They will forgive and go back to playing as if nothing ever happened. Their memory of the argument will last usually as long as it takes for a snack or new toy to be introduced into their life. Then they will go back to laughing and having a good time, having forgotten their differences, not to be remembered anymore.

Grownups are not usually like that. Often it is the case that grown-ups will become angry with other adults and they will harbor those hard feelings, sometimes allowing them to divide families and friendships. There are many variables which determine why adults allow this to happen. Of course, the ultimate reason why is they are guided by Satan and not the Savior. Peter wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Therefore, he devises his wicked ways and attacks our weaknesses to destroy God’s creation.

The apostle Paul cited this very fact when he wrote to the church in Ephesus. Having explained the fact that the miraculous gifts were temporary until the unity of the faith was come (4:8-16), he exhorted them to be renewed in their minds by the power of the Word and walk not in the vanity of the mind of the Gentiles (4:17-19). Then he said, "But ye have not so learned Christ" (4:20). That is, if you listened to and learned from Christ, you would not walk as other Gentiles but as Christians. He then reminded them: "If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (4:21-23). Christ through His Word had taught them to turn from their old ways and be renewed through His teachings to put off the *old man* and be renewed in the spirit—through the Holy Spirit's words which affect the spirit of man.

What would this renewing do for them and us? Paul informs:

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.... And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (4:26-27, 32).

If one listens to Christ, he will not let his anger get the best of him, and he will forgive as he ought. He will forgive as God forgave—for the sake of Christ and His work to redeem mankind. As people grow older, they must allow God's Word to affect their hearts and not let the experiences of life mold and shape their hearts into hardened, unforgiving places of hatred. The major problem is that people usually cease to practice the words of Christ, giving place to the works of the devil, which allows their hearts to be hardened, and therefore they retain those hard feelings and grudges through life, which will not allow them to be forgiving and great in the kingdom.

The Hebrews writer records what hardens the heart: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13). When we allow sins others have committed against us to stay in our hearts, and we harbor those ill feelings, we are allowing sin to harden our hearts. We also can allow sin to harden our hearts when we sin and will not repent of the sin. When we think we can overcome that without the aid of God's Word, we are deceived. We are also deceived when we think we can harbor hard feelings and it not affect our souls.

Little children teach us that we ought to let go of those feelings and forgive as God has forgiven us. Many of us as adults ought to feel ashamed when we compare this part of our lives to the lives of children. If we are going to be great, we must be willing to forgive. Jesus taught much on forgiveness, but none is more familiar than the parable of the unmerciful servant found in Matthew 18:23-35. Peter had asked the Lord how often one was to forgive; so Jesus spoke a wonderful parable to explain how we are to forgive. There was one servant who owed the king a debt he could not pay (some have estimated this debt as much as a million to ten million dollars in our money). When this servant was brought before the king, he begged for mercy, and the king granted it. Then this same servant approached one of his brethren who owed him a much smaller debt (somewhere around twenty dollars of our money). The servant who had been forgiven by the king would not forgive his brother to the point of choking him and casting him in prison until he could pay his debt. When the king was made aware of the forgiven servant's actions, this servant was brought back before the king and thrown into prison himself until his entire debt could be paid. Of course, the servant would never be able to pay this debt; so he would be in prison for his entire life. The application is very simple. God forgave us a debt (sin) which we could not pay. Jesus tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Paul points out that by one man's death grace abounded unto all men:

But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many (Rom. 5:15).

Therefore, since Jesus paid the debt no man could pay, we ought to forgive our brethren the trespasses they commit, provided they repent and ask for forgiveness.

Jesus lived the principle of forgiveness in His very life. As He was hanging from the cross, Jesus uttered these words, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). Jesus taught these principles as well:

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Mat. 6:14-15).

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee

seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Luke 17:3-4).

Our sins will not be forgiven unless we forgive others their sins against us, and if our brethren sin against us we are to go to them and point out that sin. If they repent we are to forgive them. Jesus also said it another way:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

We are to go to our brethren, personally and alone, who sin against us personally. If they will hear us, repent, and ask for forgiveness, then we have gained our brother and saved him from hell. However, the problem is that many brethren will tell everyone **except** the guilty party. This is not what the Bible says. If we are going to be great in the kingdom, we are to follow the example of little children and forgive as we ought.

Third, little children have the trait of **honesty**. They speak from pure hearts and minds without hypocrisy or deceit. When little children are present, they answer truthfully and honestly, which sometimes is embarrassing for moms and dads who too often have spoken in private what they do not want to be heard publicly. However, little children know no difference, and they speak honestly.

We are also taught in the Scriptures to be honest in our speech. Once again, the forces of the wicked one work against this teaching. Far too many times adults speak what others want to hear in certain circles hoping for financial rewards as their pay. Their motives are selfish and meant to profit the adult further down the road. Sometimes their words are lies, whether straightforward or suggestive. They are too often motivated by the sensual, physical things of life and think far too little about the eternal part of life. Then there is the motive of revenge. People will purposely lie about others just to damage or kill someone's influence and reputation. Whatever the motive, our speech is to be pure and honest if we are to be great in the kingdom.

The Scriptures teach this in precept and principle:

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying (Rom. 13:13).

That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and *that* ye may have lack of nothing (1 The. 4.12).

Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly (Heb. 13:18).

Notice we are to *walk* or live our lives honestly, especially toward those who are without (the body of Christ), and this means living with a good conscience. Our lives should be pictures of honest living, and we should avoid any situation humanly possible where we might be thought to be dishonest. In our business dealings we should be above-board with all so that we cannot be accused being dishonest or deceitful.

Not only should our business dealings be honest, but our speech is to be honest as well. Paul wrote: "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Tit. 2:8). Our speech should be such that we cannot be condemned for it, and it should make those who would speak against us have their mouths closed and feel ashamed for even thinking of trying to criticize us. Our speech is to be seasoned as well: "Let your speech *be* alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6). We need to study how we answer people, and that means that our answers ought to be honest. We ought not hide things and deceive others by what we say. If we will be great in the kingdom, then we must be honest, as are little children.

This is a review of the traits of greatness. We will now look at the results of putting these traits into action.

RESULTS OF THE TRAITS OF GREATNESS

The traits of little children are what Jesus wanted us to incorporate into our lives. When we do use these in our daily lives, what will be the results? How will these help us be great in the kingdom of Christ?

First, **trust** in the Father, for our very lives will help us be dependent upon Him. If we place our trust in Him, we will depend on Him to direct and determine who and what we do. Peter wrote: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). Trusting God makes one humble in God's sight. *Trust* means we understand that we must do what God wants and the way He

wants it. We cannot trust in God and then not listen to Him for directions. Little children trust their parents, and thus they will follow the very orders or commands given to them by those parents. Trusting God will also lead one to be thankful for what God has done and what God is capable of doing for him. Paul wrote of the Gentiles who were not thankful for God:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

Because they were not thankful, they did not depend upon God for His direction for their lives. Instead, they conducted their lives as **they** saw fit. The result of that was the fact they became vain—empty or useless—in determining what they ought to do to please God. They became fools because they quit believing in God. We are taught by God to be thankful for what He has done: “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, *and* into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, *and* bless his name” (Psa. 100:4). “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col. 3:15). We are to be thankful to God because He created us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). He sent His Son to die in our stead (John 3:16). He was willing to grant eternal life to all who believed and obeyed His Son (Heb. 5:8-9). We ought to be thankful to God because He provided salvation for all mankind in one body—the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). Trusting God will cause one to understand what all God has done and how great He is.

Trusting God will then lead to **humility** which will cause one to obey what God has said. The proud will be resisted, but the humble will be exalted:

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (Jam. 4:6).

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

Those who are humble will be those who are willing to listen to and heed what God has said. Those will be the ones who will be obedient, and those who are obedient will be those who will inherit eternal life:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Mat. 7:21).

Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14).

Only the obedient are the ones who will be allowed into heaven after this life. People can *say* they are obedient all they want to, but only those actually do the commandments will enter. In fact, Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus left an example of what it means to obey God no matter the cost:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

Jesus trusted His Father with His very life and willingly obeyed what the Father had willed. Even at the cross Jesus trusted His Father: “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46). Even in His death, Jesus was trusting and obeying His Father.

Trust breeds humility, and humility produces **obedience**. Obedience then means one acknowledges the greatness of God, and this leads one to be forgiving as he ought to be. If a person realizes how great God is and what God has done for all of mankind, then that humble obedient person will have the same care and concern for man as did God. One who loves man as did God will forgive. John wrote: “Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). Because Jesus laid down His life for us, we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for each other. Obviously, this will involve forgiving and seeking the best for all, rather than hating and harboring ill will and feelings for other people.

This trust, humility, and obedience will cause one to become a **servant**, as did the Lord. Jesus reminded His disciples that the great person in the kingdom was the one who served. We remember the fact that they had an idea that the great person was one who was served.

Instead, Jesus taught them that the one who would be great would serve others. He taught this by explicit statement and also by example. Note the Bible's record: "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mat. 20:27-28). "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (23:11). Jesus first showed them how this was done—by serving others to the point of laying down His life. He said also: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The greatest love shown was laying down His life for the world. He served others and then expected His disciples to go and lay down their lives for others. He taught them on the eve of His crucifixion (John 13) by washing their feet. When He had finished washing their feet, He said:

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (13:13-17).

Notice that He said He was their Lord and Master, but since He washed their feet as their Lord, they had no excuse for not serving others. His washing their feet served as an example of His serving them. It was customary in His day for the host of the house to provide water and wash the feet of his guests, seeing that the roads on which they walked were dirty and dusty. He illustrated to them that they were not above Him, and, if He washed their feet, they ought to go and wash the feet (serve) others. Having trust, humility, and the willingness to obey would make it possible for a person to serve others. Notice also that this serving should be from a heart which is *happy* or joyful to be serving. Little children are *happy* to serve others and Christians ought to also be *happy* as they serve, obeying and following the example of the Master Teacher.

Jesus took on the form of a servant to serve His Father and to serve mankind. Paul wrote:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in

fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phi. 2:5-8).

He took on that form because that was the will of His Father in heaven. He said He came to do His Father's will:

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work (John 4:34).

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me (5:30).

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (6:38).

His mission on earth was to fulfill the will of the Father and die for mankind. He served God and thus was His servant. He is the supreme example of what a servant is to be. He took this form when He was born of a virgin and when He willingly took our places on the cross. He expects us to "take on the form of a servant" so we can be great in His kingdom. We take on this form when we obey the Gospel and be faithful to the charge given to us by God.

CONCLUSION

When the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom, they fully expected an answer which matched their military idea of the kingdom. When Jesus brought and set a little child into their midst and said the disciples must become *as* this little child, they were shocked and amazed. Eventually they learned this lesson and served their Master by carrying the Gospel to the world in their lifetime. They served their Master by being faithful to the charge delivered, even to the point of death. According to history, all but one died a martyr's death. They truly learned what it meant to be great in His kingdom.

Today, we also must learn what constitutes true greatness. **Servitude** marks one as being great in the kingdom. Many members of the Lord's church love the preeminence as did Diotrophes (3 John), but humbling one's self and serving others marks one as great in God's eyes. Jesus was exalted because He humbled Himself before the Father (Phi. 2:9-11), and we too will be exalted in due time if we humble ourselves. "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Mat. 23:12). God will grant us a place in His eternal kingdom if we will empty ourselves of ourselves and be obedient until death. In a day when greatness is marked by selfishness, greed, and lust, it behooves the true followers of God to

continue to look to Jesus as our example of what it means to be great His kingdom:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“IS IT LAWFUL FOR A MAN TO PUT AWAY HIS WIFE FOR EVERY CAUSE?” MATTHEW 19:3

Kent Bailey



Kent Bailey was born in 1952 at Hamilton, Ohio. For the past 22 years he has served as local evangelist with congregations in Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, having completed 15 years work with the church of Christ in Lenoir City, Tennessee. Kent writes for various brotherhood publications and speaks on numerous gospel meetings and lectureships each year throughout the states.

During the past several years Kent has participated as the regular speaker on *Searching The Scriptures* and *The Bible Speaks* radio broadcasts and presently serves as one of the regular speakers on *What Does The Bible Say* TV broadcast sponsored by the Southwest Church of Christ in Jackson, Mississippi.

Kent is a graduate of Louisville Bible College (B.A.) and Tennessee Bible College (M.A.). He has received additional education from the Law Enforcement Satellite Academy of Tennessee, the FBI Law Enforcement Training School, and the National Institute of Justice, serving as a Sergeant with the Lenoir City Police Department Reserve Unit.

Kent is married to Judy (Whitehouse), and they have one daughter, Merideth.

INTRODUCTION

This is a very crucial theme: *Great New Testament Questions*. The case being that the New Testament is our pattern for authority, we need to be concerned about various questions that we find recorded therein. In light of the proclamation and defense of God's truth, the question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" is thereby noted.

THE ESSENTIALITY OF DIVINE REVELATION

Statistics regarding the growing divorce rate appear frequently in newspapers, periodicals, and government reports. In noting such statistics, both faithful Christians and even some alien sinners (those who accept the principles of Biblical Ethics) are deeply grieved over our current situation. In 1870 there was one divorce in every 33.7 marriages

contracted that year in the United States; during the 1970s, however, there was one divorce in every 3.5 marriages. As of the year 2000 almost 50 percent of first marriages for men under the age of 45 may end in divorce, and between 44 and 52 percent of women’s first marriages may end in divorce for those particular age groups. The likelihood of a divorce is lowest for men and women age 60, for whom 36 percent of men and 32 percent of women may divorce from their first marriage by the end of their lives. A similar statistical exercise was performed in 1975, using marital history data from the *Current Population Survey* (CPS). Projections based on those data implied that about one-third of married persons, who were 25 to 35 years of age in 1975, would end their first marriage in divorce.

This grouping of individuals, who in 1995 were approximately 45 to 55 years of age, had already exceeded these projections as about 40 percent of both men and women in these ages had divorced from their first marriage. Current projections now indicate that the proportion could be as high as 50 percent for individuals now in their early forties (Divorce Rates).

In consideration of the above facts, we note the importance of the Scriptures being our exclusive standard of authority in all matters. “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). The Scriptures are all-sufficient for humanity to know God’s will for us regarding divorce and remarriage:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3:17).

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

The basic problem that we face in society today is a rejection of the Scriptures as the only standard of authority. We have seen such regarding the Gospel plan of salvation and the oneness nature of the New

Testament church. We have seen such regarding the organization, worship, and work of the church. As we look at the influence that society has upon the church of the Lord both collectively and distributively, we take note of the obvious fact that many members of the church want that which society finds to be acceptable or unacceptable to be the qualifying standard or right and wrong. As society drifts further into sin, we thus find brethren who desire accommodation and compromise with the world than taking a stand for truth and right.

When we understand the mind-set behind compromise, we have no trouble at all of seeing where many either compromise biblical teaching or else teach outright false doctrine regarding that of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Zell Miller, U.S. Senator from Georgia, in his recently published book titled: *A National Party No More: The Conscience of A Conservative Democrat*, set forth clear evidence describing the values gap in our culture. Senator Miller observed:

Author James Davison Hunter, in *The Death of Character*, performed an autopsy on that wonderful value and blames death on modern psychologists, at least those with their fuzzy thinking and teaching that says it is just fine and dandy to go ahead and do whatever makes one feel good about oneself. They teach that strict moral judgments are harmful to one's mental health and causes great damage to the psyche of this country. Hunter maintains—and I concur wholeheartedly—that forcing commonality in the name of therapeutic benefits rather than in the name of a self-governing sense of community is lunacy. Therapeutic anarchy can be so messy....

The Death of Truth, edited by Dennis McCallum, is a collection of writings about postmodernism. One of the most startling premises in his book is the belief that all views, no matter how outrageous, are equally valid and that such a thing as one single truth does not really exist. Don't laugh.

This nutty idea can be found in educational texts and history, law, and health care books. This strange postmodern notion is responsible for a lot of today's political correctness nonsense.

Peggy Noonan, the former Reagan speechwriter, wrote that reading this book is "like prying up an iron lid and being dazed by the gases that emerge." To the editor's credit, he does point out that this movement should not be taken lightly and poses a real threat to our culture and the church (181-182).

While obviously we differ with Senator Miller regarding the concept of the church, he nonetheless presents the truth regarding the importance of proper values. Many within the church have permitted society

to determine the aspect of values rather than the Scriptures. We are now suffering grave consequences resulting from such.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING REGARDING MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

The New Testament clearly and precisely sets forth God’s divine standard for marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Truly God is “not *the author* of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). He has a holy hatred for that of confusion whether it be found in the world, in the church, in marriages, or in personal lives. Our Lord stated:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it* (Mat. 19:4-12).

Christ also stated:

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Mat. 5:32).

The above stated passages inform us that God created in the beginning one man for one woman for life, and thus demonstrated His divine plan. Further, our Lord quoted what God said regarding the solemnity of the marriage relation. Thus, the entire issue was not a matter of theoretical interpretation. God had set forth this fundamental truth from the beginning. The answer of Christ was a general statement that marriage was and is a once for all, lifetime relationship that is sacred by its very nature.

The Pharisees responded by asking why Moses then commanded to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? In reality Moses had not commanded divorce, but had given divine revelation permitting such. They were in a tremendous difficulty to bring their charge against Him of destroying the Old Covenant due to the fact that Christ had given reference from Genesis the original intent of God as revealed from the beginning. They could only ask how Moses could give a differing judgment.

Christ responded to this question by affirming that due to the “hardness of your hearts” Moses, through divine authority, allowed the putting away of their wives, however from the beginning it was not the case. The Greek term translated *hard* is defined as being “rough” or “coarse” rather than being “unimpressible.” Because of the progressive nature of divine revelation, the fact that humanity had not received the complete revelation from God, and the rudeness of the human mind, the teaching set forth by Moses as he was inspired of God gave only a temporary and incomplete means to deal with a very real problem (Acts 17:30-31).

According to Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, there is only one acceptable reason as authorized by God for both divorce and remarriage of the innocent partner and only the innocent partner—the one not guilty of fornication. By *fornication* we refer to all unauthorized sexual relations. The context of both Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 indicate that this particular sin under consideration is committed *within* the confines of marriage and is not discussing prenuptial immorality. In noting the New Testament pattern regarding this subject, we conclude:

1. God’s ideal pattern for marriage as revealed in the teaching of Christ is one man for one woman for life.
2. Divorce for any reason other than fornication does not terminate the marriage. Remarriage by either or both parties constitutes adultery.
3. Divorce is permitted (but not required) because of fornication authorizing the innocent party to remarry conditioned upon the fact that their second marriage is with a divinely qualified partner (Collins 338-342).

ALL INDIVIDUALS TODAY ARE AMENABLE TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are those who seek to evade the force of Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 by denying that all individuals today are amenable to New Testament teaching regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. While they agree that the Christian is amenable to such teaching; they deny that those same principles apply to the alien sinner (Harrell 131-135). According to this false doctrine, it is affirmed that individuals may divorce and remarry multiple times for any reason prior to becoming a Christian. Unless the non-Christian has broken some civil law regarding marriage, although God did not join the parties involved, God will recognize and sanctify those living in such a situation at the time of baptism.

Such a doctrine is fatally false, because it contradicts divine truth that Christ has universal authority over all individuals (Mat. 28:18; John 17:2; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Phi. 2:9-11). There is no civil law, or natural revelation that requires this of individuals. Therefore, it must logically follow that Christ has authority over all individuals.

The entire content of the New Testament is applicable to all individuals (Acts 17:30-31). The standard that will be used on the day of Judgment by which individuals will be evaluated who have lived from Pentecost onward will be the New Testament of Christ (John 12:48). If such is not the case, then how would alien sinners be condemned, because they have not obeyed the Gospel (2 The. 1:8)?

The New Testament clearly teaches that alien sinners are guilty of specific violations of moral law as revealed in the Gospel (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Some of the sins specified would violate civil law, while others would not. To be consistent with the "no amenability" view, false teachers advocating this position must admit that if civil law, so-called "Noahic Laws," or "Natural Revelation" is the standard for alien sinners today, then there would be no consistent way of determining if one were a sinner or not!

If it is the case that alien sinners are not amenable to New Testament teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage; then how does one conclude that the alien sinner is amenable to Christ on anything? The false teacher on this position has committed himself to a prison from which he cannot escape. If his position is true, then the following would logically follow:

1. No alien sinner could be saved from sin due to the fact that the conditions of the Gospel are components of the New Testament.

2. If it were the case that individuals are amenable to civil law exclusively and/or Noahic Laws or Natural revelation, then it would be possible for an individual to live a perfect life based upon these standards and be sinless without the need of the blood of Christ.

3. If alien sinners are not amenable to the New Testament, then it would follow that alien sinners do not commit sin when they use mechanical instruments in worship unto God or join a Baptist church. One does not violate “civil law,” “Noahic Laws,” or “Natural revelation” by engaging in such actions. However, one violates New Testament law.

FORGIVENESS DOES NOT SANCTIFY ADULTEROUS RELATIONSHIPS

While some false teachers do not deny the amenability of humanity to the New Testament teaching of Christ, they falsely affirm that because baptism is for the remission of sins, such sanctifies an adulterous situation at the time one is baptized. Here they have confused forgiveness with license (Woodruff 41-61).

While indeed God does remit personal sin when one is scripturally baptized, such is not correct reasoning to conclude that baptism is for the remission of future sins committed by a child of God. Neither is it the case that baptism is for the remission of known sins of which one refuses to repent. Just as baptism without faith is invalid (Mark 16:16), so also is baptism without repentance (Acts 2:38). One could argue the same way regarding prayer and the fallen child of God (Acts 8:22). If one refuses to repent of a known sin, prayer would be of to no avail.

False teachers advocating this position will argue that there are some sins such as murder that simply cannot be undone. While it is granted that such cannot be undone, such does not prove that one need not repent of such sin by determination to never commit such a sin again.

The sin of murder is not parallel to the sin of adultery and/or fornication. In the sin of murder there is a past fact of history which cannot be changed. In the sin of an adulterous relationship or the practice of fornication, there is not only the past fact of such a sin but an abiding reality of continuing in such a sinful relationship. Repentance (a change of mind) requires the determination to leave the continued practice of adultery or fornication.

Some, in ultimate desperation, attempt to twist 1 Corinthians 7:20 to teach that one may abide in any situation in life wherein one obeyed the Gospel. When affirming false doctrine, one needs to remember that that which proves too much proves nothing at all! If this position had any merit to it at all, then a homosexual could remain in homosexuality, a drunk could remain a drunk, a thief could keep that which he had stolen and remain a thief, a pagan could remain in paganism, and those in the denominations would not be required to leave those systems of religious error. First Corinthians 7:20 teaches that one may abide in their pre-conversion situation just as long as it does not involve one in sin.

THE DIVORCED FORNicator DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT OF REMARRIAGE

Matthew 19:9 considers only the action of the individual doing the putting away. When one reads the entire statement of Matthew 19:9, it is obvious that such applies exclusively to the action of the individual who is doing the putting away. It is the offended individual exclusively who is under consideration in the exception. The guilty fornicator in a divorce due to fornication does not have the authority of God for remarriage because he does not have the scriptural cause which bestows such a right.

The right of remarriage following a divorce is that of a contingent right. It is dependent upon a necessary prior cause—the putting away of a fornicator. Since the guilty fornicator cannot scripturally put away an innocent mate, it must follow that the guilty fornicator does not have the authority for remarriage. While it is granted that in a scriptural divorce neither of the former marriage partners are married, it is not granted that all non-married individuals have the right for the marriage relationship. Only those who are authorized by God may enter into such a relationship. There is no authority for one having been put away due to the sin of fornication to enter into another marriage relationship.

THE PROPER DEFINITION OF ADULTERY

Some false teachers regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage deny that adultery is a physical, or sexual act. They appeal to Scriptures where this term is used figuratively or metaphorically and falsely conclude that if one abandons his or her marriage partner that such is covenant breaking as fleshly Israel broke the Mosaic Covenant with

God. Indeed, when fleshly Israel abandoned God, such was spiritual adultery. However, to assume that covenant unfaithfulness by *walking out* of a marriage is adultery in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 is a prime example of fatal assumption.

Adultery is a very precise term, and, though there are varying shades of meaning in different literary contexts, there are certain core components within the term as it is used in conjunction with the marriage relationship. We note such in John 8 where individuals brought a particular woman that had been *taken in the very act* (John 8:4). As it relates to the marriage relationship, adultery is depicted as a particular act.

It is identified as a sexual act (Pro. 6:24-25, 29; Hos. 2:2; Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:8-9; 5:7-8). In the New Testament we see this set forth in Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage *is* honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Adultery as per the marriage bond is therefore a sexual act (Rev. 2:22).

It is pictured as not only being an isolated act (which indeed it can be), but it can also be a repeatable act (Rev. 2:21-22).

Adultery is identified as being a treacherous act (Jer. 9:2; Hos. 3:1). It is important to emphasize that adultery, though it does involve covenant treachery, is not exclusively, "unfaithfulness to a covenant." A covenant which a Jew had made with pagan idols had to be broken. In the Scriptures, adultery is used only of "covenant relationships" which are acceptable to God. When carefully noting *adultery* as it relates to scriptural marriage relationships one will properly conclude that such refers to physical sexual activity (Wilson 146-156).

DIVORCE WITHOUT SCRIPTURAL CAUSE IS SINFUL

Divorce has become so common in our society that the church of the Lord has not gone unaffected. Among our own brethren, some are now teaching that, while indeed sin is committed when those involved in unscriptural divorce remarry (they are correct regarding this), however they teach error in limiting the sin exclusively to the remarriage. The context of Matthew 19:1-9 denies such a view.

In the marriage relationship, God decreed that both individuals in the marriage cleave to one another; He desired the two to become one flesh. When one of the marriage partners puts the other away unscripturally, then one becomes two, and God's arrangement has been disregarded. In Matthew 19:4-5 our Lord said **No!**

God had joined two to become one in the marriage covenant and Christ clearly stated, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mat 19:6). Only God can join individuals in marriage, and only God can disjoin individuals from a marriage. Since fornication is the only grounds for a scriptural divorce, then God disjoins individuals from a marriage only when the sin of fornication enters the marriage bond and the innocent party chooses to exercise the right of "putting away" the partner guilty of fornication.

Marriages are at risk for various reasons:

1. The marriage vows made before God are broken.
2. A companion once loved is scorned and hated (Eph. 5:25-28).
3. Those who so engage in unscriptural divorce are doing what God hates (Mal. 2:16).
4. There is a disregard for the marriage bond (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).
5. One is putting asunder what God has joined (Mat. 19:6).
6. Unscriptural divorce will make it impossible to fulfill family obligations (1 Cor. 7:1-2; Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8-14).
7. One or both of the divorced individuals may commit adultery (Mat. 5:32; 1 Cor. 7:2) (Dickey 168-175).

CONCLUSION

The sanctity of marriage is guarded by the Scriptures; when individuals involved themselves in unscriptural doctrines and practices regarding such, they endanger their eternal souls and them that hear them.

May we study these matters carefully and with respect for God and His verbally inspired Word. May we resolve to stand firmly in God's truth.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Collins, Bill. "The Sanctity of Marriage." *Your Marriage Can Be Great*. Ed. Thomas B. Warren. Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1978.
- Dickey, Bob. "Divorce Without Scriptural Cause Is Sinful." *Is It Lawful?* Ed. Dennis G. Allan and Gary Fisher. N.p.: n.p., 1989.
- "Divorce Rates." Americans for Divorce Reform. Feb 18, 2004.
<<http://www.divorcereform.org/rates.html>>

- Harrell, Pat. *Divorce And Remarriage In The Early Church*. Austin, TX: R. B. Sweet, 1967.
- Miller, Zell. *A National Party No More: The Conscience of A Conservative Democrat*. Atlanta, GA: Stroud & Hall, 2003.
- Wilson, Mike. "The Meaning of Adultery." *Is It Lawful?* Ed. Dennis G. Allan and Gary Fisher. N.p.: n.p., 1989.
- Woodruff, James S. *The Divorce Dilemma*. Nashville, TN: Christian Family Books, 1973.

“WHY STAND YE HERE ALL THE DAY IDLE?” MATTHEW 20:6

Larry Powers



Larry Powers was born in Milan, Tennessee, in 1948. He entered the United States Air Force in 1966 and retired after twenty years in 1986. He is a 1988 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching, graduated from the third year program at Memphis School of Preaching in 1991, and is a 1991 graduate of Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Southern Christian University).

Larry began preaching in 1975 while a member of the Air Force while stationed in Klamath, California. He continued to preach part time until he retired from the Air Force and entered Memphis School of Preaching.

He has done local work with the Elm Grove Church of Christ in Burlison, Tennessee, Gardner Church of Christ in Martin, Tennessee, and is presently working with the Sharon Church of Christ in Sharon, Tennessee. He has done campaign work in Australia; New Zealand; Zambia, Africa; and the Marshall Islands. He has been teaching with the Online Academy of Biblical Studies since 2002.

Larry is married to the former Teresa Ann Hatchett and they have two children and two grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

“And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?” (Mat. 20:6). Someone has said, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” This statement is not found in the Bible, but a similar question was asked, “Why stand ye here all the day idle?” (20:6). Often questions are a way to get someone’s attention. Questions are a very effective way of teaching. Jesus often asked questions of those who were attempting to trap Him in His words. Jesus often answered questions with a question.

CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

What is the context of the question: “Why stand ye here all the day idle” (20:6)? Jesus puts forth the parable of the Laborers (20:1-16). A parable is a comparison between a familiar fact and a spiritual truth. This parable explains the statement made by Jesus in the preceding verses (19:28-30). This parable is in response to a question asked by

Peter, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (19:27).

The parable consists of a householder, a vineyard, a marketplace, and laborers. The householder went out early in the morning into the marketplace to hire laborers to work in his vineyard and agreed with the laborers concerning payment. He went out again the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, and finally the eleventh hour. The household did not make an agreement with these laborers concerning payment for work they would accomplish. Each time the householder went out he found some standing idle. The householder asked the question concerning being idle all day to those he found the eleventh hour. At the end of the day each worker was paid starting with the last hired. Each worker received the same amount. Those that had worked all day received the payment for which they had agreed at the beginning of the day, but they were not pleased with the fact that all were paid the same wage. The householder answers the complaint concerning payment for work accomplished. It was not wrong for the householder to give payment as it pleased him. The householder represents Christ, the vineyard represents the church, and the laborers represent the workers. The question the householder asked the ones that had been standing idle all day is an important question for today. Why are so many today standing all day idle?

CONSIDERING THE WORDS OF THE QUESTION

Words have meanings. If one is to comprehend the meaning of a passage of Scripture, he must understand the meaning of the words and how they are used in their context. To help understand the question Jesus asked, one needs to look at the words He used in the context in which He used them.

What does *why* mean? Webster’s dictionary gives several different meanings for this little word. Some of those definitions include, “for what cause, reason, or purpose...used to express mild surprise, hesitation, approval, disapproval, or impatience.” The important question is, how is the word defined in the Bible, and what is the context of the word? *Why* is found at least 238 times in the Bible, 102 of those are found in the New Testament. The word translated “why” (τίς) in Matthew 20:6 is found 538 times in the New Testament (Smith 346). This word is translated “what” 260 times, “who” 102 times, “why” 67 times, “whom” 25 times, “which” 17 times, “whose” 9 times,

"whether" 8 times, "whereunto" 6 times, etc. (Smith 346). Was the householder desiring to know the reason these men had been standing all day idle, or was he surprised that they had not been working? Was this his way of mildly rebuking those who were standing idle?

What does *stand ye* mean? This phrase is found only 4 times in the Bible, 2 times in the Old Testament (2 Chr. 20:17; Jer. 6:16) and 2 times in the New Testament (Mat. 20:6; Acts 1:11). The word which is translated "stand ye" (ἵστημι) means

to cause or make to stand; to place, put, set...to bid to stand by, set up (Acts 1:23; 6:13)...to make firm, fix, establish...to cause a person or thing to keep his or its place...to set or place in a balance, to weigh...to stand by, stand near (indicating the purpose or act or condition of the one standing) (Mat. 20:6; Luke 23:10; Acts 1:11)...to stand, continue safe and sound, stand unharmed (Acts 26:22)...to stand ready or prepared (Eph. 6:14)...to be of a steadfast mind (Thayer 307).

This word is translated "stand" 115 times, "set" 11 times, "establish" 5 times, "stand still" 4 times, "stand by" 3 times, etc. (Smith 182). In this context the householder was asking why these men were standing near by and not already working.

What does *all* mean? "All" (ὅλος) is found 112 times in the New Testament (Smith 246). It is translated "all" 65 times, "whole" 43 times, "every whit" 2 times (John 7:23; 13:10), "altogether" 1 time (John 9:34), and "throughout" 1 time (John 19:23). The men to whom the householder directed the question had not been working from the first hour of the day (6:00 A.M.) until the eleventh hour of the day (5:00 P.M.).

What does *day* mean? *Day* (ἡμέρα) in the New Testament has different meanings depending upon the context of the word. It is translated "day" 355 times, "daily" 15 times, "time" 3 times, etc. (Smith 167). In this context, *day* would mean the natural work day.

What does *idle* mean? The word translated "idle" (ἄργος) is found 8 times in the New Testament (Smith 40). It is translated "idle" 6 times (Mat. 12:36; 20:3, 6; 1 Tim. 5:13), "slow" 1 time (Tit. 1:12), and "barren" 1 time (2 Pet. 1:8). This word means

inactive, idle...free from labor, at leisure (Mat. 20:6; 1 Tim. 5:13)...lazy shunning the labor which one ought to perform...idle gluttons (Tit. 1:12)...of things from which no profit is derived, although they can and ought to be productive, unprofitable (Thayer 72).

What does *labourers* mean? The word translated “labourers” (ἐργάτης) is found 16 times in the New Testament (Smith 149). It is translated “labourer” 10 times (Mat. 9:37-38; 20:1-2, 8; Luke 10:2, 7; 1 Tim. 5:18; Jam. 5:4), “workman” 3 times (Mat. 10:10; Acts 19:25; 2 Tim. 2:15), and “worker” 3 times (Luke 13:27; 2 Cor. 11:13; Phi. 3:2) (Smith 149). This word usually means “one who works for hire” (Thayer 248).

CONTEMPLATING THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

What answer did the men give who had been idle for eleven of the twelve working hours of the day? These men said, “Because no man hath hired us” (Mat. 20:7). Was their answer acceptable to the householder? If these men had been prepared to work the first hour of the day, why were they still standing idle at the eleventh hour? Were these men prepared to work each time the householder went to hire laborers or were they merely giving an excuse for not working? The householder had been to the marketplace four times previously, and these men were not called to work or were not available. Their answer would imply that they had been ready to work, but had not been called to work for the day. After being hired with only one hour left in the day, they worked and were rewarded for their labor at the end of the day. This would seem to indicate that they had been ready to work but did not have the opportunity. Were there still others who were waiting to work? If there were others that were not hired to work, what would happen to them?

THE PLACE OF WORK MUST BE CORRECT

In the parable the workers went and worked in the correct vineyard. How does that apply today? What is the vineyard in which one is to work? Does it make a difference where one works? The vineyard represents the church for which Jesus died. Instead of standing idle all day, one must be working in the Lord’s church.

What is the church? *Church* in the original language is (ἐκκλησία) *ekklesia*. This word is a combination of two words to make one distinct idea. The word means to call out, or “that which is called out.” This originally was a common term for a congregation of God’s people. The called out people then were the *ekklesia*—the church. The calling power and the thing out of which one is called are not inherent within the word. These facts must be learned from the context. *Ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία) is translated church 112 times and assembly 3 times (Smith

116). This word is used in the New Testament for the first time by our Lord (Mat. 16:18) and the last time by our Lord (Rev. 22:16).

Since the church is composed of those who are called out, what is the calling power? Jesus is the calling power (Mat. 16:18). Christ has the authority to call men to follow Him (28:18-20). He has the authority by virtue of:

- (1) His being God's Son (Mat. 16:16; John 3:16; Rom. 1:4)
- (2) Being the Savior (Mat. 1:21; Luke 2:11; Tit. 1:4)
- (3) The fact that He is the head of the church, the builder, and foundation (Isa. 28:16; Mat. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; Col. 1:18).
- (4) By virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:22-36).

However the question to ask is: "How does Jesus call today?" Jesus uses the Gospel as His instrument for calling (Rom. 1:16-17). Today men are called unto salvation only by the Gospel of Christ (2 The. 2:13-14). Those who heed the call are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:41, 47). The men that were called by the householder the first hour answered the call to work in the householder's vineyard, as did those who were called the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours. These men were called from the marketplace to the vineyard.

Since the church is the called out, from what is one called? One is called out of sin (Mat. 9:13) and thus out of the snare of the devil (2 Tim. 2:26). One is called from his trespasses (Eph. 2:1, 5), from the old things of the world (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:12; 4:18), and of darkness (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:13-14).

Since the church is the called out, into what is one called?

- (1) Into salvation (Acts 2:47; 2 The. 2:13-14).
- (2) Into Christ.
- (3) Into the church.

Salvation is in Christ (Eph. 5:23; 2 Tim. 2:10). One cannot be in Christ without being in His church. When one is baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), he is also baptized into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13). The body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Therefore, to be in Christ is to be in His body: His church. There is no such thing as one being saved and later becoming a member of the Lord's church. Therefore those who say that one can be saved out of the church just do not know what the church is.

- (4) Into sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2).

To be sanctified is simply to be set apart (Exo. 13:2-12). This takes place when one obeys the Gospel of Christ (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Heb. 2:11; 13:12).

- (5) Into fellowship with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and saints (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7).
- (6) Into life (John 5:24; Eph. 2:1).
- (7) Into all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).
- (8) Into the light (Col. 1:13-14; 1 John 1:7-10).

Church is used in the universal sense. The New Testament church is composed of all the saved throughout the whole world. When Jesus spoke of building His church (Mat. 16:18), He was speaking of the church in the universal sense. It was to this church to which the three thousand were added on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41, 47). Relative to the church universal, there is no functioning government on earth (Zec. 6:13).

Church is used in the local sense in the Scriptures. The New Testament speaks of the church in the local setting such as the church at Antioch, the church at Ephesus, or the church at Corinth. Christians in a given geographical area work together as a local congregation. There is no sort of ecclesiastical tie that organically binds all local congregations into a highly centralized organization. Therefore, each local congregation is autonomous. Therefore, the church is not a denomination. The church is not a material house or building (Acts 17:24), but a spiritual house (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

The church of Christ is the body of Christ. Here is the organization of the church. Here one sees its unity and fellowship. Jesus is the head of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The head is the seat of government. There are many members of the body, each member is important and each has his particular function (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:16). The body and head are inseparable. Injury of one member of the physical body is felt by others and the head (1 Cor. 12:24-27).

The church of Christ is the vineyard of the Lord. Here one sees its work. Labor is necessary to salvation (Acts 2:40; Phi. 2:12-13). Where one works is important (Mat. 21:28-30). Laborers were hired into the vineyard (20:1-16). The householder went out early in the morning. This implies the importance of the work. There is nothing as important as the Lord's work (6:33). The householder went out to hire laborers. He did not try to scare them into his vineyard; a scared man will make

a really poor workman. He did not try to force them into his vineyard, nor did He try to get people into the kingdom by coercion. He went out to hire laborers, he did not want loafers or shirkers; there is no place in the kingdom of God for a lazy person. The householder went out to hire laborers into his vineyard. Therefore, it makes a difference where the work is done.

What is the relationship of the church of Christ to Christ? The church of Christ is the bride of Christ. Here one sees the purity of the church. When one is married, he goes through the process of being married. Christ has but one bride, and He condemned polygamy (Mat. 19:1-12). Did He preach one thing and practice another? Does He have a plurality of wives? **No!** As the bride forsakes all others and keeps herself unto her husband, unto him alone, so should the church keep herself unto Christ and unto him alone. The church should keep herself ever separate from the world (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17) and must not become a part of the world or flirt with the world (Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). Here in this metaphor one especially sees portrayed the purity of the church (Eph. 5:27). The very nature and character of the church demands its purity. Every person that obeys the Gospel of Christ is made pure by the blood of the Lamb (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5). The church should be kept pure because the salvation of the lost demands it (Mat. 5:13-16). Influence is something that all have (Rom. 14:7). It is either good or bad (Mat. 12:30). The church should be kept pure because of its oneness with Christ. Truly, the church is united with Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 5:30). It would be ridiculous to take the members of Christ and dedicate them to sinful purposes (1 Cor. 6:15-16). Then the church should be kept pure because its destiny (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:27).

The church of Christ is the household of God. Here one sees the family relationship of Christ and the church. This is His household (Eph. 2:19)—His house (1 Tim. 3:15). Christ is over it (Heb. 3:6), and God is the Father (Mat. 6:9; 23:9; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:14; 4:6; Heb. 12:9). All Christians are God's children (Rom. 8:14-16; Gal. 3:26-29; 4:6-7).

The church of Christ is incomparably greater than all human institutions, because first God is the one Who planned and purposed the church from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:10-11; 2 Tim. 1:9). Second the church is great because Christ is its builder. Jesus promised to build His church (Mat. 16:13-19). Third the church is great

because Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Fourth, it is greater than all human institutions because Christ is its Savior (Eph. 5:23).

Much can be understood about the church by a study of the terms by which it is called. The church for which Jesus died has been called by different terms according to the standpoint from which it is viewed and the various relationships under which it is contemplated. It is called:

kingdom of Heaven (Mat. 3:2; 4:17; 13:24, 31, 33, 38, 44-45)

kingdom of God (Mat. 6:33; Mark 1:14-15; 4:11, 26, 30; 10:14-15)

kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13)

kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5)

kingdom of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9)

church of God (1 Cor. 11:22; 15:9; 1 Tim. 3:15)

the church (Acts 2:47; 5:11; Eph. 1:22)

churches of God (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 The. 2:14; 2 The. 1:4)

churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16)

the churches of Asia (1 Cor. 16:19)

the churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1)

the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2)

the churches (Acts 15:41; 16:5; 1 Cor. 7:17; 14:34; 2 Cor. 8:18-19)

house of God (1 Tim. 3:15)

body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 24)

the army of the Lord (Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Tim. 6:12)

the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:5)

the vineyard of the Lord (Mat. 21:28-31; 20:1-16)

The householder went out to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. Christians are to work in the vineyard of the Lord, which is the church.

THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED MUST BE CORRECT

Instead of standing idle, one should be working in the church. The Bible mentions and describes several kinds of works. There are individual works and there are works of the church. What kind of work should one be doing? What kind of work should be avoided?

The Bible describes works one must avoid: works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), works of darkness (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11), works of iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23), hypocritical religious works (Mat. 6:5), dead works (Heb. 6:1; 9:14), works of the Law of Moses (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:10-11), works of human merit or goodness (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:9).

The Bible describes works that one must accomplish: works of God (John 6:28-29), works of righteousness (Acts 10:34-35; Psa. 119:172), works of obedience (John 14:15; Phi. 2:12; 1 John 5:3), and good works (2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10; Tit. 2:7; 3:1; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 10:24).

Instead of standing all the day idle, one must be involved in the work of the church. The work of the church is to prepare people for heaven, and it involves evangelism (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). *Evangelism* is not found in the Bible, but *evangelist* is found three times (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5). An evangelist was one who preaches "the gospel of peace" (Rom. 10:15). The word εὐαγγελίζω, which is translated "to preach the gospel," is found fifty-five times in the New Testament (Smith 156). This word means

to evangelize, proclaim the good news, almost always concerning the Son of God as declared in the Gospel (exceptions: Luke 1:19; 1 The. 3:6; Gal. 1:8). Used in the active voice to declare, proclaim (Rev. 10:7; 14:6); in the passive voice of matters to be proclaimed as glad tidings (Luke 16:16; Gal. 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:25), of persons as to whom the proclamation is made (Mat. 11:5; Lk. 7:22; Heb. 4:2,6; 1 Pet. 4:6); in the middle voice especially of the message of salvation with personal objective either of the person preached (Acts 5:42; 11:20; Gal. 1:16), or with a preposition of the persons evangelized (Acts 8:4, 12; 13:32; 15:35; 1 Cor. 15:1; II Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:23; Eph. 2:17; 3:8) (Zodhiates 1692).

This word is translated "preach," "preaching," "preached," or "preach-eth" twenty-three times (Luke 3:18; 4:43; 16:16; Acts 5:42; 8:4, 12, 35, 40; 10:36; 11:20; 14:15; 15:35; 17:18; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:8b, 16, 23; Eph. 2:17; 3:8; Heb. 4:6; Rev. 14:6), "preach the gospel" twenty-two times (Mat. 11:5; Luke 4:18; 7:22; 9:6; 20:1; Acts 8:25; 14:21; 16:10; Rom. 1:15; 10:15a; 15:20; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:16, 16, 18; 1 Cor. 10:16; Gal. 1:8-9; 4:13; Heb. 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:12; 4:6), "bring good tidings" two times (Luke 2:10; 1 The. 3:6), "shew glad tidings" two times (Luke 1:19; 8:1), "bring glad tidings" (Rom. 10:15b), "declare" (Rev. 10:7), "declare glad tidings" (Acts 13:32), "preached the gospel" (Acts 14:7), "be preached" (Gal. 1:11), "by the gospel is preached" (1 Pet. 1:25). The only way the church can evangelize the world is to preach and teach the Gospel of Christ.

The work of the church in preparing people for heaven involves edification (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:12). The word οἰκοδομή which is

translated “edification” is found eighteen times in the New Testament (Smith 244). This word means

to build, literally the act of building, building as a process and, hence also that which is built, the building. N.T. meanings: a building, edifice (Mat. 24:1; Mark 13:1-2, cf. 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:21); edification spiritual profit or advancement (Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3,5; 2 Cor. 13:10) (Zodhiates 1714).

Thayer gives one of the meanings of this word as “the act of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness” (440). It is translated “edification” four times (Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10), “edifying” seven times (1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 26; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 4:12, 16, 29), “building” six times (Mat. 24:1; Mark 13:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:21), “wherewith” (one) may edify (Rom. 14:19).

Another word, οἰκοδομέω, which is translated “edify” is found thirty-nine times in the New Testament (Smith, 244). This word means “To build a house, tower, town, etc. (Mat. 7:24,26); to build in a spiritual sense, as the Church (Mat. 16:18); to profit spiritually, to edify (1 Cor. 8:1; 14:4, 17)” (Zodhiates 1714). It is translated “edify” seven times (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 8:1; 10:23; 14:4, 17; 1 The. 5:11), “build” twenty-four times, “builder” five times, “build up” (1 Pet. 2:5), “in building” (John 2:20) and “emboldened” (1 Cor. 8:10) (Smith 244).

Another word, οἰκοδομία, which is translated “edifying” is found only one time in the New Testament (1 Tim. 1:4) and means the “act of building...the increase which God desires in faith” (Thayer 440). Edification is an essential work of the church. Christian growth is a theme that runs throughout the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Christians are warned to be sober, steadfast, and strong (Eph. 6:10; 1 Pet. 5:8-9). Paul said, “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26). Edification begins with education and, therefore, study is required (2 Tim. 2:15).

The work of the church in preparing people for heaven involves benevolence. (1 Tim. 5:16; Acts 6:1-6; Gal. 2:10). The word, εὐνοία, which is translated “benevolence” is found only two times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 7:3—benevolence and Eph. 6:7—good will) (Smith 158). This word means “favor, benevolence, good will, kindness” (Thayer 260). Paul said that we should remember the poor (Gal. 2:10). The word, μνημονεύω, which is translated “remember,” means “to be mindful of, to remember, to call to mind...to think of and feel for a

person or thing" (Thayer 416). It is translated "remember" nineteen times (Mat. 16:9; Mark 8:18; Luke 17:32; John 15:20; 16:4, 21; Acts 20:31, 35; Gal. 2:10; Eph. 2:11; Col. 4:18; 1 The. 1:3; 2:9; 2 The. 2:5; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 13:7; Rev. 2:5; 3:3; 18:5), "been mindful" (Heb. 11:15) and "made mention" (Heb. 11:22) (Smith 235).

Paul told Timothy that widows should receive relief or be relieved (1 Tim. 5:16). The word, ἐπαρκέω, which is translated "relieve" means "to aid, give assistance, relieve...to give aid from one's own resources" (Thayer 229). It is translated "relieve" three times (1 Tim. 5:10, 16) (Smith 137). James writes that Christians are to visit the fatherless and widows (Jam. 1:27). The word, ἐπισκέπτομαι, which is translated "visit" means

to look at something, examine closely, inspect, observe, to look upon with mercy, favor, or regard...to look after, take care of or nursing the sick (Mat. 25:36,43; Jam. 1:27); to look accurately or diligently (Acts 6:3) (Thayer 242).

This word is translated "visited" or "visit" ten times (Mat. 25:36, 43; Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 7:23; 15:14, 36; Heb. 2:6; Jam. 1:27) and "look ye out" one time (Acts 6:3) (Smith 145).

How must the work of the church be accomplished? How is the church to carry out the work of evangelism? How is the church to carry out the work of edification? How is the church to carry out the work of benevolence?

The local church is organized for evangelism being composed of Christians in a local area meeting and working together according to the authority of Christ. The Gospel can be spread throughout the whole world by use of radio, television, internet, or by sending preachers into the world. This work of preaching the Gospel is the responsibility of every congregation. The church at Antioch made it possible for Paul and Barnabas to go and preach the Gospel to other areas (Acts 11:19-26). Local churches regularly supported Paul while he was preaching (2 Cor. 11:8; Phi. 4:15-16). A local congregation can send financial support to another congregation for the work of evangelism. What about a missionary society? A missionary society was developed many years ago (1849) to take over the missionary efforts for congregations. This was and is an unscriptural organization. The missionary society was larger than the local congregation and smaller than the universal church. Even though the missionary society was composed of only members of the church that did not make it scriptural. The missionary

society exists for the purpose of doing the work which God gave the church to do. There is another organization of men attempting to do the work of the church known as “African Christian Schools Foundation,” located in Nashville, Tennessee. This foundation is composed of a board of directors which was founded in 1959. What does this organization attempt to do? The African Christian Schools Bulletin, Spring, 2001 states:

As a result of ACSF’s self-study, it was determined that the programs and interests of the organization have grown to the extent that certain aspects of the work need more attention. The CEO will focus on administrative and fund raising tasks in the U.S. while President Huffard will devote more time to recruitment of missionaries and oversight of the expanding programs in Africa.

God is not glorified in the organizations of men. When a congregation turns over the work of evangelism to a missionary society, it shirks the work which God required of them. The local church, congregation, has the machinery and the organization necessary to perform all of the duties involved in the field of evangelism.

How is the church to carry out the work of edification? The local church is organized for edification, and will be edified by worshiping together (Heb. 10:24-25), by studying together (2 Tim. 2:15), and by practicing discipline. Sometimes it is necessary to “root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down” so one can build and plant (Jer. 1:10). The apostle Paul warned that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). The damaging influence of sin must be purged out of the local congregation (1 Cor. 5:7). One must remember that church discipline is an act of love, carried out for the purpose of saving the sinner’s soul and the purification of the church. When all avenues have been exhausted, the sinner must be put away (Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 5:1-7; Tit. 3:10; 2 The. 3:14-15).

The church is not responsible for physical activities such as basketball, softball, fly fishing, etc. It is not the church’s responsibility to build gyms and family life centers and claim it is being done in the name of edifying one another or evangelizing others.

How is the church to carry out the work of benevolence? The local church is organized to carry out the work of benevolence. The local church may develop a method of helping the poor, widows, fatherless, etc. The method is decided by the elders of the local congregation. What about doing the work of benevolence through a benevolent

society? Attempting to do the work of the church through a society is unscriptural—therefore a sin. The benevolent society is unscriptural on the same grounds as the missionary society. There is simply no authority for them.

Therefore, instead of standing idle, every member of the church should be working and be involved in the work of the church.

CONSIDERING THE REASONS NOT TO STAND IDLE

The householder agreed with the ones that were first hired for a certain wage. Those that were hired the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours agreed to work for whatever was right. What about today: are there reasons to work?

One reason not to stand idle is so one will not be a discouragement to those who are working. When the children of Israel were ready to enter the promised land, some desired to stay on the east side of Jordan (Num. 32:1-5). These were asked: “Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?” (32:6). These were a discouragement to the others (32:7).

Another reason not to stand idle is shame will come to those who are idle. The wise man Solomon wrote, “He that sleepeth in harvest *is* a son that causeth shame” (Pro. 10:5). Jesus said, “The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). He also said, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35). This means that, if Christians are standing idle today and they are not involved in the harvest, therefore, they are bringing shame to themselves.

Another reason to not stand all day idle is that the ones who are standing idle are not wise and are as the ones who are asleep. Solomon wrote:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, *and* gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? (Pro. 6:6-9).

The Bible refers to those who are standing idle as being foolish (Ecc. 4:5), thus the wise will not stand idle. Paul said, “Awake thou that sleepest” (Eph. 5:14).

Another reason not to stand idle is that works are required if one is going to be pleasing to God. Works are required because salvation depends upon the correct kind of work (John 6:28-29). If one is going to obey the Gospel of Christ, he is required to do something. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit have provided the scheme of redemption. God provided the plan (Eph. 3:10-11). Christ came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He shed His blood to make possible the plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit delivered the words whereby one would know how to take advantage of that plan. Now man must do something. Therefore, salvation is conditional upon obedience to the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 6:16-18; Heb. 5:8-9). Works are required to demonstrate faith (Jam. 2:14-26). James describes by inspiration what true faith is (Jam. 2:14-17) and gives examples of faith (2:21-26). Works are required if one is to follow the example of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21; John 9:3-4; 10:25, 37-38; 17:4). Works are required if one desires to bring glory to the Father (Mat. 5:16) and if one desires to be wise (Jam. 3:13-18). Works are required because all will be judged by works (Ecc. 12:13-14; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 6:10; Rev. 14:13; 20:12-13). If you wish to be commended by the Lord, you must work.

COMMENDATION FOR WORKERS

The householder rewarded the workers for their labor. Those that answered the call to work, whether it was the first hour of the day or the eleventh hour, received what was right. How does this apply today? Jesus said, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Mat. 16:27). The workers in the Lord's kingdom have been promised a great reward. If a Christian works the works of God, then he is laying up for himself treasure in heaven. Jesus said:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (6:19-21).

Paul said:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day:

and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing
(2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Jesus said that one day a great separation will take place (Mat. 25:31-46). Those who have been faithful in their service to the Lord will hear from the Lord: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34). He continues to explain why they will hear these wonderful words (25:35-40). The faithful child of God, the children of God who are not idle, can look forward to having a home in heaven one day. Heaven will surely be worth it all.

CONDEMNATION FOR THE IDLE

What will happen to all those who stand all day idle and never answer the call to work in the Lord's vineyard? According to the parable put forth by Jesus, the householder rewarded only those who answered the call to work (20:8-16). All of those that were still in the marketplace that did not work in the vineyard received no reward.

What will happen to all of those who never hear the Gospel of Christ? What will happen to all of those who hear the Gospel call but will not answer the call? Paul declares that even those who have never heard of God will be punished (2 The. 1:7-9). Why would God punish those who never had the opportunity to answer the call to work? The punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). All of those in the world who mature to an accountable age will sin (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, all of those who have sinned will be punished for that sin. Paul also declares that all who do not obey the Gospel will be punished (2 The. 1:7-9). All of those who are of an accountable age, who have heard but rejected the call to obey and work, will be punished. Jesus declares that one day a great separation will take place (Mat. 25:31-46). Those who have not been working will hear the words of the Lord: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mat. 25:41). Jesus explains to them why they are hearing these words of destruction (25:41-45). Here are those who have continued to stand all the day idle. These will go away into everlasting punishment (25:46).

CONCLUSION

There are those today who are standing idle. The Gospel continues to call for people to obey the Gospel of Christ and become workers in the Lord's vineyard. Only those who answer the Gospel call will be

rewarded one day. Only those who continue to work in the vineyard of the Lord will be rewarded by receiving a home in heaven.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Smith, J. B. *Greek-English Concordance To the New Testament*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1955.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977.
- “Why.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. 10th ed. 1996.
- Zodhiates, Spiro. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*. Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible, 1984.

“BY WHAT AUTHORITY DOEST THOU THESE THINGS?”

MATTHEW 21:23

David P. Brown



David Brown was born in 1946 in Camden, Arkansas. He is married to the former Joann Anglin of Jackson, Tennessee. They have four children: Timothy, Carrie, Rebekah, and Joanna, and four grandchildren.

He holds the B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from Northeastern Oklahoma State University and has completed course work toward the Ed.D. at Oklahoma State University.

David has been preaching for thirty-three years and is active in Gospel meeting work and lectureships in and out of the United States. He has written for several religious journals, and for seven years served as Associate Editor for the *Christian Worker*

and presently serves as editor for *Contending For The Faith*.

He has served as Assistant Director of Turley Children's Home in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies in Austin, Texas. He presently preaches for the Spring Church of Christ in Houston, Texas.

INTRODUCTION

It was while Jesus was teaching in the temple that the chief priests and the elders posed the question that serves as the title of this chapter. To this question they attached another: “And who gave thee this authority?” In His wisdom Jesus chose to expose the insincerity, dishonesty, and hypocrisy of those who put the questions to Him, but not directly answer their question.

Knowing that it is the case that those who ask questions are implicitly acknowledging the right of others to ask them questions, Jesus said, “I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things” (Mat. 21:24). The question he asked them was: “The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?” (21:25). Their dishonesty became apparent in the reasoning they did with each other in the effort to come up with an answer. They reasoned, “If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet” (21:25-26). Thus,

they told Jesus they could not tell (21:27). Of course their answer was a lie, because they did possess the ability and evidence to know that John's baptism was from heaven. However, they were not approaching the question on the basis of determining the truth. They were looking for an answer that would get them out of the dilemma in which their dishonesty had placed them, and they did not mind lying in their attempt to do it. Jesus, therefore, refused to answer their questions.

It must be understood that regularly throughout His earthly ministry Jesus did those things that evidenced the origin of His authority. Thus, Jesus had previously answered the questions put to Him by the chief priests and elders, and throughout the rest of His earthly ministry He would continue to do so. For example, Nicodemus acknowledged that the miracles Jesus worked proved He was a "teacher come from God" (John 3:2). If Nicodemus could understand these things and from them draw the correct conclusion, so could the chief priests and elders.

JESUS INHERITED THE RIGHT TO RECEIVE ALL AUTHORITY

Jesus inherited the right to receive the authority given Him by His Father. This is the case because: (1) He is the creator of all that is creatable and has the authority over His creation (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). (2) He is God's heir. Hence, He has authority over that which has been given Him (Psa. 2:8; Heb. 1:2). (3) He is our Redeemer. Therefore, He has authority over those who have been purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

JESUS' RIGHT TO RECEIVE ALL AUTHORITY WAS RECOGNIZED

The angels of God considered Jesus worthy to receive authority. They worshiped Him when He came into the world and they now worship Him on His throne (Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:11-12).

Not only did the angels recognize Jesus' right to His authority, but the demons did too. They recognized and acknowledged that Jesus had authority to destroy them (Mark 1:23-24). Also, when He rebuked them, they obeyed Him (1:25-26).

Furthermore, those Jesus redeemed are pictured by the apostle John as being before the throne of Christ giving praise to God and the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10). Also, John praised Christ for having authority over the civil rulers of the world (Rev. 1:5; Also see 1 Tim. 6:14-15).

Thus, Paul wrote, "And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). By this Paul meant that because God had placed Christ over all things, it was only right, in view of His marvelous redemptive work, that He also be made head of His church (Col. 1:18). Our duty is to love, have faith in, honor and completely submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior—the only Begotten Son of the living God (Heb. 5:8-9).

IMPORTANT, RELEVANT, AND TIMELY QUESTIONS

Having commented on the context of the questions serving as the title of our chapter, we do not want to think that they are not important. For regardless of the wrong attitude of those who posed them, the questions are timely, appropriate, and relevant in all seasons. Furthermore, since we are to have authority from Christ for what we believe and practice (Col. 3:17; John 12:48), we should not be upset with those who ask us what we believe and the authority behind our beliefs. For all who ask such questions are not asking from the wicked motives that moved the chief priests and elders to put their questions to Jesus.

Regardless of the good or bad motives behind questions that are put to Christians, Peter admonished, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Such situations may provide opportunities to teach the truth. As a part of our faithfulness to Christ, we are expected not only to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 The. 5:21), but to defend what we believe and why we believe them. That being the case, Christians should be happy to respond to such questions regardless of the kind of motives that caused them to be asked of us.

The apostle Peter plainly tells us why we should be very careful as to whom we listen and what they teach. He wrote:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

Recognizing the reality of what Peter said, the inspired apostle John admonished: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into

the world” (1 John 4:1). How can one be faithful to Christ and ignore these warnings and admonitions?

Therefore, let us enter into this study of “By what authority doest thou these things?” with the determination to have the proper authority for our belief and actions. In doing so, we will be more secure in our own beliefs and better prepared to teach others.

FROM HEAVEN OR FROM MEN

One important thing Jesus did in asking the Jews about the source of John the Baptist’s authority to baptize was to clarify and emphasize that all religions have their origin either in heaven or in men. Thus, every religion that ever existed, does exist, or will exist finds its authority to exist from God or from man. Of course, any right-minded person should desire above all else to be a part of **only** what God has authorized. Toward that end we are pursuing this study.

Original source authority—all of it—inhered in the First Person of the Godhead—the Father (Psa. 95:5). It was the Father who gave to Christ all authority in heaven and on earth to deal with the problem of sin (Mat. 28:18). Therefore, for a religion to be from or authorized by God, it must come from Jesus Christ. During His earthly ministry Jesus stated, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). This author does not think that anyone who believes in Jesus as God’s only begotten Son will oppose the idea that, if Jesus authorized any thing, it is from God.

HEAVEN’S RELIGION CAME THROUGH THE APOSTLES

To be from God, a religion must come through the apostles of Jesus Christ. Why is this the case? This is the case because Jesus delegated His authority to His apostles because He had chosen them not only to be His witnesses but also His ambassadors. To the apostles Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (John 13:20). Also, Paul, in speaking of the apostles of Christ tells us, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). The apostles of Christ are the ambassadors to earth from the Court of Heaven. From God by the Holy Spirit they received, possessed, and exercised plenipotentiary power (the power possessed by ambassadors to speak officially on behalf of their government). They had the credentials of their office—they could work miracles no

one but the apostles could work (2 Cor. 12:12). The early church recognized the ambassadorial status of the apostles and evidenced their recognition by continuing steadfastly in their doctrine (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 The. 2:13).

For the apostles to do their work, Jesus gave them the baptismal measure of power from the Holy Spirit. This direct power from the Holy Spirit enabled them to remember what Christ had taught and directed them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:12-13); thus, their reliability was assured. If, therefore, the apostles taught it, it was from heaven. As Paul stated: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man" (Gal. 1:11). Through the baptismal measure of power from the Holy Spirit the apostles were given, they delivered all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Contained in the counsel of God are "all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Thus, Jude penned that *the faith* revealed by the Holy Spirit through them was once for all delivered—literally the faith was delivered "one time for all times" (Jude 3). In the "God-breathed" Scriptures we have all we need to be perfect (complete) spiritually and "thoroughly furnished" (thoroughly equipped) for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If it is the case a religion believes and practices those things not taught by Christ or His apostles, it is the case that said religion is from man and not from God.

THE RELIGIONS OF MEN

On the other hand, religions originating with man may have a variety of sources for their authority. Let us look at some of these.

Majority rule in religion simply means that the religion governed thereby believes and does what the majority of the people who make it up desire it to do. To them the voice of the people is the voice of God. However, note what Jesus said about "going with the flow."

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Mat. 7:13-14).

What person today would desire to be with the majority in Noah's day or the majority of the Canaanites in Joshua's day? The majority of the people were destroyed.

Some strongly believe: "If it was good enough for my **parents**, it is good enough for me." As much as I loved my parents and other kin-

folks, none of them died for my salvation. Remember that, as much as we are to love our parents, our Lord must be first in our lives (Mat. 6:33; 10:37).

If previous generations had routinely followed their parents' religions, the religion of God would have little hope of gaining a foothold in the world. This is the case because most people throughout the history of the world have engaged in some sort of religion that involved idolatry and its attendant evils. Thus, from parents to their children, false religion would have been passed down the stream of time.

Some people's religion comes from **whatever the preacher, priest, etc., teaches**. They think that, since "Pastor Pious" is a *man of God*, he could not be wrong and would not lead people away from God and His Word. However, Paul tells us how easily seemingly good people can misdirect us. He wrote:

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Unless our attitude is according to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:6, which attitude was characterized by the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11), we can be misled by those who seem to be so holy.

The **prayer books, creeds, manuals, catechisms, religious councils, conferences, presbyteries, synods**, and the like provide the authority for the denominations. Denominationalism itself—along with sprinkling instead of immersion for baptism, *infant baptism*, mechanical instruments of music in worship, observing the Lord's Supper at any time people get ready, salvation by faith only, once saved always saved, modern-day miracles, and many more false doctrines—owe their origins and maintenance to man-made doctrines. Of course, if a creed says the exact same thing as the Bible, then it is superfluous and not needed, because we already have the Bible. Please consider the following list.

1. The Baptist Manual plus the Bible makes a Baptist.
2. The Methodist discipline and the Bible produce a Methodist.
3. The Book of Mormon in addition to the Bible makes a Mormon.
4. The Lutheran Catechism coupled with the Bible makes a Lutheran.

Thus, when one accepts a man-made creed along with the Bible, one becomes something else besides a Christian. One becomes a hyphenated Christian, and such a thing as that is not to be found in the Bible.

It seems never to cross the minds of sectarian denominationalists that we must take the Bible to be our only rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 4:1ff; 1 Pet. 4:11). This is the case because "the Bible only makes Christian only and the only Christians." These Christians are to be found where the Lord put them, only in the church of Christ, as that term is defined and used in the New Testament (Acts 2:42, 47; Rom. 16:16). Thus, it is the case with the denominations as Jesus said it was of the Jews, "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

Of course, the sectarian denominationalists are not the only ones who give only lip service to the singular authority of the Bible. This present apostasy in the church is primarily about members of the Lord's church repudiating the idea that "the Bible only makes Christians only and the only Christians"—members of the church of Christ. All this present apostasy is about is turning the Lord's church into another denomination. To accomplish their work, the *change agents* know they must get brethren away from the authority of Christ as it is set out in the words of the New Testament.

Others have for their religious authority their own **conscience**. However, the Bible clearly teaches that such is not the proper authority in religious matters. For example, throughout his life the apostle Paul served God with a good conscience (Acts 23:1), but part of his life was involved in persecuting Christians (26:9-11). He was able to always possess a clear conscience because while persecuting Christians he thought he was doing God service. However, when he learned the Truth of the Gospel he gave up his error, kept his pure conscience, and obeyed the Gospel, becoming a Christian thereby (22:16).

Of the conscience, Paul wrote that it accuses or excuses one (Rom. 2:15). Thus, while Paul thought he was doing what God wanted as he was persecuting Christians, his conscience *excused* him, but when he came to know the Gospel, his conscience *accused* him. As previously stated, Paul converted to Christ and kept his clear conscience. If one's conscience is excusing him while he is transgressing God's Law, he should not listen to his conscience. Indeed, he should go to the Bible and follow its teaching that his conscience might excuse and accuse correctly (Jam. 1:24-25, 2 Tim. 2:15; John 12:48).

Other people rely on **human wisdom alone** to direct their lives. This is the way they attempt to determine right and wrong. However, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). Of those guided solely by human wisdom Paul wrote:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (1 Cor. 1:18-29).

From the apostle to the Gentiles we learn that God has chosen a plan, the design of which confounds those who rely totally on human wisdom to direct their steps. The way of salvation could not be known except that God revealed it to mankind (1 Cor. 2:9-12). As previously noted, the Father delegated to His Son the Truth regarding man’s salvation. The Son, through the medium of the Holy Spirit, revealed the New Testament System for the Redemption of mankind to His apostles. The apostles and prophets by inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote it down for us in the New Testament of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1-5). A religion founded, guided, and supported by human reason alone is a man-made religion—from men and not from Heaven.

There are those whose authority for their religion rests solely on their **feelings** or **emotions**. If they feel good in doing it, then to them their good feelings are a signal of God’s approval of their beliefs and actions, and those who are caught up in such a religion rarely leave it.

However, the Bible teaches: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). Also we learn: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered" (Pro. 28:26).

The Gospel approaches man's rational nature (Isa. 1:18). Notice that in preaching the Gospel, Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). The Gospel is not a "better felt than told religion." Instead, it offers adequate evidence logically to persuade the hearers of the Truth of the Gospel to believe and obey it. Thus, faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). It is the Truth of the Gospel that properly draws men to the Christ (John 17:17). A church solely guided by the feelings of its members is a man-made church.

There are those who appeal to the **Old Testament** to determine what God's Will is for man today. This writer recently listened to a preacher attempt to justify *infant baptism* from the Old Testament. In the beginning of his discourse, one of the first things he said was that one cannot find anything in the New Testament about infant baptism. Nevertheless, he launched into a long and confused message about how the Old Testament was the source for infant baptism. This, along with mechanical instruments of music in worship today, the false clergy/laity system, and a host of other things not authorized by the New Testament, men attempt to justify what they believe and practice on the basis of what is taught in the Old Testament.

These people do not understand that the Old Testament was replaced by the New Testament (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 7:12; 8:13). They have no idea that the Law of Moses was given as a *schoolmaster* or *tutor* to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). However, the *schoolmaster*, the Law of Moses itself, was given because of transgression till Jesus would come (Gal. 3:25; 4:4). When Jesus accomplished His redeeming work for mankind, it (the Law of Moses) was taken away (Gal. 3:25; Col. 2:14).

Notice that, when certain Jews came to Christ in belief and obedience to the Gospel, they became dead or separated from the law (Rom. 7:4). Paul also wrote that they were delivered from the law (7:6). Indeed God made a New Covenant, and it replaced His obsolete first covenant (Heb. 8:7-13).

Among other things we learn from Acts 15:1, 6, is the fact that in dealing with circumcision and the attempt by certain Jewish Christians to bind the Law of Moses on the Gentile Christians, one cannot use the

Old Testament to teach something not authorized by the apostles. Notice that the apostles frankly stated that they “gave no *such* commandment” (15:22-29).

However, the preceding remarks are not saying the Old Testament cannot benefit anyone living under the authority of Christ in the Words of the New Testament today. Paul said it was “written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). It gives us the unfolding of the Scheme of Redemption. It teaches us that man’s faith under every dispensation of time was always created and sustained in the same way. It has always been the case that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. We are also admonished to not make similar mistakes as those under the Law of Moses did (1 Cor. 10:6-11).

We may correctly, therefore, conclude that a church today that appeals to the Old Testament in seeking to determine how Christ saves a person or how Christians are to worship, etc., is a man-made church. Remember that those brethren of the first century church who sought to be justified by the law had fallen from God’s grace (Gal. 5:4).

AUTHORITY AND LOVE

We will now turn our attention to the study of an abuse and misuse of two very important doctrines—authority and love. In beginning this part of our study, let us understand that Christianity is the religion of biblical authority. This is especially significant to churches of Christ, for at present within the body of Christ the biblical principle of authority is being challenged. One effort to oppose biblical authority is to pit love and authority against each other. Therefore, we want to study the relationship of love and authority as this relationship is revealed in the Bible.

Our basic proposition is this: “The Bible teaches that the only way to yield to God’s love is to yield to God’s authority and that, therefore, the love principle never rises higher than the authority principle.” That being the case, we conclude that law and love are never mutually exclusive in the Bible, and they are not exclusive in the life of the faithful child of God.

Before offering Bible proof for our proposition, we need to spend some time studying the biblical doctrine of love. This will give us a better appreciation of what we are saying, as well as the importance of

the biblical proofs we shall offer to prove the previously set out proposition.

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF LOVE

In the English language *love* is singular in expressing what it takes four Greek words to do. Those Greek words are:

(1) *Eros*—It is rendered "erotic" in English. It means sexual desire and does not appear in the Bible.

(2) *Storge*—It does not appear by itself in the Bible. It combines with other words and pertains to family affection.

(3) *Phileo*—It has to do with affection and personal attachment.

(4) *Agape*—It differs from the other kinds of love in that it is not an emotional, affectionate, and passionate response. It has to do with love of intelligence, reason, and comprehension. It is a determination of the mind. It produces deliberate conviction and pertains to one's calculated policy of life. **It is the love of doing right, because it is the right thing to do regardless of the privation and sacrifice involved in doing it.**

This is the love Jesus had in mind when he commanded, "Love your enemies" (Mat. 5:44). He did not command us to love (*storge*) our enemies as we would our family. He did not command us to have tender affection or personal attachment for our enemies, as we love (*phileo*) our close friends and brethren. He did command us to love (*agape*)—to exercise our wills to mentally resolve to seek the highest good of our enemies. An example of Jesus practicing this highest form of love is recorded in Matthew 23. For their own spiritual good He told them what they needed to hear whether they wanted to hear it or not. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Paul, who wrote the great chapter on *agape* love (1 Cor. 13), revealed his love for the Corinthian brethren when, among other things, he told them, "For ye are yet carnal" (1 Cor. 3:3). Peter revealed the same love when he referred to false prophets as "natural brute beasts...spots...blemishes...wells without water...speak[ing] great swelling words of vanity...they themselves are the servants of corruption" (2 Pet. 2:2, 12-19). Notice that in each of the previous examples the truth was taught. This manifested Jesus and the apostles' desire for the highest spiritual good (the ultimate good) for their hearers.

Agape does not change when the emotions and passions surge and wane. Such is indicative of its relationship to an objective standard. It

always leads one to obey without question God's commandments (1 John 4:8; 5:3). It is *agape* through the Gospel of Christ that proves the faith of man by soliciting him to choose between God and Satan (Jos. 24:15, 22; Psalms 119:30; Proverbs 1:29; Isaiah 7:15; Acts 2:41-42; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Agape is the highest love because it regulates with saneness and sobriety the emotional forms of love. Therefore no form of love, no matter how emotional, rises higher nor in any way sets aside that love that always leads to obedience to God's Law (John 14:15).

If one desires proper family affection (emotion), *agape* will lead him to the Bible to learn how it is done. If one desires a better personal attachment (emotion) to friends and brethren, let them nourish *agape*, for it will point them to the Bible that teaches about and regulates such an emotion. While the New Testament does not explicitly use the Greek word *eros* (sexual love), it does imply it, and *agape* will guide, control, and regulate this passion, too. It does so by causing one to abide by the teaching of the Bible concerning such a strong emotion. Without *agape* the emotional loves will be without regulation. This is the case because it is *agape* that motivates one to submit to properly constituted authority wherein are found the controls of our emotions.

In religion, family, and friendship, matters of emotion run strong and deep. Sadly, it is mostly emotion that governs such things. However, passions and emotions are not enough to save a soul or keep one a faithful servant of God; they are not enough to cement close family ties and keep them through life's *ups and downs*. It takes *agape*—the prime mover—in all areas and relationships of life to comply with: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). *Agape* love endures when the emotions have cooled and waned. *Agape* will cause one to do his duty even when it is not pleasant, but also when to discharge it is even painful and distasteful. *Agape* sees the rightfulness of an action, concentrates on it because it is right, and complies with it for the same reason. Though such compliance brings hurt, privation, and even death in the discharging of one's duty; it is *agape* that stays with the task until it is accomplished. It is the love God had for mankind and the love Christ had for us—thus, His sacrifice to deliver us from our sins. It is the love behind His statement: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

LOVE, THE RICH MAN IN TORMENT, AND GOD’S AUTHORITATIVE WORD

With these important previous points regarding *agape* love before us, we should be better able to understand the following passages of Scripture and see how they prove our proposition. In Luke 16:19-31 we have the account of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is in torment because he died guilty of sin. Lazarus is in Abraham’s bosom because he is saved from his sins. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve him of his agony. Abraham reminds the rich man that he is being tormented because he deserves it and Lazarus is in comfort because God has rewarded him accordingly. In view of some people’s false view of love, they would have Abraham attempting to send Lazarus to the rich man to satisfy his request. They would say that Abraham did not have enough love for the rich man.

When the rich man realizes that he can get no relief, he requests Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his five brethren about this place of torment. Now it would seem to some that *love* would demand that Abraham yield to his simple request. Indeed, some have said that God will do anything to save a soul—**but will he?** Abraham tells the rich man that they have God’s Word, and it offers sufficient warning. If people are not persuaded by the authoritative Word of God to escape torment by faithfully serving Christ, they will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Thus, we see in the case of the tormented rich man and his pitiful but rebellious cries for help that *love* yielded to the authority of God’s Word, and to this day the rich man continues in his torment in that flame to which he had consigned himself by his sinful life on earth.

THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD

A second passage from the New Testament that proves that one’s love always submits to God’s Word is 1 John 2:3-6. To best understand the importance of these verses we pose the following question: “How do we show our love for God?” The apostle of love answers: “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (2:5). It is obvious that keeping His Word is the way that our love of God is brought to completion. John also writes, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (5:3). Does anyone want to see the love of God in one’s life? John says it is seen in

keeping God's commandments. Is it not obvious, even to the casual observer, that the only way we can love God is by loving and obeying His Word? Therefore, false doctrine, neo-Pentecostal experiences, and all sorts and sizes of uncertain sound **never** express love for God nor respect for the authority of His Word. We need to learn to say with Paul that all that really matters is "the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19). Remember Paul charged Timothy to "keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach" (1 Tim. 6:13-14—ASV). Hence, we understand better why Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

THE MAN WHO ONLY THOUGHT HE WANTED TO BE SAVED

In Luke 18:18-25 we have the record of the man whom the Savior could not save. It was not because Jesus did not love him that He could not save him, for Mark's account tells us that Jesus loved him (10:21). Neither was it because Jesus lacked the power to save the young man, for John tells us that he had the power to save him (17:2). The reason that Jesus, though he loved him and had the power to save him, could not save him is this: he lacked one thing—**he rejected Christ and his authority over His life**. Having spurned Christ's authority, our Lord's love could not save him.

We also learn from the account of the man whom the Savior could not save that **submission to God's word in many areas does not provide one with license to set it aside even one area**. As James wrote, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all" (Jam. 2:10). James means that one does not have to violate every principle in a body of law before the whole body of law condemns one. It is only necessary to violate one principle of a body of law, and the whole body of law condemns the violator. To illustrate: If I am in a room with four doors, must I go out all the doors before I am out of the whole room? Indeed not. When I leave by one of the doors I am out of the whole room. The point and lesson should be obvious.

We also learn that deeds done by sincere people (but done without the authority of God's Word) can never be deeds of love. Thus, the so-called principle of love is at no time and on no occasion higher or a nobler one than close submission to the letter of Christ's Law. So it is

the case that to live outside of the authority of God's Word is to live outside the power of God's love (2 John 9).

What do we learn from these three passages of Scripture previously offered and studied? It is the truth of the proposition we set out to prove, i.e., "The Bible teaches that the only way to yield to God's love is to yield to God's authority and that, therefore, the love principle never rises higher than the authority principle."

CONCLUSION

If this author knows his heart, he knows at his death or when the Lord returns (which ever comes first) that he does not desire to found in a state of rebellion against the authority of Christ as revealed in the Words of His New Testament. To do so is nothing less than to reject Christ. As Jesus said, "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). We must, therefore, cultivate a good and honest heart that hungers and thirsts after righteousness and that will obey God at all costs (Luke 8:15; Mat. 5:6; John 7:17). We must avoid the blind that lead the blind and false teachers who in secret bring in destructive heresies (Mat. 15:14; 2 Pet. 2:1). We must learn how to ascertain Bible authority and evaluate everything in the light of the Truth derived therefrom (2 Cor. 5:7; Col. 3:17; 1 The. 5:21). Thereby we will continue steadfastly in the apostles teaching as we search the Scriptures every day (Acts 2:42; 17:11). Hereby we can be sure that we are doing only what our Lord authorizes us to do. We will also leave undone what Christ has not authorized and what he has forbidden us to do. In conducting our lives accordingly we will be prepared to hear Jesus say to us at the Judgment: "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*" (Mat. 25:21).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WHICH IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?”

MATTHEW 22:36

Loy Hardesty



Loy Hardesty was born in Madison County, Arkansas, in 1941. He grew up in Northeast Oklahoma. He began preaching in 1965 in Marysville, Kansas, while a student at York College. He has been involved in youth camp work, as well as prison work. Loy has done local work in Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Wyoming, Montana, Iowa, and Florida. He has spoken on lectureships and conducted Gospel meetings in several states. He presently works with the Jay Church of Christ in Jay, Florida.

Loy is married to the former Patsy Kaemper and they have three sons and six grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

Great buildings and structures, such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Empire State Building, and others like them have rock solid foundations that continue to render support and have for many years. Bridges that cross mighty rivers have their pilings driven deep until they rest upon rock. This gives them great stability and strength.

Institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Abilene Christian, Pepperdine, and David Lipscomb are no different. All of these schools were founded on religious principles. Harvard and Yale were founded by denominationals, while Abilene, Pepperdine, and David Lipscomb were founded by our brethren. If the founding fathers of our schools were alive today, they could scarcely recognize the very institutions to which they gave birth. When we continue to add on lean-tos which have no foundation, they will eventually pull down the house. In our text, this lawyer of the Pharisees tested Jesus by asking: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus replies by stating, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Mat. 22:36-37).

This is the very foundation upon which our faith is built. The multitudes of people say “I love God,” but what is it to love God? Several

years ago, when this author was preaching for the brethren in Velma, Oklahoma, one of the high school teachers invited all of the local preachers to speak to her class about the Bible and life in general. Only two preachers showed up that morning, the Methodist preacher and this scribe. The Methodist preacher spoke first. He spoke about love—that if you love God and your neighbor, and live a good moral life, those actions are all that is necessary. He taught that it made no difference what you believed just so you loved God.

This writer was glad he was the second speaker and had the opportunity to respond to some of the things the Methodist had to say. When properly understood, love is man's proper response to God. Jesus says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). However, more than often, love is misrepresented. This Methodist preacher fairly represented the philosophy of ninety-nine percent of the religious world including our liberal preachers today, in teaching that it makes no difference what you believe and thus practice just so long as you *love* God. Is that what it truly means to love God? Is loving God simply saying so?

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him (Deu. 13:1-4).

Moses clearly sets forth the path upon which we are to walk if we truly love God.

IF WE LOVE GOD: WE WILL LOVE THE TRUTH

There are many today as there were in the first century who do not love the truth (2 The. 2:10). The Psalmist declared, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11). Paul wrote:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Jesus says, "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). John wrote:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

In the early seventies a preacher stood in the pulpit of the University Church in Abilene during their annual lectureship and declared that we cannot know the truth! Since that time we have seen a host of preachers chime in and promote this great lie.

Jesus still says, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). James wrote, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jam. 1:21). If we love the truth of God’s Word, then we will stand up for it. We will “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3). Loving the truth (that which is good and right) implies abhorring that which is evil. Paul wrote, “*Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good*” (Rom. 12:9). We are also instructed by the psalmist: “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psa. 97:10; see also Pro. 6:16-19). Yes, if we love God, we will love His Word; we will love the truth!

IF WE LOVE GOD: WE WILL ALSO LOVE HIS SON

Jesus said:

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1).

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (14:15).

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (14:21).

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (14:23).

Peter says:

Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:10-12).

Jesus said:

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

If we love God, we will love His Son.

IF WE LOVE GOD: WE WILL LOVE HIS CHURCH

Curtis Shelburne, a preacher in Muleshoe, Texas, writes a weekly column in the local newspaper. In one of his articles he wrote about how he loved the church, but he has never once defined nor identified the Lord's church. The following are excerpts from later editions of his column.

"I spent some time in Lubbock this week attending some wonderful meetings and being reminded of what a priceless thing Christian unity really is."

He refers to a Restoration meeting at the non-Sunday school Quaker Avenue Church of Christ. In this Restoration meeting there were individuals from the Christian Church Denomination, Anti groups, the Broadway Church of Christ, and many others. He continues:

Thank God that all of God's children are one! On our better days, I hope we like it, but we're brothers and sisters whether we like it or not! We're family whether you praise the Lord with a pitch pipe or an 80-piece orchestra or a bagpipe solo! Our Father is bigger than that. I can't believe God cares how He is praised, just as long as he is! We're family whether you are premillennial, amillennial or postmillennial, or panmillennial. It'll all pan out in the end, and I just want to be with all the family whenever! Our Father is bigger than our endtimes theology ("Christian Unity").

In another article he writes:

When good things happen and God is praised, all believers dunked, sprinkled, or fricasseed; shaken, rattled, or rolled; amillennial, dispensational, or persnicketydoowoplapsiduodenal (??), ought to be happy about it and often working together on it. Otherwise, we're "Our Own Worst Enemies." I read that in a magazine. But I think I read it in the Bible first ("Christians Can Avoid").

In still another article, he says:

I made a donation yesterday. Yes, indeed, I did. I may now be the only Church of Christ preacher in this hemisphere or beyond who actually owns a part of a key of the piano of his community's First Baptist Church. You see, the good folks at First Baptist are in the process of raising money to buy a very fine piano. (The sticker price convinces

me that we more non-instrumental types are too poor to change our theology much on this issue even though I think it is also poor.)

So I made the donation yesterday in the large amount of \$25....

In any case, the next time Stacy and I trade pulpits....

Anyway, it tickles me pink to think that every time those gleaming new ivories down at the First Baptist Church are tickled, my minor key will be tickled right along with the rest of them. Part of that Baptist piano is now owned by a "Campbellite" ("A Story").

Will Rogers is supposed to have said, "You can't believe everything you read in the newspaper," however this author does believe that Shelburne wrote this nonsense.

Jesus said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat. 16:18). *My* is still possessive, and *church* is still singular! Nothing has changed. Paul wrote:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:1-6).

"And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23).

"Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

Are we ashamed of Christ, of His church? Brethren, why do we take the name of Christ off our buildings? Jesus loved the church; He purchased it with His own blood. When Paul wrote, "The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16), he was not talking about "The Community Church," "The Christian Fellowship Church," or any other denominational Church. How can we reconcile division when Paul plainly states:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7; see also 1 Cor. 1:10-13).

This writer was raised in a denominational Church and obeyed the Gospel when he was fifteen years old. If the Tulsa Workshop had been around and my exposure to the church would have been to liberal

brethren, this scribe would probably still be a member of a denomination. It breaks our heart to read and hear the error that is being promoted by preachers, professors, and others. These brethren who ought to know better. Brethren, God will judge! Do you love the church?

IF WE LOVE GOD, WE WILL LOVE HIS PEOPLE

The Bible says, "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another*" (Rom. 12:10). In some congregations you find a group that sits in one area, another over here, and another over there. They mingle among themselves and are careful to exit the building so as not to come face to face with the wrong person. Folks, if we cannot get along in this world, how can we hope to go to heaven? What if we met one of those people in heaven? However, with that kind of attitude, we will not make it there.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.... If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:7-11; 20-21).

We cannot go to heaven hating our brothers or sisters in Christ.

IF WE LOVE GOD, WE WILL LOVE HIS LEADERS

We need to love and support godly elders. The Hebrews writer states:

Obeys 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 (Heb. 13:17).

Some are appointed to the eldership that are not qualified. I know of men who have been appointed who are living in adultery. God gave us the qualifications that a man must possess to be an elder (1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1). We must honor God's qualifications.

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And be at peace among yourselves* (1 The. 5:12-13).

Love your elders and pray for them!

We must also love and appreciate those amongst us who serve as deacons. Deacons are often appointed and then never given a real job to do. Elders need to delegate authority and give these men a responsibility. Love your deacons and pray for them.

If we love God, we will likewise love His preachers. Some folks see the preacher as a necessary evil. Hire a man, get him moved in, and forget him! Preachers and their families need more than just a pay-check. They need to be a part of the social fabric of a congregation and community. Pray for the man, take him fishing, include him and his family in your daily lives.

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? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:14-15).

If a man preaches the truth, lift up his hands, support, and love him.

IF WE LOVE GOD, WE WILL LOVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DOING GOOD

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Why is there a discrepancy in attendance of Bible class and the worship hour on Sunday? We see a great discrepancy between Sunday morning and evening and Wednesday night. We have brethren who claim to believe in Bible classes and would argue till the proverbial cows come home in support of Bible classes but then they will not attend. In a West Texas congregation there were brethren who would drift into the building fifteen or twenty minutes before class was over, visit among themselves, and often disturb the class. These brethren drove past a non-Sunday school congregation on their way to our building every Sunday morning. Why did they not just stop and worship there, if they did not support the Bible classes where they attended? Then there are those who suggest that the Lord’s Supper be at the beginning of the worship hour. That way they can make a quick exit after the communion trays have been passed.

There are some who inquire about the dates of the Gospel meeting, lectureships, Vacation Bible School, and then plan their vacation or

weekend outing so as not to be home and be bothered. We have an excuse for everything.

Ye Call Me

Ye call Me Master and obey Me not,
 Ye call Me Light and see Me not,
 Ye call Me the Way and walk with Me not,
 Ye call Me Life and choose Me not,
 Ye call Me Wise and follow Me not,
 Ye call Me Lord and love Me not,
 Ye call Me Rich and ask Me not,
 Ye call Me Eternal and seek Me not,
 Ye call Me Noble and serve Me not,
 Ye call Me Gracious and trust Me not,
 Ye call Me Just and fear Me not.
 If I condemn you, blame Me not.

Author Unknown

IF WE LOVE GOD, WE WILL HUMBLY SERVE HIM

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chr. 7:14).

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6).

Brethren we need to quit asking how little we can do; instead, we need to say, “Here am I, Lord, what would you have me to do?” This writer has a book in his library titled, *Let Go and Let God Have His Way*. If we will just let go and then let God have His way, our lives would be better, our family life will be better, and the life of the congregation where we worship will be better! “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9). Rubel Shelly wrote, “We do not contribute one whit to our salvation.” However Jesus says, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). “Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” (John 6:28). Think about Jesus’ answer: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (6:29). Brethren if believing is a work of God, then so is repenting, confessing, and being baptized! If God said it, then we are obligated to believe and obey it.

We are not saved because we repeat the sinner's prayer as, Max Lucado would have people do. We are not saved because we counted beads, lit candles, or prayed through at a mourner's bench. Instead, we are saved when we render obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth" (1 Pet. 1:22). Friends, we like Paul should not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is still the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

CONCLUSION

In 1996 at the Fort Worth Lectures brother E. Claude Gardner stated:

The church of today should heed the concern of the late George Benson, who before his death, could see how the church was gravitating to oblivion in America. In a letter dated January 22, 1988, he wrote with much pathos what was troubling him about the fundamentals: "Congratulations on the way you are sticking with the old principles. We need to be preaching today the things that we were emphasizing fifty years ago. We now have a younger generation coming on who have not heard much about what we were emphasizing fifty years ago. We have apparently felt we were repeating and we allowed ourselves to get away from the fundamentals. So I am very much concerned that we are moving toward troubles with worldliness in the church and lack of dedication to the Lord and His word" (302-303).

John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). All the problems we are facing in the church today are a direct result of a lack of love for God.

Brethren it is past time that we return to the old paths. We need to earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16:22).

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Gardner, E. Claude. "Dare We Change the Fundamentals?" *Fundamentals of the Faith*.

Ed. Maxie B. Boren. Ft. Worth, TX: Brown Trail Church Of Christ, 1996. 291-305. Shelburne, Curtis. "A Story About a Donation (Written in Minor Key)." *Muleshoe Journal*.

- - -. "Christian Unity Is a Priceless Thing."

- - -. "Christians Can Avoid Being Their Own Worst Enemies."

Shelly, Rubel. "Love Lines." *Woodmont Hills Bulletin*. October 31, 1990.

“WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST? WHOSE SON IS HE?” MATTHEW 22:42

Bobby Liddell



Bobby Liddell, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, is married to the former Joan Loe. They have three children: Tony, Nathan, and Keri, and two grandchildren. Tony and Nathan are also preachers. Bobby received his education at Walker College; University of Alabama, Birmingham; Memphis School of Preaching (awarded Outstanding Student, 1979; Alumnus of the Year, 1997); and Southern Christian University (B.A., Summa Cum Laude, 1985; M.A., 1986). He has preached for twenty-five years, serving locally in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee. Bobby also has spoken in lectures and meetings, on radio and TV in the states, as well as in missionary trips to Singapore, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and

Latvia.

Bobby has written extensively, having been Editor of *Defender*, Assistant Editor of *The Christian Sentinel*, as well as serving on the staff of other papers. From 1989 to 1994, he directed the Bellview Lectures (Pensacola, Florida), and edited the lectureship books. Beginning in 2003, he is the director of the Memphis School of Preaching lectures and editor of the lectureship book.

Since August, 1994, Bobby has served as Dean of Admissions and Instructor with the Memphis School of Preaching and, since 2002, as Associate Director. He works with the Cordova congregation, Cordova, Tennessee.

THE NEED FOR THE QUESTIONS: THE CLIMATE OF THE DAY

To understand the questions Jesus asked (Mat. 22:41-46; see also Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44), and the reason for them, and to understand the importance of the answer (including the importance of **our** answer), we must look at what occurred leading up to this point in time. There was an ongoing controversy fueled by the opposition of the Jewish leaders to the Lord, who sought to *entangle* (ensnare—ASV) Him, that is to catch Him in a snare (net) or trap. His crafty enemies had asked three questions in a futile attempt to take Him in His speech by trying to force him to a contradiction of God’s law, Roman law, or His own words. Jesus knew their hearts and was well able to fend off their devious attacks as well as to expose them for what they really were by His asking a simple question.

The hypocritical disciples of the Pharisees, with the Herodians (a political group who took their name from Herod the Great and who sought to promote subjection to Rome even above obedience to God), had become concerned about the growing influence of Jesus; thus, they tested Him, asking Him (the first question): “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (Mat. 22:17).

“Then went the Pharisees” [Mat. 22:15—BL]; this is the beginning of a series of councils of the Sanhedrin which resulted in the violent scenes which follow; they were frightened by the miracle of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:48-53), and enraged by the parables which Jesus had just pronounced against them (Boles 431).

Coffman made this observation:

The design of the question is plain from the Herodians having been made a part of the group asking this question. The Herodians ardently advocated Caesar’s cause and favored a complete submission of Israel to Caesar’s government. If the Christ made it unlawful to give tribute to Caesar, they would, of course, have haled him into court on a charge of sedition, punishable by death. On the other hand, if Jesus had made it right to pay the tribute, they would have advertised it in order to diminish his popularity with the people who groaned under Caesar’s yoke and longed to throw it off. They thought they had him impaled upon the horns of a dilemma (351).

Jesus wisely replied:

Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s (22:19-21).

His answer caused them to marvel, and “they left him, and went their way” (22:22).

The same day, the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, and who generally held the higher offices among the Jewish religious leaders, had tried to stump Jesus with a second question. Their question was about the resurrection (22:23-28). His answer to them, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (22:29-32), must have stung them as it lay bare for all to see what was the real problem; that is, the Sadducees’ rejection of the Truth which of which they claimed superior knowledge. As a result of this exchange, the multitude was astonished at His doctrine; that is, His teaching (22:33).

The Pharisees, having heard that “he had put the Sadducees to silence,” sent one of their own, a lawyer, to tempt Jesus by asking Him

(the third question): "Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" (22:34-36). His answer was that man should love God supremely, and should love his neighbor as himself (22:37-40). Their self-righteousness and hypocrisy denied such love either to God or man, as was apparent to others if not to themselves. While the Pharisees were gathered together, the Lord took opportunity to ask them a question—the question which is the subject of our study.

THE CRITICS

To the unbelieving Pharisees, Jesus spoke three parables, all of which were designed to confront them with their own sinful attitudes manifested in opposition to the Christ sent from God. The first two parables, Matthew 21 records: (1) The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32); and, (2) The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-44). The third parable, The Parable of the King's Son (22:1-14), again took aim at the Pharisees.

This is the third of a series of three parables Jesus directly addressed to the Pharisees. There is a definite connection in all three, revealing a progressive intensity in the sins of the Pharisees, and setting forth stronger and stronger punishments to be incurred by them (Coffman 343).

Note the response of the Jewish leaders to the Lord's parables.

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet (21:45-46).

The chief priests and Pharisees, as defiant and stubborn as they were, had no trouble realizing that the truth Jesus taught in the parables was addressed to their sins. Therefore, to eliminate their enemy, and to prevent future exposures of their obstinate disobedience to God and their shameless self-promotion of themselves and their own man-made doctrines, sought to entrap Jesus by their asking questions so constructed as to cause Him (they hoped) to contradict Himself, or the Law, if He answered, or to bemean Himself in the sight of the people if He did not answer. They were not so ethical as to be above using deceit or misquoting His statements as evidenced by the fact they sought an occasion to put Him to death (Mark 12:12). Thus, they

took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither

carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? (Mat. 22:15-17).

“Jesus perceived their wickedness” (22:18). Anyone who stands against the truth of the Deity of Jesus is wicked. They could not deceive the Christ, although trying to hide their evil motives as if they sincerely sought the answer. He knew their hearts (John 2:24-25), saw them for what they really were, and judged them accordingly, saying to them, “Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?” (Mat. 22:18; cf., Mat. 23).

Jesus, having confounded the great sects of the Jews, proceeds, in his turn, to propose to them a question for their solution. This was done, not for the purpose of vain parade and triumph, but, 1st. To show them how ignorant they were of their prophecies. 2d. To humble them in view of their ignorance. 3d. To bring to their attention the true doctrine respecting the Messiah—his being possessed of a character superior to that of David, the most mighty king of Israel—being his Lord, at the same time that he was his descendant (Barnes 237).

The wicked, hypocritical religious leaders had failed in all past attempts to entrap Him in His talk, and continued to fail. “They have been defeated and stand condemned before the people and in their own sight; so Jesus propounds to them this question” (Boles 439). Jesus responded to their questions by asking them a question “that was fair, and yet which would be impossible to explain without exposing some for their opposition to him” (Zerr 79-80).

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The Son of David*. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?* If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any *man* from that day forth ask him any more *questions* (22:41-46).

THE CHRIST

The one Who posed this question to the Pharisees was Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Christ whether the Sadducees, Pharisees, chief priests, Herodians, or anyone else believes in Him or not. The religious leaders, of all people, because of their familiarity with God’s Word, including the specific, precise, minutely detailed prophecies of Messiah’s coming—which were fulfilled in Jesus, should have recognized Him and received Him as the Christ, Whom He claimed to be, and Who He, indeed, was. Coffman notes, referring to the admission

made by the Pharisees that Jesus taught "the way of God in truth" (Mat. 22:16):

How could the Pharisees have said a thing like that? Did they in conscience know, as they said, that Jesus taught the way of God in truth? From the parable of the wicked husbandmen, it appears that they did. It will be recalled that they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Matt. 21:38). The same fatal admission is here. Their disregard of what the people might think (who were necessarily privy to this admission) was quite astonishing. It is as though they said, "We do not care who knows he is the Christ, we intend to destroy him anyway!" Such words spoken by his enemies were truth of very truth; but in their mouths even the truth underwent a metamorphosis, becoming vile, deceitful, hateful, and repulsive to Christ. How completely they misjudged him is seen in their thinking to deceive and ensnare him with such flattery (350).

THE NATURE OF THE QUESTIONS WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

Having answered three questions from the Jewish opposition, and having given three parables condemning them, Jesus asked them three questions (Mat. 22:42-45). He asked: (1) What think ye of **the** (the article is in the Greek) Christ? (2) Whose Son is He? (3) If David called Him Lord, how is He his Son? Why could not the learned, scholarly, self-proclaimed religious experts answer these simple questions? Perhaps for the same reason that some, who think so highly of themselves today because of their *scholarship* and degrees (often obtained from those who taught them error and which error they have embraced), and who look down their noses at others, cannot see the simple, clear, understandable Truth (John 8:32; 17:17; Eph. 3:3-4; 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:4).

Christ (in the Greek) equates with *Messiah* (in the Hebrew), and both mean Anointed. Anointing indicated the setting apart; that is, consecrating to their office of kings, priests, and prophets. Jesus is **the** Prophet, Priest, and King anointed of God (Heb. 1:1-3). One who approaches God's revealed Word with an honest and good heart and an open mind can readily determine, without doubt, Jesus is the Christ.

Before His crucifixion "the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61). Is He? The truth that He is Christ testifies to His Sonship—thus, His Deity (Mat. 16:16). Martha testified of His Deity when "she saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27). The inspired apostle John

declared of his record of Jesus' signs: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). When the Ethiopian eunuch requested baptism, asking "what doth hinder me to be baptized... Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36-37). The persistent persecutor who had become the powerful proclaimer of Truth, Saul (Paul), when converted, *straightway* (immediately) "preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

Interestingly, the nature of the question posed by Jesus focuses not on whether they think **He** is the Christ, but what they think concerning the **lineage** of the Christ, which the Word of God revealed, leading to the proper application that **He is** the Christ.

He does not ask them if they think that he is the Messiah, but he calls for their opinion as to whom the Messiah is; that is, "whose son is he" or through whose lineage should he come? They knew the scriptures on this point and answered promptly, "The son of David." They knew that the scriptures taught that he was to be a descendant of David. (Psalm 132:11.) When they answered the question, Jesus propounded another, "How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord?" That is, how could David call one of his descendants Lord? David in speaking was guided by the Holy Spirit. Upon what principle could David call him Lord? Mark states that David did this by the Holy Spirit, and Luke adds that it was "in the book of Psalms" that David called him Lord. (Psalm 110:1.) Jesus then quotes from Psalm 110:1 and applies the language to David and says that he spoke by the Holy Spirit and called the Messiah Lord. It seems in order to further confuse these Pharisses that Jesus added another question, "If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son?" Here was the point for them to explain. They cannot admit it without acknowledging that while he is human as descended from David, so he is divine as the right Messiah sent of God; it shows that his royalty is not on earth, but in heaven. It also shows that the Messiah on earth was to have a twofold nature—fleshly and divine. They were unable to answer him; it is not recorded that they even attempted to answer. They did not ask him any more questions; this closed his debate with them. He had answered and confounded the various sects of the Jews by answering and asking questions. They had failed to catch him in his words; they now resort to violence; next he is brought before their judgment seat; and last they are to be brought before the judgment bar (Boles 439-40).

The questions center on the genealogy of Christ; thus, the point is, "From whom would the Christ come?" They should have (and could

have) known from the Scriptures how to recognize Christ when He came—because of the obvious identifying marks given by God Himself. Therefore, they should have deduced that Jesus was/is the Christ. Concerning the accounts in Matthew and Luke of Christ's genealogy, Barnes writes:

1. No difficulty was ever found, or alleged, in regard to them, by any of the early enemies of Christianity. There is no evidence that they ever adduced them as containing a contradiction. Many of those enemies were acute, learned, and able; and they show by their writings that they were not *indisposed* to detect all the errors that could possibly be found in the sacred narrative. Now it is to be remembered that the *Jews* were fully competent to show that these tables were incorrect, if they were really so; and it is clear that they were fully disposed, if possible, to do it. The fact, therefore, that it is not done, is clear evidence that *they* thought it to be correct. The same may be said of the acute pagans who wrote against Christianity. None of them have called in question the correctness of these tables. This is full proof that, in a time when it was easy to understand these tables, they were believed to be correct. 2. The evangelists are not responsible for the *correctness* of these tables. They are responsible only for what was their real and professed object to do. What was that object? It was to prove to the satisfaction of *the Jews* that Jesus was descended from *David*, and therefore that there was no argument from his ancestry that he was not the promised Messiah. Now to make this out, it was not necessary, nor would it have conduced to their argument, to have formed a *new* table of genealogy. All that could be done was to go to the *family records*—to the *public tables*, and copy them as they were *actually* kept, and show that, *according to the records of the nation*, Jesus was descended from David. This, among the Jews, would be full and decided testimony in the case. And this was doubtless done.... So the tables here are good evidence to the only point that the writers wished to establish: that is, *to show to the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was descended from David* (Barnes 2-3).

WHOSE SON IS HE?

To the Jews, sonship meant equality with the Father (John 5:18), which is the reason they accused Jesus of blasphemy when He said He and the Father were one, that He was the Son of God; thus, He was God.

And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know

them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. I and *my* Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand (John 10:23-39).

The Jewish leaders envied Christ (Mat. 27:18) and for envy sought to kill Him.

The word "envy" in ancient writings implies somewhat more than it does now. It signified all those hostile feelings which are included under the general term "unpopularity." Fear of this power with the people, jealousy at his purity, his wisdom and miracles, a mean desire to crush a good and great man, with all the wicked, malicious feelings of a fickle multitude are ranked under the word "envy" as used here. John explains what their envy was when he says, "Behold how ye prevail nothing; lo, the world is gone after him." (John 12:19.) Again, they said, "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." (John 11:48.) We find here that the subjects dictate to their conqueror; the people prefer a murderer to the Son of God. In their blind rage and determination to put Jesus to death the Jews work out the plan of salvation for others—of ruin to themselves (Boles 532).

When rejected by Pilate, who "knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Mat. 27:18), "The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). This is the reason for their demanding that He be crucified. Pilate knew that the Jews' claim against Jesus was without merit, and he sought to free Him, even offering them a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Note the attitude of hate *the Jews* (19:7) manifested against the Christ.

When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify *him*. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify *him*: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made

himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led *him* away (John 19:6-16).

Matthew's record has this:

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? *They* all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it*. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *him* to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of *soldiers*. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted *thereof*, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might

be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God (Mat. 27:20-43).

Thus, the cry was, “Crucify him, crucify him.” Why? Because He said He was the Son of God. Of these unbelieving Jews, Peter said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Even though He was the sinless Son, they hated Him “without a cause” (John 15:25; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). Jesus asked, “Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” (John 10:36). Whether man believed Christ or not, God powerfully declared He was His Son: “And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). If He were just the descendant of David (as any other descendant), a mere man, He could not be God, but to be Christ, He must be descended from David. Thus, the question put forth to the Jewish leaders: “Whose son is he?”

What does the Bible say about the *sonship* of Jesus?

He is the Son of God. So Jesus declared: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). So “a voice from heaven” proclaimed when Jesus was baptized: “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17), and when Jesus was transfigured: “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (17:5). So Peter confessed: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). So the Gergesene demons announced: “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (8:29). So the apostles

affirmed: "Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (14:33). So the Roman centurion exclaimed: "Truly this was the Son of God" (27:54). So the inspired penman wrote: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). So the unclean spirits stated: "And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God" (3:11). So Legion said: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not" (5:7). So John the Immerser recorded: "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). So Nathanael believed: "Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (1:49). So Peter and the others professed: "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (6:69). So John the apostle wrote: "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15), and "Grace be with you, mercy, *and* peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 3).

He is the Son of man. As Jesus said: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Mat. 16:13). "And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am *he*, and *that* I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). Of Him, the people inquired: "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?" (12:34). Likewise, Stephen stated: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).

He is the Son of David. Matthew, by inspiration, wrote: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mat. 1:1). Two blind men declared the same: "And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, *Thou* Son of David, have mercy on us" (9:27). In the words of the people, who saw the blind and dumb healed: "And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?" (12:23). The Canaanite woman pleaded: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* Son of David; my daughter

is grievously vexed with a devil" (15:22). Again, the blind called on Jesus as the Son of David: "And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David" (20:30). The multitudes welcomed Him: "And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (21:9). This angered the chief priests and scribes: "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased" (21:15). Blind begging Bartimaeus cried out: "And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, *thou* Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10:47). Thus Jesus asked: "And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David?" (12:35). Of Him, the angel announced: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

He is the Son of Mary. In *his own country*, many asked: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him" (Mark 6:3).

He is the Son of Joseph. Matthew's record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ traces Him through Joseph who was His legal father, but not His biological father (1:1-16). Luke traces the genealogy of Christ through His biological mother Mary (3:23-38). Both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David (Mat. 1:1, 6; Luke 3:31); therefore, Jesus was descended from David through both (thus both legally and biologically). Luke wrote: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the son* of Heli" (3:23). Philip declared: "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45).

Therefore, He is the Christ.

HOW IS HE DAVID'S SON?

David was the son of Jesse the Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah (Ruth 4:22; 1 Sam. 17:12), and was, as God directed (2 Sam. 23:1), anointed by Samuel the prophet (1 Sam. 16:13), by the men of Judah (2 Sam.

2:4), and by the elders of Israel (2 Sam. 5:3), to follow Saul to be the second king of the United Kingdom. To him, God had promised a lineage of kingly descendants (1 Kin. 9:5; 2 Chr. 6:16), and made a covenant with him to that end (Psa. 132:11-18; 2 Sam. 7:12; 2 Chr. 21:7; Jer. 33:17). His throne was the "throne of the LORD"; "Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him" (1 Chr. 29:23).

Of Jesus, Gabriel announced to Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). It is on this throne, in Heaven, that Jesus now sits (Jer. 23:5; Eze. 37:24-25; Hos. 3:5; Mark 11:10), as "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15), but not upon a literal throne in Jerusalem (Jer. 22:30; cf., Dan. 7:13-14; Phi. 3:20).

How was Jesus David's son? Jesus Christ (Who was God in the flesh, "God with us," Mat. 1:23), was born of the lineage of David (Mat. 1). He is "the root and the offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16). Paul wrote: "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel" (2 Tim. 2:8), and, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). The Word (John 1:1-4) came from Heaven and took upon Himself flesh to live among men—and to die for men (1 John 2:2).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.... Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.... Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:9, 14, 17).

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue

should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phi. 2:5-11).

The Jews knew God had promised the Messiah would come through David; thus, the inspired writers presented Jesus as the Son of David (David's descendant), and to this point Jesus asked the questions about which we now study. No Jew would receive one as the Christ who was not a member of the Davidic family, but the evidence of Jesus' being David's descendant, and the proof of His Deity were irrefutable. Yet the Jews, directed by their wicked, hypocritical leaders, refused Him (John 1:11).

HOW IS HE DAVID'S LORD?

How could the Son of David be David's Lord? The question harkens to Psalm 110:1: "Which the Pharisees would have to accept unless they denied the Scriptures which they would not do" (Zerr 80). By David's calling the One Who would descend from him Lord, and declaring that the **Lord** (Jehovah God) said to "my" (David's) Lord (Master; that is, Jesus), "Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool," David correctly acknowledged Christ as his Lord.

This was the thrust of Peter's great sermon on Pentecost as he boldly declared the sin of the "men of Israel" who had crucified the Lord. David, whom they loved as the great king, called Christ Lord, of Whom God "had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his [David's] loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne" (Acts 2:30). The Christ God said He would raise (in the resurrection) was Jesus: "This Jesus hath God raised up." Jesus is "both Lord and Christ," and the fulfillment of David's prophetic words: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool." The culmination of Peter's stirring sermon was this: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Note the entirety of the passage:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and

my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-36).

THE NEED FOR ANSWERS

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST? WHOSE SON IS HE?

All will give answer to these questions, and the answer given will display one's attitude and determine one's destiny. Men may ignore Him for a while, even for a lifetime, but will, nonetheless, stand before Him one day to give answer (2 Cor. 5:10). Some pretend He is not Lord, rejecting the abundant, incontrovertible truth, but He is the Christ, the fulfillment of God's plan and prophecy, the Son of David, and Lord. He is coming back one day (Heb. 9:28), as Judge of all (Acts 17:30-31).

Some have their minds made up already. To the Pharisees, Jesus was just a son of a carpenter who dared to make (to them) the preposterous claim of Deity. He could prove His descent from David, but, to them, He was nothing more than a mere man. Therefore, according to them, His claims of being God's Son constituted blasphemy and made Him worthy of death.

Some will not listen to the evidence and will not be honest in their handling of Truth. Some will offer lip service, stating they believe He was a "great teacher," even, "a teacher come from God," as a prophet, but nothing more. They will not bow before Him and call Him *Lord*.

Some honestly examine the evidence and gladly receive the Word (cf., Acts 2:37-47), appropriating the blessings offered by Him to those who believe (John 3:16).

OUR ANSWER DETERMINES OUR ACTIONS

If we believe Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of man, we will love Him. If we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, Who speaks with the voice of Deity, we will hear Him. If we believe He is the Son of David, the fulfillment of God's prophecy, the promised Messiah Who sits upon David's throne, we will obey Him for He has been given all authority (Mat. 28:18-20; John 14:15; Heb. 5:8-9).

So, "What think ye of Christ?" If we think right, and act right, we will be right (Pro. 23:7; Mat. 12:34). If we think wrong, we will act wrong, and we will be wrong. If we think the wrong thing about Christ, how can we ever be right about any other spiritual matter? We cannot be right about the Old Testament because it centers upon the truth that Christ is coming. We cannot be right about the Gospel accounts, for they show the truth that Christ is come. We cannot be right about the rest of the New Testament, for it focuses upon the fact that Christ is coming again. If we reject Christ, the Son of David, we reject the only way of salvation, we reject all hope, and we reject heaven (John 14:1-4; Eph. 1:7).

CONCLUSION

Some cannot answer the questions posed by Jesus because of their religious prejudice. The Pharisees (and their cohorts) could not answer because they were not willing to acknowledge the obvious conclusion; that is, Jesus, the Son of David, is Christ the Lord, the Son of God. Some cannot answer because of sins which they hold more dear than the One Who died for them. Some cannot answer because of their unbelief for they just cannot believe that there is a God and that Jesus is His Son. Some cannot answer because of ignorance. Thus, we must "Go...into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

We must, in light of Scripture, confess, as did the Ethiopian: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). He is the promised Son of David; He is the Lord of David and all who bow to Him. What do you think?

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the New Testament, Matthew and Mark*. Ed. Robert Frew. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.
- Boles, H. Leo. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1976.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1974.
- Zerr, E. M. *Bible Commentary*. Vol. 5. St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, 1952.

“CAREST THOU NOT THAT WE PERISH?”

MARK 4:38

Terry M. Hightower



Terry Hightower is a native of Winter Haven, Florida. He is married to the former Vicki McCullough. They have two children, Kacy and Bret.

Terry preached his first sermon while attending Junior College in 1968. He graduated with honors from Polk Community College and Harding College; has an M.A. from Harding Graduate School of Religion in Philosophy of Religion and Apologetics. He has taught in Bible Chairs in Florida and Wyoming and ten years at Florida School of Preaching. He arranged the Warren-Matson Debate held in 1978.

Terry has written articles for several publications. In 1983 he published the book, *The Case For The Christian Policeman*, which deals with the “war question,” and in 1987 he debated Gary Workman on this subject. He also edited *Christ The Controversialist*. He has done local work in Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas.

INTRODUCTION

How do you deal with fear? When a Chicago policeman started to ticket a double-parked car, a man rushed up and explained that he always double-parks when he visits his dentist because he likes to have something to worry about to keep his mind off the pain! Another way of handling life’s problems would be to adopt an attitude of stoicism (cf., Acts 17:18); so you show an austere indifference to joy, grief, pleasure, or pain, but is this how a Christian should act in view of such human realities? Are you like the banker who took life too seriously and was in need of developing a sense of humor (Pro. 17:22)? He almost fainted when he entered his office one morning because all twelve ladies who operated the complicated banking equipment had come to work in maternity dresses! The notion of breaking in twelve new employees all at once hit him like a sledge hammer and he thought: “How could they do this to me!” Stunned and stumbling toward them, the twelve women in unison proclaimed: “April Fool!” Unfortunately, not all fears in life can be so easily dismissed. One

woman always went to the branch post office in her town because the postal employees there were friendly. She went there to buy stamps before Christmas one year and the lines were particularly long. When someone pointed out that there was no need to wait in line because there was a stamp machine in the lobby, she replied: “I know, but the machine won’t ask me about my arthritis.”

CONSISTENT TRUST IN THE LORD?

Brother or sister, what would cause you to push the *Panic Button*? Is there even one among us smug enough to answer: “Nothing—I always cast my anxiety upon Christ just like Peter and my Lord told me to do!” (1 Pet. 5:7; Mat. 6:25-34)? My response to that is to first remind you that Christ was and is the only perfect human being (Heb. 4:15); the second is to start asking you some questions about your *yesterdays* and your *tomorrows*. What happens when you lose your keys and driver’s license, or your mother-in-law stays two weeks, or you are somehow overdrawn at the bank? What about when you get a “Dear John” letter from your sweetheart, or your spouse telling you about the upcoming breakup in your relationship? When no one calls all weekend or asks you to go to the Friday night football game, what then? What do you do if you pray about a raise at work and then hear your boss say the very next day: “We’re having to downsize, so guess whose job is going to be the first one cut?” When Junior does not make the ball team or your business goes belly up, do you always take such things in stride? When you suddenly are standing (as did my son) about two feet from a *singing* rattlesnake in a Texas dove field, do you reciprocate by singing: “Cast your care on Jesus today, Leave your worry and fear, Burdens are lifted at Calvary, Jesus is very near” or **panic**? Does your blood pressure not start to rise when you start a new diet and **gain** twenty pounds so you cannot fit into the new clothes you bought for your daughter’s wedding? When you are already late to work and an accident up ahead causes a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam, do you really claim that you have no sudden desire to own one of those electronic Tension-Tamer Gadgets which you can use to shoot (at least the sounds of) a tommy gun or a missile, or maybe a death ray at your fellow citizens to *vent* just a bit? Before we officially present you with a wall plaque saying, “**Trust in Him at all times**” with Psalm 62:8 embossed on it, let us ask one more question: How you would react to the news that either you or a loved one has terminal cancer?

All of this causes us to ask some serious questions regarding Deity's love and care for us. Despite our realization that *yesterday* has passed forever beyond our control and our knowing that *tomorrow* is beyond our immediate knowledge and control, we still tend to fret over both—which can lead to doubt about God's concern about us. We know such fears can happen because our Lord said: "Be not anxious for your life" (Mat. 6:25). Does this mean everything will be okay no matter what the danger? Is He saying, "Do not sweat the small stuff" or that "God will always bail you out"? Does He mean only "Get out of life's *fast lane* and back off the pace a bit" or "Do not ever be frightened by life's situations—even those threatening death itself"? When Jesus further declared: "Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mat. 6:34), what did He mean? Did He mean that we humans should never plan ahead? Relax and leave the driving to God? Live for today? Did He mean that God's way is ulcer free? Further, just what is the overriding *spiritual principle* we should derive from such passages? Is it: "Slow down and live longer," or "True Christians never have problems," or "If it causes worry, check it out, then just put a **no fear** sticker on your car"?

DOES CHRIST REALLY CHANGE THE WAY YOU FACE A CRISIS?

We must recognize that our assigned New Testament question (Mark 4:38; cf., Mat. 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25), studied in relationship with the total context of the Bible, can shed some much-needed light on our restraining **legitimate human concern** from getting out of hand and going over the line into **sinful anxiety** before our God. To recognize that each day of our lives has enough trouble of its own so as to refrain from anticipating or conjuring up troubles that may only exist in our mind and consequently may never happen is one thing. However, when "upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed, when you are discouraged thinking all is lost" so as to be actually facing a stressful situation in which the "way is dark with a nameless dread and fear," we find that it is surely much more difficult to warble "count your many blessings" or genuinely sing "I know my Savior cares" or that He right at that exact moment is "a shelter in the time of storm." If Paul were here today, could he rightfully ask us: "If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the

Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (cf., Gal. 2:14; Rom. 2:17-21). While “many people believe there is a God, they really do not know him personally, for, ‘if they did, their lives would be different’” (Noebel 98). Ought we as Christians to live as do non-Christians? Tell me, fellow believer, are you really living out your professed belief (cf., Psal. 46:1; 71:1; Heb. 13:5-6; Mat. 10:29-31) that we have a God who not only hears our cries of desperation, but actually will help us? Are you truly living in obedience of faith or like a pagan? Pagans have their own way of *coping*, but it is in distinct opposition to the way a believer should deal with his or her existence. A book by David Noebel explains:

New Age meditation focuses on the “God within.” Christian meditation focuses on the God **outside us**, our Maker and Judge and Savior, and on His objective, external revelation of truth to us in the Bible. The emphasis is always on the **supernatural character...of psychological health** (862).

The key tenet of naturalistic humanism is its denial of the supernatural so that “there is no room in this picture for a properly defined **Divine Providence** (117).

Man...is not under the control or guidance of any supernatural Being or beings, but has to rely **on himself and his own powers** (116).

Human “beings, **using their own intelligence and cooperating liberally with one another**, can build an enduring citadel of **peace** and beauty upon this earth” (129).

The naturalist can accept no Designer and no personal First Cause.... There is no central, brooding will which has planned it all.... To imagine that we are going to be saved by **outside intervention**, whether in the shape of an analyst, a dictator, **a savior**, or **even God**, is sheer folly (118).

As the now deceased Carl Sagan put it: “The **Cosmos** is all that is or was or ever will be” (119) (All emphasis mine—TMH).

Biblical faith means that we act in recognition of the over-arching fact “that everything is not the result of the impersonal plus time plus chance, but that there is an infinite-personal God who is the Creator of the universe, the space-time continuum” (Noebel 260) who truly loves and cares for us. “And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, *even* to them that are called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). This truth gives ultimate meaning and a unity to all of knowledge and all of life, including, ironically, our facing death. In this we are to follow our Savior:

And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me. Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through **fear of death** were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:13-15).

WHICH DO YOU DOUBT: GOD'S CARE OR POWER?

There are two basic ways in which Satan can thwart God's plans for us. First, if he can just get us to question the goodness of God merely by causing us to doubt the integrity and care which Deity has for us, he will thereby win us away from God over to his satanic agenda, and unfortunately, to Satan's own fate (Mat. 25:41). The classic case study here in attacking God's motivation to create distrust is Genesis 3:1-5 where he made Eve think that God was holding something back she should rightfully have and only pretended therefore to care for her.

Second, when a person firmly believes in the Lord's integrity and concern, if Satan can still somehow fool the individual into rejecting or even doubting the omnipotence of God, such will lead to that person's ultimate doom. The power of God is needed to back up the promises of God, for what assurance do we have that He can do what He claims in regard to compassion if He does not have the power or ability to genuinely do them? Thus, though we know that there are some things God will not do or even cannot do by His very nature (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Jam. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:13). Scripture plainly teaches the omnipotent power of Almighty God (Jer. 32:17; Isa. 40:28-31; Rev. 19:6).

A best-selling book by Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, comes to a different conclusion. The author reasons through the book of Job and concludes that God is limited—there are some things He cannot do. Although this conflicts with the teachings of the Bible, Kushner prefers it to the alternatives available. Assuming that the reluctance of God to do something, especially to stop evil from happening, indicates His lack of concern, Kushner chooses to believe that God is limited—rather than believe that He does not care. Neither of these is the right answer according to the Scriptures. God cares, and He can do anything He wants to do. Obviously, there are things He chooses not to do. His greater knowledge and purpose control His acts of power and love (Hocking 115).

In opposition to this, the Bible teaches that God has His reasons for the problems of human suffering and that such can be a blessing (Heb.

12:4-11; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). Kushner describes his deficient view of God by admitting:

I recognize His limitations. He is limited in what He can do by the laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom... I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason (134).

Kushner has allowed his personal experiences to affect his understanding of the Bible, especially the loss of a son to progeria. His celebrated book will certainly bring the issue of God's **care** and **power** to our minds, and these two attributes are contextually at the very heart of the question asked our Lord by His apostles right after they awaken Him: "Teacher, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38). What about you, reader? Have you truly **never** been led by the circumstances surrounding you to doubt either Christ's care or power? Where has Jesus *disappointed* you? You prayed, but seemingly no answers came. You even pleaded, but God has apparently delayed (cf., John 11:3, 6, 21, 32) or perhaps is asleep as was Jesus in this instance. Yet, how can God, if He is God, be **asleep**, especially in view of Psalm 121:3-4?

PREACHING CAN BE HARD WORK!

The Lord had been engaged in a long, strenuous ministry of teaching and healing in the vicinity of Capernaum and so was exhausted. As the crowds increased, the drain on His time and energy became so great that He needed some relief. (He seems to have had to work more than the "only four hours per week" that some brethren like to claim about us preachers today.) Extremely tired, Jesus therefore decides to move to the east side of the Sea of Galilee where He was not so well known and where the crowds would be smaller. He said unto the apostles: "Let us go over unto the other side" (Mark 4:35). You will remember that at another time Christ sat by Jacob's well "thus" or "as He was" (ASV footnote) from "being wearied with his journey" (John 4:6), so Mark uses the same description: "And leaving the multitude, they take him with them, even *as he was*, in the boat" (Mark 4:36). Along with other boats, they embark with the Prince of Preachers for the region of Gadara to find a place for some much-needed rest and recovery. (Did you elders make a note here in reference to **your** preacher?) As they sailed, the wearing nature of His work bears down upon Him, and He falls asleep on the cushion in the boat's stern (Mark 4:38). His body was a real body with nerves and muscles subject to the same conditions

that control ours. Similar in nature to other descriptions of Him, this sleep of fatigue certainly implies that our Lord was genuinely and fully qualified as a human to come to the aid of His followers: “Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful [compassionate] and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (Heb. 2:17; cf., John 4:6-7; 19:28-30). Biblical authors never questioned that Jesus was fully human and fully God (1 John 1:1), though some heretics (e.g., the Docetics) doubted the reality of His human body and contended that physical functions, such as eating and sleeping, were illusions to those who observed Jesus’ life. No, Jesus was like us in every respect with no dimension of humanity missing as was tested by the sense experiences of the apostles in seeing Him sleeping from weariness as they did here.

WHEN THE STORMS OF LIFE ARE RAGING

Realize There Is No Salvation in Autonomy

Unfortunately, the Sea of Galilee is subject to sudden violent windstorms because of its being located about 600 feet below sea level and surrounded by steep hills. The disciples had not made it very far when a tremendous wind came down on the lake causing “a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves: but he was asleep” (Mat. 8:24) with the violence of the waves finally beginning to fill the boat with water (Mark 4:37) to the point that they “were in jeopardy” (Luke 8:23). They at last find their voices to call to the all-powerful Savior. Could they not be regarded as strong, brave souls for being able to control themselves from awakening Jesus to the absolute last minute? Or, from the way that they phrase their question to Him and His subsequent statements to them (Mark 4:38-40; Mat. 8:26), could they not more properly be accused (as can we today) of depending upon their own finite human resources to try to save themselves instead of awakening the Master of ocean and earth and skies! Professing to be His disciples, they seem to be acting more like naturalistic humanists—as if the Lord was not in the boat with them! Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy once said: “I have found within myself all I need and all I shall ever need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in G. Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me” (qtd. in “No Comment” 836). This is a bit like the tiny fried chicken place in Atlanta boasting on their sign: “If the colonel had our chicken recipe, he’d be a general!” Perhaps it will take going through death’s door for Gordon to finally

recognize just how much he needs Someone beyond himself to act as his Advocate (1 John 2:1) before the Almighty Judge, but then it will be too late. Many people live their whole lives as if Christ does not exist, but then at death's door yell for Him as a futile, last resort.

The apostles finally awaken Jesus and say: "Save, Lord; we perish" (Mat. 8:25). Just in the nick of time they at last go to the only source of salvation (Acts 4:12; Eph. 2:8-9), as cited by Paul: "for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). If possible, we as Christians must not wait until emergencies arrive to reach out to our God! Some folks' prayer life reminds me of the verbal and boisterous child who was being hurried out of a Kentucky worship service slung under his irate father's arm. Nobody raised so much as an eyebrow at this scene until the child captured everyone's attention by crying out in a charming Southern accent: "Ya'll pray for me now—ya hear?" Do not wait until the water is in your boat before speaking to God about it or asking the righteous to pray on your behalf! Prayer should never be just an SOS when your *Titanic* is going down! Even putting on the whole armor of God is to be accompanied "with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18; cf., 1 The. 5:17)! Do you fear the gathering clouds of sorrow? Remember that you have a friend in God. Peter, for one, learned the lesson of that stormy night because he later used the exact same word for *care* as found in Mark 4:38: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Know That Christians Are Not Exempt from Them

Forrest Gump's Mom was right: "Life is like a box of chocolates... you never know just what you're gonna get." Just as this storm came impartially upon the apostles, we must realize that every person experiences storms, even those who have Jesus in their boat: "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Mat. 5:45). Followers of the Lamb are not automatically exempt from natural occurrences (Gen. 8:22), for mankind is born unto trouble as surely as the sparks fly upward (cf., Job 5:7). In fact, in this earthly life there are three kinds of Christians: (1) those coming out of a storm, (2) those in a storm, and (3) those fixing to go into a storm. Each non-Christian and every Christian fits into one of

these categories. As you read this, you may be at this moment enduring a downpour and are wondering just how you will keep your boat afloat!

First, remember that sometimes storms come into our lives as a result of our own sinful choices, like Jonah who disobeyed; so God had to send a mighty storm after him to retrieve him. If you decide to go to Las Vegas and gamble your paycheck away, then do not ask God later why you are having financial troubles. If you fail to biblically discipline your child from the start, then do not wonder when they hit the teen years why you have a rebellious hellion on your hands.

Second, sometimes storms come even when we are doing right. Paul did say to his fellow Christians: “And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 4:19), but he also knew that *supply* might just mean a plank to ride to shore after the shipwreck (2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 27:44) or a basket ride down a wall (2 Cor. 11:33)! Fact is, the apostles in the boat with Christ were doing exactly what the Lord had asked them to do: “And he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake: and they launched forth” (Luke 8:22). Just because you have been added to Christ’s body does not mean you will never get cancer. Just because you marry another Christian does not mean you will never have terrible problems in your marriage. Just because you give as you have prospered does not mean you will never be in debt, thus making the proclaimers of the “health and wealth gospel” all liars. The Lord will not exempt us from pain, but desires us to follow Him for unselfish reasons in spite of it (Job 1:9, 4-6; Mat. 7:24-27). It has been said that God had only one Son without sin, but none without **suffering**. Paradoxically, Paul learned that God, in fact, may be strengthening us when we are enduring a weakness such as a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:1-10). In a similar paradox, Jesus once said: “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Sometimes the Lord will not calm the storm, but He will calm **you**. He does not always bring peace to your circumstances, but if you allow Him, He will bring peace to your spirit. In **this life** we are all in the same boat named *Troubles*—but thanks to His glorious and triumphant resurrection we will not be in the **next**!

Recognize That They Often Come Unexpectedly

Here we see even the expert fishermen onboard caught off-guard by an especially rough squall. One second it is blue skies and within about ten or twenty minutes a strong thunder-head can fill the sky on the Sea of Galilee enough to terrify everyone present. Perhaps the fishermen failed to see this one early on because it was evening (Mark 4:35). The storms of life will come upon us when we least expect them, when life is going well, and then all of the sudden the *bomb is dropped*. Without warning, your routine examination reveals a tumor. You get a phone call in the middle of the night, and your Dad sobs: "Momma's gone!" You cannot believe that it is real and keep thinking you will awaken to find that it is all just a bad dream. This author will never forget the 1988 early morning phone call from my wife in which she told me that both of her non-Christian parents had been killed in a tornado. The only way you can make it through such is to bring Christ your "every care" and "weep out your blinding tears, upon His breast" knowing that "His love is wonderful, His pow'r is great, and none that trust in Him, shall be desolate." When you seriously ask: "Does Jesus care when I've said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me, and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, is it aught to Him does He see?" you will **find solace only** in knowing the biblical truth is: "O yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief" that "When the days are weary, The long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares."

Be Positive, Not Pessimistic

Being finite, none of us can prepare ourselves as to the specifics of whatever trouble may come to us, but we can know enough concerning God's **love, care, and omnipotent power** in the world to be *positive* instead of *negative* in our basic outlook on life (Psa. 143:8-12). Luke reveals that the apostles were like many of us in that their first instinct was panic and fear, for they cried: "Master, master! we perish" (Luke 8:24). When storms come, many times we automatically tend to think the worst. Our spouse is ten minutes late getting home; so we assume there has been a wreck. We get a call from the police and automatically we think our child is hurt; then we find out he has *only* been arrested. (So then we think how **we** will make him hurt when we get him home!) The disciples certainly had reason to fear, yet in view of Christ's already demonstrated power and care for them and others, they should **not** have panicked.

There are at least three good reasons why none of the men in the boat should have been truly disturbed (Psa. 143:4). First, did they not have His commandment that they were going to go over to the other side of the lake? Though He did not promise them an easy trip, is there not implied an almost guaranteed arrival, especially since He had to complete their training as fishers of men and His time had not yet come?

Second, was Christ not right there in the boat with them? If He was with them, exactly what was there to fear since the worst that could happen is not to die, but rather to be placed in hell by God (Mat. 10:28; Acts 17:31)? David had it right when he said: "I am in a great strait [distress]: let me fall, I pray, into the hand of Jehovah; **for very great are his mercies**: and let me not fall into the hand of man" (1 Chr. 21:13). They had also been privileged to see many of His miracles, some involving His previous mastery over Nature (John 2:9) and some even involving the sea (Luke 5:1-11). He had cared enough to cast out demons and heal many people right before their eyes (Mat. 4:23-24), which was the primary cause for traveling in this instance in the first place. Over and over again He was "moved with compassion" (Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13), as He continued to be the rest of His existence, for He was no hireling Shepherd who did not care for the sheep (John 10:13). Most of all, they should have thought back to Nain where He had earlier raised the widow's only son from the dead (Luke 7:11-16)! How could they not have complete confidence in his handling of any situation: including death itself? How can we, possessing inspired historical accounts of His miracles (John 20:30-31), not have implicit trust in Him, too? Like us, the apostles' *forgetters* were working better than their *rememberers*! This is exactly why we have the Bible (2 Pet. 1:15). Tell me, is there enough evidence from your life to actually prove you know Christ (Luke 22:54-60)? Barclay rigorously confronts us.

There are *the storms of passion*. Sometimes we are apt to be carried away in the heat of the moment, especially if we have hot tempers and strong feelings. There was a French courtier who had a very ungovernable temper. He was always doing and saying things for which he was very sorry afterwards. A friend of his knew just the kind of thing which annoyed him. One day, when this courtier was in the king's presence, one of these annoying things happened, but he kept his temper. Afterwards his friend said to him: "When that thing happened, I was surprised to see how well you kept your temper." The courtier

answered, "I had to. The king was there, and I couldn't lose my temper in front of him." His friend said quietly: "I wish that you would remember that, wherever you are, you are in the presence of the King of kings." If we remember that Jesus is always with us, it will bring a new calm to us when the storms of our own passionate natures threaten to sweep us away (85).

Third, His example before them was one of perfect peace even in the midst of storm. They should have been encouraged knowing that (of all people) He was in God's will and trusted so much that the Father would care for Him that He took a nap instead of No-Doze tablets! An anonymous author writes:

Suppose a fellow was selling vitamin pills door to door. Constantly he combed the neighborhood, knocking on doors and trying to persuade people to buy and use his brand of vitamin tablets. "These things will add years to your life," he said. "Use these and you'll stay in the peak of health. My vitamins will make you feel better than you have ever felt before." But there is just one problem that kept him from selling more vitamins...he had a rash all over his face; he always had a bad cold; he stayed in bed half the time; and he was a nervous wreck. He told people how to be one thing, but no one took him seriously because of his example to the contrary (*The Man From Galilee* 73).

Jesus preached to others that following God would bring peace of mind: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (John 14:27). His doctrine would have been pretty hollow if He Himself had been anxious and worried all the time, but He practiced what He preached! After first calling attention to the power and knowledge necessary by God to design and control the world (Pro. 3:19-22), Solomon draws the only rational conclusion by saying: "Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely, And thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: Yea, thou shalt lie down, and **thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear**" (Pro. 3:23-25). When we are tempted to toss and turn on our "Sleep Number" beds, we should be like the woman who finally learned to sleep soundly when she discovered and believed Psalm 121:3-4, which told her that God who protects His followers will not slumber nor sleep. This refreshed and renewed lady made the point: "Why should *both* of us stay awake?" No, only foolish devotees of false *gods* may be mocked and told as did Elijah to the prophets of Baal: "Cry aloud... peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked" (1 Kin. 18:27).

While this author admits that Jesus' dual nature as the son of man and the Son of God could be confusing to the disciples, there was enough evidence for their holding a rock-solid faith in Him rather than letting it vanish in a crisis (Luke 8:25). Yet, even though we rationally know it to be counterfactual, we all at one time or another *feel* in the face of problems that our omni-traited God is *sleeping* on the job or hiding His face from us as did Korah's sons (Psa. 44:23-24). Even martyrs for their faith are said grow impatient with waiting on Christ to act: "And they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10). We must ever keep in mind that though Paul was referring to Timothy when he said: "For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state" (Phi. 2:20), the only reason he could say this and not be *lying* was because Jesus was no longer present in the flesh! If Scripture proclaimed: "Like as a father pitieth his children, So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:13-14), then how much more does He pitieth us who *became dust* even as we and *inhabited* "our frame" for thirty-three years (Phi. 2:3-8)? Instead of following after the twelve disciples in questioning the Savior's care for us, we ought rather to assume His empathy for us (Heb. 2:17)! Even though at times it seems to us that He is unconcerned, we must realize the truth that He will accompany us through the storm.

Learn to Know the Savior Better

Have you ever been accused of wrongdoing when you had no way to humanly know anything about it? Imagine going over to Michael Hatcher's office to find him sleeping, and then you not only shake him awake, but at the same time you accuse him of not caring that your house two streets over just caught on fire! Is this fair? In a similar fashion, Mark 4:38 plainly indicates that in their question to the Christ, the disciples have implied doubt as to His love and concern for them. Despite this, when the now awakened Jesus sees His disciples frantic with terror (Luke 8:24), He immediately responds: "And he awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39). When this writer is tired, even persons whom he truly loves are the most likely to get either a s-l-o-w response out of him or no response at all! Nevertheless,

despite His exhaustion, watch how He was quickly stirred to action by their cry for help! This action-oriented love once again displays part of the Lord's true character for the apostles and us. By contrast, it is later recorded that, at the Transfiguration when He was talking with Moses and Elijah as intimate friends about His upcoming passion in Jerusalem, we see Peter, James, and John barely managing to stay awake (Luke 9:32)! Then, when His own soul was sorrowful even unto death in Gethsemane, He repeatedly finds these same men sleeping (Mark 14:37-41)! Despite being His closest friends, they failed Him when He needed them the most. Do you not see yourself exhibited more in **them** than in **Him**? When the storms of life are raging, we must learn to know the Savior better!

Earlier, He had demonstrated compassion on them in their sorrow at Lazarus' death, and here He has care and empathy for his friends' **fears**. His few words to this tempest amount to saying *be muzzled* and are equal to Archie Bunker telling Edith to "Stifle it!" You have heard the saying about walking softly and carrying a big stick? Well, this is God's big stick of Omnipotence which nothing today but Christianity possesses! If there is comfort in the presence of Jesus in the face of death, there must also be unlimited power. Remember how Jesus deliberately turned an *ordinary* healing into a stupendous faith-building miracle (John 11:15, 42, 45) with three words: "Lazarus, come forth" (11:43)? Similarly here, *Peace, be still*, allows Christ to strengthen these men for the future and speaks volumes about who He really is! The apostles had been there in person when "Jesus wept" (11:35) and had come groaning "in the spirit, and was troubled" (11:33) to Lazarus' grave. Despite all the various viable (and more complex) explanations as to why the Lord wept, very simply put: **He cried because He cared!** He cried for the same reason we cry at funerals. He grieved for Mary and Martha for He loved them and Lazarus. He identified with their pain, and He understood their tears because that is what compassionate friends do—they cry when *you* cry (Rom. 12:15). He had to endure implied criticism from Mary and Martha (John 11:3, 21, 32) for His own greater purpose for their lives (11:4, 15). He endures it here from fearful men in training.

Remember the Savior's Pre-Incarnate History

Along with the Jewish leadership, the apostles had failed (as do we today) to recognize the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness was

this same Christ in the boat with them (1 Cor. 10:4). The Old Testament describes God's sustaining love especially through the Angel of Jehovah in such times of trial:

I will make mention of the lovingkindnesses of Jehovah...and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. For he said, Surely, they are my people...so he was their **Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them** (Isa. 63:7-9).

And God heard the voice of the lad [Ismael]. And **the angel of God** called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? **Fear not.** For God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thy hand. For I will make him a great nation (Gen. 21:17-19).

These and many other Old Testament verses demonstrate that Christ existed from eternity with the Father, and they tell us of the Savior's activities on behalf of the redeemed during those long years when man groped in darkness for God not seen (in completeness). He was representative of God's very presence (Isa. 63:9). On the stormy Sea of Galilee, the apostles should have waxed strong in their faith in the One of whom Jacob said: "The God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel who hath **redeemed me from all evil**" (Gen. 48:15-16). Though Christ was a guiding hand before He came as Jesus, the son of Mary (cf., Dickason 78-84¹; Richard 16-32; Main 143-157), how easy it is for us in life's storms to forget that: "**The angel of Jehovah** encampeth round about them that fear him, And delivereth them" (Psa. 34:7; cf., 2 Kin. 19:35). If God could make Himself known in human form in the Incarnation (John 1:14-15), we ought not to be surprised that He did it in angelic form prior to this! This same eternal (John 8:58) Jesus is with us today through His omnipresence (Mat. 28:20; cf., 26:29) and in His sense of approval when we act as His body (Mat. 18:20). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Psa. 23:4) because each one knows He is with each one! His promise to never leave us or forsake us is secure: "For himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). "Blest Savior of us all, Almighty Friend! His presence shall be ours, Unto the end!"

As pointed out in an earlier section, one reason Christians are not exempt from troubles is so we might grow in faith, strengthened (Heb. 11:34) in the sometimes unknown (i.e., as to specifics) purpose of God

for such turbulent times in our lives. The Angel of the Lord (Exo. 14:19; 13:18-22; 14:3-9) was the agent who plainly led the Israelites into what *appeared to the people* to be a trap, with their way blocked by the sea in front (the Hirot river or canal on one side) and the fortified Egyptian town of Migdol on the other side. When pagan Pharaoh received intelligence of where his ex-slaves were camped, God knew he would immediately assume that they were "entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in" (Exo. 14:3), so he then led an army to reclaim them. This humanistic unbeliever concluded that God's people were trapped with no place to go! Unfortunately, God's chosen people started thinking like Pharaoh. Parallel to the apostles, who assume they face their own impending death by drowning and who make an implicit attack in the form of a question to the sleeping Jesus in the boat with them, the Israelites go after Moses also by way of interrogation (Exo. 14:10-14). God led His chosen people into danger, and their angel-Guide led them into a trap. Have you not ever wondered if the Lord was *sleeping* or maybe taking the day off from looking after you? We wonder, too, if God is really with us, how He could let things like this happen to us. The Israelites assumed that God had led them into trouble to harm them. Yet, we find that in reality, the about-to-happen miracle explains God's divine purpose (Exo. 14:4). He, in fact, had led them into the *trap* so He might deliver them, after which we are told: "And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared Jehovah: and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses" (Exo. 14:31).

You see, if we were never in danger we would never have the opportunity to see God act for us. If we were never frightened, we would never have the opportunity to trust God in extreme situations. When the Lord delivers us from troubles, it is a way that He evidences Himself to us and to the world, and it is a way that He strengthens our faith and trust in Him. The Angel of Jehovah led the people of God to camp by the edge of the sea, next He saved the Israelites from even getting their feet wet in the crossing of it, and then used those same waters to drown the Egyptian soldiers. He is the same One who also urged His followers to travel upon the Sea of Galilee into a horrific tempest, then with three words spoke it quiet! It is not unusual to question God's concern for us when we find ourselves in the midst of life's hurricanes, but when tragedies occur, we must remember that God most assuredly has a good purpose in mind, just as He did the

fearful Israelites and panic-stricken disciples. God only permits fear, harm, or suffering to bring glory to Himself and to enrich the life of the believer so tested (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:1-6, 10-17; Jam. 5:11). God intended to draw Job closer to Him through his fearful experience, and Jesus intends for the stilling of the storm to prepare His men for the task ahead (Mark 16:15). Those training sessions worked for them! For the apostles the

miraculous interposition of Jesus at the crisis of their peril was fitted to impress on their minds the conviction that even after He had ascended He would still be with them in the hour of danger...they might further learn to cherish a calm confidence in the government of their exalted Lord, even in the midst of most untoward events (Bruce 132).

Are the ones which God is sending your way accomplishing His purposes in you as it did in theirs (Acts 4:13, 18-20; 5:29)?

It is clear that the apostles' fear and momentary anguish led them to a more accurate understanding of themselves and their Savior. When they see One who is more powerful than the awe-inspiring storm, they "feared exceedingly, and said one to another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). Their temporary terror of the *powers of nature* is gloriously overridden by their godly fear (1 Pet. 2:17; Heb. 11:7) of Him who created them (Col. 1:16-18; Heb. 1:2)! When he had earlier witnessed Christ's raw power over multitudes of fish in the same sea, "Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.... And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:8, 10). Compared to any natural event, it will certainly be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:11)! John later answers the question of "Who then is this?" by saying:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth (1:1-4, 14).

Jesus personally does not care about the storm, after all; He is the Co-Designer of water molecules, wind, and the whole meteorological phenomena, but **He does care about those who care about the storm!**

After standing up to hush the wind and ocean like a parent rebuking a child, Jesus proceeds to scold the disciples concerning their lack of faith (Mark 4:40), proving once again that negativism can have a good purpose (2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). From His words to them, we can see that spiritually destructive fear (Rev. 21:8) is the opposite of Bible faith.

Fear is not an unbelief that denies some truth directly, but one which neglects to appropriate truth that is available. The disciples failed to appreciate the latent power in Jesus' presence, and became frightened because they measured their situation by the *storm* and not by *Him*. Their appeal to Him was prompted more by desperation than by confidence (Tenney 61).

Faith is not some foolish leap-in-the-dark feeling, but is rather as strong as the truth (i.e., evidence) properly appropriated to one's mind (Heb. 11:1; Jam. 1:6-8). Some fears, griefs, problems, disappointments, and failures are the common lot of humanity; so the victory of faith does not really consist in dodging the storms but in finding and knowing the Master of them. "For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7).

A family was awakened by their smoke detector in the middle of the night to discover that their house was on fire. The father ran into the upstairs bedroom of his children and carried his 18-month-old baby in his arms while dragging his 4-year-old son by the hand. They were halfway down the stairs when the little boy remembered that he had left his teddy bear in the bedroom, so he broke free from his father's hand and ran back to retrieve it. In the furor and confusion, the father didn't notice that his son was not with him until he was outside. By now the little boy was trapped in flames and smoke in his 2nd story bedroom. Smoke swirled around him and he coughed and cried out from an upstairs window: "Daddy, Daddy! Help me!" His father yelled from below: "Jump out of the window, Andy! I'll catch you!" In the darkness and the smoke the little boy yelled back: "But Daddy! I can't see you!" Daddy shouted back: "That's OK, son. *I can see you!* Jump!"

You might not see Jesus, but Jesus sees you—and He cares for you. He has already showed you how much He cares for you by being crucified for you in your stead (Rom. 5:8). Even though the investment may be high (Rev. 2:10), investing your life for the Lord means that the outcome is securely guaranteed! As the purpose of God unfolds in your life, you gain a constantly enlarging understanding of His objective (Gen. 50:20), and you can acquire a growing faith in His ability to

perfect that purpose. This confidence is an effective antidote to fear: “Master, the terror is over, the elements sweetly rest; earth’s sun in the calm lake is mirrored, and heaven’s within my breast. Linger, O blessed redeemer, leave me alone no more; and with joy I shall make the blest harbor, and rest on the blissful shore”!

CONCLUSION

There was a woman in a community who was well-known for her simple faith and great calm in the midst of trials; so another woman who had never met her came to visit one day to find out the secret of her calm, happy demeanor. As she met her, she said: “So you are the woman with the great faith I’ve heard so much about!” “No,” came the reply, “I’m not the woman with the great faith, but I am the woman with the *little* faith in my *great* God.” “Oh, but how do you have such peace facing your terminal cancer—with every day closer to death—and you with a husband and three children at home? How do you have so much peace?” “I believe that Jesus is in control,” she said. “I believe that He is caring for me right now. And the reason I must believe is because I saw what He did for me on the cross. I saw Him die for me. I saw Him rise from the dead. I know that my Redeemer lives, and that I will see Him when I die, and that He will take care of my family when I’m gone.” Sometimes even a doctor walks away from such patients utterly baffled because all he sees is her pain. What he cannot see is that she was completely clinging to the cross of Jesus Christ, and He was giving her an incredible amount of hope and strength—even joy in the midst of her suffering. Christ gives us His church so we can encourage one another. Do not wait to wake Him up so **you** can also cling to Him! Look in His Word, and you will see Him! He will change the way you think about tomorrow! He has promised to be with you to give you the strength and guidance to be able to sing: “O yes, He cares, I know He cares” while seeing you safely to the other side.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Barclay, William. *And He Had Compassion*. Rev. ed. Valley Forge PA: Judson, 1975.

Bruce, A. B. *The Training Of The Twelve*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971.

Dickason, C. Fred. *Angels, Elect And Evil*. Chicago: Moody, 1975.

Hocking, David L. *The Nature Of God In Plain Language*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984.

Kushner, Harold D. *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*. New York: Avon Books, 1981.

“No Comment Department.” *The Christian Century*. Comp. by The Editors. Chicago, IL: Christian Century Foundation. 94 (1977).

Main, Wynelle F. *An Investigation Of Angels*. Abilene TX: Quality, 1992.

The Man From Galilee. Cleveland TN: Pathway, 1974.

Noebel, David A. *Understanding The Times*. Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Ministries, 1991.

Richards, Larry. *Every Good And Fallen Angel in the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998.

Tenney, Merrill C. *12 Questions Jesus Asked*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1980.

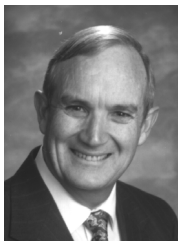
ENDNOTE

¹A great sermon could be formulated using just the Old Testament references to the care and power of the Angel of Jehovah (cf. Richard & Main above).

“HOW SHALL THIS BE, SEEING I KNOW NOT A MAN?”

LUKE 1:34

Curtis A. Cates



Curtis A. Cates is the son of a gospel preacher and has been preaching for over thirty years. For over twenty years, he has been engaged in training preachers. He is married to Annette Bingham Cates, and they have two children: Curtis A., Jr., and Daniel Frazier, both of whom are preachers.

He has degrees in Bible, English, Science, History, and Education from the University of West Alabama and Samford University. He holds the Master of Theology degree from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Education from the University of Alabama. He has done post-doctoral work at Abilene Christian University.

Curtis has been director of the Memphis School of Preaching since 1982, and continues to teach on the adjunct faculty in Bible and apologetics, Southern Christian University.

He speaks in Gospel meetings, lectureships, and mission efforts, including Southeast Asia. He has authored several tracts, numerous articles, and several books. He co-edits *Yokefellow* and the Memphis School of Preaching lectureship books, and serves as the president of the board of directors for *The Gospel Journal*.

INTRODUCTION

Absolutely essential to the Christian system is the Incarnation of Christ—and the virgin birth is the how and the when of the Incarnation. For this reason, Satan and his agents (modernists) have during the past 100 years sought to undermine the clear and powerful affirmations that Christ (the God-man) was begotten by God when God the Spirit overshadowed the womb of Mary (Mat. 1:20).

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

Some have tried to get around the force of this passage by averring that Christ was begotten only as Christians are begotten when they become sons of God. However, Christ had a specially prepared body (Heb. 10:5) and was “that holy thing”; the Christian is not thus described.

Thus, Christ was “his only begotten Son” (John 3:16; et al.). This chapter will discuss why the virgin birth (and the incarnation) is very critical, a cardinal doctrine of Christianity, and the biblical evidence of the virgin birth.

“HOW SHALL THIS BE?”

The Holy Scriptures (which “cannot be broken”—John 10:35) predicted:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet [John the Immerser] before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5-6).

Luke recorded the foretelling of John’s birth to Zachariah, the husband of Elisabeth. “And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years” (Luke 1:7). They had prayed for a child. Gabriel told Zacharias that

thy supplication is heard, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.... And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient *to walk* in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord [the Messiah] a people prepared *for him* (1:13-17).

Zacharias asked for a sign, as a result of which he was stricken dumb (1:18-22). After completing his course as a priest and having returned home:

And it came to pass, when the days of his ministration were fulfilled, he departed unto his house. And after these days Elisabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord done unto me in the days wherein he looked upon *me*, to take away my reproach among men (1:23-25).

In the sixth month after, John was conceived.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary (1:26-27).

Having informed Mary how greatly favored she was by the Lord, he said:

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto

him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (1:30-33).

No doubt Mary knew well the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the coming Messiah, that One who would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), that One who would be born of the virgin (Isa. 7:14), that One who would be “called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” on whose shoulder the government of the kingdom of prophecy would be placed (Isa. 9:6-7). **Now**, she learned that she would be the one who would give birth to “the Son of the most high”!

We marvel at Mary’s great faith. She asked not for a sign, as had Zacharias. She merely asked, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). She would give birth to the Son of the Highest; how could this be? Notice how the demon addressed the Messiah: “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?” (Mark 5:7)! Mary expressed no doubt; she merely wanted to know how she could give birth to the God-man, the Messiah, inasmuch as she had strictly maintained her virginity. She, a descendent of Judah and of David, would conceive before she actually married and had sexual relations with Joseph. She realized that this was impossible through natural means; it had not happened in all the annals of history, thus her question to Gabriel. No, this is not doubt but only bespeaks a childlike lack of understanding and an humble heart of innocence. We see a similar heart of inquiry in Nicodemus when Christ told him one must be born anew (John 3:3-5), something physically impossible. For her to conceive without the agency of a man would be to violate the physical, universal law of procreation. Please observe that, as yet, Gabriel had not informed her as to how this natural impossibility would occur.

The inspired record continues:

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

The angel of the Lord used deep reverence and most delicate terms to describe this marvelous miracle of conception. Any demeaning, crude averment of physical relations having taken place is absolutely without justification. The overshadowing, or cloud, of Jehovah upon the tabernacle simply represented His power and presence (Exo. 40:38). “The Spirit of God moved [was brooding upon—ASV margin] upon the face

of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). The words, similarly, simply indicated that the power of the Holy Spirit was active in enabling Mary to conceive. In this way, "a body didst thou prepare for me," Christ affirmed (Heb. 10:5).

The omnipotence of God enabled Mary to conceive, making God the Father of the Second Person in the Godhood and Mary the mother—thus, the God-man. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He was the Son of God, and the Son of man: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). See Hebrews 2:5-18, 1 John 1:1-3, et al.

Christ became the Incarnate One: "Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Mat. 1:23), "wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). He by that very overshadowing became the "holy offspring of God." He had been deity from eternity; hereby, He took on flesh. Someone stated he had figured it out: "Christ was fifty percent deity and fifty percent human." He was one hundred percent wrong! Christ was one hundred percent deity and one hundred percent human. The action which made it possible was wholly divine. Many times Christ acknowledged His own deity (Mat. 26:63-65; 27:43; John 8:12-19; 1 Tim. 6:12-16; et al.). Anyone who fails to confess Christ as deity, the Son of God, will be lost. "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24), "whither I go, ye cannot come" (8:21). To deny the miraculous conception and birth of Christ is to deny Christ (Mat. 10:32-33). "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:23; cf., 4:15).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Whereas those who respect the inerrant, verbal inspiration of the Word of God have always defended the doctrine of the virgin birth; modernists have tried to disregard its importance and to discount passages which teach it. First, they have held that the virgin birth **violates natural law**. Such reasoning disregards and/or shows a lack of belief in the fact that God created the universe and thus can (and has) *dipped into* the goings-on on earth any time He wishes! The Bible believer has no problem with the Incarnation. Which is the greater miracle—the

creation of the universe (Gen. 1:1ff; Exo. 20:11), the creation of the man from dust (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7), the creation of the woman from the body of man (Gen. 2:21-23), the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep and bringing about the universal flood (Gen. 7:11), enabling Isaac to be born as the result of miracles on two people (Rom. 4:19; Heb. 11:11-12), the dividing of the Red Sea (Exo. 14:21ff), the cutting off of the powerful Jordan River when it was going “over all its banks” (Jos. 4:18), the formidable walls of Jericho falling down flat after they were compassed about (Jos. 6:20; Heb. 11:30), et al., or the virgin birth? If it was necessary for man’s redemption (and it was), God had it in His plan before the foundation of the world. How was the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” if the incarnation, and thus the virgin birth, was not a part of God’s plan (Rev. 13:8)? When did the necessity of performing a miracle ever thwart the eternal purpose of the Almighty (Psa. 89:3-5, 33-37)? The purposes which govern God’s scheme of redemption far transcend His created natural law. To reject the virgin birth is to reject the Omnipotent God!

Second, they have held that the virgin birth, as well as other descriptions of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, was **simply pagan and/or Jewish legend and myth**, borrowed and appropriated to a Messiah, who was but a figment of the imagination of the followers of Jesus. Ideas from ancient, mythological stories were transformed into the biblical story, they affirm. The fictitious and corrupt accounts of the reproduction of the gods, who had offspring with other gods, became through the evolution of religious thought the idea that the Holy Spirit had sexual relations with Mary, or some similar story. Imagine comparing the decent, pure, righteous overshadowing (not sexual relationship) of the Holy Spirit which enabled Mary physically to be with child, with the carnal, sexual, licentious, corrupt perversion characteristic of heathen mythology. What blasphemy!

Just as monotheism long preceded polytheism, God’s plan for the virgin birth goes back to Isaiah, to Job, and even to Genesis 3:15, just after the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Further, the stories of the so-called *virgin births* in mythology are nothing more than the substitution of gods performing the sex act instead of men. The conception of Mary resulted from no physical sex act, either with the Holy Spirit or with a man. Their myths are a far cry from the actual, historical virgin birth of Christ, whose coming was prophesied in

Micah 5:2 and was quoted to Herod by the wise men (Mat. 2:5-6), and to which man had looked and waited 4,000 years.

Third, they have held that the **New Testament writers merely appropriated various Old Testament Scriptures** to try to lend credibility to the *false* idea that Christ was born of a virgin. Passages which did not in any way have reference to the Messiah were accommodated to Him; similar areas of accommodation would include such as Christ's death and resurrection, His being God's Suffering Servant, et al. They argue that neither the Jews nor the early followers of Christ knew anything about the virgin birth of Christ. This false idea had to evolve and be added to the *Kerygma* (to use their modernistic term) as myth, some falsely aver.

NECESSITY OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Man's redemption of man depends on the virgin birth of Christ. First, **the deity of Christ, the God-man, is impossible without the virgin birth.** No mere human being is divine; we are created beings, as the angels. However, Christ is a member of the Godhood, or Godhead; He is the very "image of his [God's] substance" (Heb. 1:1-3). He could say while in the flesh: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, Show us the Father?" (14:9). He, unlike man, had glory with God before the world was (17:5).

Peter, and the other apostles, declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mat. 16:16), as did God at Christ's baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat. 3:17), and at Christ's transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Mat. 17:5). Even the demons correctly confessed Him to be the "Son of God?" (Mat. 8:29). Paul referred to Christ as God, Who purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), as "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15), and as the One "who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13) (the same good confession which Timothy confessed in the sight of many witnesses—1 Tim. 6:12—and which the alien confesses in becoming a Christian—Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). Did Christ blaspheme God when He professed to be the Son of God (deity) before Pontius Pilate (John 18:37; Mat. 27:11)? He was accused of blasphemy, for when He affirmed: "I and

the Father are one. The Jews took up stones again to stone him” (John 10:30-31), because “thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (10:33). He had to be the only begotten of God to be deity.

Second, **the authority of Christ is impossible without the virgin birth**. Christ had to be a tried stone to be the foundation of the church, the precious corner-stone (Isa. 28:16; 1 Cor. 3:11). To be tried, He had to suffer and die as the God-man; He had to be the only begotten Son of God. As Paul observed: “Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:8-9).

Christ has all authority over the church/kingdom. “All authority hath [after His death and resurrection (Mat. 16:18-19; John 20:21-23; Luke 22:28-30) and ascension (Eph. 4:8ff; 1 Cor. 15:20-28)] been given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat. 28:18). He was raised to sit on David’s throne; He is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-36). No wonder the millions of heavenly hosts sang: “Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Rev. 5:12). Was Christ really the Lamb slain, yet raised from the dead (5:6-7), the Root of David, yet God (5:5)? What does that require? It made the virgin birth absolutely essential!

Third, **the resurrection of Christ would have been impossible without the virgin birth**. Was Christ really raised never to die again, ascending to the Father after His bodily resurrection (Heb. 2:14-16; Acts 1:9-11)? Indeed! Contrast with this the fact that some, as Lazarus, Dorcas, the saints when Christ was on the cross, et al., were raised from the dead but died again.

Why did Christ not die again? Christ was the firstfruits of the dead, symbolizing the general harvest when all will be raised, either to eternal life or to eternal punishment (1 Cor. 15:20; John 5:28-29). He “was declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; *even* Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4). Note in the verse previous to this one, He is described as being “born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (1:33)—the God-man (100% divine and yet 100% flesh).

To deny the virgin birth is to deny the very point of Hebrews 2. Man has no difficulty dying but every difficulty coming out of the grave. Angels could have taken on flesh (if according to God’s purpose) and

thus be killed, but could not have come out of the grave. Thus, Christ had to partake of death (as man's Kinsman) and yet (because He is God) have power over death and come forth from the grave triumphant. The virgin birth was necessary to make possible His death and also His resurrection (Heb. 2:14-15). Thus, Christ became man's *goel*, man's redeemer (Job 19:25).

Fourth, **the miracles of Christ would have been impossible without the virgin birth.** "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him," Nicodemus exclaimed (John 3:1-2). The woman at Jacob's well and other Samaritans knew because of Christ's words and miracles that "this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). He was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9:2: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." The people were the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali: see John 2:11 and Matthew 4:12-15.

The above events are tied into Isaiah's prophecy:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom (Isa. 9:6-7).

How was Christ these exalted things, including Everlasting Father, Mighty God, and yet descendent of David on David's throne?

Notice also that Christ cast out demons by the Spirit of God. Did He cast them out by the power of Beelzebub? Far from it! His reaction to the charge was

But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. Or how can one enter into the house of the strong *man*, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong *man*? and then he will spoil his house (Mat. 12:28-29).

Does anyone affirm that some mere man could have bound Satan and spoiled his house? Only the only begotten Son of God could do that!

Fifth, **the atonement through the blood of Christ would have been impossible without the virgin birth.** Only the blood of the innocent Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world, through His vicarious suffering and death, could pay the tremendous price for sin. It was to this blood slain on the cross that every sacrifice of innocent animals in the Old Testament pointed (Heb. 9:18-22; 10:1-18). Note that for blood of the God-man to be shed: "Sacrifice and offering

thou wouldest not [they could not pay the price for sin], But a **body** [through the virgin birth] didst thou prepare for me” (Heb. 10:5). “By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). Is anyone prepared to affirm that a mere man’s body being offered in sacrifice could take away sin?

The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin: it was but a type, a shadow of the pure, innocent blood of the *Lamb of God—the God-man* “in whom we have redemption through his blood,” said Paul in blessing “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” “The Beloved” in whom we are saved (Eph. 1:3, 6-7). “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father” (Rev. 1:5-6—KJV). “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat. 26:28—KJV). Since man had committed spiritual suicide through transgression and since the principle is “life for life,” then innocent blood had to be shed, a Lamb without spot, for man’s redemption (John 1:21; Isa. 53:11-12). Christ carried His own blood to God’s mercy seat in heaven, “having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). The virgin birth, resulting from the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit (the *how* and the *when* of the incarnation), made possible the body of Christ, which was hung on the cross and which shed the precious blood by which the obedient are redeemed through God’s grace.

Sixth, the ascension of Christ to the Father in heaven would have been impossible without the virgin birth. Daniel in the night visions saw four beasts come forth from the sea, likely the Mediterranean. During the time of the diverse beast, the Roman Empire, “one like unto a son of man [requiring the virgin birth—Christ]...came even to the ancient of days [God the Father]... And there was given him [Christ] dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.” He would by the angels be led before God in His coronation as King, having ascended to the Father in the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:9-14). Daniel’s vision was fulfilled in Acts 1:9-11 (cf., John 17:4-5).

Regarding Christ’s entrance into heaven after His resurrection from the dead, note David’s prophecy of His coronation (Psa. 24:7-10). Christ, the God-man, is called the “King of glory,” “Jehovah strong and mighty,” “Jehovah mighty in battle,” and “Jehovah of hosts.” Is someone prepared to affirm that Christ could be thus described without the virgin birth? Having made an end of sins in the atonement and finished

transgression, Christ would begin His reign of everlasting righteousness and would make reconciliation possible, having been anointed by the Father (Dan. 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:18).

Seventh, **the mediatorial work of Christ would be impossible without the virgin birth**. Because He became the "Son of God" through the virgin birth, He is able to be "touched with the feelings of our infirmities"; He was "in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help *us* in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16). Otherwise, we would have **no** high priest, **no** mediator. Paul urged, "For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, *himself* man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). He also described Christ thus, "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable" (1 Tim. 6:15-16). Which way other than through the virgin birth (the miraculous) could God become incarnate, human flesh?

Because God became flesh ("Immanuel," "God with us"), whom John (and countless other reliable witnesses) saw with the eyes, heard with the ears, and touched with the hands, the apostle of love could write and assure his *little children*, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). "And ye know that he [Christ] was manifested [in the flesh] to take away sins; and in him is no sin" (3:5). "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (3:8). John warned, "Every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already" (4:2-3; cf., 2:23; 4:15). The anti-christ denies the virgin birth.

Eighth, **the second coming of Christ would be impossible without the virgin birth**. Because Christ came to suffer and die for man (Heb. 2:9), of necessity having become a little lower than the angels in taking on flesh so He could die on the cross, He was able to fulfill and is fulfilling His promise to the disciples to go and prepare a *place* for us. He likewise promised, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). "I came out from the Father [how, except through the virgin birth?], and am **come into the world**: again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father" (John 16:28).

After Christ was glorified again with the Father (John 17:4-5), He was seen by Stephen (“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God”—Acts 7:56f) and by Saul (“The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth”—Acts 22:14). The apostle Paul said, and he had empirical knowledge of Christ’s existence in heaven at God’s right hand, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him.... For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven” (1 The. 4:14-16). Note the connection between Christ’s death and resurrection to redeem man and to overcome Satan’s power and His coming again, at which time the dead will be raised (cf., John 5:28-29). How comforting!

AFFIRMATIONS OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

From before the foundation of the world and the creation of man, the virgin birth was in God’s plan. Paul wrote, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit [His eternal spirit—ASV margin] offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14). It was immediately after man’s sin in the Garden of Eden, long before man knew that woman had a *seed* (a pre-scientific statement), and without the agency of man, that the incarnation was necessarily implied. “And I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This prophecy also must have been in the mind of God when Isaiah predicted (speaking to Ahaz): “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). The prophecy is of “the virgin” (ASV margin), *ha almah* in Hebrew. *The* implies some virgin already prophesied. Christ through His death on the cross could not have bruised the head of the serpent (Satan) had He not been born of the virgin. The “principle of first mention” (Hermeneutics) traces Romans 16:20 back to Genesis 3:15. Paul affirms the prophecy’s fulfilment in Galatians 4:4: “But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” Paul confirmed the pre-existence of Christ (God’s Son) and the fleshly side of Christ (born of woman,

without the agency of man). It was the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 in which also Adam (Gen. 3:20) and Eve (Gen. 4:1) showed faith.

Isaiah's prophecy that the virgin would conceive and bear a son, "Immanuel" (that is, *God with us*—Mat. 1:23), uses *almah*, which means "a woman of marriageable age who has never known (sexually) a man." Note its other usages in the Old Testament:

(1) Genesis 24:43 in reference to Rebekah, sought as a wife for Isaac: a virgin.

(2) Exodus 2:8 in reference to baby Moses' sister, Miriam: clearly a virgin.

(3) Psalm 68:25 referring to damsels offering demonstrations in honour to God: also virgins.

(4) Proverbs 30:19 regarding the way of a man with a maiden (like not knowing which way a circling eagle will fly off, or which way a serpent will slide off a rock on which he is sunning, or which way a ship has been by its wakes or which way it is going, at a distance; Solomon cannot know whether a young man and a virgin will become engaged, marry, etc.): clearly a virgin.

(5) Song of Solomon 1:3 referring to maidens who love the young Solomon: virgins.

(6) Song of Solomon 6:8 maidens in contrast to queens and concubines: clearly virgins.

Who can successfully affirm usages in God's Word of *almah* referring to a woman who is not a virgin? No wonder, then, Matthew quotes Isaiah's prophecy applying it to Christ and uses the Greek *parthenos* which means "virgin." "Now all this is come to pass, **that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, **the virgin** shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Mat. 1:22-23). See the earlier discussion of the evidence of the virgin birth from Isaiah 9:6-7.

In a Messianic context, in which, among other things, Jeremiah prophesies of the nature of the new covenant (in contrast to the old) and of the establishment of the church in which all would be united, he predicted a creation not included in the original six twenty-four hour days of Genesis One. "How long wilt thou go hither and thither, O thou backsliding daughter? for Jehovah hath created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall encompass a man" (Jer. 31:22). Since creation, women had hugged men—nothing new. And through natural laws of procre-

ation, women had long brought forth male children, begotten by men. **However**, never before the virgin birth of Christ had a male child been encompassed by a woman who had never known a man. Christ had but one human parent—a new creation in history, the result only of a miracle.

Christ's having been born in Bethlehem was prophesied in Micah 5:2: He would "be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." No mere man is from everlasting, "from ancient days" (ASV margin). See John 1:1-3, 14, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 3:9, Hebrews 1:2, Revelation 22:13, et al. He was the God-man, the Messiah, the Ruler in Israel, according to Micah, explainable only through the virgin birth of Christ.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Space will permit but a brief discussion of a few of the many testimonies of Christ's deity and of the virgin birth in the New Testament. Matthew was careful to record, after having listed all the men who begat other men in Christ's genealogy, "and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Mat. 1:16). Why? Because Christ was not begotten by Joseph! He also records the shock of Joseph when Mary was found with child; he knew the child was not begotten by him (1:18-20); he "knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS" (1:25). Matthew affirmed the virgin birth to fulfil Old Testament prophecy; it **was not** an *appropriating* of this doctrine to Old Testament prophecy, as liberals and modernists falsely aver, even some in the church. Again, Matthew wrote that what was "conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (1:20).

Christ confirmed Himself to be the Messiah—virgin born—when He confounded the Pharisees and Sadducees. They had taken turns trying, unsuccessfully, to confuse and embarrass the Lord, when He asked finally:

What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The son of David*. He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit [by inspiration] call him Lord, saying, The Lord [God] said unto my Lord [Christ], Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions (Mat. 22:42-46).

The Pharisees had known that the Christ, the Messiah, had been prophesied. They acknowledged that he was to be the Son of David, but when the Lord asked them how David could prophesy of Christ's being both David's Lord and David's Son at the same time, they could not answer without admitting and, indeed, affirming the virgin birth. First, no Hebrew father would call his son lord. Second, David's Lord would later, in the flesh, become His Son, through Mary. His physical begettall would not conflict in any way with His having existed eternally in the Spirit. His flesh did indeed have a beginning, through the miraculous begettall.

Mark implies the virgin birth in the immediate beginning of his Gospel record, saying, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). Verse 11 records God's affirmation: "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased"—the virgin birth. One is amazed in reading Mark at the many references to Christ's deity.

Luke records (as noted above) how that Mary was surprised to learn that she would conceive and bring forth a son: "The Son of the Most High [God]," who would "reign over the house of Jacob for ever," for he would descend from David, in the flesh. "And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I **know not a man**?" The answer was: "The Holy Spirit shall come unto thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten [physically] shall be called the Son of God" (1:31-35). Why was Mary "greatly troubled?" She was a virgin! (1:27-28). *He* would be a **son**, called *Jesus*, born of a virgin; she said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (1:38).

John records that "the Word was God," who had always been with God. He became God's Son when He was begotten of God in the womb of Mary. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14). In the same context, John called Him "the only begotten Son" (1:18). Being a part of the Godhood with God and with the Spirit, He also took on the nature of man, manhood—God-man, 100% human, as well as retaining His 100% divinity. Often called the Golden Text of the Bible, John 3:16 states that God's gift, through love, of His only begotten Son makes eternal life possible. Without the incarnation, man would be hopelessly lost. Some who believe in the virgin birth and incarnation of Christ have, regretfully, tried to remove the virgin birth from John 3:16, charging that to use "only begotten

Son” is “false doctrine,” to use their description. This author has a kindred spirit with brother Foy E. Wallace on letting some brethren (whom he heard brother Wallace name) take away arguments which he, Foy E. Wallace, Sr., and other faithful brethren had used in debate for many years. He was making reference to some modern brethren who began making sectarian arguments on 1 Corinthians 13 and Colossians 2:14, trying to say that these Scriptures do not have reference to the cessation of miracles nor to the ending of the law of Moses. When brethren start making the same arguments as, and citing those who deny the virgin birth as authorities on “only begotten” (*monogenes*), they can be sure that many brethren will be unshaken. From the earliest times, the church held *monogenes* to include reference to the virgin birth of Christ.

Other inspired writers also necessarily implied the virgin birth. Paul wrote in Romans 1:3-4:

Concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh [His body had a beginning], who was declared [proven] *to be* the Son of God [His deity, His spirit was eternal] with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; *even* Jesus Christ our Lord.

Further he declared that Jesus is: “He who was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the spirit, Seen of angels, Preached among the nations, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). Still further Paul wrote: “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). These references could be multiplied.

CONCLUSION

Were Christ not the only begotten Son of God, born of the virgin, we could not be sons of God, adopted into the family of God, born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5; Rom. 8:14-17).

Mary was weeping at the empty tomb, for she said to the angels, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (John 20:13). She was mistaken; He had risen from the dead. Today, people indeed **are** trying to take away our Lord! One way is through a denial of the virgin birth. They are chipping away at every passage (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, John 1:18; 3:16); they are endeavoring to undermine even what one brother, in opposing “only begotten,” affirmed to be “the undisputed passages (Matthew 1 and Luke 1).” Let God’s people be set for the defense of all the facts and Scriptures on the subject!

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

“SON, WHY HAS THOU THUS DEALT WITH US?”

LUKE 2:48

Kenneth E. Ratcliff



Kenneth Ratcliff was born in Nashville, Tennessee. He is married to the former Eugenia Hollon, and they have three sons and six grandchildren. He has a BBA from Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso, Texas), an MBA from the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, and a JD (Doctor of Jurisprudence) from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

Kenneth started preaching in 1952 and preached for congregations while furthering his education and serving in the U.S. Air Force, where he retired after 29 years with the rank of Colonel. He has been a part-time instructor at Southwest Texas State University at San Marcos and a Hearing Officer for the State of Texas Worker's Compensation Commission. He is currently working with the Schertz Church of Christ, Schertz, Texas, where he also serves as an elder. He has made three mission trips to Hungary and has conducted Gospel meetings in several states. Kenneth is a member of the Board of Directors and the business manager for *The Gospel Journal*. He is the president of the school board for the Schertz, Cibolo, Universal City Independent School District, and is a member of the Texas Bar Association.

INTRODUCTION

The question posed in Luke 2:48 has been read by possibly everyone who has taken even the slightest interest in reading the New Testament. However, it is doubtful if most readers give any serious thought to this question. The greatest attention is likely to be given to the overall account of the event when Jesus was twelve years of age with particular attention to His conduct. Nevertheless, the question is worthy of our consideration.

A brief review of the events set forth in Luke 2:41-52 will be sufficient. Joseph with Mary and Jesus went from Nazareth to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of the Passover when Jesus was twelve years of age. Afterwards, they began their journey home supposing that Jesus was with their kinsfolk and acquaintances. After traveling a day's journey, they realized Jesus was not with them, and they returned to Jerusalem. After searching for three days they found Him in the temple in the midst of the doctors, listening to them and asking questions. All

who heard Him were astonished because of His understanding and answers. Joseph and Mary were amazed. It was at this point that Mary asked the question: “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?” In addition, she stated, “Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.”

To see the entire picture the balance of the event is quoted:

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man (Luke 2:49-52).

Having briefly reviewed the surrounding circumstances, consideration will now be given to the subject question from several aspects.

THE NATURE OF THE QUESTION

Note again the question posed by Mary: “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?” It would be of great assistance as well as interesting to have seen the faces of Mary and Joseph and to hear the tone of her voice as this question was asked. Of course, we can do neither. She may have felt hurt, disappointed in Jesus, or even angry. Her face may have reflected calmness and relief or anger. Nevertheless, from what we are told, we can tell that Mary is asking Jesus why He has treated them (as His parents) in such a way that they have reason to look for Him with great concern (sorrow). From her language, she placed Jesus in a position of doing that which was wrong. He had absented Himself from them and their traveling companions without their knowledge, and this action had caused them to worry about His well-being.

THE QUESTION POSED AS AN EARTHLY PARENT

Most likely the vast majority of parents take their responsibilities very seriously. They are very careful to protect their children and provide for their physical needs. There is great joy in watching a healthy child mature physically, mentally, and emotionally. That love and interest continues even after the children have become adults with families of their own. The fact that they may have greater abilities than their parents in every respect does not diminish a parent’s concern. Regardless of a child’s age, parents are likely to be reminded to dress appropriately when going out into bad weather and to drive safely. This is not an effort to control or a reflection on the judgment of the child. It is merely a continuation of the love and interest in their well-being.

At times there is a mixture of both love and anger in a parent towards a child. Consider a child who has been repeatedly told to stay out of the street. Even though a parent may be very near, the child may suddenly run into the street after a ball and come within inches of being killed by an automobile. The child might not even notice how close he came to losing his life. For the parent it is a moment of terror and anger. There is anger because of the disobedience and what might have happened. The terror and anguish over what might have happened is greatly heightened because of the love for the child. The desire to embrace and to punish the child is likely to be aroused at the same time. Mixed with this is likely to be a feeling of fault on the part of the parent for not having been more watchful. Even if the parents had done all that anyone might have expected, they would most likely feel a guilt throughout their life if the child had been injured or killed.

In the situation involving Jesus, Mary and Joseph supposed that He was with relatives and friends. We were already told in verse 40, "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him." Even without these words, it would be expected that Jesus was a model child. He gave His earthly parents no reason for concern. As a result, they were possibly less watchful over what He said and did. They, therefore, traveled a day's journey before becoming aware of His absence. Under the very best of times and circumstances this would be a good reason for serious concern even for a child twelve years of age. It would possibly take another day to return to Jerusalem, and then an additional three days were spent in looking for Him. If upon finding Jesus, they immediately started for home, it would possibly mean that they had lost six days. In conjunction with this is the likely potential that they would no longer be traveling with family and friends, and both Joseph and Mary may have had work at home that was being delayed. Did this additional time and travel require expenditures that they could ill afford?

What might be the attitude of Joseph and Mary as they retraced their steps to Jerusalem and then searched the city? Surely they must have discussed every possible event that could have caused Jesus to be separated from them. This was not to be anticipated, and therefore, something must have happened to Him that was beyond His control. Had He been injured, killed, become sick, or even kidnaped? Why had they or others failed to notice that He was not with them? When and where was the last time that He was seen? Could it be that Jesus had

gone ahead and possibly they would encounter Him as they returned to Jerusalem? Surely, these and other questions filled their minds and discussion as they began their search for Him. They were probably not prepared for what they would find.

If Mary and Joseph found that Jesus had fallen and was seriously injured through no fault of His, there would have been nothing but love and compassion. None of their fears were realized. Jesus was not even running through the street playing with other children, having forgotten that his parents were on their way home. Nor did they find Him looking for His family and friends. Instead, He was in the temple in the midst of some of the elite men of that time. He was engaged in an intellectual discussion, astonishing those men with His knowledge and understanding. Most likely, this conversation was above the social and intellectual status of Joseph and Mary. We do not know how long they observed what was happening before Mary spoke. They were there long enough to grasp what was happening, for we are told that they were amazed. We also do not know whether Jesus gave any recognition to them having arrived. Since we are told that Jesus was seated in the midst of the doctors, it is very likely that Mary and Joseph, at least initially, stood at the outer edge of the group.

All of the worry and the thought of the many harmful things that might have happened to Jesus must have vanished in an instant. New thoughts and questions may have quickly passed through their minds. What is He doing here and with these men? Does He realize all of the worry, time, effort, and expense that He has caused? If He was going to stay behind, why did He not tell someone? We can understand the words of Mary when she said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

THE QUESTION POSED AS THE PARENT OF THE SON OF GOD

Prior to the birth of Jesus, an angel appeared to Mary and we are told:

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:30-33).

In a similar manner, while Joseph was considering the fact that Mary was expecting a child we are told:

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Mat. 1:20-21).

To these events can be added the visit of Mary to Elisabeth (Luke 1:39-56), the visit by the wise men (Mat. 2:1-11), and the visit by the shepherds (Luke 2:8-17). There was the occasion when Jesus was taken to the temple and was seen by Simeon and Anna and the words which they spoke (Luke 2:22-38). Surely, they had not forgotten these events and their flight to Egypt and return (Mat. 2:13-23). They may not have fully understood the full nature and mission of Jesus, but they must have been fully cognizant that He was a very special and exceptional being sent directly from heaven by the heavenly Father. Even His conduct must have set Him apart from all other children and adults.

What a tremendous responsibility and burden they must have felt. Here was a child who was born of a virgin. There was not a bit of a doubt in the mind of Mary. Angels had spoken to them, and the heavenly host had sung at His birth. A star had shone in His honor. Men had come from a distance to bring rich gifts and worship Him, an honor rightly reserved for kings. Herod, no doubt in fear for his throne, had sought the death of Jesus. Mary had been told that her son would rule over a kingdom that would have no end (Luke 1:33), and Joseph was told the name of the child would be Jesus, and He would save His people from their sins (Mat. 1:21). Surely, there was not a single day that passed without them thinking of these things. There can be no question but that Mary and Joseph were the right people to be given this great responsibility. They must have been very God-fearing and obedient to His laws. Notice that they were not given a book or any other instructions on the proper rearing of Jesus. If they were, that guidance has not been preserved for our learning. Their godly lives had already prepared them for that all-important task.

Suppose for a moment that men of great importance had given you a child to raise. You are told that this child is destined to be the ruler of the greatest nation on earth and that the period during which he will rule will be the most important in all history. You believe this will

come to pass. It is your responsibility to watch over, protect, educate, and train this child in preparation for the future. You also know that the manner in which you raise this child will determine whether he is a great and good ruler or very wicked. Would you willingly volunteer for such an assignment? Would you be convinced that you had the ability to train this child so that he was properly prepared ruling a great nation? This is far from being equal with the responsibilities of Mary and Joseph, but it may assist in appreciating the great burden that they must have felt.

Children of royal families are mortal the same as others. Some are very intelligent and capable while others are simple-minded or not adaptable to leadership. The result is that some will be great kings and others dismal failures. Nevertheless, those who are in line to be king must receive some very special treatment in their childhood from their tutors and guardians. As far as we are aware, Joseph and Mary were neither royalty nor people of great influence in their community. Likewise, they were not great educators, specialists in rearing children, or scholars in the Law of God. They knew Jesus was to be a great king, but the crown with its power and glory did not come through either of them but directly from the Father. Mary and Joseph were the proper individuals to serve as the earthly parents of Jesus, but He was not dependent upon them to prepare Him for His mission on earth.

In the situation facing Mary, should she confront Him as a normal parent in relation to a twelve-year-old son or as a guardian of a future great king? Should He be chastised or permitted to do as He pleased without question or comment? In the same situation, what would any of us have said and/or done? Should Jesus be treated as a boy who had done wrong by causing inconvenience to others? Or, should they have recognized that Jesus would do only that which was proper and that this was His right and authority? If Jesus were an ordinary boy, it could easily be assumed that, absent some valid explanation, His conduct was wrong. Jesus was no ordinary twelve-year-old boy, and there was no sin or wrongful conduct in His life. Nevertheless, the language of Mary leaves the impression that she believed that Jesus had not acted properly in His relationship with them and had brought them sorrow. Was Jesus a thoughtless child in this instance?

There are other facts that have not been revealed to us. We do not know the events that were occurring during the general time period when Jesus became separated from Mary, Joseph, and others. They

could have been occupied in visiting and other matters for several hours without giving any attention to the presence of Jesus. When it came time to travel, they merely assumed He was with them without being certain. If factors such as these existed, then they were negligent in their responsibilities as parents in watching over the child that God placed in their keeping. Even if Jesus had slipped away when they were not watching, it was a considerable time before they realized He was absent. Guardians over an heir to the throne might be severely punished or be executed for such a failure. When God confronted Cain with the question: "Where *is* Abel thy brother?" Cain responded with: "I know not: *Am* I my brother's keeper" (Gen. 4:9). As Mary and Joseph traveled home, God might well have asked them: "Where is Jesus?" What rightful response could they have given?

There are other facts that we do not know. How did Jesus become separated from Mary and Joseph? Where and how did He spend His time after the separation? How did He manage to become involved in the discussion with the Doctors? Although we do not know the answers to such questions, we do know that what occurred was not accidental. This is reflected in the response of Jesus: "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Just as we do not know the answers to the various questions already posed, we also do not know very much about the early years of Jesus. Nevertheless, this statement by Jesus suggests that they had seen and knew enough about Him that there was no reason for them to either seek Him or to be concerned. Further, they should have known that it was already important for Him to be involved in the work of His Father. We also do not know the facial expression, tone of voice, or the thoughts of Jesus as He gave His reply. However, we do know that He was not showing disrespect or in any way misrepresenting the truth. This places the entire matter in a different light than might be expected with a normal child of that age including the heir to a throne.

Some years ago a situation occurred which has probably been repeated a number of times by others. There were a number of children in the family. Following a Sunday morning service the parents got the children in the car and drove home. About the time they arrived at home their telephone was ringing. They had left one of their children asleep on one of the benches in the church building. They clearly thought they had all of their children with them. Had they noticed a

child was missing before arriving home they probably would have quickly turned around and returned to the last place where they had seen the child. There might have even been some concern. Under the circumstances, would anyone expect the child to be rebuked? If there was any fault, it would be with the parents. In a similar manner, any fault would lie with Mary and Joseph.

LESSONS LEARNED

Mary and Joseph assumed and expected Jesus to be with them when in fact they needed to be with Him. Most people do not intentionally do that which is wrong. They would not think and do as they did if it were wrong. Such being true, anything to the contrary is therefore wrong. We may evaluate others on the basis of how their ideas coincide with our own. The nature of God, the church, and what is necessary for salvation may be shaped in our minds based upon our personal concepts and attitudes. We may expect Jesus to walk in step with us in the direction that we wish to travel instead of us walking with Him.

We may be inclined to assume far more than we should. In conversations with others, how often is there an inclination to assume facts? It is surprising how much erroneous information can be passed to others as factual because of assumptions. In most instances, no harm may be done. However, assumptions can result in terrible consequences. Occasionally, we read of a family hearing a noise in their house in the middle of the night. They obtain a gun from the night stand and slip out of the bedroom to investigate. They hear additional noises and then see the form of someone in another room possibly going through some things. Assuming it is a burglar they fire the gun, shooting the individual. When the lights are turned on, much to their dismay, the person shot was not a burglar but one of their children.

Spiritually, there are many people who have assumed that God is with them, but they have rejected Jesus as the Son of God. Many others have assumed that Jesus is with them when they are traveling a different road than He. Often they are traveling with their relatives and friends. Surely, Jesus is somewhere in their midst. However, the further they travel, the greater the separation becomes, and the more time and effort it will require to be reunited.

Observe that when Joseph and Mary noticed that Jesus was not with them they looked for Him "among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." This would be expected in such a situation where a child is missing.

However, spiritually that is likely to be where many will search for Christ. In spite of all of the Bibles readily available, how many people seriously search the Scriptures to see if their lives are acceptable to God? Their religious concepts are built around what they have heard from others, their own ideas, and a smattering of what they have read in the Bible. It is not surprising that those of Thessalonica were praised for searching the Scriptures daily to determine if the things they had heard were true (Acts 17:11).

If we find that we are not with Christ or that, having walked with Him, our paths have parted, what should we do? We do not assume that all is well, and we do not look for Christ among our friends and relatives. We go back to the point where He can be found or where we know that our paths parted. We do not ask why He dealt with us in such a manner. We are humble, repentant, and submissive for having been separated. There will be sorrow for our personal failures rather than an allegation that He has caused us sorrow. We must travel with Christ rather than He with us.

There is often a tendency to blame others for our own errors. This seems to be a characterization of our society today. Whatever the crime or problem, someone other than the person committing the act is at fault. Frequently, the fault is levied at society in general—this is not new. Eve blamed her disobedience on the serpent (Gen. 3:13), and Adam blamed his on Eve and God (Gen. 3:12). It was undoubtedly true that Mary and Joseph were sorrowing as they sought Jesus. However, any fault in the separation was their own. On the day of judgment there is likely to be a lot of finger-pointing and accusations, as those who are lost seek to escape punishment by placing the blame on others. It will be of no avail as each individual will be judged based on his own personal conduct (Rev. 20:12-13).

We can ascertain at this early point in the life of Christ that He was aware of the fact that He had a mission on earth, which was to do the will of His Father. He had a priority and goal in His life. By the age of twelve our character has been greatly formed. Even at this point in His life, Jesus serves as a great example. How wonderful it would be if everyone by that age had their mind focused on doing the will of their heavenly Father, and that remained their attitude throughout life.

CONCLUSION

Joseph and Mary did not grasp the significance of what Jesus said, but we are told that Mary “kept all these sayings in her heart.” As a good Son, Jesus went to Nazareth and was subject to them (Luke 2:50-51). Although we are not informed of additional events involving Jesus as a child, Mary apparently became more aware of the power, nature, and mission of Jesus, which would be in addition to those things spoken to her by an angel prior to His birth. One cannot escape her conduct at the marriage feast in Cana. When she was informed there was no wine, she told Jesus. Even though, “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come,” she merely told the servants to do whatever He told them to do (John 2:4).

What might we finally learn? It is not our right, position, or authority to either question the actions of Jesus or by implication or otherwise tell Him what He should do. He is not a child left in our custody but our supreme King. We are to be His loyal, humble, and obedient servants. We must travel with Him and never leave His side.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WHY CALL YE ME, LORD, LORD, AND DO NOT THE THINGS WHICH I SAY?”

LUKE 6:46

Eddy Gilpin



Eddy Gilpin is a native of Fayette, Alabama. He is a 1985 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching in Memphis, Tennessee. He has done local work with congregations in Crossville, Tennessee; Mammoth Spring, Arkansas; Munford, Alabama; and has served as a missionary in Tanzania, East Africa (1991-1994). He is presently working with the West Side Church of Christ in Salem, Virginia. Eddy is the director of the annual “Polishing the Pulpit” Preachers’ Workshop.

Eddy is married to the former Jeanny McCracken and they have two sons: Kyle and Kirk.

INTRODUCTION

There are over 3000 questions contained in the Bible. Of these, over 1000 are found in the New Testament (Hatcher *Preface*). The Lord often used questions as a teaching instrument, both in instructing His followers and in answering His critics. The passage under consideration for this study is one such question posed by the Lord. Luke 6:20-49 comprises Luke’s account of the great Sermon on the Mount (cf., Mat. 5-7), which was preached before a great multitude, but addressed directly to His disciples. Near the end of Luke’s record of this lesson comes the question which serves as the basis of our study: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

Myriad could be the finer details to which such a question could be aimed. Regardless of the command given, the warning issued, or the fact revealed in God’s Word, man has either shunned it, modified it, violated it, or attempted to negate it in some fashion. He has failed, and that miserably, in doing the Lord’s Will in the Lord’s way. Thus, this 2000-year-old question is just as pertinent (if not more so) today than it was when first uttered by the Lord of Glory. In this brief study let us

examine this question in four key areas: His World, His Word, His Work, His Worship.

WHY CALL YE ME, LORD, LORD, AND DO NOT THE THINGS WHICH I SAY...REGARDING MY WORLD?

It seems as though modern man is bent on changing every item regarding truth. From its absolute nature to its objective character to its being ascertainable, man is determined to undermine every aspect of truth in virtually every realm. This is evidenced in at least three very important disciplines: true science, recorded history, and the medical realm. That the world and all things contained therein were created by an omniscient, omnipotent God (Gen. 1-2) is supported by the abundance of evidence to that effect. However, man continues to disregard the evidence in favor of his pet theories.

Evolutionary mentality has long dominated the professional realm of scientific thinking in our society, even though the evidence supporting such a mind-set is nil. The ripple effect of Darwinian philosophy has washed over the ivory palaces of institutions of higher learning, swept away the scientific method of proving or disproving one's theory by the evidence available, and roared virtually unchallenged into the textbooks of school children (and, thus, into their minds as well). Said evidence, in most instances, has been replaced with fabricated models depicting the "hopeful monsters" of evolution, further ensconcing the hallowed shrines of atheism-disguised-as-science onto the scenes of modern society. Such foolhardy attempts at *scientific investigation*, instead of being castigated and abolished to the realms of snake oil and black magic, are highly-touted and applauded by the *scientific community* to a great extent.

The Word of God reveals the truth to which the evidence points, that the world was a product of Divine activity and not blind chance and great lengths of time. The creation record of the first two chapters of Genesis (bolstered and confirmed by numerous other passages, both Old and New Testament) reveal God's Word on the matter. The intricate nature and detail of the world around us combined with the grandeur of it all forever proclaim the work of an infinite God (Psa. 19:1) and not the accidental occurrences of nothing left to time. No wonder the Record states that one is a fool who would doubt the existence of God (14:1; 53:1)! The Gentile world was condemned as being without excuse because of their failure to recognize the magnifi-

cence of and give due regard to the One who had created all (Rom. 1:18-20).

The height of hypocrisy concerning this subject involves those who would lay claim to belief in both God and the evolutionary system. This writer vividly recalls asking his fourth-grade teacher (a member of the Lord's church, mind you) about the contradiction between evolution and the Bible's account of creation and being told that this "might have been the way God chose to do it." One cannot help but wonder just how many of these frail members of the body of Christ are out there. No, one cannot believe in both of these! They are antagonistic to each other. Either God did it the way He said He did, or He is deceptive and can never be trusted in any other realm about which He speaks. If the God of heaven cannot be depended on when He speaks of the origin of the world, how can He be trusted to tell of the redemption of the world!? If He is deceptive in relating the story of creation, how can He be thought worthy to reveal the story of justification!? If He is untruthful (and what else can it be called?) in His portrayal of the beginning of the world, how can He be thought competent to unfold the end of the world!? If He cannot be counted on as Creator, why should He be thought worthy as Judge? Indeed, how can any dare call Him their God and then deny what He says about His world?

In God's world marriage is sacred and honorable (Heb. 13:4). It is a union ordained and sanctioned by God between two adults—one female, the other male (Mat. 19:4-6). It involves partners who have either never been married, have lost their scriptural spouses through death (Rom. 7:2-3), or who are the innocent parties in marriages violated by fornication (Mat. 5:32; 19:9). Some want to apply such laws only to those who are in "covenant relationship with God" already. What kind of "covenant relationship" did Herod have with the Lord (Mat. 14:3-4)? He had little to no regard for the Lord whatsoever; yet he was in violation of God's standards for marriage—standards that are imposed and binding upon all men. Many today (even some of our own brethren) want to adopt the live-and-let-live policy regarding marriage and relegate God's laws regarding it to ancient tribal customs or some such realm. Others want to open the floodgates and allow "homosexual marriages" (a contradiction of terms). Sadly, many among those calling and clamoring for such are likewise those who claim to be religious and make a pretense of being followers of the Lord. How can anyone think

he can claim to be a legitimate follower of Christ while refusing to heed His Word on such basic matters? Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say regarding my world?

Two other thoughts regarding this matter of God’s world not only involve the moral and biblical, but also the political. One is abortion; the other is homosexuality. Since these matters do indeed involve the moral and the biblical, for the child of God, the political side should hold no true concern (Acts 5:29). But, alas, there is that segment of the Lord’s body who refuses to see that political candidates who uphold such immoral practices as abortion and homosexuality cannot be supported by those who believe and know the truth. Too many such members of the Lord’s church vote (and thus lend their influence and support) on the basis of a candidate’s party affiliation and disregard entirely the candidate’s stand (or lack thereof) regarding these very serious moral issues. Abortion is murder, plainly and simply (Exo. 21:22-23; Job 3:3; Psa. 139:13-16; Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5)! Homosexuality is sinful and will cause the soul of the practitioner of it to be lost (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deu. 23:17; Mat. 19:4-5; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10)! Of these truths there can be no doubt. How can one possibly claim to be a servant of God on the one hand while pulling the voting lever in support of one who upholds such ungodly practices as abortion and homosexuality with the other? Some say that we should not intermingle religion and politics. If faithful members of the Lord’s body do not speak up and speak out against such immoral practices as abortion and homosexuality, just who do we think will? It certainly will not be the rabid politician bent on getting the votes at any price and obtaining the office at any cost! Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do the things which I say concerning my world?

WHY CALL YE ME, LORD, LORD, AND DO NOT THE THINGS WHICH I SAY...REGARDING MY WORD?

The Word of God is to be the source that guides man throughout life and ultimately to the heavenly realms beyond (Psa. 119:105). It is through God’s precepts that we get understanding (119:104). There has never been a greater need for the guidance provided by the Word of God than currently exists in the world. The Bible (God’s Word once for all time delivered—Jude 3) is the only source that provides such needed information. Although claims are made for other documents (Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Koran, etc.), there is none that has been

given by the inspiration of God save the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21). Within its pages are directives for how it is to be handled. However, man continues to reject these measures in his attempts to make his own way. Numerous are the individuals who call Him, “Lord, Lord,” but fail to give His Word the due regard it deserves and for which it calls.

Those who truly love the Lord will buy the truth and sell it not (Pro. 23:23). Two evident errors are revealed in this passage and continue to be practiced by man: (1) many fail to “buy the truth”; (2) many “buy it” but then sell it. The thought that the truth must be *bought* indicates that truth is not something one will merely find by happenstance. It is something for which one must seek as for hidden treasure (Pro. 2:4). Many fail to seek truth as they should. Consequently, they are left in the dark regarding spiritual matters and are further blinded by the doctrines of man (Mat. 15:9; 2 Cor. 4:4). Sadly, others, although they have obtained the truth, will “sell it.” They will exchange it for “the praise of men” (John 12:43), change it to fit their own purposes (Rom. 1:25) or, in some other fashion, surrender it for something of far less value (Mat. 16:26). Why is it that some men will call Him “Lord, Lord,” but then fail to buy the truth or, once they have obtained it, make a foolish and fatal exchange?

The Scriptures reveal that man is to “know the truth” (Pro. 22:21; John 8:32; 1 Tim. 4:3; Heb. 10:26). That man would come to its knowledge is the desire of God (1 Tim. 2:4). It must be stored up in the heart to prevent sinful actions (Psa. 119:11). Since truth is the Word of God (John 17:17), man must thus come to know the Bible. Therefore, he must familiarize himself with it. This is done, of course, through study (2 Tim. 2:15). In response to many questions posed to Him, Jesus would reply: “Have ye not read,” and would then quote passages relating to the subject at hand (i.e., Mat. 12:3; 19:4; Mark 2:25; Luke 6:3). Inherent in such response is the implication that man must read the Scriptures (cf., 1 Tim. 4:13). Why is it that many profess to call Him, “Lord, Lord,” and then refuse to obtain the knowledge of truth so vital to serving Him? Such is an indictment not only against the world at large and the religious world in general, but also of far too many in the Lord’s church in particular. Hand in hand with this responsibility is that of desiring the Word of God (1 Pet. 2:2). To grow as one should

he must have that strong desire to know more of the Will of God. Indeed, why call Him Lord and then refuse to study His Word?

Additional revelation from God reveals that His Word must be rightly divided (2 Tim. 2:15). Herein is the fault of many a religious system and many men. Failure to understand the basics of biblical hermeneutics has resulted in multiplied numbers of divided institutions (all claiming to be right) and will result in the tragic loss of a multitude of souls. The vast majority of the religious world has no concept of the difference between the Old and New Testaments. Failure to rightly divide the truth has fostered countless false doctrines such as Pre-millennialism, Sabbatarianism, and various aspects of Calvinism. Men continue to claim Him as Lord but fail to handle correctly His Divine Word.

The Word of God also demands that men have a love for it. Failure to have such a love for the truth will result in one's being lost (2 The. 2:10). Proclaiming a love for something or someone and actually loving such are two different matters. Corresponding with a love for the truth is obedience to it. Jesus proclaimed, if ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). Thus, genuine love for Jesus must be accompanied by obedience to that which He says. A love for His Word will result in obedience to all that it states. It is only through obeying the truth that the soul is made pure (1 Pet. 1:22). It is not possible for one truthfully to claim Jesus as Lord of his life while never surrendering in obedience to His Word. Failure to love and obey His Word results in damnation of the soul and negates any and all sentiments of loyalty to Him.

The Word of the Lord is also to be properly taught (Mat. 28:19-20; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). Many claim an endearing love for Jesus but will never mention Him to another. Jesus revealed that one expressing such shame for Him would be met with the same at the Judgment day (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). No excuse will cover the sins of those who fail to obey His Word regarding this matter. A lack of knowledge is destructive in many ways (Hos. 4:6) and far-reaching in its consequences. As has been noted previously, the study of the Bible is commanded of all. Thus, a lack of knowledge regarding God's Word will not justify one's failure to teach it, nor deliver his soul from the God who has demanded it. Neither will the fear of rejection or failure omit one from spreading the seed of the kingdom. The fearful have their place reserved in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). Fear paralyzes and prevents one from accom-

plishing God's tasks (Mat. 25:25; cf., 1 John 4:18). No rightful claim can be laid to loving the Lord by any who would refuse to teach His Word to others.

In response to the Word, many seek to pervert it (Gal. 1:7) or otherwise modify it into something it was never intended to be (Rom. 1:21-25). Modern man has a disdain for the Bible, as evidenced by his many attempts to have it removed from society. The very thought of a God who has a say in his life and any vestige of authority over him enrages the average 21st century man, who is far too sophisticated and technologically advanced to pay the slightest attention to such an ancient Being. Countless others pay lip service to the God about whom they know so little and about whom they actually care even less. This is evidenced by the many attempts to provide "a church which meets your needs" or other such offerings that vainly soothe the conscience by allowing adherents to participate in something resembling religion without altering their lifestyles in any fashion. The fact that there are over 2000 religious groups in the United States alone testifies to this modern mentality. Foolishly, man continues at his attempts to bring God down to his level instead of rising to the level demanded by God. God is not as we are (Psa. 50:21). He will not be brought to man's standards. He will not respect those who degrade His Word by disregarding its teachings and substituting their own. The words of Isaiah echo with crystal clarity through the ages to remind us that man has changed little in his disregard for God's standards. This great prophet said:

For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions *are* with us; and *as for* our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter (Isa. 59:12-14).

Our nation should awaken to the consequences a rejection of its God will bring. How is it that we can dare speak of ourselves as "one nation under God" while casting out the very God we claim to honor? Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

WHY CALL YE ME, LORD, LORD, AND DO NOT THE THINGS WHICH I SAY...REGARDING MY WORK?

Jesus proclaimed that He was sent to work, to do the will of Him that sent Him (John 4:34; 5:17; 9:4). Just prior to the cross He proclaimed that His work was finished (John 17:4). He further taught that those who would follow Him must likewise work. Mark 13:34 states: “*For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, **and to every man his work**, and commanded the porter to watch.*” The faithful child of God will always be abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 9:8). Paul presented himself and Timothy as examples of such workers (1 Cor. 16:10). His prayer for the Colossians was that they “might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). One’s works will be a primary factor at the Judgment bar of God (Mat. 16:27; 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 22:12). Without proper works, faith is said to be dead (Jam. 2:14-26).

Thus, one who calls Jesus Lord is expected to work for His Cause. After all, He is the Savior of those (and only of those) who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9). Many in the denominational world seek to deny the proper place of obedience (works) in God’s great scheme. As noted, James reveals that faith is dead if not accompanied by works of obedience to God. For some this poses a problem because they attempt to array Paul against James. Paul stated, “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” (Eph. 2:8-9). In their failure rightly to divide the Word of truth such men see Paul as teaching one thing and James teaching something totally contradictory to him. (This mentality brought about Luther’s statement that James was a “right strawy epistle.”) Many of them refuse to see that Paul spoke of a different type of works from James. They also fail to take note of the fact that Paul continued in his statement to the Ephesians with these words: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **unto good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (2:10). Strict obedience to God is essential. Such examples as Noah (in the building of the ark with the proper dimensions and material), Moses (Exo. 25:40; Heb. 8:5; Num. 20:7-12), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2),

Naaman (2 Kin. 5), the twelve Ephesian men (Acts 19:1-7), and a host of others illustrate this point clearly.

Christ has demanded that those who follow Him do what He says. Doing nothing is always wrong when something needs to be done. In the parable of the talents (Mat. 25:14-30), the one-talent man was condemned for doing nothing. Thus, it is seen that one who does nothing when the Lord has demanded something is as severely condemned as the man who does that which the Lord has strictly forbidden. Concerning His people, the Lord has commanded that we do a number of things. Our primary work is to teach the Word of God (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). How can one possibly claim that Jesus is his Lord and then refuse to teach others about Him? He has likewise called on us to serve our fellow man out of love, being benevolent in character. How can one claim a love for the God he has never seen while disdainingly his fellow man whom he has seen (1 John 4:20)? Foreign mission work is an indication of a willingness to be obedient in both these realms—in teaching the lost and serving our fellow man. However, some congregations have all but given up on the plan God designed. They refuse to support worthy foreign efforts, hoarding their collected funds for the proverbial rainy day, and robbing themselves of the rich blessings inherent in such service. Are we among those guilty of calling Him Lord, and not doing what He says regarding His work?

WHY CALL YE ME, LORD, LORD, AND DO NOT THE THINGS WHICH I SAY...REGARDING MY WORSHIP?

It has always been the case that worship to God must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Although little detail is given regarding worship during the Patriarchal dispensation, it is still abundantly clear that God expected to be worshiped in particular fashion. Concerning Abel's worship, the Bible reveals that it was done by faith (Heb. 11:4). Since it was "by faith," it had to be in accordance with the stipulated Will of God (Rom. 10:17). Cain's worship was not by faith; thus it was a violation of God's stipulations regarding worship. Some have the erroneous idea that this matter of worship from Cain and Abel was something they voluntarily presented to God without any word from God concerning it. God whimsically accepted one and rejected the other. However, such a concept is a violation of the very nature of God and of His Word (Acts 10:34). Where there is no law from God regarding a matter, there can be no transgression by man (Rom. 4:15). Thus, the

fact that there was acceptance of one's worship and the rejection of the other's is sufficient evidence to show that there was indeed instruction from God regarding it.

God has never left man to his own devices regarding this matter of worship. Intricate detail accompanied the worship required under the Mosaic system (i.e., Lev. 1:3-5; 2:1-3; Lev. 16). Such service to God was regulated by God. Violations resulted in His displeasure with and, at times, His immediate wrath upon the violators (10:1-2). Thus, in Old Testament times God required man to worship in the strict fashion He prescribed.

From the time of Cain and Abel there have been constant attempts by man to interpose his will upon God in regards to worship. Man's desires often overruled God's demands (in man's mind, that is). In quick fashion the children of Israel dethroned God and enthroned the golden calf which they had fashioned (Exo. 32:1-6). Since that time man has often sat down to eat and drink and arisen to play (32:6). Various other attempts were made by the Israelites along the way to empower themselves and negate God (i.e., Num. 16:1-40). The king they wanted so desperately violated God's demands by foolishly substituting his will for God's way (1 Sam. 15:15). Even if Saul was sincere in his desire to offer these preserved animals as sacrifice in worship and homage to God, such worship would have been in vain before God. Modern religionists should take note of this fact that worship does make a difference with God. David's introduction of mechanical instruments of music was not of God's choosing and continues to plague man to this very day. In response to the question: "Did David introduce instrumental music into Old Testament worship with divine approval?" the scholarly and lamented Guy N. Woods replied in part:

I do not believe that he did. The strains of mechanical music were never heard in the worship of God in Israel for more than four hundred years after the law was given on Sinai (Exo. 20:1-17); and the law forbade additions to it as clearly and emphatically as the New Testament prohibits supplements to it (26).

Later, when the kingdom divided, the first items to be changed were in regards to worship. Jeroboam made changes in the object, place, priests, and time of worship (1 Kin. 15:25-33). The Record's summary of this matter is quite fitting and should be studied by those who seek

to change the Lord's expressed will for man's worship. The writer stated:

So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense (12:33).

It should be very obvious from these and numerous other Old Testament references that God is serious about worship and takes seriously violations concerning it.

What about more modern times? What about worship as addressed by the New Testament? Has the Lord left man with the freedom to express himself however he sees fit in his worship today? Is there any word from the Lord regarding this matter of worship? Apparently, many in the religious world (and, sadly, some in the church) have forgotten that worship can be "in vain" (Mat. 15:9; Mark 7:7). To them, any expression of praise to God is to be respected by man and will be acceptable to God. However, as has already been seen, God is not indebted to man and will not be made susceptible to the fancies of man. As Jesus stated, worship to God **must** be in accordance with truth (John 4:24). So, instead of devising new ways to entertain himself through an avenue he calls worship, man would be much better served by going back to the Bible for God's directives on how He wants to be worshiped (Jer. 6:16).

Biblical examples authorize man the stipulation to worship God on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Further New Testament study shows that man is to participate in prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-8; 1 Cor. 14:15), preaching/teaching (Acts 20:7; 1 Tim. 4:13), giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-11), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), and the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24). The example of the church in the first century demonstrates her faithfulness in worshiping in such fashion (Acts 2:42). Those who call Him Lord will want to do as He says in the fashion He says.

The innovations by man into worship supposedly directed by and to God have compounded over the years. Like Jeroboam of old, modern man has changed the time, place, object and priests of worship. In disregarding the importance and emphasis of the first day of the week, man has substituted Saturday as well as other days of the week as being just as suitable for worship. (While it is true that man can worship at

other times, he is expressly commanded by God to assemble for such on the first day of the week.) In the name of convenience man has substituted the gathering commanded by God (Heb. 10:25) for the lake-side or the golf course, deceiving himself into believing that God is with him in such neglect. In his innovations and violations man has long abandoned God as the object of his worship and either substituted his own idol or taken that position for himself. Since the Bible reveals that Christians are priests, authorized and approved of God to offer up acceptable worship (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), religionists and unfaithful brethren have substituted men of all sorts for the true priesthood ordained by God.

Such a study as this would be remiss without at least a mention of the subject of mechanical instrumental music. Like David, many have introduced mechanical instruments of music without regard to God's desires concerning this matter. Most religious groups have practiced such for so long that there is never even any question about the scriptural aspects of such. It is automatically assumed that since it is acceptable and practiced by so many men that it must be acceptable to God. Numerous are the arguments used in support of this innovation; but, the bottom line to it all is, what did God say about it? What is the Will of Christ concerning it? As is sufficiently demonstrated in the Bible, God is not pleased with those who add to or otherwise modify His Word (Deu. 4:2; Pro. 30:6; Rev. 22:18). In regards to the subject of music, the New Testament is clear in its restriction upon vocal music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Just as God restricted Noah to a certain wood (Gen. 6:14), Moses to a certain address (Num. 20:7-8), Naaman to a certain river (2 Kin. 5:10), the blind man to a certain pool (John 9:7), and those who commune to certain elements (1 Cor. 11:28), so He has restricted music in worship to Him to being vocal. Vain is any attempt to find authorization for the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship in the New Testament of Christ. Thus, vain is the worship of those who would incorporate such into their efforts of praise to God. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke 6:46).

CONCLUSION

Indeed numerous are the areas in which the searchlight of the Lord's question on this occasion could be aimed. The history of man is replete with occasions when he violated God's Will, substituting his own

standards. Man has rejected the Lord's way concerning His world, His Word, His work, and His worship. Grievous will be the consequences to those who make a pretense of calling Him Lord, but who reject His Will. Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
Hatcher, Michael. "Preface." *Great Old Testament Questions*. Ed. Michael Hatcher. Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 2003.

Woods, Guy N., *Questions and Answers—Open Forum Vol. 1, Freed-Hardeman College Lectures*. Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1976.

“SUPPOSE YE THAT I AM COME TO GIVE PEACE ON EARTH?”

LUKE 12:51

Jerry Murrell



Jerry Murrell was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and grew up in Munford, Alabama. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have all served as elders in the Lord's church. He is married to Sherry (Honeycutt), and they have three children. Jerry earned his B.A. degree in Bible from Faulkner University, an M.A. degree in New Testament from Freed-Hardeman University, and a Master of Divinity degree from David Lipscomb. Jerry is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He is the author of *Women's Role in the Church: Paul of Pop Culture*. He currently works with the Needmore Church of Christ in Indian Mound, Tennessee.

INTRODUCTION

The question to be considered in this study is puzzling to the average person in the world. When most people think of Jesus, they would rather think of the silent babe in the manger than to think of the thundering preacher that He became. In the text under consideration, Jesus asks, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth?” (Luke 12:51a). Fortunately for us, we do not have to rely on modern mushy moderates to answer the question. We do not even have to rely on the His apostles to answer the question. Jesus Himself answers by saying, “I tell you, nay; but rather division” (12:51b).

This is contrary to the answer that most people would provide for this question. Many people picture in their minds a Christ who never existed—a non-controversial Christ. They have created Jesus in their own image and forgotten that Jesus came to reveal God (John 14:9) who is a “consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). To study this text, we want to begin by looking at the context of the passage. Then, we will notice the content of the teaching in the text assigned. Finally, we will note the consequences of this teaching today.

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

Remote Context

Luke presents the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a Gentile audience. Beginning at Luke 9:51, Jesus had “steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” It will be in Luke 13:22 that Jesus will go through the villages and towns, “journeying toward Jerusalem.” Everything that Jesus said and did in this section was with the cross foremost in His mind. Everything that Luke recorded was designed to explain the church, which was a present reality in his day, to a Gentile audience. Gentile religion was not exclusive in its nature. The gods of the Gentiles did not demand the kind of loyalty that the God of the Bible demands. Everyone could believe in the gods the way they saw fit to believe in them. Though pagan religion was divided, this division did not result in persecution, since no one claimed to have a corner on absolute truth. When Jesus claimed that He was the truth (John 14:6) and His apostles claimed that He was the only way to be saved (Acts 4:12), this was not easy for Gentiles to grasp.

Because of the nature of Christianity, Luke placed great emphasis on preparing the followers of Jesus to suffer for His sake. He understood that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. We find a similar passage later in Luke. Here Jesus said, “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Likewise in this section, Luke is using the words of Jesus to prepare his readers for the future suffering that will result from the division caused by the Gospel.

If I were to ask the question: “Why did my savior come to earth?” you would answer, “Because he loved me so.” This is correct as far as it goes. However, the real question before us in the text is not “What caused Him to come to earth?” but “What did He seek to accomplish while He was on earth?” The answer you give to that question may say more about you than it says about Jesus.

In John 10, Jesus discussed His role as the Good Shepherd. In the midst of that discussion, He said to the Pharisees (John 9:40), “The thief [Jewish leaders] cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). In contrast to these men, Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). This answer is not a problem to most people. If you put

up on a marquee: “Jesus came to bring you an abundant life, John 10:10,” no one would get upset. This is clearly one of the things that Jesus sought to accomplish while He was here on earth. However, this was not the only reason that Jesus gave for His coming to earth.

Immediate Context

In the context under consideration in this study, Jesus said, “I am come to send fire on the earth” (Luke 12:49). This statement is much more controversial than the statement found in John 10:10. Not only did Jesus come to “send fire on earth,” but He desired that the fire had already started. He continued by saying, “What will I, if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12:49). The meaning of this Hebrew idiom is: “How I wish that it were already kindled” (Marshall 546).

The identification of the *fire* in this text is problematic. Hendriksen thought that it refers to the judgment of God on sin that would come on Jesus at Calvary (681). Boles thought that it refers to the fires of purification, as well as the fires of judgment (263). However, when the immediate context is considered, it seems that Arndt was correct when he said that fire “stands for trouble” (323). According to Arndt, the fire refers to the “clashes that would be caused by the gospel, some people rejecting, others accepting it and even friends opposing one another in their interpretation of its meaning” (323). David seems to use fire in this way when he wrote:

Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins.
Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and
through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy *place* (Psa.
66:11-12).

Jesus knew that since division is coming as a result of His Gospel, it would be better if the division would be over already.

Then Jesus explained how this fire would exhibit itself in His own life. He said, “But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). In the Old Testament, the idea of being immersed in the waters of affliction, referring to be overwhelmed in suffering is well established. For example, David wrote:

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto *my* soul. I sink in deep mire, where *there is* no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God (Psa. 69.1-3; cf., Psa. 124:4).

In a conversation with James and John, Jesus referred to His own coming crucifixion as a baptism of suffering. He said, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38). That He was referring to His own crucifixion is evident from the context (Mark 10:32-34, 39).

The crucifixion came because Jesus had preached the Gospel and caused division within Judaism. He was not crucified for talking about the lilies of the field (Mat. 6:28). As long as He was willing to feed people, the Jews wanted to make Him an earthly king (John 6:15). He was crucified because He told the Jews things like: “Did not Moses give you the law, and *yet* none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?” (John 7:19). They were focused on their carnal problems, while Jesus was focused on their spiritual problems.

The Content of the Teaching

Next, Jesus asked the question: “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth?” (Luke 12:51). Most people would answer this question in the affirmative. When Zacharias was empowered by the Holy Spirit to prophesy about the coming Messiah, he said that the Messiah was coming “to give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79). When the angels announced the birth of Christ, they said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). Jesus was even predicted to be the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:5).

Some might see the idea that Jesus brought peace to earth (Luke 2:14), yet He says that He did not come to bring peace (Luke 12:51), as contradictory. This would not be correct. There can never be peace between the children of God and the children of the devil. Too many people have followed the philosophy of Neville Chamberlain, not recognizing that the church is the Lord’s army (Eph. 6:10ff), and there is no peace in our time.

Christ does not bring peace between the church and the world. He brings peace between man and God. He brings peace among all the people who are willing to obey the Gospel and become part of His body—the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Those who remain with Christ are united with each other, while others are divided from the Lord and His servant (Mat. 12:30).

Since the giving of the law, there has not been peace between Jews and Gentiles. Without Christ Gentiles were “without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12), but through the death of Christ, those who enter into the body of Christ receive peace. In the church, the enmity between Jews and Gentiles should be a thing of the past (Eph. 2:14-16).

Jesus does not simply deny that He has come to bring peace. He said that instead of peace He came to bring *division* (Luke 12:51). The result of the Gospel is inevitably division. When the Gospel is preached, some will accept it, and some will reject it. These are two kinds of people in the world. Luke 12 clearly shows us the distinction between these two groups. In the parallel passage Matthew tells his Jewish readers that Jesus came not “to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Mat. 10:34). This sword is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), which is used here as a symbol of division (cf., Heb. 4:12).

In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus tells us about the rich fool. A man came to Jesus and asked Him to get his brother to divide the inheritance with him (12:13). Jesus told this man that his real problem was not his brother, but his covetous heart (12:14-15). He then told the man the parable of the rich fool who was only concerned with carnal things and not with spiritual things (12:16-19). God took the rich fool’s life; since all that he had was on earth, he lost everything that he had. This is what happens when any man is selfish and does not lay up his treasure with God (12:20-21).

Then Jesus addressed His disciples. He told them they should not concentrate on the cares of this world. Instead they should seek the kingdom of God. If their greatest treasure is the kingdom, their heart will be in the kingdom (12:22-34).

At this point, Jesus told another parable. The main point of this parable was that Jesus is going to return and hold men accountable for their actions. This means that all men should be prepared for Christ’s return. The way to be prepared for His return is by focusing on the eternal spiritual things rather than on temporal carnal things (12:35-40).

The Gospel exposes this division to open view. There are people who focus on carnal things and there are people who focus on spiritual things. Some people who focus on carnal things reject the Gospel out of hand. Others who focus on carnal things want to go to heaven—on their own terms. The Gospel, as it is, does not appeal to them. When the Gospel confronts them, they choose to change the Gospel, rather than to change themselves.

This division, which comes as a result of the Gospel, would even come to the closest earthly relationships. Families would be divided along generational lines. Jesus would describe it as: “There shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three” (Luke 12:52). The different sides would be:

The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law (12:53).

The mother and the mother-in-law would be the same person; so there is a total of five people mentioned in Christ’s illustration.

John informs us that the division had begun to take place even during the lifetime of Jesus. John wrote:

Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him (John 7:40-43).

John also informed us that, after Jesus declared that He was the Good Shepherd:

There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? (10:19-21).

This division was even present in the family of Jesus. His brother did not believe on Him during the time of His personal ministry (John 7:5). However, later he witnessed the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7) and became an elder in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; Gal. 2:19).

The Consequences of the Passage

In the first century, most Jews were looking for an earthly kingdom led by a Messiah who would overthrow Rome and reign from David’s literal throne in Jerusalem. They desired a carnal kingdom and therefore rejected Jesus and His spiritual kingdom (John 18:36). Their carnal minds blinded them from the Gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 3:14-16).

This same division exists today between those who teach the doctrine of Dispensational Premillennialism and those who teach that the church is the visible manifestation of God’s kingdom on earth. The

church was in the mind of God before the "foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), because it was part of God's "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). Those who desire an earthly kingdom with carnal promises make the same mistake that the first century Jews who rejected Jesus made. Those who seek a spiritual kingdom (Mat. 6:33) with spiritual promises are divided from them by the Gospel of Christ.

This same division exists also between the Lord's church and the community Church movement. Those who follow the community Church model appeal to the *felt* [carnal] *needs* of man. They survey a community to see what people desire to find in a church. Then they build a church to attract the carnal people who responded to their survey. Others read the Bible to see what Jesus expects of His church (Mat. 16:18). Then they attempt to duplicate in doctrine, practice, and attitude the church that Jesus actually built as we read about it in the Bible. As a result of this, there is a division between the Lord's church and the community Church movement. Unfortunately, oftentimes this division exhibits itself along generational lines.

The same division exists between those who are self-styled *change-agents* and those who seek to follow the pattern found in the Bible. The change agents look to the denominations round about and seek to emulate them (cf., 1 Sam. 8:7). In doing so, they follow the denominations into carnality. Others seek to read the New Testament and follow the commands of the Lord and the example of the early church. They recognize that the teachings of Paul are "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37)—not the suggestions of Paul, subject to change over time.

CONCLUSION

Jesus prayed that all of His followers might be one (John 17:21). This unity is possible for those who believe on Jesus through the words of the apostles (17:20). The church began on Pentecost after Peter preached the first Gospel sermon (Acts 2:47). The church was united to the extent that they gave to each other's financial needs (2:44-45). This was possible because they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (2:42).

As can be seen in the rest of Acts, though those who followed the apostles' doctrine were at peace with one another, they were not at peace with men who did not follow the apostles' doctrine. In Acts 4, the Jewish leaders were grieved at the apostles' preaching (4:1-2).

These leaders put Peter and John in jail and told them not to preach any more by the authority of Christ (4:5ff). This division was caused by the Gospel.

In Acts 5, we learn that even some in the church had not put carnality behind them. Ananias and Sapphira sold land and gave part of the price of the proceeds from the sale to the church. They lied about the transaction to the apostles and were struck dead. Again, there was division between carnal men and spiritual men because of the Gospel.

In the rest of the Bible we see Jews who wanted to bind the carnal system on Gentiles, causing division in the body of Christ. Those who were willing to abide by the apostles' teaching were not divided from each other (Acts 15), but they were divided from the Judaizing teachers. There was division in the local congregation at Corinth because many of the Christians there were carnal (1 Cor. 3:3). Even today the Gospel divides those who are concerned with the here and now from those who are concerned the hereafter. Christ, through the Gospel, is still bringing division on the earth.

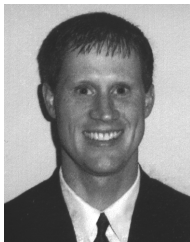
WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Arndt, William F. "Luke." *Concordia Classics Series*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1956.
- Boles, H. Leo. "Luke." *Gospel Advocate Commentary Series*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1940.
- Hendriksen, William. "The Gospel of Luke." *New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978.
- Marshall, I. Howard. "Commentary on Luke." *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978.

“LORD, ARE THERE FEW THAT BE SAVED?”

LUKE 13:23

Steven E. Yeatts



Steve Yeatts was born in Virginia. He is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University (M. Ed.) and Freed-Hardeman University (B.A.). He is presently working with the Bethlehem Church of Christ in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and directs the annual Greater Murfreesboro Area Lectureship. Steve has held meetings and spoke at lectureships in Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, Illinois, Ohio, Texas, and Vermont. He has also preached in England and taught in the Murmansk School of Preaching in Murmansk, Russia. Steve is a co-author of a book titled: *Preaching The Whole Counsel Of God*.

Steve and his wife, Brenda, have three daughters.

UNIVERSAL SALVATION?

We live in an era when the prevailing theme is that almost everyone goes to heaven. It would appear based on the hagiographies written about worldly cultural icons that most in America have salved their consciences into a mind-set that will have heaven with standing room only, leaving Satan and his angels with little, if any, additional company in the hereafter. This writer saw a poll recently that indicated we live in a country where people believe in heaven to the exclusion of hell about two to one. Such a view of eternity lends itself to “Universalism” (universal salvation). This universal viewpoint of eternity affirms that all (or all but the abjectly evil) will be saved.

This writer lives in Middle Tennessee (about 30 miles from Nashville). In perhaps no other genre of popular culture is this universal perspective so well championed as it is in country music. Many current and recent mainstream country songs purport the ecumenical idea of salvation for all. In fact, a recent song by the country duo, Brooks and Dunn, “Red Dirt Road,” includes in its lyrics, “I’ve learned the path to heaven is full of sinners and believers.” The implication is that it does not matter what you believe, or if you believe for that matter. Also, notice that according to the lyricist’s perspective, the path to heaven is

quite crowded (*full*). This scribe guesses such skewed soteriology within this song should not be surprising because the same song also asserts that the red dirt road, for the songwriter, was “Where I drank my first beer—It’s where I found Jesus.” In the somewhat linear music video that accompanied Brooks’ and Dunn’s song, the “I found Jesus” statement is matched with a *baptismal* scene that shows water being poured on the “sinner or believer.” This author guesses in the world of universal salvation, whether one believes in Christ or not, or whether one has been sprinkled, poured, immersed, or left high and dry is of no consequence.

Just in case the living country stars do not succeed in the promotion of the everyone-is-saved mentality, the eulogies for the deceased country music icons pick up where they left off. It seems that the country music community and fans have taken it upon themselves to deliver everyone associated with their genre of music safely into the arms of God—no matter what type of life they lived. The late Waylon Jennings in his autobiography years ago penned his grammatically incorrect and spiritually blasphemous opinion to the effect of the “Church of Christ has got it wronger than anybody.” However, sure enough, the day after Waylon died, the country music world was lauding his maverick reputation and wondering how he was settling in to his new digs in heaven. Whatever Waylon has learned since his death (and this author does not know his spiritual state when he died), this writer is confident that in either case he now knows that those faithfully following the New Testament pattern of the Lord’s church have indeed tuned in to the proper standard and are not “wronger than anybody.”

This author is not the judge of the destiny of folks’ souls (country music performers or otherwise), but he is sanctioned by the Word of God to be a judge of fruit according to a righteous standard (Mat. 7:20; John 7:24). The very incarnation of the righteous standard, Jesus, the Word, asserts that few will find the strait and narrow gate that leads unto life (Mat. 7:13-14; John 1:1ff). Certainly, individuals who lived lives fraught with blatant worldly excess, false ecumenical religious viewpoints, and in some cases downright decadence were living far from navigating the strait and narrow. It was subsequent to that statement that our Saviour spoke of being able to ascertain one’s spiritual standing by their fruit (Mat. 7:16-23). Our Saviour certainly never promoted or promised universal salvation. He, as the embodiment

of truth, spoke of a final judgment scene involving those who will call Him by name and claim to have done “many wonderful works” in His name (Mat. 7:21-22). To these impostors He will say, “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mat. 7:23). Certainly those who were brazen enough to promote their degenerate lifestyle right to and through death’s door epitomize the folly of the masses on the wide and broad way that leads to destruction.

If Universalists bother to try to have proof texts for their belief, they have been known to use Ephesians 1:10 to try to support their doctrine (Coffman 139). Paul states: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him.” The key and operative phrases in this verse in regard to salvation are “in Christ” and “in him.” Only those who are truly “in Christ” where every spiritual blessing resides are those who will enter heaven (1:3). The prevailing theme in the religious world today is that one who mentally acknowledges Jesus Christ is accepted with Him and is a *Christian*. Nowhere does the New Testament even hint of such an arrangement. Submission to the plan of salvation, understanding the oneness of the church, and faithful living are foreign concepts to Universalists, who are content in their ignorance of “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). As Christ indicated in His Sermon on the Mount, many will **claim** to have done things in His name, but their assertion does not equate with true salvation. Only those who obey the Gospel and faithfully strive will have indeed made their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

THE QUESTION

We are not told in the Scriptures who it was that asked the question: “Lord, are there few that be saved?” The text simply states that it was *one* in a crowd somewhere along the way as Christ journeyed through the cities and villages as He worked His way toward Jerusalem (Luke 13:22). We do not know what precipitated the question. Perhaps it was an attempt on the part of the questioner to try to prove some sense of Jewish exclusivity. The entire answer that Jesus gave is inclusive of the statement: “And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (13:30). This statement appears in three other cases in the New Testament (Mat. 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31). In each case Jesus was either referring to the Jews or speaking directly to

a Jew (the rich young man in the parallel accounts of Matthew 19 and Mark 10, and the parable of the laborers in the vineyard from Matthew 20). This may indicate that the inquirer was a Jew since his question prompted a similar response from the Savior as used in other places to refute any idea that the Jews would be universally saved no matter what. In fact, the predominant rejection of Christ by the Jews would facilitate the reality of the maxim stated by Jesus regarding the spiritual role reversal regarding Jews and Gentiles. The Jews (“first which shall be last”) had been reached out to initially with the gospel, but because of their contempt for Christ the Gospel would extend past them to the Gentiles (“last which shall be first”) who were much more receptive.

Perhaps it was an inquiry (as was often done) attempting somehow to entrap our Savior so later His enemies could try to use the answer against Him. We simply do not specifically know the background for the question and despite an effort to be thoughtful, we cannot render undue speculation since we really do not know the subject matter being taught by Jesus, nor is it revealed for us the disposition or intent of the questioner.

If the greatest question one can ever ask is “What must I do to be saved?” and it would be difficult to deny the ultimate rank of that question, then the query “Are there few that be saved?” certainly shifts the perspective from an individual and objective one to perhaps a subjective, universal, and unwise comparison. Even if the question from Luke 13:23 was one based on naive curiosity, it perhaps points to the modern difficulty we have in dealing with those who use others (usually deceased parents, grandparents, or perhaps other family members and friends) as a subjective crutch to keep them from obeying the Gospel. Their statements might go something like this: “So you’re telling me that only a few will be saved and that you have to be a member of the church of Christ to be saved. Well, what about my Grandpa? He was a member of _____ Church and he went to church every Sunday and he was a good man. So, you’re telling me that he went to Hell.”

Of course, all you may have done is teach the essentiality of baptism, or stress the oneness of the church, or rightly teach any number of Bible truths. However, we have learned that one can lose common ground with such a person very quickly when one speaks the truth on the matter of salvation and the exclusivity of the church. *Exclusivity* does not refer to a secret and closed society of believers.

The Gospel is for all (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:4). That being understood, it is equally true that few (in a relative sense to the billions of souls on this planet) will submit their will to the Will of God by obeying His Son. In that sense, the church is exclusive because the terms of being added to it automatically exclude those who will not yield themselves to them (belief, repentance, confession, baptism, and faithful living). When Jesus said, “Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5), that is decidedly exclusive. An exceptive clause by definition is an exclusive one in that it excludes everyone who will not submit to the exception.

Since there is exclusivity regarding the saved, a spiritually/scripturally ignorant or misguided person upon hearing that reality may continue to reject the Word of God as the objective standard for truth because of their inability to get past their subjective feelings. Though we should strive to be as kind as possible when teaching the gospel, we cannot always help the offensiveness of the truth. What is a spiritually attractive, sweet-smelling savor to some is the savor of death to others (2 Cor. 2:16). The disposition of the heart of the hearer is the key to success when the Gospel is preached (Luke 8:15). Those who are determined to argue personalities, privilege, or ancestors as a smoke-screen for their own disobedience will hardly be influenced to obey. Until one is objective about his or her own soul, any discussions about emotional and subjective experiences and familial religious predilections will be futile as it pertains to true salvation.

Just as we do not know with what inflection or emotion the inquisitor posed this question to the Saviour, we are not given the reaction by the inquisitor in this scene from Luke 13. We do know the question was not worthy of a direct response because it was not nearly as sincere as “What must I do to be saved?” The “what must I do” question reveals a good and honest heart that we trust is on the brink of obedience and is not merely looking for a percentage of the saved to which to compare himself or by which to make a subjective assessment (see Acts 2:37, Acts 8:36, and Acts 16:30 for variations and results on the greatest question that one can genuinely ask).

THE ANSWER

Jesus gave no merit to the question, “Lord are there few that be saved?” The answer that our Savior gave brings gravity and a time for

reflection that Christians should use as motivation to stay faithful and to further spread the Gospel. The question is, in and of itself, rhetorical. Yes, few will be saved. Jesus said as much in His Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 7:13-14). However, Jesus' answer should have served as a motivation for self-evaluation not for interpersonal comparisons. Jesus answered:

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last (Luke 13:24-30).

“Strive” from Luke 13:24 is the Greek word *agonizomai*. This word carries with it the idea of “struggling, fighting, and laboring fervently.” The root of this Greek word (*agon*) is used in Hebrews 12:1 and is translated “race.” *Agon* is the basis for our Anglicized word, *agony*, and describes the effort, the anxiety, the conflict, the struggle, and the contention that is part of any contest (Thayer 10).

It is also tantamount to the picture given us by Matthew 7:13-14, where Jesus said that the gate that leads to life is *strait*. *Strait* means that due to obstacles that are very nearby the way becomes narrow and difficult, though certainly not impassable. For example, an open stretch of rural highway on a clear day with little or no traffic around is an optimal driving situation. If there are no impediments, no clogged lanes, no enraged drivers to deal with, then such a road is easy to maneuver. However, if one drives in heavy metro traffic, the analogy quickly changes. The roads in a downtown area are usually narrow, congested, with cars parked on the street all around, and perhaps confusing and unfamiliar signs that may fluster an inexperienced city driver. This image shows the potential difficulty of maintaining one's composure and faithfully focusing on the destination of this Christian life. Jesus never promised a life of ease and contentment. Heaven is not on earth. The apostle Peter penned, “Beloved, think it not strange

concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet. 4:12). The faithful chronicled in Hebrews 11 longed for “a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (11:16). Jacob, when he had lived 130 years, still said, “few and evil have the days of the years of my life been” (Gen. 47:9). This life provides us many wonderful things as we are daily blessed by God, but we must reckon with Paul “that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

Jesus shreds the type of mentality that asserts salvation for all by proving that the conditions necessary for salvation are indeed a serious litmus test. Not many will be able to handle the level of commitment, conflict, and struggle that may assail the child of God. Not only are the conditions for obedience to the Gospel a stumbling-block and foolishness to many (1 Cor. 1:23), but once one has submitted to the plan of salvation, the commitment is to be constant (Luke 9:23). The calling is so serious that Jesus said a true disciple *hates* his family (loves them less than he loves Christ) and forsakes all that he has to follow Jesus wholeheartedly (14:26, 33). The very reason that few will be saved is that, when true commitment is seriously considered, the masses refuse to subscribe to such devotion. This is reminiscent of the scene in John 6 when Jesus began to speak of true commitment and true discipleship to the multitude. Many had followed him as long as they were being fed and impressed by His miracles. Yet, when Jesus spoke of His sacrifice that would in turn demand the sacrifice of self by His followers, the Bible says, “**Many** therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60). The sad scene includes “From that *time* **many** of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (6:66).

However, that scene from John 6 also gives us a picture of hope and what it means to be truly dedicated.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God (6:67-69).

The conditions set forth for salvation and discipleship are the line of demarcation that separate the few from the many, the good from the evil, and the just from the unjust. What Jesus said also shows the futil-

ity and spiritual danger of comparing ourselves among ourselves. If few are saved, that does not exonerate one from yielding to the plan of salvation. If few are saved, no one is allowed to use that as a standard to suggest that somehow God is unfair in setting forth conditions for salvation. If few are saved, that does not reduce one's responsibility one modicum in regard to fulfilling the Great Commission. If few are saved, that does not justify anyone keeping the Gospel a secret under the false assumption that it (the Gospel) would only serve as condemnation, not salvation for lost souls around the world.

The rest of Jesus' discourse (Luke 13:25-30) in this context speaks to one taking advantage of the opportunity to be saved when it is presented and not foolishly trusting in some subjective standard to claim privilege when ultimate accountability comes. The prophet Isaiah said it this way: "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). For example, the Jews not only generally took for granted the presence and influence of the Savior, and in fact, largely denied that He was the Messiah, but also persecuted those who proclaimed Him, yet Jesus foretold of the camaraderie that they (the Jews) would later claim when it came time for reckoning. Their hollow claims would reveal them for the spiritual impostors that they were, and any sense of Jewish exclusivity and privilege would be found wanting in regard to the new covenant of the Messiah.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate impact of the statements of our Saviour in Luke 13:23-30 is that the time of salvation is now (Rom. 13:11-12; 2 Cor. 6:1-2). One should not waste his time wondering how few will be saved, but should use the sobering reality that relatively few will be saved as motivation to view people as they really are—an eternal soul that will reside in either heaven or hell forever. This perspective will motivate us to be more diligent in preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The best question for an honest and good heart to ask is: "What must I do to be saved?" Upon hearing, believing, repenting, confessing the name of Christ, and being immersed in water for the remission of his sins, he then needs to live a faithful life keeping his eyes on the heavenly prize. All during his life as a Christian he is to proclaim the glorious Gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. Are there few that be saved? The Savior did acknowledge that such was the case (Mat.

7:13-14; Luke 13:24). Dear friend, are **you** saved? That question and its answer are of utmost importance to every individual (Phi. 2:12).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1977.
- Thayer, Joseph H. *Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.

“WHY SLEEP YE?”

LUKE 22:46

David B. Watson



David B. Watson was born in Webb City, Missouri. He attended Missouri Southern College, Joplin, Missouri, for three semesters. While in the U.S. Army he saw duty in Viet Nam as a Chinook Helicopter Mechanic/Crew Chief. David graduated from the Florida School of Preaching in 1977 and Southern Christian University with a B.A. degree in Bible in 1994. He has attended Singing/Song Leader Schools, Personal Work/Home Bible Study Schools, and a Men's Leadership Training Course. He has done part time and full time local work in Florida and speaks on Gospel meetings and lectureships. He has also done radio/television work. He has held three debates on the subjects of anti-ism,

church discipline, and marriage-divorce-remarriage.

David is married to the former Peggy Lee Comstock and have three children: Michael, Kristina, and Michele.

INTRODUCTION

It is my assignment to deal with the great New Testament question: “Why sleep ye?” (Luke 22:46). According to *Webster's Dictionary*, *sleep* (as a noun) can mean: “any state of inactivity thought of as like sleep, as death, unconsciousness, hibernation, etc.” The same source says that *sleep* (as a verb) can mean: “to be in state of inactivity like sleep, as that of death, quiescence, hibernation, inattention, etc.” The title to my lesson is taken from the text of Scripture found in Luke 22:39-46:

And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

THE CHRIST IS NOT SLEEPING

The Place

Jesus had preached His farewell discourse to His disciples (John 14-16) and had prayed His prayer to His heavenly Father (John 17). He and His band of disciples had then journeyed in the direction of the Mount of Olives. Their destination was "over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples" (18:1). The garden was named/called Gethsemane (Mat. 26:36; Mark 14:32).

The Pleas

Jesus issued two pleas to His disciples in this garden. The first was a plea to pray. "He said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Luke 22:40). He instructed them to sit while He went and prayed (Mat. 26:36; Mark 14:32). He then took Peter, James, and John and began to be sorrowful and sore amazed and to be very heavy (Mat. 26:37; Mark 14:33). He said to these three: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." It was then that He issued His second plea for them to watch. He said: "Tarry ye here, and watch" (Mat. 26:38; Mark 14:34).

The Prayers

Jesus then withdrew Himself from them about a stone's cast, and uttered the first of three prayers. His posture is first recorded. Luke says that He "kneeled down, and prayed" (22:41). Mark tells us that He "fell on the ground, and prayed" (14:35). Matthew tells us that He "fell on his face, and prayed" (26:39). The Savior started out kneeling and ended up falling on His face on the ground as He prayed.

His prayer is then recorded.

Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me (Luke 22:42).

He said, Abba, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me (Mark 14:36).

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mat. 26:39).

All three synoptic writers tell us that He also prayed: "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*" (Mat. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Only Luke records the appearance of an angel, strengthening Him and His agonizing earnestly so that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (22:43-44). After this first supplication, He returned to His disciples to find them sleeping (Mat. 26:40; Mark 14:37; Luke 22:45). It was on this occasion that He asked: "Why

sleep ye?” (Luke 22:46). His two previous pleas to “watch and pray” (Mat. 26:41; Mark 14:38) were also spoken to them again.

Jesus then went away and prayed His second supplication. Mark tells us that He spake the same words (14:39). Matthew tells us that He “prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (26:42). When He returned to His disciples, He again found them asleep (Mat. 26:43; Mark 14:40). Then, “he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words” (Mat. 26:44). He came back the third time to find His disciples still sleeping. This time He allowed them to sleep on and rest until He aroused them. There was no time for Him to sleep, for the hour was at hand and the Son of man was betrayed into the hands of sinners (Mat. 26:45-46; Mark 14:41-42).

The Preventatives

Watchfulness and prayer are great preventatives concerning temptation. Paul gave the command to the Colossians: “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (4:2). Peter wrote: “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Pet. 4:7). He further explained: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (5:8). Jesus did not sleep in the garden of Gethsemane, and He and His Father do not sleep now. “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:4). We must not sleep nor slumber but ever be vigilant and prayerful like the Savior “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). One of Satan’s most effective devices is to seek out those who are sleeping. The Savior asks: “Why sleep ye?”

THE CONDEMNED ARE NOT SLEEPING

One of the parables that the Lord explained to His disciples was the parable of the tares:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that

we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Mat. 13:24-30).

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (13:36-43).

The Sowers

There are two sowers in this parable. One is “a man which sowed good seed in his field” (13:24). This is the householder (13:27), who is the Son of man (13:37). The other is “his enemy” who “came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (13:25, 28). This is the wicked one (13:38) or the devil (13:39). Both of these are sowing seed.

The Seed

There are also two kinds of seed in this parable. One is called good seed (13:24, 27, 37-38) and wheat (13:25, 29-30). The Lord identified such as the children of the kingdom (13:38) and the righteous (13:43). The other seed is tares (13:25-27, 29-30, 40). The Lord identified these as the children of the wicked one (13:38) and them which do iniquity (13:41).

The Springing Up

“But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also” (13:26). When the two seeds sprouted, each was identifiable. Jesus said: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (7:15). He then explained how to tell a wolf—even one dressed in sheep’s clothing. He said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (7:16). He

repeated this, emphasizing: “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (7:20).

The Surprise

When the tares sprang up with the wheat, the servants were surprised. “So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?” (13:27).

The Surety

The householder, knowing he had sowed good seed, knew of a surety that: “An enemy hath done this” (13:28). Please note that this knowledge was gained by implication.

The Suggestion

The servants of the householder then suggested “that we go and gather them up” (13:28). We learn later that those who *gather* are to “bind them in bundles to burn them” (13:30). “They shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (13:41-42). We also learn that this is the task of angels and not men (13:41).

The Safeguarding

The response of the householder to the servant’s suggestion was “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them” (13:29). He wanted the wheat to be safeguarded until the time of harvest.

The Solution

His solution was: “Let both grow together until the harvest” (13:30). “The harvest is the end of the world” (13:39).

The Sending

At the appointed time of harvest: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (13:41). “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world” (13:40).

The Sentence

His final sentence shall be one of condemnation: “I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (13:30). “The reapers are the angels” (13:39). Concerning the tares, the reapers “shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (13:42). Concerning the wheat: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (13:43).

The Sleeping

Now look back and notice that “while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (13:25). The thing that allowed the enemy to come and plant the children of the wicked one among the children of the kingdom was that men, servants of the householder, were sleeping. While the servants slept, the wicked one worked. The Lord asks: “Why sleep ye?”

The Sphere

Please also notice the sphere where all of this seed sowing is taking place. That sphere is a field (13:24, 27). That field is then identified as the world (13:38).

THE COUNTRY IS SLEEPING

The Survey

A book of 171 pages titled *Surveying the Religious Landscape* was published in 1999 by George Gallup Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay. This book compared and contrasted a number of religious polls taken over the last seven decades here in America.

The Statistics

The statistics revealed the following concerning God, Jesus Christ, religion, and the Bible. 95% of the people surveyed in 1947 said they believed in God compared with 96% in 1999 (2). This means that at least for the last 50-plus years a total of 95 to 96 out of every 100 people in America continue to believe in God. One survey showed that 84% of the people polled believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, contrasted with 46% of the people polled in Great Britain who believe the same (123). Thus, 84 out of every 100 people in America believe that Jesus Christ is God’s Son. Another survey found that 87% of the those questioned said that religion was very important or fairly

important to them (10). Thus, 87 out of every 100 people claim that religion is very or fairly important to them personally. 80% of those surveyed stated that they believe the Bible is the actual inspired Word of God. Thus, out of every 100 people, 80 believe the Bible to be inspired of God. This led the pollsters to conclude: “Americans outshine most other industrialized nations in religious fervor” (119).

The Spirituality

Profession is one thing, and practice is another. When Americans were polled concerning their practices, such did not match the percentages of their professions. For instance, 93% of all Americans have a copy of the Bible, 80% stated that they believe the Bible to be the actual inspired Word of God, and 87% said that their religion was very or fairly important to them personally. Yet only 42% can name even five of the Ten Commandments. When younger people (ages 18-29) were asked if they believe that premarital sex is wrong, only 1 in 4 said that they considered it wrong (98). This means that 75 out of every 100 younger people in America believe that fornication is not wrong, even though the Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that such is a sin (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19; 1 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 13:4). 50% of those polled concerning whether it is wrong for unmarried couples to bear children out of wedlock said that they do not think that such is wrong (127). Clearly, America’s practices do not measure up to America’s professions. This led Gallup and Lindsay to conclude: “Spirituality in America may be three thousand miles wide, but it remains only three inches deep” (45).

The Scriptures

The Scriptures speak to this very problem. James asked this powerfully penetrating question: “What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (Jam. 2:14). He answered by saying:

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (2:17-20).

He emphasized works, saying: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (2:24). He concluded: “For as the

body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:26). He was simply echoing a question the Lord once asked: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). The Lord explained the fate of such:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Mat. 7:21-27).

America is a house foolishly built upon sand. The majority of Americans think that by saying "Lord, Lord" their iniquities will be ignored. They hear but do not heed the sayings of the Savior, and this flimsy foundation is being washed away by winds of wickedness and floods of foolishness while the simple slumber and sleep. Jesus Christ asks America: "Why sleep ye?"

THE CONGRESS IS SLEEPING

The Speech

On Thursday February 12, 2004, United States Senator Zell Miller (D-GA) delivered a twelve-minute speech on the floor of the Senate concerning a "Deficit of Decency" in America. He quoted from the Old Testament prophet Amos concerning a famine in the land:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it (8:11-12).

The Study

He also quoted from "Arnold Toynbee who wrote the acclaimed 12-volume, *A Study of History*, saying that: 'Of the 22 civilizations that

have appeared in history, 19 of them collapsed when they reached the moral state America is in today.’” Miller then pointed out that:

Toynbee died in 1975, before seeing the worst that was yet to come. Yes, Arnold Toynbee saw the famine. The “famine of hearing the words of the Lord.” Whether it is removing a display of the Ten Commandments from a Courthouse or the Nativity Scene from a city square. Whether it is eliminating prayer in schools or eliminating “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. Whether it is making a mockery of the sacred institution of marriage between a man and woman or, yes, telecasting around the world made-in-the-USA filth masquerading as entertainment.

The Stink

He asked: “How many of you have ever run over a skunk with your car? I have many times, and I can tell you, the stink stays around for a long time.” He next stated: “So the scent of this event [The Super Bowl half-time show] will long linger in the nostrils of America.” He went on to challenge Congress, saying:

The desire and will of this Congress to meaningfully do anything about any of these so-called social issues is non existent and embarrassingly disgraceful. The American people are waiting and growing impatient with us. They want something done.

The Silence

He then asked and answered a question, saying:

So, if I am asked why—with all the pressing problems this nation faces today—why am I pushing these social issues and taking the Senate’s valuable time? I will answer: Because, it is of the highest importance. Yes, there’s a deficit to be concerned about in this country, a deficit of decency.

He concluded his remarks by saying:

So, as the sand empties through my hourglass at warp speed—and with my time running out in this Senate and on this earth, I feel compelled to speak out. For I truly believe that at times like this, silence is not golden. It is yellow.

Sadly, Congress was silently sleeping.

The Scriptures

The wise man spoke concerning national leaders: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34). For this reason the “king’s favour *is* toward a wise servant: but his wrath is *against* him that causeth shame” (14:35). Those that direct should be directed by Deity. “The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the

rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (21:1). Authorities should not be an abomination but should rule righteously. “*It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness*” (16:12). The pronouncements of politicians should be righteous.

A divine sentence *is* in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment (16:10).

Righteous lips *are* the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right (16:13).

Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince (17:7).

Rulers should not rebuke the righteous but the wicked.

He that saith unto the wicked, Thou *art* righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: But to them that rebuke *him* shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them (24:24-25).

Superiors should scatter the wicked away.

A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes (20:8).

A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them (20:26).

Thrones are established by truth.

Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy (20:28).

Take away the wicked *from* before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness (25:5).

Righteous rulers cause rejoicing.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn (29:2).

Congress, “Why sleep ye?”

THE COURTS ARE SLEEPING

The System

Brother Wayne Jackson wrote an article titled “America—A Nation Out Of Control” (July 28, 1999). In the article he dealt with “The Judicial System” of our nation and had this to say:

Another symptom of a nation out of control is the manner in which our judicial system has decomposed over the past half-century. A very significant book arrested the public’s attention recently. It is titled, **Guilty: The Collapse of Criminal Justice** (1996, Random House). The author was the late Harold J. Rothwax, a judge who presided over

criminal cases in New York City for the past twenty-five years. Apparently Judge Rothwax was not conservatively oriented. He stated that in his early life his hero was Clarence Darrow (the atheist who argued for evolution in the famous Scopes trial). Too, in his younger lawyering years, Rothwax was a card-carrying member of the A.C.L.U. I mention these things to emphasize that this judge was not out of a strait-laced background.

The thesis of the Judge's book is this: The American justice system is in a state of moral collapse. He writes: "We have formalism and technicalities but little common sense. It's about time America wakes up to the fact that we're in the fight of our lives." This prominent jurist further stresses: "The bottom line is that criminals are going free." He notes: "There is no respect for the truth, and without truth, there can be no justice." Rothwax charges that "our system is a carefully crafted maze, constructed of elaborate and impenetrable barriers to the truth."

The Situation

Jackson then summarized the situation by citing two examples to illustrate the problem with our system of justice.

On Christmas Eve of 1968, ten-year-old Pamela Powers was attending an event with her parents at the YMCA in Des Moines, Iowa. She went to the rest room and was never seen alive again. A few days afterward, a car was discovered in Davenport (160 miles away) containing some of her clothes. Two days later, Robert Williams, owner of the car, surrendered to Davenport police. Officials in Des Moines dispatched two policemen to transport Williams back to the site of the abduction. They were strictly charged not to question him en route. Along the way, one of the officers commented that it was Christmas time, and it would be wonderful if the Powers family could at least recover the body of Pamela and give it a "Christian burial." Sometime later Williams spoke up: "Okay, let me take you to the body."

He directed the officers to the place where he had buried little Pamela in a ditch. Subsequent tests revealed that she had been raped and smothered to death. Robert Williams was convicted of murder. However, the conviction was overturned in federal court. When the U.S. Supreme court finally ruled on the matter, the majority opinion, written by Justice Potter Stewart, stated that Williams' "rights" had been violated by the police officer's "Christian burial" speech.

Here is the second example brother Jackson gave.

At 2 a.m. on November 20, 1990, Leonardo Turriago was pulled over by two state troopers for speeding. The officers asked if they could look into his van; Turriago said they could. Inside, the troopers saw a trunk and asked Turriago about it. He sprang open its lock, then ran

away. Opening the trunk, the troopers found the body of a man shot five times. Turriago was caught quickly.

In his apartment, police found eleven pounds of cocaine and guns. The suspect told them where to find the murder weapon. Turriago was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to forty-five years to life. The defense appealed, arguing that the troopers had no right to search the van. On June 6, 1996, Turriago’s conviction was overturned. A New York appellate court ruled that the police search had been coercive.

The Separation

Zell Miller (in his Senate speech quoted previously) also spoke about our judiciary system saying:

I stand shoulder to shoulder...with our Founding Fathers in the conception of religious liberty and the terribly wrong direction our modern judiciary has taken us in.

Everyone today seems to think that the U.S. Constitution expressly provides for separation of church and state. Ask any ten people if that’s not so. And I’ll bet you most of them will say “Well, sure.” And some will point out, “it’s in the First Amendment.”

Wrong! Read it! It says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Where is the word “separate”? Where are the words “church” or “state.”

They are not there. Never have been. Never intended to be. Read the Congressional Records during that four-month period in 1789 when the amendment was being framed in Congress. Clearly their intent was to prohibit a single denomination in exclusion of all others, whether it was Anglican or Catholic or some other.

It was Alexander Hamilton who pointed out that “judges should be bound down by strict rules and precedents, which serve to define and point out their duty.” Bound down! That is exactly what is needed to be done. There was not a single precedent cited when school prayer was struck down in 1962.

These judges who legislate instead of adjudicate, do it without being responsible to one single solitary voter for their actions.

This is why, even when voters voice their objections, the judges seem to be sleeping.

The Scriptures

The Judge of all sets judges in the land. “And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city” (2 Chr. 19:5). Judges are to render rulings for Jehovah. “And [Jehovah] said to

the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who *is* with you in the judgment” (19:6). The law of the Lord is to fear Him. “Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do *it*: for *there is* no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (19:7). Judges are to render just judgment. “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment” (Deu. 16:18). The judicial process should not be perverted by judges being blinded by bribes. “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (16:19). The judgments of judges determine the destiny of the land in which we all live. “That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (16:20). Judges, “Why sleep ye?”

THE COLLEGES ARE SLEEPING

The Secular Schools

Wayne Jackson, in the article previously cited, also had a section dealing with “The Educational System” of our colleges, schools, and universities. He wrote:

Another segment of our society that is out of control is the educational system. Gone are the days when the American school room was a place of “‘readin’, writin’, and ‘rithmatic, taught to the tune of a hick’ry stick.” Nowadays, many youngsters cannot read—even when they leave high school. They cannot write decently, and they cannot balance a simple checkbook. As for the “hick’ry stick,” it has been banished to the Smithsonian museum, while the school yard has become a war zone.

There are three major problems with the modern school system. (1) It does not educate. (2) It is a propagandizing tool with a humanistic agenda. (3) It has become an environment of extreme danger. Let us consider each of these areas.

1. Journalist Charles Sykes has produced a bombshell volume titled: **Dumbing Down Our Kids** (St. Martin’s Griffin, 1995). The **Washington Times** characterized the book as “a scathing indictment of the educational establishment and should be required reading for all parents still in denial about the true condition of K-12 education in America.” Sykes subtitled the book: **Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can’t Read, Write, or Add.**

Here is but a sampling of some of the startling data Sykes presents. Twenty-five percent of high school seniors can barely read their

diplomas. A standardized test, given to 26,000 Americans (sixteen and older), concluded that 80 million Americans are deficient in the basic reading and mathematical skills needed to perform the rudimentary tasks of today’s society. When America’s finest students (the top 1 percent) are compared to the best foreign students, our youth come in dead last! What does all of this tell us about the task before us as we attempt to teach the future generation the great truths of the Bible. How can people study the Scriptures when they cannot even read competently? (cf. Eph. 3:4).

2. There is absolutely no doubt but that the national educational system has a subversive agenda, the design of which is to proselyte children to materialistic humanism. This motive is no longer even concealed. A recently published book, **Darwin’s Dangerous Idea** (Simon & Schuster, 1995), urges teachers to admit that evolution refutes religion. The author, Daniel Dennett, said: “We will attempt to teach this [doctrine of organic evolution] to your children at our earliest opportunity.” Our youth are brainwashed with evolutionary propaganda in a variety of classes—astronomy, anatomy, anthropology, biology, geology, psychology, sociology, history, etc.

Note this quotation from a 1994 biology textbook.

“Darwin knew that accepting his theory required believing in philosophical materialism, the conviction that matter is the stuff of all existence and that all mental and spiritual phenomenon [sic] are its by-products.... In Darwin’s world we are not helpless prisoners of a static world order, but, rather, masters of our own fate.... And from a strictly scientific point of view rejecting biological evolution is no different from rejecting other natural phenomenon [sic] such as electricity and gravity.”

3. Aside from the foregoing factors, the American schoolroom has become one of the most dangerous environments in which your children can exist. And is it any wonder—when teachers are advocating the notion that there is no such thing as “eternal truth,” there are no absolutes relative to “right” and “wrong.”

Children and teachers alike are in danger on campus. Handguns and knives are common among students. Drugs are freely circulated, condoms are provided, and sexual promiscuity is rampant. Is this the sort of “socialization” that some parents are fearful their youngsters will miss if they are educated in private Christian schools, or in a home environment?

The Saints’ Schools

When saints send their children and their cash to schools run by our brethren they find that many of them are also asleep. In an article titled “Our Christian Schools,” an Apologetics Press writer said:

The central justification for the creation of private Christian schools is **to provide a haven from the worldliness that has inundated the public school system.** When a Christian school—which claims to be an antidote to the secular, worldly school—permits the gradual encroachment of worldliness into its own ranks, it has forfeited its right to exist—or at least to bill itself as a “Christian” school. Such a school either needs to stop existing—or stop claiming to be “Christian.” The compromise of even one moral principle places it in the same class with secular schools. It differs from them only in degree—**not in kind.**

In addition to allowing ourselves to tolerate and become comfortable with the worldliness that engulfs the nation, somewhere along the line the original intention of the Christian school was subtly altered. Attention was originally directed toward insulating children from worldliness, while educating them to live life in view of God, i.e., to prepare them to be upstanding, decent adults. Now, however, the focus of the private Christian school is to achieve academic credibility according to the world’s standards. The Christian school now seeks secular credibility and worldly authenticity for the student. With that goal in view, the personal moral conduct of teachers has taken a back seat to the need to provide academic “quality.”

To call attention to this insidious occurrence is taboo. It is considered by some as tantamount to challenging the Lord Himself. An irrational attitude exists among many that a school—one’s alma mater (or employer)—is sacred and must be defended, protected, and excused at all cost. This misplaced zeal puts loyalty to men and manmade institutions above loyalty to Christ and His church. It places personalities and politics above principle, and sentimentality above spirituality. It is a classic case of the tail wagging the dog.

The Scriptures

The Scriptures teach that the home, not the school and not the church, is responsible for the proper education of children. The Lord had Moses write:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deu. 6:6-9).

Solomon said to parents, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6). The apostle Paul penned the same: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph.

6:4). If colleges, schools, and universities, whether secular or those for saints, are not helping the home to teach and train youth in ways that harmonize with heaven’s will, then parents and people in general should not send them their children nor support them with their cash. 2 John 9-11 applies to apostate institutions just as much as it does to apostate individuals.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Colleges, universities, and schools, “Why sleep ye?”

THE CONGREGATIONS ARE SLEEPING

The Shepherds

In February of 2000 Harry Ledbetter wrote an outstanding article for *The Gospel Journal*, titled “Elders—Their Scriptural Responsibilities.” He pointed out that pastors should be leading the flock, feeding the flock, and guarding the flock. He penned Paul’s great passage on overseers spoken to the Ephesian elders:

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. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

Three years later the very same thing happened at the Pearl Street congregation in Denton, Texas, where Harry Ledbetter served as a Shepherd—a wolf entered in among the elders. He began to speak perverse things concerning the subject of the Holy Spirit. He drew away foolish disciples and drove away faithful disciples. The flock was not spared but scattered. This perverseness might have been prevented had Ledbetter watched and warned as exhorted. However, instead of speaking as he should, he was sleeping as one dead, unconscious or in hibernation.

The Speakers

Those that speak in any congregation, whether elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, or members, have a grave and great responsibility to glorify God.

If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God; if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:11).

Sadly, we have a host and horde who preach a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:6-7) which brings God's curse (1:8-9). The 2004 Tulsa Workshop provides such a sampling. Speakers included Lynn Anderson, Rick Atchley, Mike Cope, Randy Harris, Evertt Huffard, Victor Knowles, Jim McGuiggan, Howard Norton, Marvin Phillips, Terry Rush, Rubel Shelly, Jeff Walling, and Larry West. These speakers are known to "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). They "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (16:18). They should be severed not supported, marked not mimicked, avoided not given an audience (16:17). Yet we have congregations that promote these men, participate with them, and practice their perverted doctrines. "Why sleep ye?"

The Supported

God's oracles also obligate congregations to support only those who faithfully follow the *old paths* (Jer. 6:16). When those who are supported refuse to "*give an answer to*" (1 Pet. 3:15) those that support them concerning their beliefs and teachings, their support should be stopped. Some have argued that they can hold a false doctrine so long as they do not teach it and be deserving of continued support. The Lord told the church at Pergamos:

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev. 2:14-16).

The Lord is against those who harbor the holders of false doctrines. He hates the holding of false doctrines and will hold the support of such against those that sanction it. Jesus said that false doctrines held should

be fought against with His sword and not sanctioned nor supported. Christ requires repentance of those that hold false doctrines and those who harbor such.

CONCLUSION

America, needs to "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). Congressmen need to "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). Courts and judges should hear and heed the admonition: "Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 The. 5:6). Colleges, universities, and schools should know "that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). Congregations should listen to the Lord:

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee (Rev. 3:2-3).

The condemned should "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14). Christians should "watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Gallup, George Jr., and Michael Lindsay. *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1990.
- Jackson, Wayne. "America—A Nation Out Of Control." *The Christian Courier* 28 July 1999. Christian Courier Online. 24 March 2004
 <<http://www.christiancourier.com/archives/outofcontrol.htm>>.
- Ledbetter, Harry. "Elders—Their Scriptural Responsibilities." *The Gospel Journal*. Ed. Dub McClish. Cibolo, TX: The Gospel Journal, Inc., 2000.
- Miller, Dave. "Our Christian Schools." *Apologetics Press*. 24 March 2004
 <<http://www.apologeticspress.org/scrspeak/2003/ss-03-51.htm>>.
- Miller, Zell. "Deficit of Decency in America." *Senator Miller's Website*. 12 February 2004. March 24, 2004
 <<http://www.miller.senate.gov/floor/02-12-04decency.html>>.
- Webster's New World College Dictionary*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

“THIS IS AN HARD SAYING; WHO CAN HEAR IT?”

JOHN 6:60

Lee Davis



Lee Davis was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He preached his first sermon at the age of 17 and preached regularly after that. Lee is a 1985 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching, has B.A., M.S., and M. Div. (cum laude) degrees from the Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Southern Christian University) and is working on his D. Min. Lee has been preaching for 23 years and has done local work in Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama. Since September of 2001, Lee has been working under the oversight of the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida, as their missionary to Singapore. In January of 2003 Lee went to Singapore to begin teaching as one of the instructors at the Four

Seas College of Bible and Missions. Lee is also on the faculty of the Online Academy of Biblical Studies.

Lee is married to the former Patricia Crabtree of Crossville, Tennessee; they have six children. They are very active in adoption and foster care and have adopted children from Russia as well as the United States.

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

One thing that one should avoid in a study like this is the temptation to take a verse out of context and apply it in a way that is foreign to what was originally intended by the Holy Spirit. While this is not a study on the book of John, the passage under consideration will be interpreted in its context, and application will be made from the actual context before the general principle is applied to other passages and subjects that have their place in a more general context within the Bible. As long as this is done, there should be no misapplication of these outlying passages.

In John 6 Jesus is teaching a lengthy discourse to people who have been following Him for several days. They literally followed Him from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other side. As to the motivation for doing this, it seems that these folks are intently interested on getting another “free meal” (Young 125-126). They had eaten the loaves and fish but had not considered who it was that had given it to them. Jesus states that He is the “bread of life” that had come down from Heaven

(John 6:35ff). With this statement Jesus was confirming that He was the only one that could give them true spiritual sustenance (Coffman 179).

John then describes the reaction that *the Jews* had at these words. The apostle John used *the Jews* in a way of identifying that segment of the Jews that were hyper-critical of the Lord and not just referring to their ethnicity (Woods 87). They at least understood what Jesus was saying and teaching. The Lord was confirming his Divine Mission and the fact that he was God in the flesh (6:35-40). The Jews understood very clearly what Jesus was saying; they just did not believe Him (6:41-43). Their unbelief was a tragedy that was self-inflicted. The Lord clearly points out that His mission did not originate in Himself apart from the Father. He stresses to them that through His teaching the Father is drawing them and that He, Jesus, would raise them up at the last day (6:43-46).

At this point, Jesus begins stating some principles that are intended to get these worldly, sensual, and unbelieving people to think at a more spiritual level. The Lord states, "I am the living bread...if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (6:51). Jesus is telling them that His sacrifice on the cross will enable them to be in fellowship with Him and the Father, if they will obey Him (Coffman 185). He is stating that, if they are going to be "spiritually, well fed," they would have to *eat* of His *flesh*. That is, they would have to partake of the total teachings of Christ for their "souls' food" (Coffman 186). As usual, the *Jews* did not think above their early wisdom, and they questioned the Lord's statement (6:52). In reaction to their unbelief, Jesus uses several metaphors to illustrate the principles about which he had been speaking prior to this statement. He states:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (6:53-58).

Jesus is pointing out to these unbelieving Jews that, if they are to have any hope in the world to come or any fellowship with the Father in this

life, they will have to accept Him for Who He claims to be. Either they believe He is Deity and accept and obey the totality of His teaching, or they will be lost forever.

A question at this juncture is appropriate. Is what the Lord saying here, in fact, *hard* to understand, and thus we really cannot blame those disciples for leaving the Lord? While it is true that these statements of the Lord are amazing, they are not impossible to understand (the *Jews* understood His intention). It is more likely that *hard* is used only because these people **chose** to disregard the Truth that they did not want to obey (Young 137-38). The fact is, the Truth of God that is disregarded by the mass of humanity is caused not by the world's difficulty in understanding that Truth but by the world's refusal to **obey** what they know the Bible teaches.

Also, it is this author's contention that our Lord purposefully couched His words in metaphorical language to test the *Jews*. Notice that it was His disciples that reacted by making the statement found in verse sixty. This group is not the same as the *Jews* to which Jesus addressed the statements of verses fifty-three to fifty-eight. These disciples were reacting to the disbelief of the *Jews*. It is a common fact that negativity and unbelief *find their own level* just like water. These weak and worldly disciples took their lead from the *leaders* in the unbelief, who were the *Jews*. This is overwhelming evidence that a person's or group's error can affect in a negative way those who are not grounded in the Truth.

Jesus knew that His disciples were murmuring at what He was saying (6:61). Jesus then attempts to strengthen His disciples, not by shrinking back and avoiding their weaknesses but by giving them more Truth that had the potential of *running them off*. Today, in many circles within the church, people cry loudly that we need to *back off* from the more distinctive Truth and *tip-toe* around the sinner so as not to *offend* them. Jesus did not take this path. The fact is, the best way to approach an individual (at least those who were of the same spiritual level of those in this context) is to approach them with all the Truth and nothing but the Truth. Jesus knew that Truth has a way of separating the "wheat from the chaff." Those that will accept the Truth will do so and those who do not, have no excuse for their rejection of it. These same disciples that had earlier wanted to forcibly make Jesus their King now turn and walk with Him no more (6:66). Was it the case that Jesus abandoned them in their hour of need? **No!** He remained there to

provide for them any explanation they would have needed had they only asked. They are the ones that left. Thus, we have the dilemma of the teacher: Does one *water down* the message to retain large numbers, or does one faithfully and lovingly proclaim the Truth of God's Word and never apologize for it? We must do what Jesus did if we are to be effective in the sight of God.

Now with the context explained, here are some principles that can be gleaned from what happened to these people in John 6:60.

STATEMENTS REGARDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

As has been noticed, the statement from the people was not so much a statement regarding their not being able to understand the saying of Christ, as it was their refusal to accept the Lord's statement as it related to various things that are mentioned in the context. The same attitude and ideology is true in today's world. Many times a person's lack of obedience to a biblical principle does not come from his lack of understanding said principle or command, it is his refusal to accept what God has clearly implied. This is especially true today regarding the subject of biblical authority. Many people today ask: "How does the Bible authorize?" not from the standpoint of wanting to know what the Bible teaches, but from the standpoint of *rethinking* what the Bible teaches on the subject. These people do not believe in the Bible's teaching regarding hermeneutics, the law of exclusion, and other vital biblical themes.

HERMENEUTICS

What is *hermeneutics*? Simply put, it is the study of interpretation—that is, how one is to interpret something from a particular source (Dungan 1). When applied to the study of the Bible, it most often is called "sacred hermeneutics" (Dungan 1). This is a distinctively biblical topic. The apostle Paul wrote that one must rightly divide "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The ASV translates this as "handling aright the word of truth." Therefore, since there exists a proper way to interpret the Scripture, there of necessity must exist an incorrect way of interpreting the Word. So, is there one proper way of interpreting the Word of God? Yes! If this is not the case then 2 Timothy 2:15 and statements like it found elsewhere in the Scripture mean absolutely nothing.

The apostle Peter as directed by the Holy Spirit addresses this issue:

As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned

and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

Peter states that those that are “unlearned and unstable” twist the Scripture—that is, they interpret the Word of God in a way that is not correct. Today, many teach that there is no incorrect way of interpreting the Scripture. If there is an incorrect way to interpret the Word, there is, by implication, a proper way of interpreting the Word. A person who is *learned* and *stable* does not twist the Scripture. Peter continues: “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye **know *these things before***, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (3:17). Peter wrote to people that knew the difference between properly interpreted Scripture and improperly interpreted Scripture.

Today, we have the same challenge and responsibility. A few questions at this point need to be addressed. One, does it really matter how we interpret Scripture? In January, 2004, this author had the opportunity to speak with a man who has brought about much agnosticism and error in the Lord’s church. This writer was on his way back to Singapore, and when he boarded the plane in Nashville, so did Rubel Shelly. This scribe was able to talk to him for about 20 minutes in the Los Angeles airport. One thing that he stated that is worthy to mention here is that, after pointing out to him that we now differ widely on biblical topics but at one time in the past he used to hold the same as do this writer held, he stated, “Yes, Lee, we may differ about these things, but it really just does not matter.” Is Rubel Shelly correct in his assessment? By implication he stated that there is no such thing as a *proper hermeneutic*. Based upon what Mr. Shelly had written in the past, he rejects the idea of a *pattern* being present in the Scripture—for man to follow and thus to be approved by God (Miller 130-131). What hermeneutic did Rubel use to reach this conclusion? The fact is, he had to use a hermeneutic to reach this or any conclusion. If one wants to call it a *new* hermeneutic, so be it, but the fact remains that he had to determine by this author’s statement what was meant by biblical topics and that he now differed from these topics. Shelly, as well as all of these men, involve themselves in a constant contradiction regarding their own principles. They write volumes on why one cannot reason correctly about the evidence that is presented to them. That is, they try to *reason* correctly about how we cannot “reason correctly” regarding truth. This forever will be their problem. They repudiate the idea of

logic, yet they strive to be logical in making that assertion. Of course, they are not being logical and reasonable in these assertions but the fact remains they argue in that form. Does it matter how one interprets Scripture? Shelly says no! Jesus says yes! The liberal says no! The Scripture says yes!

Second, is there a proper and exclusive way of understanding the Word of God? In an example from the life of our Lord regarding a proper hermeneutic, a lawyer asked Jesus a question: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Was Jesus right in asking the man to read the Word of God and draw a conclusion from it? Jesus stated, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (10:26). And after the lawyer did what the Lord commanded him to do, Jesus told the man that he had interpreted the Scripture correctly and that he should be obedient to that proper interpretation. Jesus did not condemn the man and say that his position on the law was only *human doctrine*. Jesus did not say that the man was doing the impossible and that any old view of the law would do. Jesus told the man that he had given the proper interpretation.

Today, many state that one cannot properly interpret the Scripture because we are so withdrawn from the original context of the statement that we cannot fully understand the circumstances in which the statements were made (Miller 150-156). If that is so, why did Jesus claim that this man had a proper understanding of a context that was far removed from the then present situation? This is an example of one's properly interpreting the Word.

What of a person's improper interpretation? Is there such a thing? In Mark 12:18, a group of Sadducees come to Jesus with a hypothetical situation. Their situation is built upon their understanding (or what is more accurate, misunderstanding) of the statement made in Deuteronomy 25:5 by Moses. If one's understanding of Scripture is not important, then Jesus did these men a great disservice in telling them that they had erred in their understanding of the passage. The Sadducees had formulated an entire doctrine around their misinterpretation of this passage found in the book of Deuteronomy. It is interesting to note that Jesus did not address their error by giving a proper interpretation of the passage but rather simply stated that they had erred and then proceeded to correct their view of life after death. Jesus exposed their error by the very method that the liberal of today says is not valid. The liberal states that one can know nothing in the Scripture unless one has an *explicit*

command or statement (Warren 97-103). Nevertheless, Jesus used **implication** to correct their erroneous view of the passage in Deuteronomy.

The fact is, the Bible says nothing to me or you **explicitly**. All of us must reason correctly about the evidence given. The evidence is given through an explicit statement, but we must correctly infer from the implied statement what the truth is. Our inference (as long as it is valid and sound) does not produce human doctrine, but only recognizes that which the doctrine of God was as taught in the Word of God to begin with (Warren 97-103). These explicit statements were made to people who have long ago passed from this life.

They accuse us of following a “restoration model” of authority when in reality we are following the hermeneutic of Jesus. To ridicule and slander how God authorizes is but to ridicule and slander our precious Lord (Miller 113-116). So, when people ask us how we ascertain biblical authority, we should state without apology that God authorizes in the following ways: (1) Example, (2) Implication, and (3) Direct Statements. There are several subcategories of direct statements. First, one must determine in what mood a statement is made. Is the statement given in the indicative, subjunctive, imperative, or optative mood? If it is indicative, is the nature of the statement declarative or interrogative? If it is a subjunctive, is the nature of the statement: hortatory, conditional, prohibitory, final, or deliberative? If the statement is imperative, is the nature of the statement: prohibitory, mandatory, or permissive? If it is optative, then the nature of the statement is a wish. (Deaver 66).

The very nature of the Word of God demands that there be a proper hermeneutic. If God does not expect us to correctly interpret his Word, then why did He give us His Word? This is a *hard* statement for some because they do not want to accept the fact that there is a right way to understand the Scripture and a wrong way to understand the Scripture. And they will be held accountable for how they interpret the Word of God.

One of the most ridiculed principles of biblical authority is the “law of exclusion.” This principle is also known by: “Silence of the Scriptures,” “restrictive silence,” and such like (Miller 117-120). Is this a principle that can be found and demonstrated in the Word of God? Yes! This principle is what separates the faithful child of God from the world. This principle is what makes the plea of the Lord’s church a

distinctive and scriptural one. When the apostle Peter stated, "If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11), he was giving the rationale behind this very principle. He was stating that if a person was going to say or do anything in matters of religion, that person must operate within the parameters of the Word of God. Paul states, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). There is no stronger statement in the Bible that addresses the idea of restrictive and permissive authority than this verse.

An *antinomian* position regarding the actions of individuals in religion totally denies the truth. What had been a position held by the denominational world and some extremists within the Lord's body at one time has now become the *mainstream* position for the vast majority within the church that term themselves *progressive* or *change agents*. They *couch* their error in language that is not as explicit, as this author has just stated, but they still come to the same unscriptural conclusion. They would deny doing anything without biblical authority. (Some do in fact state that biblical authority is not needed for anything that is done as long as it is done in sincerity, but, even this is an appeal to authority. Just like the Joseph Fletcherites, these people act with authority that is autonomous and situational. They become their own authority for acting or not acting. They become a *religious humanist*. They elevate themselves to a position of *godhood* by becoming their own authorities in matters where God is the only authority, and He authorizes only through His Word.)

Is the principle of silence illustrated in the Word of God? Yes, there are several places. One passage will suffice to make the case beyond a reasonable doubt. In Hebrews 7, the writer (whom this scribe believes to be Paul) makes an argument from the silence of the Old Testament. Paul is showing that the priesthood of Jesus is a greater priesthood than that of the Levitical priesthood. Since Jesus is our great High Priest, there must be a change in the Law. How do we know this? God only authorized those from the tribe of Levi to be priests; God was silent about any other tribe. Paul states: "For *it is* evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (7:14). Due to the silence of the Scriptures, Jesus could not be a priest on earth. Jesus is our High Priest (He is serving as our High Priest in heaven). However, for Him to be such, the Law of Moses could no longer be in effect—there had to be a change of the Law

because of the silence of the Scriptures. God did not have to state: "No one from the tribe of Judah can be a priest." The reason is, His explicit statement regarding who was to be a priest created a *restrictive silence* about the subject. This is a case where God's silence restricts.

Why is this true in this instance and not in others? For example, when Jesus commands the Christian to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" why does the silence regarding a mode of travel permit us to use anything that is expedient in carrying out that command? When God designates the *what and how* of an action, that provides restriction. Because Jesus did not specify the *how* of the mode of action in the taking of the Gospel into the whole world, this creates a situation that *permits* one to act. Someone might say, "That is acting without authority!" Not so! The authority is *generic* in nature as opposed to *specific*. That is, God allows one to act in any expedient way to fulfill the commandment. Let it be said that, before something can be expedient it must be authorized. Lest one deny *generic* and *specific* authority, one had better re-read Colossians 3:17. Some, of late, have ridiculed generic and specific authority. The problem is, they put nothing in its place that is consistent with the Word of God. They want to deny this principle because they want to act in areas that God has not given us permission to act, or they want to restrict action where God has permitted us to act. Generic and specific authority are well attested to principles within the Word of God (Music 316-317).

Now, how does one apply this to our present topic? Here are some statements that are *hard* to accept by people today, yet if they are not accepted, it will lead to the destruction of many people's souls. One, there is no authority for the use of mechanical instrumental music with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs! Two, one is not to hum, whistle, or make his voice sound like an mechanical instrument of music in relation to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs! Three, one is to sing (lyrical expression) when fulfilling the command of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16! Four, in worship, congregational singing is to be done, and there is no authority for choirs or choruses to be used. Five, one must use unleavened bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper exclusively. Six, there is no New Testament authority for "burning incense" in worship to God. Seven, there is no New Testament authority for dancing as an act of worship to God. One could multiply these statements but the point has been made. More and more

today we are hearing our brethren use the arguments of the denominationalist. They state, “Why can’t we do this, God did not say that we could not do this?” Another extreme is just as sinful: “There is no authority for helping the non-saint through the church treasury. Individuals only are to do these things!” Many of our problems stem from a total lack of understanding as to how the Bible authorizes or a refusal of people to accept the truth of how it authorizes. Faithful brethren have fought and continue to fight the good fight against this type of error. Nevertheless, it demands that we educate ourselves regarding the truth and that we do as our Lord did and not compromise for any reason. We may have some *walk no more* with us, but we cannot change the truth to accommodate mere human beings.

STATEMENTS REGARDING BIBLICAL PURITY

Perhaps at no other time in our nation’s history has there been such an overwhelming rejection of what God says about morality and purity by the average man on the street. On a daily basis we are confronted with a steady stream of ungodly individuals spewing out their nasty, repugnant, and dehumanizing filth. As the early church went through the whole world with the Gospel, they confronted the same poison that we confront today. How did they react? What did the church do to combat the impurity of its day? They took their example from Christ Himself. Whatever subject one can think of today that involves man’s behavior was addressed by our Lord, and it is also addressed by the early church. The truth that they preached must be the truth we preach. To do otherwise is to be less than what God intends for his children to be. More than that, it is to repudiate the very nature of Christ. The biblical standard of purity did not originate in man’s mind, but it flows from the very nature of God (Warren 32). One need only take the daily newspaper and his Bible and start at the beginning; eventually the problems of today’s society will be addressed and solutions given by the Lord. This is why so many do not want to obey what the Bible has to say about these things. It is not that they do not understand the Bible’s standard of purity—they do understand it. They do not want to abide or conform to it. Why do men constantly reject a standard that, if followed, will bring abundant life in this world and eternal life in the next? Not only that, they reject this standard and accept various ways of living that will eventually destroy their lives and souls? Jesus put it this way:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved (John 3:19-20).

This is the root problem of those in John 6 as well. They did not want to adhere to what Jesus was teaching. The same is true today. What are some of these *hard* sayings that people reject when it comes to being morally pure?

First, Jesus stated in His Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Mat. 5:21-22).

Jesus addresses the problem of hate and malice. In these and following verses, Jesus gets right to the heart of why one hates and even murders his fellow man. This is a *hard* saying for those that wish their fellow man harm. This is a *hard* statement for those who are so insecure in their lives that they cannot allow something good to be said about a person without their being jealous of that person's accomplishments. These people will always have some *smart* remark to make that serves to degrade or defame the person under consideration. Jesus calls this: sin! James states that it is an impossibility to slander and degrade our fellow man and, at the same time, out of the same mouth, praise God (Jam. 3:8-12). This is a great weakness in the lives of some preachers, this scribe included! In reality, this is a great temptation for many people, preachers or not. Rare is the person who can be self-confident enough to allow others to receive praise in their presence and at the same time do some of the praising. It is our hope that this characteristic increases in all of God's children.

Second, Jesus states this about forgiveness: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mat. 6:14-15). Jesus makes it very clear to us that we must forgive an individual if that individual repents of his transgression toward us (Luke 17:3). For some, this is a *hard* statement because they are of the mind that one must forgive a person no matter what that person does or does not do. Now, it is true we must have a spirit of forgiveness (a willingness to forgive), but we have no ability to do that

which our blessed Lord cannot even do. God cannot forgive a man who will not repent (Luke 13:3-5). The fact is, most of us have trouble complying with the forgiving that the Scripture does make obligatory. The Scripture makes it very clear that we are to strive to pattern our forgiveness after God's forgiveness (Mat. 18:21-34). Immediately after the Lord makes the statement about a person's having to repent before he can actually be forgiven, He makes this statement, "And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:4). No wonder that the reaction of the disciples was to ask the Lord to "increase our faith" (17:5). When we look into the mirror of God's Word about this matter, do we see what the Lord wants us to be, or do we see "the elder brother" (15:25-32).

Third, Jesus states in that same Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Mat. 5:27-28).

One usually does not classify this statement as a *hard* statement. Most all agree on the importance and meaning of this Scripture. It is the set of verses that follow that receive the label. Jesus continues commenting on this same subject:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell (5:29-30).

Lust! Lust is like an awful specter that appears to terrify you when you least expect it, and when you think you have avoided it, there it is again around the next corner. Fighting this evil nemesis is a never-ending action that has with it many defeats and hopefully many victories. It is the goal of the Christian to strive to experience fewer defeats and more victories. It is no wonder that Jesus then goes into a discussion of divorce (5:31-32). The battlefield of life is littered with many dead marriages that had as their primary enemy, lust. Jesus is saying, no matter what the cost, no matter what the sacrifice, the Christian is to repudiate and avoid lust in any form that it takes. A related passage is that of Matthew 19. The disciples of the Lord react to His teaching regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage like many do today (19:10-

12). They saw the seriousness of the situation and voiced the idea of not even getting married. Today, many react to the teaching of Christ by rejecting His teaching. Some reason that the teaching of Christ cannot be obeyed and that He will overlook any violation of these verses. Matthew records:

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it* (19:10-12).

Is Jesus saying that some people can mess their lives up so drastically that it is impossible for these folks to even be married and be right in the sight of God? Olan Hicks and others say, no! (Guzman 48-50). Jesus says, yes! This is just another example of lowly and sinful mankind attempting to negate the plain teaching of the Lord. People did the same thing in John 6, and they do the same thing today.

Fourth, Jesus states, "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female" (Mat. 19:4). Our Lord had no trouble understanding that a marriage is composed of a scripturally qualified male and a scripturally qualified female. However, many today think this is too *hard* of a statement to accept as truth at face value. It does the cause of truth no favor when a womanizing, pro-abortion, Governor of the State of California is the one that stands against the sickening and putrid perversion of the Sodomites. His immoral life is as wrong as those he opposes. Brethren, let us stand against this awful crime of homosexuality before their agenda makes said opposition illegal. Even if that transpires, let us keep on preaching against it with every fiber of our being, no mater the cost!

CONCLUSION

Much more could be said regarding the rejection of the Bible and its teaching, but the situation is clear. Man has not changed much since the time of our Lord. His needs are the same, his sin is the same, and the cure remains the same for those sins. We must surrender our stubborn will to Christ's truth. We must give every effort in being more and more like Him Who died for us.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Coffman, James Burton. *A Commentary on John*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1974.
- Deaver, Roy C. *Ascertaining Bible Authority*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1987.
- Dungan, D. R. *Hermeneutics: A Text-Book*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1977.
- Guzman, Ron. "False Teaching On Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage." *The Current Digression II*. Ed. Jerry Moffitt. San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1987. 41-52.
- Miller, Dave. *A Guidebook For Assessing Change In Churches Of Christ: Piloting The Strait*. Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996.
- Music, Goebel. "Is there Authority in Biblical 'Silence'?" *Rightly Dividing The Word: Volume I General Hermeneutics*. Ed. Terry Hightower. San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1990. 313-328.
- Warren, Thomas B. "The Seriousness Of The Ridicule, Rejection, And Hatred Of Logic." *Rightly Dividing The Word: Volume I General Hermeneutics*. Ed. Terry Hightower. San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1990. 97-103.
- - -. *The Warren-Flew Debate*. Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1977.
- Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary On The Gospel Of John*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1981.
- Young, Tyler. "Jesus Feeds Five-Thousand, Walks On The Sea, Preaches (6:1-71)." *Studies In John*. Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1999. 118-144.

“TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?”

JOHN 6:68

Gregory K. Lewis



Gregory Lewis was born and reared in Detroit, Michigan. He retired from the U.S. Army in 1995. Gregory was educated in Michigan, Maryland, and European colleges with work toward a degree in Psychology and Biology. He is a 1997 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and a 2001 graduate of Southern Christian University with a Bachelor of Art in Bible/Ministry. He is married to the former Pamela Linden. They have three children: Leika, Patricia Phillips, and Stephen. He preached part time in Hawaii and Virginia while stationed in the military. Gregory worked as the associate minister for the Merton Street Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, and full time minister for the

DeKalb Church of Christ in DeKalb, Illinois. He is presently working with the Hopkins Road Church of Christ in Richmond, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, **to whom shall we go?** thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot *the son* of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve (John 6:66-71).

This writer has been assigned the question: “To whom shall we go?” To better understand any subject, it is best to define the matters being discussed. This writer will do this by first looking at the context of the assigned Scripture, next by examining where some people choose to go instead of to Jesus, and finally attempt to give an answer to the question that Peter posed.

CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

To understand this question we must look at the context of John 6:68. The immediate context is Jesus asking the question: “Will ye also go away?” (6:67). We must take in not only the immediate context, but also the remote context of why Jesus asked this question. Looking at this remote context involves going back to the beginning of John 6. At

the beginning of chapter six we read of Jesus performing the miracle of feeding the five thousand men with five loaves and two little fish (6:1-13). When the people beheld this miracle, they believed that Jesus was a great prophet (6:14). The people on recognizing this (and probably many other miracles) decided to make Jesus their earthly king (6:15). Jesus, knowing that His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom (18:36), went away alone to pray (6:15). Another miracle is performed when Jesus walks on the sea (6:19) and invites Peter to step out of the boat and walk on the water (Mat. 14:28-31), calms the sea, and gets into the boat which is automatically transported to the other shore (John 6:17-21).

The people realized that Jesus had left, but knowing it was not with His disciples, began to search for Him, and take boats to Capernaum (6:22-24). Jesus rebuked the people for solely following Him for the food they had received when the miracle was performed (6:25-26). Jesus explains that the people should labor for the food which does not perish. His desire is for them to think spiritually not physically. He also wants to teach them to have faith (belief) in Him as the Messiah (Son of God) (6:27-29). They ask for a sign as Moses did, in giving manna (bread) from heaven (6:30-31). Jesus then explains that manna was not the true bread from heaven and that Moses did not give the manna, but it came from God the Father. He then explains that He is the true Bread of Life, of which they must partake for eternal life (6:32-50).

It must be remembered at this point that the people have their minds on a physical application (eating the bread and fishes of the miracle), not on a spiritual application. Therefore, when Jesus begins to speak of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, they feel He is asking them to violate what they hold sacred (the Law of Moses; Lev. 17:10; Deu. 12:16). Jim Laws makes the following observation on the mind-set of the Jewish people on the eating of the flesh of Christ and the drinking of the blood of Christ: "They ate loaves yesterday, and they had come back today. They were not seeking the sign (miracle); it did not appeal to them, they wanted more food" (10). Jim Laws goes on further to state:

It was when Jesus came to the term "flesh and blood" in verse 53 that the crowd was startled.... The previous day they had seen Him literally distribute bread among them. Would He now begin literally to distribute Himself among them for eating? (11).

Based on what Jesus has said about eating His flesh, the people began to murmur and complain. The American Standard Version says they “strove one with another.” Brother Guy N. Woods says of this verse:

These Jews “strove” one with another by engaging in contention among themselves. This does not mean that some defended Jesus and others opposed Him; all of them were antagonistic to Jesus and opposed His teaching; but they argued among themselves about how to combat what he had said (133).

Carl Hecker nearly echos brother Woods’ statement, but adds, “They were divided over how to answer that which they all rejected” (137). The Jews, as has been mentioned, were thinking that Jesus wanted them to literally eat His flesh and drink His blood, and this *turned their stomach*. “Since they objected to the idea of eating the Lord’s flesh, does Jesus back away from what He said, or rephrase it in more palatable terms? To the contrary, He reiterates the thought” (Young 134).

Many of His disciples said this was a *hard saying*. The saying was hard for a number of reasons. First, it was a hard saying because they misunderstood His spiritual application. Second, it was a hard saying because they failed to truly believe in Christ as the Messiah. Third, they may have considered it a hard saying because to them it may have been difficult to accept Jesus’ teachings: (1) That He would not be an earthly king (John 6:15), (2) They must eat His flesh, (3) He came down from heaven and was the Son of God, but they knew He was from Galilee (6:42), (4) He said that He was going back to heaven. They also found it hard to comprehend that the one whom they wanted to make king had to give His life (6:61-62). With these thoughts in mind we go into verses 66-71. These *hard sayings* became very difficult for some to accept; so “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (6:66). Guy N. Woods says of why many left:

He did not fulfil their desires for an earthly monarch, and His teachings they found objectionable. They had followed for a time, perhaps, by His miracles and stimulated by His original teaching, but now returned each to his former business or activities (138-139).

Jesus was not what they thought the Messiah should be; so they returned to their prior obligations. He still does not fit the expectations of many today. Some people forget that God’s ways are greater than man’s ways (Isa. 55:8-9). From this background Christ asked the question: “Will ye also go away?” We know that the Lord knew the

answer prior to asking this question; so He must have done it for the benefit of the apostles. We now see that they are referred to as the twelve, showing the closeness or melding together of this group. He may have been trying to get them to think about all who had departed and were no longer a part of His disciples. Brother Woods makes the following observation:

The question put to the disciples brought an expected answer. The larger group of disciples had been sifted.... The band of disciples now smaller, but far more worthy and these (with one exception, Judas) would not forsake Him (139).

Brother Woods goes on to say, "The 'ye' of the Lord's query is emphatic and the construction of the Greek sentence required a negative answer. Ye in contrast with those who have forsaken me, will not go away, will ye?" (139). In reference to Guy N. Woods' quote, Tyler Young states:

The Lord places the question before them, not because He does not know what they will do.... But to give them the opportunity to make a decision, to strengthen their resolve, to abide with Him and give them the opportunity to express their faith (140).

Peter thus answers the Lord's question with a question and a statement, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of life."

AGELESS QUESTION

The question which Peter asked is an ageless question. The question in some form has been asked by the people of God since Adam and Eve committed the first recorded sin in the Garden of Eden. God told Adam and Eve that the Seed of woman would bring salvation into the world. Eve, as recorded in Genesis 4:1, said, "I have gotten a man from the LORD." Could it be that Eve was looking for that one "to whom she should go" for the salvation of her and mankind from their sins? That man child for whom Eve was looking to save mankind is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior. The people of Israel were told to look for a prophet like unto Moses who would save them from their sins (Deu. 18:15, 18-19). That prophet was the only one "To whom we shall go."

Job looked for someone who would stand between him and God, someone who would be able to plead his case, someone who was a nearer kinsman (redeemer) (Job 19:25). David was looking for one to proceed out of his bowels (2 Sam 7:12-13). Prior to entering into the New Testament age, there is Simeon and Anna looking for the one "To whom they shall go" for redemption (Luke 2:25-30, 36-38).

The ageless question of “To whom shall I go?” was applicable to the Old Testament age, but also to the first century Christian, and it is equally applicable to modern day man. If the world remains standing, it is also for the man of the future. Luke clearly taught the world that the question of, “To whom shall I go?” is answered in Jesus Christ, when he (Luke) wrote as we have recorded in Acts 4:12: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The only valid answer to this ageless question is Jesus the Messiah.

TO WHOM SOME WILL GO

Peter asked the question: “To whom shall we go?” in reference to salvation. The answer is that we can only go to the Savior of the world. “To Peter, there is simply no question about the matter. He realizes that when we leave Christ there is no other place to go to find eternal life” (Young 140). Notice that Peter provides the reason for going only to Jesus when He says, “Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Although Peter gives the only valid answer, there are some who still seek other avenues. John 6:66 says that some departed: “From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Not only does it say many departed, but that they went back. Some in the first century answered the question “to whom shall we go?” by going back to the religion of their forefathers. Some left Christ to go back to the life of the Pharisees, believing that the oral traditions of men were as important, if not more important, than the written laws of God. They went back to the piousness of the Pharisees, and the rituals of hypocrisy. As Pharisees, they would believe in the resurrection from the dead, but lose belief in the One Who was resurrected to save their soul from an eternal death (1 Cor. 15:1-4). They would leave the simplicity of the Savior to return to the strictness of the Law of Moses.

Others would leave the Christ to return to the sect of the Sadducees. In this sect of the Jews, they would hold to the sacredness of the written Law of Moses. They would reject the traditional views of the Pharisees to take hold of the authoritative explanations of the Hebrew Scriptures (Freeman 365). By going back, they lost faith in the resurrection from the dead. Still others would leave the Savior to return to the life of the Herodians. In this Jewish party they would look to politics and a loose interpretation of the Law of Moses. Still others would travel to the sect of the Zealots. This group “felt that their religion forbade them to give

political allegiance" to Rome (Robinson 593). Their belief was in God protecting His holy temple and a Messiah who would set up an earthly kingdom to free His people. This is probably the group that John is speaking about when he says, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (6:15).

In this century some go back to the religion of their forefathers. This is seen in the set-up of denominational Christianity. What is meant here by going back to the religion of their forefathers is that, when presented with the truth of Christ, they will say "My mother lived and died a _____; so I am going to be a _____ for the rest of my life." (You can replace mother with father, grandmother or grandfather, uncle, aunt, or any other relative. You can also put any denominational name in the blanks.) This person is what he is religiously, even if it is correct, just because of someone he loved. Some years ago this writer heard Curtis Cates say in a sermon, "We must have our own faith. We will not get to heaven on the faith of our mother, father, or anyone else." This is very true; God wants us to serve Him because of our own faith.

Some have gone to the religion of Catholicism. They learn more from the Catholic priest than they do from the Word of God. Like the Pharisees, their laws are based on written (the Bible) and oral traditions (decisions of the pope). There is as much, if not more, weight placed on the words of the pope than placed the written Word of God. The Words of Christ have been replaced by the teachings of the pope.

Others have answered the question, "To whom shall we go?" by going to Baptist doctrine. They, therefore, reject Christ for the "best man" (John 3:29). These individuals have put the traditions of men above the written Law of God. Like the Sadducees of old, they do not hold to the binding of oral laws as being as important as written Law. They would reject the traditional views of many denominations to take hold of the authoritative explanations of the Baptist Manual. They say that Christ is first in their life, but they hold to the traditions of men. There are many other examples (i.e., Calvinists, or the Methodists, or the Jehovah Witness, etc.) that this writer could use to show how men reject Christ and follow the religion of their forefathers.

Some may have gone back to the philosophies of men. During the first century, an abundance of philosophies abounded. Some may have gone to the philosophy of Gnosticism. This philosophy taught that the spirit was good and that the flesh was evil. Gnostics

claimed a superior knowledge; actually a Heavenly apprehension of Truth, a "more excellent way." By this superior knowledge they professed to know the Gospel better than anyone else, even more accurately than the apostles and prophets (Hatcher 28).

In reality, their teaching allowed man to believe that he was able to gain his own salvation. "This term, however, is generally used to refer to those who rejected the revelation of God and relied upon human wisdom" (Mattox 74). Of the Gnostics there were two groups. One group (Ascetics) basically taught that if man punished his body, and denied pleasure to the flesh, his spirit would "raise above the sinful world of material things" and reunite with God (Mattox 75). The other group (Epicureans) also felt that the body was evil, but instead of depriving the body, they felt that evil could be overcome by "indulging its desires until they were all satisfied" (Mattox 89). Pleasure was the chief object of life. Epicureanism "made no provisions for a future life, for it knew of no other life than this. Its creed is briefly summed up like this: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (Freeman 447).

Others may have gone to the philosophy of the Stoics, who believed that the world was divided into two parts, active and passive. The passive was all things made of matter, such as people, plants, or animals. Thus, the physical world and all that was in it was considered a part of this passive. The active was the spiritual, or god. Some believed that our souls are emanations of deity. The Stoics, unlike the Epicureans, did not believe that the body was for the sake of pleasure; they believed the body was to be used for only that which was right. They believed that this active part (our soul) would one day be absorbed into deity. Others may have gone to the philosophies of great men such as Socrates, who believed that God was present in all places, and that all was created for man; he taught that every part of man is adapted for a good purpose: "In individual man the riper his age and judgement, the deeper his religion." Socrates believed in asking questions to gain knowledge (Robinson 288). Plato's religion was one of pantheism (nature is in all things) and one full of mysticism (Robinson 678).

Neoplatonism held that with god's aide one could free themselves from the world and commune with god, because the soul of man is merely a part of the divine soul, and through the help of philosophy one can return to the divine soul (Robinson 678).

In this century many have also gone to the philosophies of men. Instead of the going to superior knowledge of Gnosticism, they have

gone to the superior knowledge of intellectualism. Some answer the question "To whom shall we go?" with the answer of "The god of higher learning." There is nothing wrong with higher learning, but there is something with making higher learning a god. To choose to get a higher degree is not a problem. The problem comes from what a person will do to get that higher degree. Another problem is whether the individual possesses the degree or whether the degree possesses the person. Will it help a person to remain faithful to Christ and bring others to Christ?

Rather than going to the philosophy of the Epicureans, some have gone to the philosophy of Humanism. Humanism holds that "only nature exists—thus, God, heaven, angels, Satan, hell, mind, spirit, soul, and all other hints of the supernatural are regulated to the realm of fantasy" (Noebel 114). In David Noebel's book, *Understanding the Times*, he says the following in reference to the ethic of Humanism, "Still, the majority of Humanists claim that ethics need no foundation outside of man and that man himself must constantly rework his ethical ideas" (200). He goes on to say:

Today, the phrase *situation ethics* has been largely replaced by ethical relativism... "Relativism" refers to the idea that certain moral actions can be more or less right relative to the specific situation in which they are used (200).

This philosophy teaches man that there is no standard for a person except that person himself. As Epicurus' followers would say, "Let us eat, and drink for to-morrow [sic] we die" (Noebel 447). In this system, there is no right or wrong because man is the standard. Thus, each individual is his own god.

Still others have chosen the philosophy of Theistic Evolution. People utilize science as their god. They put God's Word on trial and use man's *science* to act as judge. In this system, man is saying that God's creation must fit into the science which man has formed. Others have gone on to a rehash of the Platonian system of God being in everything. They have given it the name of "New Age Movement." In this philosophy lies the "belief that truth resides within each individual and, therefore, no one can claim a corner on the truth or dictate truth to another" (Noebel 850). The New Age Movement, according to Johanna Michaelsen, "Is the ultimate eclectic religion of self; Whatever you decide is right for you is what's right, as long as you don't get narrow-minded and exclusive about it" (Noebel 850). Unlike many other

philosophies, it embraces neither atheism nor theism. It teaches that all purported special revelation is no more important than any other. David Noebel makes the following statement about Cosmic Humanism (New Age Movement) beliefs:

Cosmic Humanists believe that the Bible is no more the word of God than is the Koran, or the works of Confucius. David Spangler, who has been described as the “Emerson of the New Age,” says, “We can take all the scriptures, and all the teachings, and all the tablets, and all the laws, and all the marshmallows and have a jolly good bonfire and marshmallow roast, because that is all they are worth” (851).

Since this is their philosophy one could conclude that the death, burial, or resurrection of Christ is not important in their scheme. The New Age theory declares, “The significance of incarnation and resurrection is not that Jesus was a human like us but rather we are gods like him,” according to a quote in David Noebel’s book from an article in *Science of Mind* (851). Noebel goes on to quote New Age Theologian, John White, “The Son of God...is not Jesus but our combined Christ consciousness” (851).

The problems with these philosophies are dealt with by the words of Peter, when he said to Jesus, “thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus also dealt with these philosophies by saying, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (8:32). Jesus said in His last recorded prayer to the Father, “thy word is truth” (17:17). Jesus and Peter taught that there is an objective standard, by which we must live and that standard is the Word of God. We know that some have gone back to the philosophies of men or to the religion of their forefathers or to the traditions of men. Nevertheless, our ultimate question, was (and still is), “To Whom Shall We Go?”

TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

Peter, in response to the question: “Will ye go away also?” gave the responding question and statement: “To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Foy Smith adds the following comment on this verse:

The disciples already knew Jesus well enough to know that if they left him there would be no place to go. How could they improve upon the “words of eternal life?” ...would they go back to the heathen philosophers? Back to the Scribes, and Pharisees? Back to the old ways of life? (153).

This writer believes that there is an unspoken question, just as important as the question which Peter asked, that must be asked and answered. The question is, Why is Jesus the only one to whom I should go to supply all of my needs? When people truly answer this question, the response that Peter gave will also be, for them, the one and only valid response. Paul teaches that the one we serve is the one to whom we belong (Rom. 6:16). Satan is doing everything that he can to win the hearts and minds (souls) of people. God wants people to serve Him and Satan wants people to serve him. If a person really thinks about it, he will either allow Jesus to supply all his needs, or he will allow Satan to rule his life. First, a person must look at the qualities of Satan to see if that is the one whom he wants to follow. Jesus said that Satan is "a murderer from the beginning...a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). Satan does not care anything about us, nor does he care who or what we serve as long as we do not serve God. He will use any tool or trick to get us to serve anyone or anything except God. Satan will charge God with not giving a person everything he needs (holding back on the good things, Gen. 3:5). Satan will lie, cheat, steal, and offer anything that he feels will tempt a person to sin. Satan's only concern is winning a soul from God. Satan does not care if a person gets hurt or goes to hell, as long as he wins that soul from God.

Look at Job; he only suffered because Satan wanted to win against God. Satan first hurt Job by taking away all his animals, his property, and finally his sons and daughters (Job 1:8-19). When Satan did not win, he went back and took away Job's health, friends, and his wife's loyalty (Job 2). Satan did not care how much Job suffered, he just wanted to prove to God that he could win. This shows that Satan really does not care about mankind. So, when a person is asking: "Why should Jesus be the only one to whom I should go to supply all my needs?" remember that Satan does not want us to go to heaven. He will use anything, anybody, or any promise to keep us from going there. When we truly understand that Satan is not our friend and that we cannot believe anything that he says, we will not allow him to supply any of our needs.

Jesus is referred to by different designations such as "The Door" (John 10:1-2, 9), "the True Vine" (15:1), and the "Living Bread" or "Bread of Life" (6:35, 51). By looking at these different designations, we will know who Jesus really is and why we should go to Him. When a person thinks about a door, they may think of a device to allow

entrance. They may also think of something that limits entrance. Jesus is a Door in the respect that He is the only entrance to heaven. He said, "I am the way, ...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (14:6). Jesus is also a Door of protection. During the first century (and in some remote places today) no door was put at the entrance of the sheep pen. The shepherd would lead the sheep into the pen and would lay or sit in the gate (entrance). The sheep would know that he was there for their protection, and they would not pass when he was in the opening. This is the same idea given when Jesus said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.... I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.... the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (10:7-11).

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who acts as a door for His sheep.

Jesus said also that He was the True Vine (John 15:1). A vine is the life-giving source for fruit which is on the vine; without the vine the fruit would wither and die. The vine also provides the ability for the fruit to reproduce (15:4). Only the fruit attached to the vine is of the vine. This is the same with a Christian relationship with Christ. If the person is not a part of Christ, then he does not draw his strength from Christ. The life-giving source for a Christian is Christ; therefore a Christian can only produce fruit when he abides with Christ.

The third designation that will be discussed is that Christ is Living Bread, or the Bread of Life. In John 6 there is a discussion in which Jesus rebukes the people for coming to Him for food. The rebuke is not that the people came to Jesus for food, but that they came to Him for physical food instead of coming for spiritual food (6:26). Jesus goes on to explain to the people the difference between physical and spiritual food (6:27-51). The problem is not that the people asked for physical food, but that their thoughts were on the physical instead of the spiritual. This may be the main reason why they did not understand when Jesus offered them His body to eat and His blood to drink. Jesus informs them that the food that they are seeking is that which does not last.

In John 4 there is another example of a person whose mind is not on the spiritual but on the physical. Jesus asks the woman at the well for water and engages a conversation with her, in which He says, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee

living water" (4:10). Jesus explains that He will give her **Living Water**, and with this Water she will never thirst. She responds: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (4:11-15). Jesus is of course talking about the spiritual water of life (His Words), but the woman is thinking about physical water from the well. Jesus is the Bread of Life (6:48), and by eating this bread we will never die (6:50). Jesus is the Living Bread (6:51) that abides for ever. Jesus is the Living Water (4:10), of which if we drink we shall never thirst spiritually. The great difference between physical bread and water and the Living Bread and the Living Water is that which man gives will only help our physical body, but that which Jesus gives will feed our eternal souls.

Why must we let Jesus be the person that supplies our need for knowledge? For man there are two types of knowledge. Man's knowledge is finite and thus is incomplete. When one partakes of the knowledge which man can give, it will only help man on this side of eternity. The knowledge which Jesus provides will not only last into eternity but will help us gain eternity. True knowledge and wisdom, obtained from God will manifest itself in devotion to the Master and Service to mankind, but man's knowledge and wisdom is demonstrated by devotion to self and service to one's own needs.

Why must we go to Jesus as the King of our lives? The zealots and many other Jews looked for a Messiah to triumph over Rome (John 6:15). However, "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (18:36). Peter teaches that the kingdoms of this world will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10-12). Many religions of today teach that this earth is important, but the kingdoms of this world are temporal and one day will end. Jesus' kingdom is the only one that will last into eternity (Dan. 2:44; 7:12-13). Since our goal is to spend an eternity in heaven, we must follow the Lord of lords and King of kings.

The unspoken question of why we must go to Jesus to supply all of our needs is best answered in the following quote from Wendel Winkler, given by Dick Sztanyo: "Since Jesus is 'the way,' without Him we are lost; since Jesus is 'the truth,' without Him we are in error; and since Jesus is 'the life' without Him we are (spiritually) dead!" (4).

CONCLUSION

When all is said and done, every person must answer the question: “Will ye also go away?” Jesus asked this question of the “Twelve,” knowing the answer. By the very fact that they were still standing there He knew their answer was that they would not leave Him. Each person today also needs to give an answer to that question. Each person must ask himself, if he will also go away or stay with Jesus. These are the only choices which all have. People can choose to go to the philosophies of man, or the religion of their forefathers, or to the one who gives eternal life. The question: “To whom will I go?” must be answered. The only two possibilities are God or man. Jesus contrasted the two possibilities when He asked the question: “The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?” (Luke 20:4). Is a person following the philosophies which originate from God or man? Is a person following a religion which originates from God or man? Is a person acquiring an educational degree to be seen of God or of man? Peter gives us the only valid way to answer: “Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). If our goal is to go to heaven, we want knowledge that is from God, food that will feed our eternal soul, and the leadership of the Good Shepherd to guide us. If you are listening to my voice or reading these words, you still have the ability to make the right choice. Will you choose this day to be with God for all eternity? The answer that you give today will determine where you spend tomorrow.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Freeman, James M. *Manners and Customs of the Bible*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972.
- Hatcher, Michael. “The Gospel of John—An Introduction.” *Studies in John*. Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1999. 17-37.
- Hecker, Carl G. “Provisions of the Son.” *John*. Ed. William S. Cline. Chattanooga, TN: Ridgedale Church of Christ, 1989. 132-40.
- Laws, Jim. “Eating Flesh and Drinking Blood.” *The Spiritual Sword* 22.3 (1991). 10-13.
- Mattox, F. W. *The Eternal Kingdom*. Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1961.
- Noebel, David A. *Understanding The Times*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999.
- Robinson, Charles A. *Ancient History*. New York, NY: MacMillan, 1967.
- Smith, Foy L. “Will Ye Go Away?” *John*. Ed. William S. Cline. Chattanooga, TN: Ridgedale Church of Christ, 1989. 147-54.
- Sztanyo, Dick. “Jesus Called Himself ‘The True Vine.’” *The Spiritual Sword* 18.4 (1987). 3-4.

Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on The Gospel According to John*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1989.

Young, Tyler. "Jesus Feeds Five Thousand, Walks on The Sea, Preaches." *Studies in John*. Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1999. 118-44.

“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

JOHN 18:38

Eddie Whitten



Eddie Whitten worked in industry for thirty years before going into full-time preaching. He attended Brown Trail School of Preaching, graduating in 1969. He preached in San Antonio before returning to Brown Trail where he worked as the Administrator for 11 years and Director of the School of Preaching for 5 ½ years. He served as an elder of the Brown Trail church for 15 years.

He is the author of a book on the Minor Prophets and has edited several lectureship books. He appears on lectureships and Gospel meetings across the country each year and has preached in a number of foreign countries. He has written articles for numerous brotherhood publications. He is a former staff writer for

Contending For The Faith.

Eddie and his late wife are the parents of three daughters; he has nine grandchildren and twelve great-grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Thus, we have the question that has plagued the minds of many since that fateful day: “What is truth?” It would seem that to anyone seeking what he must do to be pleasing unto God would have a ready answer to this seemingly simple question, but that is simply not the case. Many people in the church of Christ, as well as the majority of those not in the church, are not really aware of what *the truth* means and are not aware of the significance of their lack of knowledge of this vital issue.

Truth, to most of the world, is whatever one wants it to be. That philosophy is far more pervasive than most people realize, or care about enough to investigate. The result of this kind of negligence is manifest in the New Age movement, the Humanist Manifestos I and II, and the general consensus that truth is relative to the need of the moment.

The truth of the matter is that truth does matter. Truth is definable, it is by design, it is teachable, it is discernable, and it is deliverable. In our study of this important topic, we hope to show not only that truth is all of the above, but that our eternal destiny depends upon our understanding of it and obedience to it.

"WHAT IS TRUTH?" INVOLVES

The Definition of Truth

Truth, like any other noun, demands a standard by which it can be measured. Without a standard, truth could be subjectively determined by whatever would be most advantageous for a person. Without a standard, there would be no such thing as a lie, since truth would be whatever one wanted it to be. The dictionary is usually consulted to determine the meaning of any word. Webster defines *truth* as:

2 a (1): The state of being the case: FACT (2) the body of real things, events, and facts: ACTUALITY (3) a: a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality. b: a judgment, proposition, or idea that is true or accepted as true. c: the body of true statements and propositions. 3a: agreement with fact or among true facts or propositions. c: fidelity to an original or to a standard.

With the exception of the last definition, "fidelity to an original or to a standard," *truth* could still be defined just about the way anyone would deem it needful for his purpose.

The dictionary defines words according to the primary usage of them. That criterion is true in the case of *truth*. Notice one of the definitions: (3)b, which states, "a judgment, proposition, or idea that is true or accepted as true." The fallacy of such a definition lies in the proposition that something can be true if it is *accepted* as true. In such a case, the common usage of the word determines the meaning of the word. If this kind of thinking were applied to the biblical usage of *truth*, it would do irreparable harm to its meaning and the significance of its application.

Most everyone realizes there is such a thing as truth. Everyone knows that a lie can be told that misrepresents facts, conditions, or possibilities. The presence of truth is not the consideration in this particular section of study. What is under consideration is the definition that fits truth under all circumstances. We are concerned with two applications of truth. (1) An expression compared to fact, or a standard, such as someone who intentionally misrepresents facts either to protect his own actions or to mislead another to believe something that is false. (2) A system that is all encompassing called, *Truth*, as in John 8:32: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Thus, the system of knowledge known as *the truth* contains all that is necessary to set a person free from sin. These comments are applicable to any phase of life. The source of the question we are dealing with, however,

is in connection with the teaching of the Bible and the lack of knowledge that prompted Pontius Pilate to ask the question: "What is Truth?"

Regarding the definition of *truth* as a statement of fact, we have pointed out that there is no definition without a standard by which a statement can be measured. The standard by which *truth* can be measured must be uniform, universal, and unified. There are many criteria for truth, but only one that meets the requirements of uniformity, universality, and unification: the Bible. Therefore, we turn to the Bible from which we can derive a proper definition of *truth*.

In the Gospel account according to John, it is established that Jesus is God. It says of Him: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). It is further said of Him, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (1:14). As we continue reading, we note that *the truth* which is applied to Jesus is not just that He spake the truth but that He was filled with or represented a system of truth. Note: "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (1:17). From these verses, we can readily see that *grace*, representing an entity of God's love, devotion, and provision for man is more than an application as such, but involves a system. The same is true with regard to *truth*. Jesus brought into the world a system representative of Him and all that He was to teach during His ministry, and subsequently to all mankind through His apostles and through the succeeding generations to the present.

Another example of *truth* being a system or entity is expressed with regard to our worship of God. Jesus, speaking of His Father, stated that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Again: "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 shew you things to come" (16:13). Other examples of the biblical usage of *truth* being a system of principles, instructions, doctrine, and correction can be given, but for a concise, biblical definition of *truth*, we turn to John 17:17 which defines the word so there can be no misunderstanding about it. Jesus, as He prayed to His Father, pleaded: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." There, in just those few powerful, succinct words, Jesus circumvents all human

efforts to justify human behavior by reducing the definition of *truth* to the Word of God—the Bible.

The Design of Truth

Pontius Pilate did not have the slightest understanding of what Jesus was talking about that evoked his famous question. Jesus had been arrested and brought before the High Priest. He had been subjected to illegal trials and had been convicted of *blasphemy*. He had been sentenced to death, but the Jews could not put a person to death without the consent of the Roman authorities. Hence, the Jews brought Jesus before Pilate. A discussion ensued between Pilate and Jesus. Pilate asked Jesus if He were a king. Jesus' response confused Pilate and brought forth his question:

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:37).

Jesus gave the design of truth in His answer to Pilate when He said, "for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." The design of truth involved:

(1) **The witness of Deity as the source of truth and its purpose.** Jesus, making this summary statement, did not imply that there was no truth prior to His advent. What Jesus said, in effect, was that for the first time, there was a **system of truth** that He brought into the world that presented mankind with the necessary information that would make it possible for one to go to Heaven; that his soul could be saved from sin.

In the letter Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, he pointed out that the law of Moses was as a *supervisor* to bring us to Christ. Paul wrote: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (3:24-25). Vine points out that *paidagogos*, translated as "schoolmaster," is not the instructor in this context, but one who is responsible for the moral and physical well-being of a child. Vine states:

In this and allied words the idea is that of training, discipline, not of impartation of knowledge. The *paidagogos* was not the instructor of the child; he exercised a general supervision over him and was responsible for his moral and physical well-being. Thus understood, *paidagogos* is appropriately used with "kept in ward" and "shut up,"

whereas to understand it as equivalent to “teacher” introduces an idea entirely foreign to the passage, and throws the Apostle’s argument into confusion (265).

Jesus further avowed that truth emanated in Deity when He addressed His disciples just prior to His crucifixion. He promised His apostles that “In my Father’s house are many mansions,” that He was going to prepare a place for them, and that He would come again and receive them unto Himself, that where He was they may be also. Thomas questioned Jesus as to how they would know the way. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). This statement was made by Jesus to His disciples as He was preparing them for His own death. Thus, He confirmed the fact that the source of truth is in Deity, since John 1:1 so identifies Jesus as Deity.

(2) **That truth is the basis for the salvation of the souls of men.** *Truth* has several synonyms in the Scriptures. Among those synonyms is the *Gospel*. *Gospel* is also defined as “Good News” or “Glad Tidings,” all referring to the advent of Jesus. Paul defines the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as the death of Christ (according to the Scriptures), His burial, and His resurrection from the dead the third day (according to the Scriptures). Understanding this vital connection to the system of truth that is involved in the salvation of souls is paramount. Without this crucial understanding that truth includes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, as a part of the system of faith or truth, it will be impossible to understand the beauty, as well as the horror, of the sacrifice that Jesus gave on the cross of Calvary.

We can now understand the admonitions of Paul much better as he addresses the conduct of the Romans:

But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (2:8-11).

Paul’s concern was for the welfare of the souls of the Romans, but his duty was to point out to them that to disobey God was tantamount to receiving God’s indignation and wrath. To obey the truth would receive God’s blessing.

He chastised the churches in Galatia as well. The Galatians were being taught error by those who would see them go into Judaism, or for

those Jews in the churches in Galatia, to go back into Judaism, that they were departing from the truth. He stated to them: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (3:1).

In both of the admonitions above, it is pointed out by Paul that those involved were not obeying the truth (that system of faith that had been revealed as necessary to the salvation of one's soul—the Gospel). If Paul is the penman of the book of Hebrews, he also makes an inclusive statement that applies to all men of all time. Speaking of Jesus, he said, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). Obeying Jesus is synonymous to obeying His Word. Jesus said, "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). Add to these verses the powerful declaration of Paul in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Jesus, speaking to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2-10), said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." *Lost* pertains to the condition of one's soul being separated from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Isaiah says that sin separates one from God; therefore to be lost, in the context of Jesus' statement, means to be lost in sin or to be separated from God because of sin. Jesus' purpose for coming to the earth was expressly to become the vicarious sacrifice sufficient to bring about the total forgiveness of sins committed by anyone who will turn away from sin and obey His word. To obey the will of Jesus is synonymous to obeying the system of truth He brought to the world. Note: Jesus said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). He also said, "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (17:8). Thus far, we have *the truth* as being the Word of God. Additionally, Jesus said He had given unto His apostles the words He (God) had given Him (Jesus). Further, Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (8:32). To make one *free* means to make him free from sin. Therefore, obeying the will of Jesus is synonymous with obeying the truth which makes one free from sin.

Finally, in this section, “obeying the truth” is the same as “obeying the Gospel.” We have noted that *truth* has several synonyms among which is the “Gospel.” Paul, writing to the church in Corinth stated:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

A more definitive description of *Gospel* is nowhere given in Holy Writ. He says the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus according to the Scriptures, as alluded to previously. In the reference to what the Gospel does, please note: (1) It had been preached to the church in Corinth by Paul; (2) The people received what he preached; (3) It (the Gospel) is that in which the people are now standing (or, living by); and, (4) It is that by which they are saved! *Saved* is synonymous to being “made free from sin,” as discussed above. So, the Gospel is that by which people are saved from sin. Paul stated also to the church in Corinth, “for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15).

The Delineation of Truth

Webster defines *delineate* as: “1 b: to represent accurately. 2: to describe in usu. sharp and vivid detail,” and *delineation* as: 1: the act of representing, portraying, or describing graphically or verbally.” Thus, to have the awesome responsibility of preaching the Gospel, the Truth, places upon the preacher the necessity of speaking the truth about the Truth! Making the claim of being a Gospel preacher does not necessarily make one a preacher. Standing before an assembled congregation does not, of itself, make the speaker a true Gospel preacher. Unless he is delineating the Truth as it is revealed in the Bible, he is not preaching the Gospel. Sadly, he is falling short of preaching the Truth, but he is also leading his hearers down the road of error that cannot result in their salvation.

Preaching and teaching involve two aspects of biblical study: Hermeneutics (the science of interpretation), and Homiletics (the proper and effective presentation of the Gospel). Both of these elements require personal integrity: (1) Deep and abiding honesty in the face of any and all circumstances; (2) Much, much study of God’s Word with an open and receptive mind devoid of preconceptions; (3) Desire to know what God would have us know; (4) An abiding love for lost

souls; (5) Humility before the throne of God, and (6) Purging any proud or arrogant attitude of self-righteousness.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is named after the mythical Greek god, Hermes, and means “the science of interpretation.” When applied to the study of the Bible, it becomes Biblical Hermeneutics. There are many, many aspects of hermeneutics—too many to go into an in-depth study in this chapter, but some basic rules of hermeneutics must be addressed for the Gospel to be delineated to the glory of God.

First, there is the basic and vital rule that the study of any word, verse, or passage involves the context in which it given. Many have taken individual words, or phrases, or verses out of their immediate and remote contexts to make them seem to mean something they were not intended to mean. This is easily done in any pursuit of life, and is done frequently. When a statement of any kind is taken out of its intended context and twisted to convey something entirely different, the speaker (or writer) is misrepresented and the hearer (or reader) is grossly misinformed. The result can be devastating, especially if it involves the destiny of one’s soul. There is an old adage that says, “A text, taken out of its context, is a pretext.” Even though old, it is still true.

Second, to derive from God’s Word the true meaning concerning any subject, all that is written pertaining to that subject must be considered. For instance, someone might say that the Bible teaches that we are saved by faith alone because John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [faith] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” So, they say, *belief* or *faith* is all that is necessary for one to be saved. However, we read in James: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (2:24). Do we have a contradiction here? One passage says that “whosoever believeth” should be saved, and another passage that says justification is “not by faith only.” There is no contradiction! It does mean that there is something about *believeth* in John 3:16 that involves more than just mental assent. Further study is necessary to secure the proper understanding of the passage. That is an application of hermeneutics.

Third, hermeneutics (proper interpretation) involves recognition that “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This truth being so (cf., Gal. 1:12), we must accept the evident fact that there

are no contradictions in the Bible. God is the author of all that is written in the Bible. Titus 1:2 tells us that God cannot lie (and still be God), therefore, if God said something in one place and contradicted Himself in another, He would not be the author of peace. Paul writes, “God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). Consequently, the catchy cliché of recent years that boasted, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it,” is false. The truth is, “God said it, that settles it whether I believe it or not.” One other passage of note is:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

So, we have the assurance of the Scriptures that they are the very Word of very God and, as such, are verbally inspired.

There are many other aspects of hermeneutics that need to be addressed, but these will suffice to assure that preachers and teachers who apply hermeneutics properly in their study will glorify God in their preaching and teaching because they will be teaching the Truth.

Homiletics

Homiletics merely means: “The art of preaching” (Webster). Homiletics involves the delivery of a homily. *Homily* means “1: a religious discourse usu. before a congregation; an informal exposition of Scripture” (Webster). Most references to homiletics are applied to those who preach. The teaching of homiletics is primarily centered upon teaching how to design and deliver a sermon. The unfortunate reality is that, because of that emphasis, the common pew-sitter or church-goer is not cognizant of the great need for preparing himself for the greatest work in the world, that of teaching others the soul-saving Gospel of Christ.

Homiletics is not a scary word representing the accomplishment of some kind of higher level of education. People, men and women, who claim to be Christians, use homiletics when they talk to friends, neighbors, or others about the church or about what one must do to be saved. They are delivering a homily when the Word of God is being explained in its simplicity and truth.

What we are concerned about is the basis for the proper implementation of delivering the truth of the Gospel. Arrogance and bigotry in the presentation of the message of the love Christ has for us is never acceptable. Untold thousands of precious souls have been turned away

from hearing of God's love for us (1 John 4:10), the sacrifice Jesus made for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8), the church He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28), and the promise of eternal salvation (Rom. 6:23) by the pompous, better-than-thou attitude of some ill-advised teacher. It is this regrettable development that has, for years, given the church of Christ a reputation that it really does not warrant. It is, unfortunately, sometimes our own fault. Paul admonished the church in Ephesus: "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ" (Eph. 4:15). We have not slacked in "preaching the truth," but sometimes we have fallen woefully short in preaching that truth with an attitude of *in love*. Those who believe that being *positive* in their preaching requires insulting and demeaning speech have done much more damage to the cause of Christ than perhaps anything else. Doctrines that will cause people to lose their souls because they are not in harmony with truth, should and must be exposed and defeated, but at the same time we must remember that the people that are following those doctrines are sincere, honest, and loyal. Paul remarked to the church in Corinth:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

We emphasize that Paul said, "We persuade men," not insult them or berate them. The attitude of the teacher often has an effect upon the pupil that causes the teaching to be accepted or rejected.

Homiletics also involves *truth* just as much as hermeneutics, as discussed above. While hermeneutics involves the process of ascertaining truth, homiletics involves the proper and accurate presentation of truth. Regardless of the oratorical capabilities of a preacher or teacher; regardless of the sincerity of his presentation, if what is being taught is not truth, it is worthless, misleading, and damaging to the souls of the hearers. Paul refers to the Gospel as being truth: "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5). He wrote to the saints in Thessalonica that it is the Gospel by which we are called:

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 The. 2:14-15).

From these observations it becomes clear that the preaching/teaching of God's message to anyone must be *the truth* as it is determined by the proper application of the methods for determining truth (hermeneutics) and the proper, humble, and effective presentation of that truth (homiletics) in love.

The Destiny Truth Provides

Life is short and fleeting; death is certain; and what awaits following death is everlasting—without end. James wrote: “Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (4:14). The writer of Hebrews said, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (9:27). Jesus, speaking of those who followed Him, said: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

We present these basic premises of life, death, and eternity to emphasize the need of every person to hear the truth of God's Word, for it is in His Word that we find the solution to the problem every person faces. The specter of death is not pleasant to contemplate, yet it is unavoidable. The apostle Peter wrote:

For all flesh *is* as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

The *word of the Lord* to which Peter referred is, by definition, “Truth.” He predicated the above statement with the fundamental doctrine of Christianity:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye* love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

The Truth, the Word of God, the Gospel, the Good News, all are synonymous terms, meaning the love of God for man as it was determined in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:10-11), presented to the world in the incarnate Christ (John 1:1), revealed to man for all time by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Gal. 1:12), confirmed by signs and miracles (John 20:30-31; Mark 16:20),

preached by His apostles (Acts 1:8; Col. 1:23), and given as promise of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9).

CONCLUSION

In our study of Pontius Pilate’s infamous question, “What is truth?” we have attempted, to the best of our ability, to present basic thoughts that bear upon the thinking and conscience of those who will read and study. We have tried to be objective in presenting the thoughts addressed. We have relied solely upon God’s Word and the scholarly works noted for definitions and applications. We have noticed: (1) some thoughts by way of introduction; (2) the definition of *truth* in its biblical context of the entirety of the Word of God; (3) the design of *truth*, that it is for the purpose of leading people out of the sinful influence of the world and to bring the lost to salvation; (4) the delineation of truth, i.e., the necessity of presenting the truth as it is in harmony with all the teaching of the Bible—that it reflects the honest and forthright treatment of the sacred text; and (5) the impact of truth upon the eternal destiny of every man.

It is our hope and prayer that all who consider for themselves, “What is truth?” will benefit from the thoughts expressed herein.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary. 1967.
Vine, W. E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1940.

“LORD, WILT THOU AT THIS TIME RESTORE AGAIN THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL?” ACTS 1:6

Clifford Newell, Jr.



Clifford Newell, Jr., was born and reared in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. He attended Memphis School of Preaching, Alabama Christian School of Religion (B.A. and M.A.), Kentucky State University (M.P.A.), and Southern Christian University (D. Min.). He has taught religious courses at colleges, universities, and schools of preaching. His preaching has involved radio and television programs, lectureships, and mission trips overseas.

Clifford is married to Diane Elaine (King), and they have two children: Joy Wooten and Clifford III, and three grandchildren. He has been preaching since 1976 and is currently working with the East Bristol Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

Our question is taken from the one book of history in the New Testament: the book of Acts. “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” In answering our question, it will be necessary for us to survey the book of Acts.

THEME OF ACTS

It is this writer’s firm conviction that the theme of Acts is the **kingdom of God!** This can be seen from the beginning of Acts all the way through to the end of the book. The beginning and the end of a book can give tremendous insight into what the book is about. At the beginning of Acts, we read, “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the **kingdom of God**” (1:3). When we come to the last verse of Acts, it states: “Preaching the **kingdom of God**, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (28:31).

Throughout Acts the kingdom is set forth, not as a political kingdom nor as a glorified country club, but as a spiritual entity:

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

This spiritual kingdom would uphold the laws of the land and therefore would receive civil endorsement (Acts 17:6-9). The conduct and decorum characterized by its members would be exemplary: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Further, this kingdom would be one that is exalted and honored:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:2-4).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In Acts, we have statements that show that the church and the kingdom of God are the same institution, only being described in reference to its organization and government. The kingdom that was announced and prophesied in the Old Testament finds its reality in the work that Jesus did in making it possible for that kingdom to come into existence. This very book is introduced with the statement "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (1:1). Thus, this becomes the foundation and the basis of the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus came into the world to bring about—the establishment of the kingdom of God. Jesus had talked to the disciples regarding things pertaining to the kingdom of God. This would include the great commission as given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Acts is the development of the kingdom of God, growing out of the Old Testament, beginning at Pentecost, and spreading throughout the

world as set forth in Acts. In this development of the kingdom of God in Acts, it is intended to show that the kingdom is a culmination of that about which the Old Testament points. In this manner, it separates the kingdom of God from Judaism and from the literal fleshly kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament prophets played a significant role as they wrote and spoke concerning the kingdom. God's use of these inspired men (2 Pet. 1:20-21), whose tongues and pens He controlled, was to prepare the minds of the people for the coming of His kingdom. Observe:

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Thus, by means of the coming of Christ and His kingdom, people were to have access into God's grace.

The kingdom prophecies of the Sacred Scriptures have challenged and continue to challenge the thinking of many. It is stated:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Mat. 5:17-18).

Good people, are we convinced that Jesus did what He came to do? We observe that according to Isaiah 2:2-4, the kingdom/church was to be established in the last days, and it was (Acts 2:1-47). In Isaiah 9:1-7, the authority in the kingdom was to be established, and it was (Luke 1:32-33). According to Isaiah 11:1-10, there would be one spiritual kingdom with a powerful nature, and there was (Acts 13:22-24; Rom. 15:12). Jeremiah spoke of the kingdom beginning with a new covenant which would come from the Lord (Jer. 31:31-34), and it did (Heb. 8:6-13). Daniel stated that the kingdom shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44), and it is (Heb. 12:28). Daniel further said that Jesus, like the Son of man, ascended to the Ancient of Days and He received three things—dominion, glory, and a kingdom; which He did receive (Acts 1:7-9). It must

be obvious that the kingdom was a topic which the prophets did prophecy.

An important question that must be raised is, "How were the kingdom prophecies received as the New Testament opened?" It is not surprising to the serious student of the Bible that there was a rejection of this kingdom and a great deal of misunderstanding associated with it. With the teaching of the parables of Jesus, some have said that when the Jews rejected the concept of the kingdom, Christ substituted the church in its place. The real issue was the Jews wanted a physical material institution that would deliver them from oppression by the Romans. This demand by the Jews is what led to the misconceptions of the kingdom and its nature.

The characteristics of the kingdom of God include that: It is not of this world (John 18:36). It would not be meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). It cannot be moved and therefore is indestructible (Heb. 12:28). True greatness is measured by service in it (Mat. 20:20-28). It can only be entered by a new birth (John 3:3, 5). Its citizens must obey God (Mat. 7:21). This kingdom must be received as a little child (Mat. 18:1-3).

Hence, Acts begins with the establishment of the kingdom of God in Acts 1 in Jerusalem (the very center of Judaism), and it goes all the way from Jerusalem to Rome, where Paul was when he made the statement of Acts 28:31; Rome is as far away from Jerusalem as one could go. In the development of ideas concerning the kingdom, one sees the separation and the distinction of the kingdom beginning at Pentecost (with all the misconceptions surrounding the very headquarters of Judaism and the center of fleshly Israel) with the ideas that people shared regarding the kingdom in the Old Testament. Even the apostles raised the question regarding the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6). According to Luke 19, the apostles thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. Acts clarifies how their misunderstanding and failure to conceive what was set forth in the Old Testament. Luke's design was to draw out the misconceptions relating to the kingdom and separate it entirely from the Judaistic system that belonged to the Old Testament. It is from this framework that we discuss the kingdom of Acts 1:6.

PROGRESSION OF THE KINGDOM

In Acts 2, *kingdom* is not used. However, in view of the fact that it is introduced in chapter 1, we can conclude that the very things that they preached in Acts 2 were but a further extension and development of the things that Jesus discussed with them from His resurrection until His ascension. Therefore, the church in Acts 2 is but the kingdom about which Christ talked with His disciples in Acts 1.

Kingdom next appears in Acts 8. Philip was sent to Samaria to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, which he did. “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (8:12). In John 4 Christ was talking to the woman at the well in Samaria. She was shocked, for the Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans. Samaritans were a mixed race: half Jew and half Gentile; and this made the Samaritans a hated people by the Jews. They (the Jews) even considered the Samaritans as dogs! It is interesting to note the very next occasion of *kingdom*—it is in relation to the Samaritans who believed and were baptized as per the Great Commission. Thus, the kingdom in Acts is moving out of Jerusalem!

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 8:1).

The case is that this had already taken place.

The Jews misunderstood the very nature of their mission; they looked at it in the fleshly state instead of its spiritual application. Further, the kingdom of Acts 2 was not based upon fleshly descent. This helps us to see why Acts contains the cases of conversions. Conversion has to do with spiritual ideas and spiritual changes. It does not relate to endless genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4) or of Abraham being their father (Rom. 4:1).

In Acts 14, we have the next occurrence of *kingdom*. “Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (14:22). We have seen the kingdom established by preaching the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:17-21). The Samaritans through obedience to the truth have been included in that spiritual kingdom. Through these efforts, the kingdom was established. Now Paul mentions that he returned and visited them, confirming them, and reminding them, “we must through

much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." If these were already in the kingdom, in what possible sense would they enter into the kingdom? The meaning must be that Paul has in mind the eternal sense of the kingdom. To the Corinthians he said, "Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24). Friends, there is no room here for a return of the Christ to set up an earthly physical kingdom! Thus, Acts succinctly shows that the kingdom was in fulfillment of the Old Testament and leaves no place for a physical one with a supposedly return of Christ.

Acts 19 brings to our attention *kingdom*:

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus (19:8-9).

The apostle Paul is found preaching and disputing the things concerning the kingdom of God. It is interesting to note that the Gospel will affect people. In Paul's persuading them of the things pertaining to the kingdom, some were upset with Paul and thus spoke against, or evil of, the way. *The way* has reference to the kingdom of heaven on earth. "And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (9:2). This is but another occasion that inspiration demonstrates to honest people that the church and the kingdom are one and the same institution. This is directly related to one's proper understanding of the kingdom and its restoration.

Acts 28 states:

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *his* lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and *out of* the prophets, from morning till evening (28:23).

The preaching of the Gospel has been known to upset people. In some ways, preaching is like the sun that affects this universe. When it shines, it hardens the clay and it softens the butter. The difference is one's attitude toward such. That is precisely what Paul was experiencing on this occasion. However, he reasoned with them in regard to the kingdom of God. As we began with the first chapter of this rich book,

Jesus was talking to His apostles about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (1:3). We now come to the last chapter of this inspired account, having observed that the kingdom is what Philip preached (8:35) and is the same institution that Paul preached (28:23). The peerless Paul talked about the kingdom of God, and he did so based upon what Moses and the prophets declared. The kingdom was so important that Paul was reasoning with them from morning until evening. “And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not” (28:24). We understand that a separation was beginning to take place in the minds of people regarding the understanding of God’s kingdom.

Earlier, the apostles asked, “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6)? We have seen Acts unfolding; and now, in the last chapter, we have Paul who is not looking for that kingdom to be restored. His thinking was not in line with what so many had believed that being a physical kingdom. In the process of Paul studying with them, he quotes the prince of the prophets:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed (Isa. 6:9-10).

Paul states: “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it” (28:28). The progression has been from a Jewish concept, no doubt because of the Jews obeying the Gospel in Acts 2. The Gospel was to be preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16-17). The development has moved from Jerusalem, for Paul is now in Rome. When he told them he was sent to the Gentiles, the next verse declares, “And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves” (28:29).

Therefore, Acts ends with a total separation of those who held on to the false Jewish notion of an earthly, physical, and temporal kingdom. As Paul gave his farewell, he was bidding farewell to the Jewish system that had resulted in his being imprisoned. He now declares unto them, “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (28:31).

Acts closes with a total separation from the Jewish teaching concerning the kingdom of God. The Gospel of redemption that was promised to Abraham (and prophesied by Daniel and Jeremiah) was made a reality by the things Jesus began both to do and to teach. This is what the apostles carried out in their lives. Hence, this is the kingdom as found in Acts. Hopefully, seeing the kingdom from this standpoint, one can understand why we have recorded the cases of conversion. The kingdom is spiritual in nature and requires a new birth (John 3:3, 5; Tit. 3:5; Eph. 5:26-27). This is in harmony with the great commission as taught in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-47, and John 20:30-31.

CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The sacred pages of inspiration records for man the fundamental fact that *church* and *kingdom* are often used interchangeably. We recognize that there is a difference in the spelling of the words; however, that they refer to the self-same institution cannot be successfully denied. Jackson wrote:

The English word “church” is derived from the Greek *kurikon*, meaning “belonging to the Lord.” The actual word in the Greek text, that stands behind the modern rendition, “church,” is *ekklesia*, “called out.” It is now generally conceded that the basic meaning of the term is “assembly” or “congregation” (31).

The word “kingdom” (*basileia*) is a noun that generally refers to a territory over which a king rules. Three senses are prominent in the theology of the N.T. (a) Jesus uses the term to denote the reign of God over the nation of Israel (Mt. 21:43)...(b) The term “kingdom” is commonly used in the N.T. as an equivalent to the “church”...(c) The word “kingdom” also may refer to the final heavenly state of blessedness in which the people of God will abide eternally (2 Tim. 4:13; 2 Pet. 1:11) (102).

The Sacred Scriptures speak:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mat. 16:18-19).

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed

for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (26:26-29).

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

If the church and the kingdom is not the same, then who gave Paul the authority to take the Lord's Supper out of the kingdom and bind it upon the church?

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13).

To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.... Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:23, 28).

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9).

The only logical conclusion that one can draw from these passages is that they speak of one institution—the church and kingdom.

The fact remains that the church and the kingdom have the same source of authority (Eph. 1:22-23; Luke 1:30-37). The church and the kingdom have the same laws (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:28). The subjects of the church and the citizens of the kingdom are the same (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19). Members of the church or kingdom have been cleansed by the washing of water (Eph. 5:26-27; John 3:3, 5). Membership is associated by obedience (1 Cor. 12:13, 18; Col. 1:13). The territory relating to both institutions is the same (Col. 3:15; Heb. 8:11).

Therefore, the church and the kingdom are referring to the same institution. If not, why not?

CONCLUSION

The question stated, “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) The fact that they still thought of the kingdom through the Old Testament demonstrates the utter lack of understanding of the kingdom of God. The disciples wanted to know when the Lord would “restore the kingdom to Israel” as, with the Jews generally, the apostles were still laboring under the illusion that Christ would *restore* the Jewish regime of the Old Testament. They had not yet fathomed the truth that His kingdom was not of this world.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

By the time one gets to the close of Acts, the tone and tenor of the disciples’ question had faded into oblivion.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.
Jackson, Wayne. *Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy*. Stockton, CA: Christian Courier, 2002.

“UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?”

ACTS 8:30

Randy L. Mabe



Randy L. Mabe was born in Nashville, Tennessee, in January, 1951. He is married to the former Sharon M. Rebmann, of Scio, Oregon. They have two children: Lewis and Jennifer.

Randy received his formal Bible training through Alabama School of Religion (now Southern Christian University) and the Madisonville College of the Bible. Since 1979 Randy has been the pulpit preacher for congregations in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Nevada. He has been used in Gospel meetings and lectureships in Idaho, Montana, California, New Mexico, Texas, Oregon, Utah, Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Randy taught in the College of the Bible, Madisonville, Kentucky, under Joseph Meador, Academic

Director. Since 1993 he has served as minister and Academic Director for the Southwestern School of Religion, Las Vegas, Nevada.

The question assigned me is found in the context of Acts 8:26-39. This text is read at every baptism at the Boulevard Church of Christ in Las Vegas. This is done for the clarity of its content and to fix the minds of everyone on the event at hand. It is powerful for the candidate to fully realize that he/she is doing exactly what people did in the first century to become a Christian. The question, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” defines the basis for the decision to be baptized: understanding the knowledge gained in the study of the Bible. In most every case that candidate has been guided, helped, instructed in the Word of God to arrive at this knowledge and understanding. It is the time to ask more questions and get more instruction if there is any doubt on the part of the candidate. They are encouraged in knowing that they are following this Bible example of conversion without any addition or subtraction. Their joy is full and they realize that it is good to rejoice in the Lord as the Ethiopian did in the long ago.

Preachers and teachers are always trying to improve methods that will quickly and efficiently bring understanding to a student as they acquire knowledge through the study of God’s Word. It is my observation over many years in this search that nothing replaces making a

diligent effort in a direct study of God’s Word. This is God’s command: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The American Standard Version 1901 says to *give diligence*. Many people read many books about the Bible, commentaries on the Bible, and rarely get around to reading and studying the Bible! The Ethiopian was reading the text of the Bible. He was reading from the prophet Isaiah, known to us as chapter 53.

We can see that reading the Bible does not automatically ensure an understanding of the text read. The Bible has some difficult, and easy, material to learn. The apostle Peter makes this plain:

And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

The Ethiopian was confused concerning the person the text centered upon. This is a primary consideration to understanding any text. We do not know for sure why the Ethiopian was confused. Sometimes it is hard for us to understand why he would be confused when the text is so plain to us. Remember it is plain to us because we have studied it! Placing ourselves in the Ethiopian’s time frame helps us to understand his dilemma. He had no knowledge, of which we know, that Jesus had established His church. He was traveling to Jerusalem to worship under Judaism. Isaiah 53 is written in the prophetic future tense which appears to us as the past tense in our language. In the Greek it is written in the perfect tense indicating a completed action, but it is speaking of one to come in the future to the time of Isaiah’s writing. Yet, Jesus had come in fulfillment to Isaiah’s writing from the Ethiopian’s time reference. Thus, the Ethiopian asks who the text is about, Isaiah or someone else? Philip becomes the Ethiopian’s guide to understanding the passage at hand. He is a good guide in that he started at the very text that had the Ethiopian confused and continued the study to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the same text. He is a good instructor in that he used the opportunity to continue the study of Jesus so the Ethiopian could choose to become a Christian, thus saving his soul.

This author has refined a study guide to help him and others as we study the Bible. It will help us to understand what we read. At the very

least it will clarify the real questions that we need to ask a guide when we fail to understand. These few points will enhance anyone's study of the Bible. The points in this guide will enable us to approach the Bible with confidence. Remember that God said we shall know the truth (John 8:32).

The first point is to approach a text as if it were our first time to read it. We have many factors that influence our Bible study—some for the good and some that hinder us. A preconceived view may hinder us from seeing the truth that is actually in the text. It is also possible that we have been taught wrong. The Bible will teach us correctly. We must exercise ourselves to exegete, read out of the text what exists in the text. We must never eisegete, read into the text what we think exists in the text. We should allow the Bible to speak without undue filtering through our accepted beliefs. Peter missed one of the main points of the sermon he preached on Pentecost in Acts 2 for this very reason. He preached that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2. He quoted the prophecy that whosoever called upon the name of the Lord would be saved. Yet his Jewish heritage filtered the message to say, to him, that whosoever of the Jews that called upon the Lord would be saved. He has to be shown a vision three times in the future and be sent to the Gentiles to preach this same message before he realizes that the Gospel is for all, just like he preached on Pentecost (Acts 10:1-17, 34)! Notice that God's Word did not change because Peter did not assess it correctly. Peter had to change to a correct assessment and understanding of what God said.

The next point is to stake out a complete text for the study and write it down at the top of the study page. Many times people are confused in their Bible reading because they read incomplete thoughts, portions of texts. It would be like Mom cooking using only portions of the recipe. Read thoroughly to define the beginning and the end of the text being studied. Then study this text as a whole, the sum of its parts. When we write the complete text at the top of the page, we can then organize this study with others in a notebook in biblical order. If some future time we have questions about the same text (we do forget), we can quickly reference the study we have made instead of having to repeat this study process in its entirety.

The next step in this study process is to ascertain who is speaking in the text. Remember that God is the author of the Bible. An inspired writer has written the book the text is in. Yet the one speaking in the

text may be someone else and not inspired. Understanding who the speaker is will help us understand the text. Write this information on the study paper.

Next, determine the recipient of the message. Who is being addressed? It may be a single person, or a group of people, or many groups of people each distinct from the others. Write down each one addressed in the text and a statement of fact about each one. This will give a broader base of understanding how they receive this message and their response to it.

Now we need to consider the circumstance that led to this discussion. Sometimes we can find this information within the text. Other times we must go the greater context, reading before or after the verses contained in the immediate text. It may be that we need to read a couple of chapters or, in the case of smaller books, the entire book. When the stage is properly set in our mind in which the discussion takes place, we will readily see influences bearing on the text that casual readers almost always miss. These will promote greater understanding of the text. Be sure and write the result of each point on the study paper. This will help us reflect upon all the information at a glance. It keeps all points fresh in our mind so we can reason properly.

The next two steps are very important. We must be very honest with ourself at this point. Accept the fact that we are ignorant concerning this. This means that there are things we do not know. If we cover this fact with pride, we will remain ignorant. We will overcome ignorance only by recognizing what we do not know and by setting out to find the answers. Read the entire text and make a list of every word of which we do not know the meaning on the study paper. Write down every word about which there is any doubt.

In like manner, read the entire text again and make a list of every phrase that is not fully understood. This may be due to the usage such a long time ago, the manner of wording, or a variety of reasons. Be very honest in this assessment.

Now return to the list of words whose meaning were not fully known. Look these words up in a dictionary and write down the meaning on the study paper. Use a modern dictionary only if that is all the resource available, although this will prove to be inadequate in many cases. This is due to the attributes of a living language. Words in English will change meaning in time. In the 1600s *prevent* actually had as its primary meaning the thought “to precede.” The modern dictio-

nary will define *prevent*: “to keep from happening.” See the difference this makes in the text of 1 Thessalonians 4:15! We need to buy, borrow, or check out of the church library a Bible dictionary. These deal with Bible words in their correct time frame and original language to clearly set forth the correct definitions. It is also the case that our English words are broader in definition than in other languages. Our word *love* covers a lot of definitions depending on the context in which it is used. This author loves his wife, children, and dog in different ways, but he will use the same word for each. The Greek language has a word for each kind of love under consideration. A Bible dictionary will sometimes specify which is the proper word and its definition that has been translated in a particular verse. We can even learn to use an analytical lexicon in the original language that will get even more specific and give more information that will bear on the text. The point is to find the proper definitions of the words that we did not know and write them down on the study page. It is much easier to do this work one time and save it in an organized way!

The next step is obvious. Go back to the list of phrases whose meanings were not know. Now we can find help in understanding these in a variety of sources. The first is to use a Bible concordance to try and find other occurrences of these words or similar phrases. They will help us to understand the usage in the immediate context. Computer Bible programs are excellent tools for this kind of search. In just seconds all occurrences can be ready for our investigation. These programs also contain many reference works, commentaries, dictionaries, lexicons for immediate use. Then we may consult commentaries on the Bible. Beware! Remember that commentaries are only what uninspired men think the passages mean. We will often find disagreements on the same verse or phrase in different commentaries. The key is to consult many commentaries on our verse and phrase. We are looking for insight as to the usage and meaning. We do not expect any one commentator to explain the phrase fully. We will be the one to decide that matter by the evidence we have gleaned in this process. This is to be our faith! It is also helpful to read the phrase in many English translations of the Bible. Do not be afraid to use them all in comparative study! The New International Version and others make very poor translations for a main study Bible, but they are useful in a comparative study to give ideas in shades of meaning and a different perspective to consider in the study. Write down all pertinent information on the study paper.

The time has now come to complete the inductive method of study. We have gathered the evidence that we need to understand the passage. Now we can analyze all this evidence. Keep that evidence that is in keeping with the context, and discard the evidence that disagrees with the context. An important rule to remember is that the context determines usage. Place the definitions of the words in place of the words in the text. The proper definition will not drastically change the meaning of the sentence or thought in which it is found. The same is true for the phrases that were investigated. Let the context determine usage. Analyze thought by thought, line by line, phrase by phrase, and word by word.

The last step is to deduce the proper meaning of the text through the analyzing of the evidence gathered in all the steps. This can be done by writing the text in our own words and comparing it to the biblical text. Write an expanded version of the text. Use all the information that provides clarity concerning this text in the expanded version. This could make it quite long, but that is acceptable. Remember we are providing clarity on this text not only for the present time but also the future. Compare the finished expanded version to the biblical text. They must agree. Remember it is the Bible that is correct—always. If there is disharmony between the expanded text and the Bible, it is the newly formed text that is incorrect. If the expanded version is in agreement with the evidence and the biblical text, but disagrees with the previous belief on the text—accept the truth regardless of who taught otherwise. God is right.

This scribe did not promise an easy way of effective Bible study. In fact, this author knows of none, but this provides an effective way of Bible study. Yes, it takes great effort. Yes, it takes time. Yes, it is fruitful. We may have many years to study the Bible. Using this process and keeping the results in an organized notebook will become a treasure that we can pass to our family as an inheritance worth more than silver and gold. Just think of the great benefit if every person compiled such a notebook during their life of study and left it to others on their passing into eternity. God’s Word does not change nor pass away. Our studies through the generations can be a great dialogue upon the Scriptures though many already be dead. Their thoughts, studies, and works could live on. These books would stand as living memorials as to the perceived importance of the Bible in daily living and the deep study of

the Bible as of the utmost importance to our education and welfare to the coming generations.

This writer read recently of a man who now is 80 years old. His obligation in the family has been to stand his watch protecting the family fruitcake. That fruitcake was made by a known ancestor 125 years ago! Every member of the family that was chosen to protect and deliver the fruitcake to successive generations have held their office in high esteem. Their names have been recorded and their service commended in that the fruitcake is preserved. This man will now choose another to protect and deliver this fruitcake to the generation to come, as he will soon die. Family members anxiously await his decision as to the person that will get this great honor. There may even be some politics involved, who knows? One thing is for certain: This fruitcake is important to this family! How much greater would it be to pass down the family Bible and a great notebook of study notes on all of its passages by many generations now past. This treasure would show the Bible to be important to the family and demand that others study and record evidence in this great study book.

The Bible is the real treasure. It demands that we study to show ourselves approved before God. Get started now. Remember to be as wise as the Ethiopian to recognize when we need someone to guide us. Choose someone qualified by a respect for and great knowledge of the Bible. God will provide for us as he did the Ethiopian. Remember to pray for wisdom to utilize the knowledge we gain in Bible study. James 1:5 says that He will provide this to us abundantly. He will not mock us overcoming our ignorance. He will sustain us in our efforts. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). God wants all men to come to a working, saving knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

Elders, you are charged with feeding the flock of God. Do you provide a library at the church building for your members to use? Many hungry Bible students cannot individually afford reference books and tools they would happily use if provided them. A well stocked and maintained church library is invaluable to these students. A computer with a good Bible research program installed would open up new worlds of study for some students.

An internet connection gives access to such great web sites as www.oabs.org and www.christiancourier.com. Debates, lectureships, Bible Schools, Magazines, articles, Gospel meetings are all archived for on-demand use at the click of a button. A good supply of appropriate

commentaries, concordances, lexicons, cultural background studies, Christian evidence books, video tapes, audio tapes, and such like would potentially strengthen your congregation by leaps and bounds. This would lessen your work as people studied and lived the Christian life with confidence. Problems would decrease, evangelism would increase. This has been a magnificent asset to our congregation, and it would be to yours. We are so fortunate to live in an age when we have so many great reference resources and so much time in which to use them. To have been educated to read and reason making us ready to study these works. It is a shame to not provide them for all to have access. These resources are not readily available in our public libraries. What is provided may not be the best selection of material for young Bible students to use. Stocking your own library in the church building would give you control to provide proper materials in a location central to all members.

Let us all be encouraged to read, study, and obey the Bible all our lives. We will be called on to answer questions for others: Let us be ready (1 Pet. 3:15). We will be called upon to defend the faith: Let us be ready (Jude 3; Eph. 6:13-18). We will be called upon to give answer at judgment: Let us be ready (Mat. 25:31-46).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?”

ACTS 16:30

Harrell Davidson



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955 and began preaching every Sunday in October, 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on Marriage and The Christian Home (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He is presently working with the church in Obion, Tennessee, which is

only 20 miles from where he was born and raised.

Harrell is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock. They have four children and five grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of salvation ought to penetrate the hearts and souls of us all. Mankind, from the time of sin, has been separated from God. Isaiah said almost 700 years before Christ that it was not God's fault that man is lost due to God having an arm that could not reach down or an ear so heavy that He could not hear. Isaiah added, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear" (59:2). It is abundantly clear that man is estranged from God due to his own sins. We ought to take this personally. I am not lost because of your sins, nor are you lost because of my sins. I am not lost because of my parents. If I am lost it will be my own failure to obey that which is written in the Bible.

The first sinners were Adam and Eve. They transgressed God's law and by doing so they were separated from God. God cast them out of the beautiful Garden of Eden because they had disobeyed Him. Thus, sin had its ugly entrance into this old world because man decided that he did not have to obey God. He could choose his own course and follow after ways that will lead to torment. God saw the plight that man was in and purposed His only begotten Son to be a sin offering for man. God said, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and

between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Moses is recording these words that God spoke many years after the fact. God also promised to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Thus, we have the purpose and promise of Almighty God that man can rid himself of his awful past and be saved. As the Old Testament unfolds from Genesis 3 down until Acts 2 when the Day of Pentecost arrived, God had unfolded through types or shadows the matter of salvation.

It would be soon that Cain would kill his own brother Abel, who was trying to do that which was right in the sight of God. Cain did not have enough faith to do likewise. Cain would become a vagabond, but Abel, though dead, still speaks volumes to us today about obeying God. The great flood would come and destroy mankind and beasts that God had made except for those in the ark that Noah was told to build. The apostle Peter would say hundreds of years later:

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

This is an obvious reference back to the days of Noah for Peter by inspiration calls his name. Did you notice that Peter says that eight souls were *saved* by water? What in the world does *saved* mean? They must have wondered back there at the time of the flood. Peter then says that baptism *now* saves us. In the record of the flood, God was slowly preparing man for the time that complete salvation would be made possible through the seed that He purposed and promised. On and on through the Old Testament we are given glimpses of this salvation. Little by little God was very busy revealing to man this important matter. In fact, there is not a matter that is more important than our soul salvation.

God sent His son as He purposed, promised, and planned in the Old Testament. God was getting the world ready for Him who would take away sin. Moses told the second generation removed from the wilderness of wandering (the first generation perished in the wilderness): "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deu.

18:15). The *Prophet* would be Christ. “Of thy brethren” indicates that this prophet would be of Jewish descent—thus thy brethren. Moses showed that it was to Him (Christ the prophet) that they should listen or give heed.

Isaiah would tell that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). Others would tell that He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea—not Jerusalem. This One born of a virgin would be of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). The Old Testament closes, after God had disclosed by way of the prophets, that this Savior of the world was coming just as God had promised. The New Testament opens by telling us this important information: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mat. 1:1). About four thousand years had gone by since God prophesied of His coming Son in Genesis 3:15, but now it is a reality. It had been purposed, promised, planned, and now executed. However, only a sinless person could qualify as the “lamb of God” that could take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Regarding His purity and freedom from sin, the Hebrews writer said, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). How one could perfectly keep an imperfect law is almost beyond our comprehension because we cannot, in the strictest sense, live above sin; yet the Prophet, Son of God, High Priest, and our Savior kept and fulfilled that old law. He thus qualified Himself to be the Savior of the world. It is the grandest story that has ever been told, and we have only noticed a few of the highlights of this marvelous story.

In Acts 2 this salvation pure and free was preached. In that very first Gospel sermon on the first Pentecost, after the ascension of our Lord, about three thousand people were saved from their past sins and were added by God to the Lord’s church. Thus, God had kept His Word and had delivered that which He had in His mind to accomplish for the human race so man could be in fellowship with the Almighty. The apostles would go out, preach the Word, and baptize people into Christ for the remission of their sins. The Gospel spread almost like a wildfire. Christianity had many enemies. The Jews in general and the Pharisees in particular did not want the saving Gospel preached. We are introduced to one of these named Saul in Acts 7:58; 8:1. This mean vindictive individual would do everything in his power to stop God from fulfilling His Word. However, in Acts 9 this mean-spirited man was

converted to the Lord, and he himself obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, having his sins washed away (Acts 22:16). Later his name was changed to Paul and he went from being one of the greatest enemies of the church to one of the greatest friends of the Gospel and would preach the church to thousands before he was ready to be offered (give his life) so men and women would and could obey the precious Gospel.

PAUL AT PHILIPPI

Paul would go on three missionary journeys preaching mostly to the Gentiles whom before his own obedience to the Gospel would have nothing to do with them whatsoever. It was on that second journey that he came to Philippi, which was a chief city of Macedonia (16:12). He went to a river where prayer was "wont to be made" (16:13). Lydia and her household became the first Christians in Philippi. Paul and his partner, Silas, cast a demon out of a damsel. Her owners took Paul and Silas to the authorities who had their clothes stripped off them, had them beaten until they had wounds on their bodies, and were cast into the prison in this chief city. The authorities charged the jailor with keeping them safely which was a charge not to be taken lightly. In Acts 12, when the apostle Peter was imprisoned and the Lord "sent his angel" (12:11) to rescue him, when old Herod sent for Peter that he might also put him to death as he had James, Peter was not there because the angel had helped him escape. The guards had charge of Peter and because he was gone, Herod put them to death. This illustrates how serious an offense it was for a jailor, when charged with keeping a prisoner, to allow him to escape. It meant death to the prison keeper.

Acts 16:24 shows that the jailor had received the charge of these two Christian prisoners and put them in the inner prison. They were in a prison that was within a prison, not only so, but their feet were put in stocks. He made doubly sure they were in safe keeping, and, having made these arrangements, he goes to his house, which evidently was joined to the prison but was isolated from it also, and pillowed his head in sleep. Paul and Silas were unmoved and unshaken by all of this for at midnight they were singing and praying (16:25). Acts 16:25 indicates that the prisoners heard Paul and Silas worshiping at midnight, but nothing indicates that the jailor could hear them. "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep" (16:27). There is every indication that he heard not the prayers and songs of Paul and Silas. "Suddenly there

was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken” (16:26). This would be enough to awaken anyone, but what is he to do? He has been given charge of two men, who in reality were as harmless as doves, yet he had their charge because they were despised for the truth’s sake. He drew his own sword, probably his short sword, and would have killed himself.

DO THYSELF NO HARM

It is hard to imagine what repose must have overcome this prison keeper when Paul cried, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here” (16:28). This is truly unusual! Open the doors to any prison, and the prisoners will be gone—escaped, and the jailor knew that was the case. What is this I am hearing, he must have thought within himself? It was at the midnight hour and the inner prison would naturally be dark. It may have been dark even at high noon. The jailor called for a “light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas” (16:29). Did the jailor understand all that was going on? Did he know why Paul and Silas were there in his prison? It is almost certain that that particular night he had not heard them singing and praying, for he was asleep. He might have heard something about these fellows, but he understood that something strange was happening because the prisoners were all present and there had been an earthquake. No one had escaped! Truly that was/would be a strange thing. Notice what he asked as he falls down before Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (16:30). Whether he knew of soul salvation at this point the author is not convinced, for we have no record of him having heard. Romans 10:17 still tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The jailor had not come this far as yet. Obviously he had not heard their worship. He might have been asking from a physical point of view, but the answer that he is to receive is not saving oneself physically, rather the answer has to do with saving the soul from spiritual death.

WHAT MUST I DO?

Paul tells him, “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Is this an impossible command? No, it is not impossible, but he did not fully as yet understand the full meaning of the command. Paul said in Romans 10:14: “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?" It is crystal clear that the jailor had to hear the Gospel proclaimed before he could have the kind of saving faith that Paul is commanding of him. Paul understands that completely for Paul and Silas spoke the Word of the Lord to those present in the jailor's house (Acts 16:32).

We cannot know all that Paul and Silas said, but we know it was enough to produce the kind of saving faith that one must have to obey the Gospel. Speaking and or preaching the Word of the Lord is a broad matter. Not that the Word is broad, but the way it is preached may differ according to the needs that a person or persons might have. In Acts 8 we have the record of the Ethiopian eunuch and the Scriptures reveal that Philip began in Isaiah 53 and preached unto him Jesus. We do not know all that Philip said; we do know that he preached Jesus. This includes the matters regarding the home, the church, and all facets of New Testament worship and work. This is precisely why we said that it was a broad subject. The Ethiopian was a believer in the law because he had been to Jerusalem to worship; however, a eunuch could only worship in a very limited way under the old order. We know that Philip preached to him about faith in Christ and that baptism was essential to one's salvation. How do we know this? Why when they came to a certain water, the Ethiopian said, "See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip told him that if he believed with all his heart that Jesus was the Son of God, he could indeed be baptized. The evidence had been presented in sufficient detail so that the eunuch could say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). He did not know this when Philip first met him. How did he learn this much? It was through preaching that led him to have faith that caused him to confess that faith in Christ and be baptized. He never argued about what to do to be saved. He gladly submitted to the waters of baptism and then went on his way rejoicing. Preaching Christ and obedience unto Him will cause one to rejoice when he obeys.

Preaching Christ will cause one to repent, because preaching includes the subject of repentance. In Acts 2, in that great sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached Christ crucified and told his audience that they had crucified Jesus. When they saw and heard the evidence that was presented, they were pricked in their hearts (Acts 2:37) and cried out, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" This question is very similar to the question that the jailor asked. Some notice a little different answer in the various conversion records in the book of Acts and

go away with wrong thoughts, all the while failing to realize that each account shows that people were at a different stage or state of obedience. In Acts 2 they already believed in God, or they would not have been at Jerusalem on Pentecost. They had Christ preached to them. They now believe in Him, so they ask what to do and Peter responds by saying, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (2:38).

The jailor was not told to repent because he demonstrated repentance before Paul and Silas’ very eyes, for he washed their stripes—those laid on them at the beating. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of conduct. The jailor demonstrates this entirely and completely by helping them mend from their beaten condition. The Jews on Pentecost have just heard that they were guilty of crucifying Christ and had demonstrated no repentance; thus they were told to repent and be baptized.

In Acts 18:8 it is said that the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized. Repentance is implied in this instance. Cornelius had to hear words whereby he and all his house could be saved. Words, mind you! However, these words would produce faith that would lead to salvation. Peter said near the end of that discourse the following: “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (10:47-48).

Regarding Cornelius, the jailor, and Lydia, the Scriptures tell us that their *household* was baptized. Some try to argue that we have infant baptism in these cases. There is not one word of truth to this, for there is no man living that can prove that they had infants in their household. This writer and his wife have a household, but our children are all grown and married. That which proves too much, proves nothing. Additionally, how can an infant confess faith in Christ as the eunuch did? Pray tell me what an infant has to repent of as the people in Acts 2? How can an infant have faith, which comes by hearing the Word of the Lord? These are rather ridiculous arguments that are made by these advocates of infant baptism that are totally unfounded, because there are no scriptural grounds that permits or command such.

Others lift one or more of the examples already listed and make it to teach a faith only doctrine. In some of these examples they are told to believe; so they conclude that we are saved by faith only. While it is

true that some were told to believe, no one was ever taught the damnable doctrine that salvation by "faith only" is full of comfort to the soul of man. In fact, a reading of James 2 teaches us that faith without works is dead. James would further say that works made faith perfected, that is, works make faith complete. We show our faith by our works. "Faith only" people will find no comfort in the book of Acts. However, they will quote the Gospel record of John all day long. John does not teach "faith only." More often than not, it tells us of a system of faith that is all inclusive of that which the Lord commands that souls might be saved. The plain and simple facts are that each of the conversion records in the book of Acts report the very same thing. Individuals were simply at a different stage in their acceptance of the Gospel message— some had more information than others.

SALVATION

What about the matter of salvation? It is a common word and is used by many. We wonder if it has become commonplace with us today so we do not appreciate the significance of its true meaning. Someone might say, "Why surely we understand the matter of salvation?" Do we really understand? What does it mean to be saved from all past sins? God owes us nothing. When man fell, God was not obligated to him to give him a way out of his sins. Man stands at the mercy and grace of God. We deserve absolutely nothing, and God owes us nothing. In fact, man by himself is spiritually bankrupt and cannot pay himself out of sin unto salvation! Some seem to think that they can *buy* salvation. Wrong! It is not possible. Christ paid the price for our sins on Calvary. On that awful, but wonderful day, He shed his blood that sins may be washed away. We reach the blood of Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3). We are buried with Him in baptism (Rom. 6:4) just like the Ethiopian went down into the water and came up out of the water (Acts 8:38-39). No one can earn salvation. No one deserves salvation. In addition, each one must obtain it to go to heaven.

CONCLUSION

How can an Omniscient God forget? Would you say that this is impossible? Read with me this promise of the Lord: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12). The author of these few lines wishes to remember that day that God started remembering my sins no more. That was the day that the author obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and

was added to the Lord's church—saved. How precious these thoughts are as they pass through the mind of the writer. All the past is forgotten and forgiven. God remembers my sins no more, which means that He puts them behind His back never to pull them out and hold them against me. Thanks be unto God for this unspeakable gift!

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“HAVE YE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST SINCE YE BELIEVED?”

ACTS 19:2

Editor

The next two chapters of the book deal with the subject of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Within the brotherhood, there are two basic views as to **how** the Holy Spirit dwells within the Christian: (1) that He dwells personally, or (2) that He dwells representatively through the Word. All agree that the Spirit dwells in the Christian; however, brethren have discussed **how** He dwells in the Christian for many years. This disagreement has never been a source of division within the body of Christ—and it never should be! The editor of the book chose two individuals who represent each of the two views to present why they believe as they do. These two chapters are presented with the desire that they will help in our study and understanding of this question.

Both writers, along with the editor, stress that this question (**how** the Holy Spirit **dwells** in the Christian) should never be a test of fellowship among brethren. We also stress that the way in which the Spirit **works** upon the human heart is only through the Word of God. We all believe that in conviction, conversion, and sanctification, the Spirit **works** in an indirect manner using the Scriptures (Eph. 6:17). When individuals move from this solid foundation and begin teaching that the Spirit works **directly** upon the heart of the sinner or the Christian, then fellowship cannot be maintained.

“HAVE YE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST SINCE YE BELIEVED?”

ACTS 19:2

Brian R. Kenyon



Brian Kenyon graduated from the Florida Institute of Technology in 1984 (A.A.), from the Florida School of Preaching in 1991, and has B.A. and M.A. degrees from Freed-Hardeman University (1993 and 1995). He has done local work in Tennessee and is presently working with the Eagle Lake Church of Christ in Eagle Lake, Florida. He served as a deacon over missions with the North Jackson Avenue Church of Christ in Bartow, Florida. Brian has been a full-time instructor with the Florida School of Preaching since 1996 and has been the editor of the annual lectureship book since 2000. He speaks on several lectureship and meetings each year and has written for brotherhood publications.

Brian is married to the former Amber Davis, and they have two children.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is full of questions, some rhetorical—and some demanding answers. The Lord used questions throughout both Testaments as a means of teaching truth and exposing error. Therefore, a study of these questions is very profitable (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The question under consideration in this lesson is: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2).

The editor of this book asked that this be written from the view that the reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts 19:2 refers to a literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit that all Christians possess from the moment of conversion. This view is sometimes referred to as the “ordinary measure” of the Holy Spirit. The *fact* of Holy Spirit indwelling is beyond question. There are numerous passages that plainly declare such (John 7:37-39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.). However, the *how* of Holy Spirit indwelling is open for discussion since the Bible does not explicitly say *how* it occurs. Unless one’s view of Holy Spirit indwelling violates plain Bible passages or principles, one’s view of Holy Spirit indwelling should not be a matter of fellowship.

In this chapter, consideration will first be given to the question in its context and supporting points will be given as to why this writer thinks the context best supports a literal, non-miraculous Holy Spirit indwelling. Then, additional points will be given in support of a literal, non-miraculous indwelling view. It is not within the scope of this chapter to address the various objections to a literal, non-miraculous view of Holy Spirit indwelling, except by way of comparison as they relate to the affirmations set forth below.

THE QUESTION IN ITS CONTEXT

The immediate context of this question is found in Acts 18:24-19:7. This context may be analyzed in two parts as it relates to the question under consideration. First, Acts 18:24-28 speaks of Apollos' teaching in Ephesus. The key thought in these verses, as it relates to the question, is that Apollos preached, "knowing only the baptism of John" (18:25b). Apollos was a great preacher (and worthy of imitation by preachers today). He was a friend and valued co-worker of Paul (1 Cor. 3:5-9; 16:12; Tit. 3:13), and he had a tremendous impact on the early church (cf., 1 Cor. 1:10-13). He was from Alexandria (Acts 18:24a), one of the most important cultural centers of the ancient world. He was "eloquent," "mighty in the scriptures," "instructed in the way [singular] of the Lord," "fervent in the spirit," and he taught diligently "the things of the Lord" (18:24-25). However, as mentioned above, he knew "only the baptism of John" (18:25b). This is important to the second part of this context because it is impossible to believe and confess as Romans 10:9-10 instructs when one is taught only the baptism of John.

Unlike some preachers and elders in the church today, Apollos was of such a disposition that he was able to be corrected. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him "speak boldly in the synagogue," they knew he had not been grounded in certain matters of the faith, such as great commission baptism, so they took him aside and taught him "the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). This incident says much about both the team of Aquila and Priscilla and Apollos.

Second, Acts 19:1-7 speaks about Paul's re-teaching in Ephesus. The key thought in these verses is the question: "Unto what then were ye baptized?" (19:3). After Apollos came to Corinth, Paul passed through Ephesus, where he found "certain disciples" (19:1). Nothing is known of these *disciples* except what is revealed here. One can certainly know that these *disciples* were not true Christians. They

needed to be baptized correctly, and no true Christian needs to be baptized. Most likely, they are referred to as *disciples* from Paul's initial perspective. That is, to Paul they at first appeared to be *disciples*.

Paul recognized something about these *disciples* that did not seem right, so he asked them two questions. Paul first asked: "Have you received the Holy Ghost [Spirit—ASV] since ye believed?" (19:2a). Whether Paul was referring to a literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Spirit that all receive at baptism (discussed below) or to a miraculous gift measure of the Spirit that came only through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-17; 2 Tim. 1:6) is irrelevant to Paul's purpose in asking the question. Their answer is all the information needed by Paul for him to know that they were inadequately informed and thus improperly baptized.

They answered Paul's first question, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" (Acts 19:2). The key phrase from the original language in this response is translated, "not so much as" (*All' oud'*, Ἀλλ' οὐδ'). This translation comes from two Greek words which occur at the beginning of their response for emphasis sake. The first word, *alla* (ἀλλά), is often translated "but." However, this is not the common conjunction. Rather, it is the adversative *but*, which indicates a strong contrast. The second word, *oude* (οὐδέ), means "not." Thus, to paraphrase their response, they are saying, "Not only did we not receive the Holy Spirit when we were baptized, but we have not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit." "Not so much as heard" should probably be taken in the sense that "we did not know the Holy Spirit has been given." John the Baptist did mention the Holy Spirit in his teachings (Mat. 3:11; John 1:33), but not to the extent that He is mentioned by Jesus and the apostles, applicable to the new covenant (John 14-16; Mat. 28:19; Acts 2:38-41; et al.).

From their answer, Paul realized that they had been misinformed. Therefore, he asked a second question: "Unto what then were ye baptized?" (Acts 19:3a). Their answer, "Unto John's baptism" (19:3b), reveals the cause of their ignorance. John's baptism contained no promise of the Holy Spirit. Unlike great commission baptism, which is to be done "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mat. 28:19), John's baptism had no such instruction. Therefore, at the time of their baptism, these twelve Ephesians did not know the full teaching of Jesus necessary for the new covenant relationship.

Paul gave the difference between John's baptism and great commission baptism by referring to what John himself said of his own baptism. "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:4; cf., Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). John's baptism was an immersion in water based upon repentance, which obviously involved a degree of faith (cf., 2 Cor. 7:10). Although not stated in Acts 19:4, John's baptism was "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), which is almost the exact expression (in the original language) as "for the remission of sins" in Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38. Furthermore, John's baptism was based upon belief on "him which should come after him" (Acts 19:4). Paul made clear that the "coming one" was Christ. John's baptism, therefore, pointed beyond itself and John to the Christ. One living in the new covenant period of time cannot be baptized correctly if he or she does not know about Christ's redemptive work and His established kingdom (cf., Acts 8:33-38). John the Baptist did not live to know the Gospel as a reality (Mat. 14:3-12). He did not know the message that Peter and the rest of the apostles preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40). Upon hearing the truth from Paul, these twelve Ephesians were baptized correctly (19:5-7).

The baptism with which a person is baptized does matter. Accurate teaching must necessarily precede scriptural baptism. One cannot be taught wrong and baptized right! In the case of these twelve Ephesians, they were taught the baptism of John at a time when the baptism of John was no longer valid. Being baptized with belief in the one who *was to come* is not the same as being baptized in the name of the one who *already came*! The former requires faith in what Christ will do. The latter implies faith in what Christ did do (cf., Rom. 10:9-10).

ANALYZING THE QUESTION IN THE CONTEXT

As mentioned above, the exact measure of the Holy Spirit Paul had in mind when he asked the question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2), was irrelevant to his purpose. His goal was to learn about their baptism because something (not revealed in the text) caused him to question their status in Christ. However, for the following reasons, the context best supports the view that Paul's question refers to a literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit that all receive at conversion.

First, of all the things Paul could have asked to determine their status in Christ, he chose to ask whether or not they “received the Holy Ghost.” His question was to the point and represented the fundamental difference between the Old Testament age and the church age—the role of the Holy Spirit. A simple yes or no to this question would let Paul know whether or not their baptism was correct and thus whether or not they were truly in Christ. The only rational conclusion that one can draw from this is that Paul knew being a Christian involved having the Holy Spirit in some way, or at least being taught that Christians have the Holy Spirit in some way.

Some may think that, because Paul imparted miraculous spiritual gifts upon these twelve Ephesians after they were baptized (Acts 19:6), Paul’s question must have referred to the miraculous gifts measure of the Holy Spirit. Such a conclusion, however, is contextually unwarranted. Paul’s follow-up question: “Unto what then were ye baptized?” shows that in whatever way they would have received the Spirit, they would have received it in connection with their baptism. All baptism, whether scriptural or unscriptural, is a response to some kind of teaching (cf., Rom. 6:17). However, even in the first century, all who were baptized were not able to perform miracles (Acts 8:5-17). Therefore, these twelve Ephesians would have known whether or not they received the Holy Spirit, not by their ability or inability to perform miracles, but by their being taught the Gospel!

Second, when both questions are grammatically and syntactically analyzed, one will learn that receiving the Holy Spirit, believing, and being baptized occur at the same time, which would be impossible if the miraculous gifts measure were intended. Note the two questions: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?... Unto what then were ye baptized?” (Acts 19:2-3). All three verbs: “received” (from *lambano*, λαμβάνω), “believed” (from *pisteuo*, πιστεύω), and “were... baptized” (from *baptizo*, βαπτίζω) are in the aorist tense, which refers to action which took place at a specific point time in the past. As the informed Bible student knows, belief, as used here and throughout the Book of Acts, is often synonymous with obedience (4:4; 8:12-13; 11:21; 13:48; 17:12; 19:18). The construction of Paul’s first and second question shows that in whatever sense Paul had in mind that the Holy Spirit was received, it was done when one believed, and the moment one believed was the same time one was baptized. The miraculous spiritual gifts measure of the Holy Spirit, however, did not come at the

moment one believed and was baptized. Since the miraculous gifts measure could only come through the laying on of an apostle's hands, it would necessarily come **after** baptism!

A similar use of the aorist tense in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit is also found in Ephesians 1:13: "In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." Note the sequence: they "heard [aorist participle] the word of truth;" they "believed" (aorist participle); and they "were sealed" (aorist tense) with the Holy Spirit. The moment they "believed," which implies being baptized, is the moment they were "sealed" by the Holy Spirit!

A LITERAL, NON-MIRACULOUS HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING?

Since all would not agree that a literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a viable possibility, it is necessary to give a brief explanation as to why this position is held. The short answer is simply because that is what the Bible teaches. Before developing this approach, two terms must be justified.

First, consider *literal*. As mentioned above, many passages state the fact that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian (John 7:37-39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.). To deny He indwells the Christian in some form or fashion is to deny the God-inspired Scriptures. Since the Bible plainly teaches it, the Holy Spirit must either indwell the Christian literally, or He must indwell the Christian figuratively (i.e., representatively). There are no other options! This writer, therefore, uses *literal* because he sees nothing in the contexts of these passages that demands a figurative (i.e., representative) meaning (discussed in more detail below).

Second, consider *non-miraculous*. Again, if the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian (and He does, at least in some way), He does so either miraculously or non-miraculously. There are no other options! While it is true that there were cases of miraculous Holy Spirit indwelling during the first century, which also manifested itself with the ability to work miracles, wonders, and signs (Acts 2:4-12; et al.), it is not the case that all "Spirit," or "spirit," indwelling has to be miraculous. For example, all Bible believers know that humans have a spirit which is given by God at conception (Ecc. 12:7; Zec. 12:1; Mat. 10:28; Jam.

2:26). The creation of humanity with spirit was clearly miraculous (Gen. 2:7), but the procreation of humanity with spirit in accordance with natural law established at creation is non-miraculous. If a human spirit can dwell in the individual non-miraculously, then why cannot the Spirit of God dwell in a human non-miraculously? Additionally, if all Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them (which this writer believes to be the case), and if the miraculous age has ceased (which it has, 1 Cor. 13:8-13), then Holy Spirit indwelling must necessarily be non-miraculous.

Having defined the terminology, consider the following argument which this writer believes proves that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian in a literal, non-miraculous way.

1. All Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning are statements which are to be taken literally.
2. All statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in numerous passages (John 7:37-39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.) are Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning.
3. Therefore, all statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in numerous passages (John 7:37-39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.) are statements which are to be taken literally.

It must be recognized from the onset that according to the rules of logic, this syllogism is valid (having the form AAA-1). Therefore, if both premises are true, the conclusion **must necessarily** be true. To prove this argument unsound, one must prove either (or both) of the premises to be false.

The major premise: "All Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning are statements which are to be taken literally," should be obvious to all rational Bible students. In fact, this is one of the, if not the most fundamental, rules in hermeneutics. When this rule is not followed, all kinds of error result (cf., the many allegorical interpretations of Scripture evident throughout church history). Even those who oppose a literal, non-miraculous indwelling view of the Holy Spirit apply the truth that "all Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning are statements which are to be taken literally" to every

area of their Bible study, except, in the opinion of this writer, to their study of how the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian. Who can rationally deny the truthfulness of the major premise?

The minor premise: "All statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in numerous passages (John 7:37-39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.) are Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning," is also true. While the spatial scope of this chapter forbids a detailed grammatical and syntactical analysis of each of these passages, the argument above does not demand such. The question is not: "Can these passages be understood in some other way than literal?" Rather, the question is: "In what way would the first readers understand these references to Holy Spirit indwelling?" Of course, in the opinion of this writer, the first question would clearly be answered negatively. That is, given all the biblical evidence, these passages could not be understood in any other way than a literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, the strength of the argument is in the answer to the second question.

As mentioned above, all of the passages state the **fact** of Holy Spirit indwelling, and none of them state the **how** of Holy Spirit indwelling. This fact speaks volumes as to how the first readers would have understood it. If a figurative (i.e., representative) meaning were meant for these passages, then surely it would have been given by inspiration. If *receive* were not to be understood as *receive* (John 7:38), then where is the inspired explanation as to what it is supposed to mean? An interesting incidental here is that John 7:38 is clearly figurative: "He that believeth on me...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." John gives the meaning of the figurative expression: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (7:39). Those who take the figurative (i.e., representative) view must conclude that the God-inspired apostle explained a figurative expression with another figurative expression without explanation! What in the context (immediate or remote) demands such an interpretation?

Furthermore, if "the Holy Ghost...given to them" were not to be understood as "the Holy Ghost...given to them" (Acts 5:32), then where is the inspired explanation as to what it is supposed to mean? If "the Spirit of God dwell in you" were not to be understood as "the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16), then where is the inspired

explanation as to what it is supposed to mean? If “the Holy Ghost which is in you” were not to be understood as “the Holy Ghost which is in you” (1 Cor. 6:19), then where is the inspired explanation as to what it is supposed to mean? If “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts” were not to be understood as “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts” (Gal. 4:6), then where is the inspired explanation as to what it is supposed to mean? It should be obvious to the unbiased reader that these statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling should be taken literally because this is the natural reading, and there is nothing in the context which demands otherwise.

This writer realizes that one cannot always take the most *natural* meaning of a passage and not find himself or herself in a contradiction with other plain Bible passages (cf., “only in the Lord” meaning only a Christian, 1 Cor. 7:39; “baptized for the dead” meaning some sort of proxy baptism, 1 Cor. 15:29; et al.). However, it must be noted that the instances where the most *natural* meaning does not fit the total teaching of the Bible are few, and often such a verse is the only verse that uses a particular expression or is the only verse that addresses such a topic. Unlike those verses, passages which mention Holy Spirit indwelling are numerous. Surely, with so many references, one must conclude that, if any meaning other than a literal meaning were intended, God would have said so. It seems that only when one’s mind is prejudiced against a literal, non-miraculous Holy Spirit indwelling can he or she conclude that the plain Bible passages which declare such should be taken figuratively (i.e., representatively).

The burden of proof rests with those who take a figurative (i.e., representative) view of Holy Spirit indwelling in these passages. Again, what in the context (immediate or remote) of these passages demands a figurative (i.e., representative) indwelling? Since the major premise is true, and since the minor premise is true, the conclusion **must necessarily** be true: “all statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in numerous passages (John 7:37-39; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.) are statements which are to be taken literally.”

CONCLUSION

The question, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2), was crucial to Paul’s understanding of where the Ephesian *disciples* stood in relation to Christ, and it is nonetheless crucial today. Whether one adheres to a literal, non-miraculous view or to a figurative

(i.e., representative) view of Holy Spirit indwelling, all faithful members of the church of Christ would agree that only through obedience to the Gospel can one attain this beautiful blessing from God (Acts 2:38), and only through continued obedience to the Gospel can one maintain this beautiful blessing from God (1 John 1:7 cf., 1 Sam. 16:13-14; Psa. 51:11).

This writer is convinced that, if one were to unbiasedly examine the Scriptures in their contexts and let the Scriptures speak for themselves, he or she would come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit indwells every faithful Christian in a literal, non-miraculous way. It seems to this writer that the figurative (i.e., representative) view of Holy Spirit indwelling is an over-reaction to the errors of Pentecostalism. If it were not for the abuses imposed by denominationalism concerning the Holy Spirit, this writer cannot imagine why one would ever think that plain Bible statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling should be taken figuratively with no contextual indication.

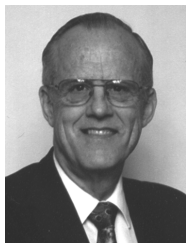
WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“HAVE YE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST SINCE YE BELIEVED?”

ACTS 19:2

Wayne Price



Wayne Price was born in Sedalia, Missouri, in 1939. He graduated from Abilene Christian College in 1963 with a B.A. degree in Bible and an M.A. degree in Biblical Languages. He has done local work in Oklahoma and Texas. Wayne is presently working with the Oklahoma City School of Biblical Studies in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He speaks on several lectureships and Gospel meetings each year. He is the author of two tracts: *The Gift of Acts 2:38, 39* (co-authored by Ron Cosby) and *Should I Be Baptized Again?*

Wayne is married to the former Jolene Smith and they have four children and eight grandchildren (the ninth is expected in the

Spring of 2004).

How does one “receive the Holy Ghost” (Spirit), and when? It is this writer’s belief that many New Testament passages mentioning the Holy Spirit have been misinterpreted, pulled from their original context, and made to refer to a dwelling of the Spirit (either a direct, personal dwelling of the Spirit or to a representative dwelling, i.e., a figurative or metaphorical dwelling). If such passages were left in their original context, and that context be taken into consideration, we would see that the actual reference is to a miraculous event of the first century and not to a dwelling of the Spirit at all.

DOES A CONVERT TO CHRIST RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT IMMEDIATELY UPON HIS BEING BAPTIZED IN WATER FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS? Additionally, what is the nature of that which he receives, or in simpler terms, just WHAT is it that he receives? (Price and Cosby 2).

Just as some brethren erroneously use Acts 2:38, Acts 5:32, and Acts 19:1-7 (our passage under consideration in this treatise) to refer to a personal, direct dwelling of the Holy Spirit, others use Galatians 3:2 to refer to a “figurative dwelling of the Holy Spirit.” It is this writer’s studied conclusion that these passages, and numerous similar ones,

refer to the miraculous element in the first century, and not to a supposed dwelling of the Holy Spirit within the Christian today.

Since the expression "receive the Spirit" is a reference

to the miraculous, and the Scriptures are consistent, all passages using the expression: "receiving the Spirit" are a reference to the miraculous. Those who reject this conclusion must set forth a good reason for the language not being consistent (Fox 309).

The New Testament teaches that the receiving of the Spirit is **not** simultaneous with a convert's being baptized into Christ, but rather that it is subsequent to that event. We now take a look at the passage in question, Acts 19:1-7.

Since Paul had last visited Ephesus (Acts 18:21), Apollos arrived there (Acts 18:24-25) and began teaching. Due to his efforts, evidently a number of people were influenced by his teaching, inadequate as it was (Acts 18:26). Unlike Apollos himself, of whom the New Testament says nothing about his being baptized again, those baptized by Apollos after Pentecost, yet under John's baptism, were baptized again (Acts 19:7) because John's baptism had ceased to be valid.

Upon Paul's return to Ephesus after Apollos' departure, Paul encountered these disciples mentioned in Acts 19:1-7. The question asked by Paul is an intriguing one, due to the circumstances that prevailed. He asked: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2). The verb *believed* is merely a synecdoche for "saved," which leads inquiring minds to ask: "Why would Paul ask such a question if one automatically receives the Spirit when he is baptized?" If the Spirit (or Holy Ghost) were given automatically, simultaneous with one's obedience to the Gospel, which includes his burial in baptism for remission of sins, and since Paul thought that they had obeyed the Gospel, why would he ask such a foolish question?

The question is foolish only to those who believe that one automatically receives the Spirit when he is baptized! Paul's purpose in asking this question was to ascertain whether or not they had received miraculous gifts, because that was dependent upon an apostle laying hands upon them. This was the reason Paul asked such a question, and the context bears out such a purpose because after being "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus," Paul (an apostle) "laid *his* hands upon them," and "the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (Acts 19:6). The context itself irresistibly leads to this conclusion as to the purpose of Paul asking the question in the first

place. He was not asking if they had obeyed the Gospel, and thus were saved; he was asking if “they had received the Holy Ghost” since they were saved (since he thought they had already obeyed the Gospel).

The response of these disciples of John (verses 2-3) helped Paul to understand that something was amiss. He then asked: “Unto what then were ye baptized?” They answered, “Unto John’s baptism.” In Paul’s original question, “Have ye received the Spirit since you believed,” he was not referring to a supposed “non-miraculous measure of the Spirit,” but rather to whether or not they had received miraculous gifts since they were Christians. However, notice that Paul’s question establishes the fact that **it is possible** for one to be saved and yet to **not** have received the Spirit.

The obvious conclusion is that “the reception of the Spirit did not automatically and necessarily follow baptism, but rather was dependent upon the laying on of apostles’ hands” (Price and Cosby 5). Thus about twelve men (Acts 19:7) received the Spirit that day, but **when** on that day? It was when the apostle Paul laid hands upon them. Let it be remembered that in both Acts 8:14-18 and Acts 19:1-7: “those who had believed and were baptized (as commanded by Christ earlier—Mark 16:16) received the Holy Spirit, not because they had believed and were baptized and that alone, but because APOSTLES LAID HANDS UPON THEM!” (Price and Cosby 5). Something, in addition to obeying the Gospel, had to be done to receive the Spirit, and that was to have an apostle to lay hands upon a disciple. Hence, to “receive the Spirit” once again refers to being endowed with a miraculous gift of the Spirit. Furthermore, “the gift of the Holy Ghost” is a reference to miraculous gifts being imparted, not only by the laying on of hands of an apostle (Acts 2:38), but also to those gifts which came directly from heaven to prove Gentiles and Jews were accepted by God on an equal basis (Acts 10:44-47).

To those who maintain that the reception of the Spirit was only available to those who have obeyed the Gospel, and that they received it simultaneously with their being baptized into Christ, be it remembered that Cornelius “received the Spirit” (Acts 10:44-47) before baptism (48). This reception of the Spirit was also used by Paul to prove that he was an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12; 1 Cor. 9:2). Hence, we confidently affirm that the Spirit was bestowed, not because these men in Acts 19 had become Christians, but rather because an apostle laid hands upon them (Acts 19:6). It is a mistake to automatically assume that all

uses of *Spirit* in the New Testament refer to a non-miraculous (yet personal) dwelling of the Spirit, since to do so is to divorce the term from a first century miraculous context in which it is found.

The question naturally arises then, what about today? Does the Holy Spirit dwell in anyone in this twenty-first century, and, if so, does He dwell personally or through agency? There are but three ways to interpret passages that make reference to the Spirit's dwelling: (1) He dwells literally, i.e., not through the agency of the Word of God, (2) He dwells both literally and figuratively, or (3) He dwells only through the agency of the Word of God.

There are a number of problems with the idea that the dwelling of the Spirit within a child of God must be a dwelling of the *person* of the Spirit Himself within the physical body of a Christian. Many of our brethren holding this view maintain that this personal dwelling of the Spirit does not do anything for the Christian except through the Word of God. This has been dubbed "the hibernation theory," i.e., He is in there, but not doing anything. However, it is not long before some of their students go a step further, thinking that if the Spirit is personally living within an individual, He must be doing something in there! Since God never does anything without a reason behind it (the principle of parsimony), then some argue that the Spirit must be doing something after all, because He has to have some reason to be in a Christian's physical body. However, the same law of parsimony can be used to argue against a personal dwelling of the Spirit. A personal dwelling of the Spirit is not needed to bring about conviction of one's heart (John 16:8) because the Word of God given by the Spirit Himself does that as well (Tit. 1:9). Both the Spirit and the Word of God are also said to beget (2 Cor. 3:6; Jam. 1:18), teach (Neh. 9:30; 2 Tim. 3:16), sanctify (1 Cor. 6:11; John 17:17), strengthen (Eph. 3:16; Acts 20:32), et al. The irresistible conclusion is that the Spirit does all of these things through the inspired Word of God. Hence, there would be no need for an "in person" dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and no reason for His personally dwelling within a Christian. Conclusion? The hibernation theory violates the law of parsimony.

If those advocating the personal dwelling theory believe that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within a Christian at the time he is baptized, how do they explain the Spirit's dwelling in Old Testament times (1 Pet. 1:11)?

At times, those advocating the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit base their argumentation on John 1:12 and Acts 2:41. Their argument goes like this: “Our representative indwelling brethren believe the Holy Spirit is the word of God” (we do not, but some set up this “straw man” so they can knock him down). Next, they argue that if the indwelling is figurative, then those of John 1:12 and Acts 2:41 must have received the Holy Spirit before baptism, since they received the Word before baptism. However, if valid, and if this argument proves a literal dwelling as they claim, then there must have been a literal dwelling before Pentecost in Acts 2, and hence before one is baptized into Christ, thus contradicting their assumption that Acts 2:38 refers to a literal indwelling of the Holy Spirit that one receives at the point of baptism.

Another problem with using Acts 2:41 to show the representative indwelling is wrong due to the fact that one “receives the word” before baptism, is that they equate *receiving* with *dwelling*. If the words meant the same thing, then they might legitimately contend that a figurative dwelling of the Spirit would mean that a believer receives the dwelling **before** baptism. However, *receive* simply means to “accept, welcome” **but** it does not mean “dwell.” Obviously the non-Christian is **influenced** by the Word of God before becoming a Christian, as well as afterwards, but that does not insinuate that the non-Christian’s welcoming of the Word makes him a Christian. In fact, it is the welcoming of that Word of God (his receptiveness) that hopefully will lead to his obeying the Gospel and being baptized. When you welcome someone into your home, does that mean that they have come to dwell (live) with you? It did not in the case of Paul (Acts 28:30), where the same word is used. The fact is, Acts 2:41 does not militate against a representative dwelling of the Spirit. The Word of God must first be welcomed (received—Luke 8:15), then it dwells in the heart when that receptive attitude results in his obeying the truth (Heb. 5:9)! Some claim that no preachers have ever been able to answer this Acts 2:41 argument. We just did!

Does the Holy Spirit dwell within the child of God? Absolutely! How does He dwell? Representatively, metaphorically, or figuratively through the dwelling (or influence) of the Word of God in our lives. The Holy Spirit works in conviction and conversion of the non-Christian the same way the He does in sanctification of the Christian—only through the agency of the Word of God! He does not change

His methodology when one becomes a child of God; He continues to work on Christians through the same medium—His inspired Word.

Ephesians 5:18, when compared with Colossians 3:16, illustrates that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians in a figurative manner, that is, through the influence of God's Word in our lives.

The first passage above says: "Be filled with the Spirit" while the second words it this way: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." These companion passages (they discuss the same things, cf., Eph. 5:18-19 with Col. 3:16) aid us in seeing that the Spirit's indwelling is a figurative indwelling through the Word of God.

Ephesians 5:18 has this indwelling as a command "be filled with the Spirit." Both verbs in this eighteenth verse ("be filled" from *plerousthe* and "be drunken" from *methuskesthe*) are conjugated as second person plural imperatives, and are either passive or middle in voice. The middle voice better describes both verbs, since Paul is not talking about something that is done to someone, but rather what one "does for himself." The Ephesians, to whom this epistle was directed, were to "fill themselves" with the Spirit, and Paul immediately informs them how this can be accomplished.

It is significant that this indwelling is described not as a one time thing but that which is to be done continually. Also significant is the fact that this is not a "promise" of the Spirit, but a "command" to be obeyed! If this *filling* were the same as a *dwelling* of the Spirit, and was a promise to be received, then it could not be a command to be obeyed. However, if it was correctly understood as metonymy, with the Spirit bringing about a changed life through the influence of God's Word in one's life, then it could be obeyed. This cannot be referring to a personal indwelling of the Spirit, but rather to His dwelling figuratively, or metaphorically through the agency of the Word of God.

The great majority of passages used to bolster the concept of a personal dwelling of the Holy Spirit today in the lives of saints are passages that speak of the miraculous age of the first century and are then mistakenly applied to our non-miraculous age of this 21st century. The author of the following material makes a valid point which far too many modern-day Christians have never considered when it comes to Bible interpretation. With this quotation, we close this treatise, with the wish that this matter of the dwelling of the Spirit never become a point over which to divide the brotherhood. Good men on both sides of this issue have fellowship with one another, yet both realize that the "direct

operation” of the Holy Spirit in salvation and sanctification is another entirely different matter. To claim **direct guidance** of the Spirit is to “go beyond the teachings of the Scriptures,” and we also stand in unity opposing this false doctrine.

SOME VERY IMPORTANT FACTS CONCERNING THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When it comes to the proper interpretation of scripture, one of the necessary principles to employ is that of considering the historical context in which a book was written. Sadly, many of those who insist upon this principle the strongest fail miserably to apply it to the subject of the work of the Holy Spirit.

(1) The New Testament documents came into existence miraculously (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

(2) The New Testament documents were confirmed by miraculous signs.

(3) The original recipients of those New Testament documents had seen and heard, as well as possibly experienced, the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit themselves.

(4) Those original readers would have known absolutely **nothing** about some “non-miraculous hibernating personal indwelling.”

(5) Every passage they read which mentioned the Holy Spirit would have been understood in the context of the miraculous age.

(6) It is the responsibility of the present-day reader to take this (i.e., the historical setting) into account, and not leap to interpretations that would have been untrue for the original readers.

(7) This means that a passage cannot **now** mean something that it **never** meant.

(8) Since the age of miracles has ceased (and it has), we would do well to tread lightly in suggesting that anything we read about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is for us today, beyond the effect He has upon us by means of the written Word of God (Hinton).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Fox, Marion R. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. Oklahoma City, OK: Five F Publishing, 1991.
- Hinton, Johnny. “Some Very Important Facts Concerning the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” *The Eastside Edifer* (Muskogee, OK) 31.49 (Dec. 14, 2003). n.pag.
- Price, Wayne and Ron Cosby. *The Gift of Acts 2:38, 39*. Pottersville, MO: Scaggs Publications, n.d.

“SHALL WE CONTINUE IN SIN, THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND?”

ROMANS 6:1

Jerry C. Brewer



Jerry Brewer was born in Childress, Texas, in 1941. He was baptized into Christ in 1954 by O. M. Curry, and preached his first sermon at age 16. He attended the Elk City School of Preaching in 1969-1970 where he studied under W. R. Craig, W. S. Boyett, and Gary Colley.

Jerry is married to the former Sherlene Holley and they have six children and 15 grandchildren. His son, Nathan, shares preaching duties with him in Elk City. Nathan's twin brother, Landry, is the song leader and teaches Bible classes for the congregation.

INTRODUCTION

When Paul asked the question of our subject in Romans 6:1, he anticipated an erroneous conclusion that some people might draw from what he had just written in chapter five. In it, Paul showed that God's grace was efficacious in covering *all* sin, not just the sin of Adam who violated God's positive law. *One* man—Adam—brought death into the world through his *one* sin, but by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the grace of God was manifested to justify men from all sins they commit. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Then, skipping past the parenthetical material contained in Romans 5:13-17, we read the conclusion:

Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:18-21).

The death contemplated in verse 12 is not physical death, for it is conditioned upon the fact that “all have sinned.” This could not mean that infants die a physical death because they have sinned, for they are innocent, and yet they sometimes die. Therefore, we conclude that the death Paul deals with in this verse is spiritual death which occurs when one’s sin separates him from God. This connects with his earlier consideration of the depravity of the Gentile world (Rom. 1:18-32) and his demonstration that the Jews are also guilty before God (Rom. 2-3). It is also further proof of his thesis in Romans 1:16-17 that the Gospel is God’s power to save all men, both Jew and Gentile.

The thrust of Paul’s argument in Romans 5 is that, although through Adam’s one sin death passed upon all who sin, the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ is efficacious not only to cover Adam’s sin—but *all* the sins of men. The grace of God is of much wider application to the salvation of the human race than the single sin of Adam was to its destruction. In Adam, men died, but in Christ all are made alive (1 Cor. 15:22). When Adam sinned in the Garden, he died. All since have died because all men since Adam have sinned. We did not and do not inherit the sin of Adam, but all die because “all have sinned.” Hence, God’s grace through Christ’s work is designed to cover not only the sin of Adam, but the sins of all who come to God in obedience.

Now, in considering this argument, some might conclude that if the grace of God is more extensive than Adam’s sin, we ought to sin more for His grace to abound—that abundant sin will produce more abundant grace. That is the philosophy of self-indulgence and one which grips millions of professed believers in Christ in our day. The prevailing notion in the religious world is that God’s grace is equivalent to toleration of sin—that under the law of Moses, God condemned and punished sin, but His grace eliminates all law, and He now tolerates every sin man wants to commit. Thus, the modern answer to Paul’s question is: “Of course! The grace of God will save me regardless of how I live.” Will it?

To get a grip on what Paul has written and what follows in Romans 6, it is necessary to understand that he uses *faith* and *grace* as synonyms for the Gospel scheme of redemption. He wrote to the Ephesians that “by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8), yet he said to the Romans that the Gospel is God’s power to save men (Rom. 1:16-17). The Gospel system of justification is one of grace on God’s part and faith on man’s part. So the Gospel—the message of grace and faith—is

that which reveals God's grace and produces obedient faith in those who accept it. It was through the free gift of Christ that God's grace was manifested to the world, but it is through the faith of man that His grace is applied to our souls. The plan of salvation is singular, but consists of two parts—God's and man's.

THE GRACE OF GOD

So far as God's grace is concerned, He has done everything He is going to do to bring about our salvation. His plan to save the race of man was purposed from eternity; executed in the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and coronation of Jesus Christ; and revealed to man by the Holy Spirit through Christ's apostles in the first century. His purpose was carried out, Christ died *once* for sin (Heb. 9:27), and everything necessary for man to know about God's plan of salvation has already been revealed by the Holy Spirit (Jude 3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Tit. 2:11-12). Note the past tense of Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation **hath** appeared to all men." God has completed His work in saving man, His grace has been revealed, and there is nothing more He will do.

As the prime cause of salvation, God willed it according to His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:7-11). As the sacrificial cause of salvation, Christ freely gave Himself for our sins (Rom. 5:6-8). As the procuring cause, His blood purchased us from sin (Acts 20:28; 1 John 2:2; Eph. 1:7). As the revealing cause, the Holy Spirit miraculously guided the apostles into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13) and revealed the mystery—or plan—of salvation through them (Eph. 3:3, 5). As the instrumental cause of salvation, the Gospel, which was revealed by the Spirit, brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10) and is God's power to save. Since God has done all this, that leaves man with the responsibility of availing himself of God's grace, and that must be done "by faith."

MAN'S FAITH

It is by faith that man appropriates the grace of God and receives salvation. That was Paul's argument in Galatians 3:6 when he said, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Notice that Paul *does not* say, "Abraham believed *in* God," but that, "Abraham **believed** God." When Moses disobeyed God's instruction to speak to the rock at Kadesh and struck it twice with his rod, God told him he would not enter Canaan: "And the LORD spake unto

Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel” (Num. 20:12). Moses believed **in** God, but did not believe God. One may profess belief **in** God, but if one does not **obey** God, he is an unbeliever and, in this sense, Moses was an unbeliever.

Faith in God is not mere mental assent to His existence, but a willingness to do whatever God says. That is amply illustrated in Hebrews 11. The faith of those worthies listed there was one which moved them to action. “By faith Abel offered” (Heb. 11:4). God told Abel what to offer, and Abel did what God told him, for “faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Likewise:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7).

By His grace (Gen. 6:8) God instructed Noah to build an ark and gave him the specifications for it. By faith, Noah obeyed and built the ark according to God’s instructions and it was said of him, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). That was acting “by faith.” So it was with Abraham’s faith. He heard God’s voice and acted upon the commands God gave him. Thus, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Gal. 3:6). Faith is doing what God says because God says to do it. No other kind of faith is acceptable to God, and no other kind of faith will make one righteous.

In Galatians 3:6, Paul argues that we have been called to the liberty which is in Christ and no longer serve God as bondslaves, but as sons in the glorious liberty of the Gospel by which God forgives, receives, adopts, and blesses those who answer its call. Even in the liberty of the Gospel there is danger. Not a danger that arises from the Gospel itself, but from the liberty that is ours therein. That danger is the one which we find so rampant in our contemporary world and which Paul addressed in the Roman epistle—the danger of viewing God’s grace under the Gospel as a license to sin.

For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by

the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin (Rom. 5:17-6:7).

When a person is baptized into Christ, he is separated from his old life of sin which held him in bondage. He is no longer a servant of sin, but a servant of Christ.

If we keep in mind what Paul had been saying, we will see that to crucify the old man is the same thing as to die to sin. Of himself, Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 3:20). Paul the sinner died. What was true of him is true of everyone who becomes a Christian. The old man, the body of sin, is the sinner. Every time a person becomes a Christian, a sinner dies. We die as sinners and are raised up as saints.... We are then no longer the bondservants of sin. When a bondservant, or a slave, dies, he passes from under his master. His master no longer has dominion over him.... If a slave of sin dies to sin, he is free from service to his master. Sin rules him no more (Whiteside 133).

If grace abounds much more than sin, as Paul wrote to the Romans, then the objection might be raised that we ought to sin more that God's grace might abound much more and be magnified. However, Paul refutes that theory in Romans 6 in drawing a contrast between the servant of sin and the servant of righteousness. Liberty in Christ does not make one free from all restraint. That is the point in Paul's refutation of that theory:

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:15-18).

The servant of sin is the man who allows sin to have control of his life, but the servant of righteousness is the man who stands in the liberty of the Gospel system of faith. Into his life sin may enter but it does so as an intruder, not as a ruler. The servant of righteousness will control his fleshly lusts through continuing obedience to the Gospel, and not use his liberty as an occasion to sin that grace to abound. Sin is a severe taskmaster which promises great things and may deliver them “for a season,” but in the end the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The body of sin is destroyed in baptism, and the new man rises to “walk in newness of life.” That life which follows baptism into Christ is new in quality as well as quantity and is to be lived separate from the dominion of sin.

Their number is legion in our postmodern world who teach that the grace of God allows men to continue living in sin and will then usher them one day into heaven. This is one of the most pernicious and dangerous teachings extant in our world. That philosophy equates God’s grace with His toleration of every imaginable sin. Consequently, its conclusion is that the law of Moses demanded right living, but under the system of grace, that is no longer required because we are no longer under **any** law. That conclusion is the basis for much licentiousness that is practiced by the religious world, and flies in the face of Paul’s statement, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). The “law of the Spirit of life” is the Gospel—God’s law of grace by which we are delivered from the guilt, dominion, and consequences of sin.

To be in captivity under the law of sin is to be dead spiritually. Hence, this law of sin in our members is also the law of death. Freedom from that law is salvation. But the law of the Spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death—that is, it is that by which we are saved. In chapter 1:16, Paul tells us that the gospel is God’s power for saving people. We conclude, therefore, that the law of the Spirit of life is the gospel. This conclusion harmonizes with Paul’s line of reasoning. It would be absurd to think that Paul started in to prove that the gospel is God’s power for saving people, and then reached the conclusion that some other law saves us, or frees us, from sin and spiritual death (Whiteside 168).

There are three laws Paul has under consideration in Romans 8:2-3—the “law of sin and death,” the law of the Spirit of life,” and “the law.” The “law of sin and death” is that which he had just discussed in Romans 7. The “law of the Spirit of life” is the Gospel by which we are

saved from the law of sin and death, and "the law" is the law of Moses. In this passage, Paul says we are made free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life, or the Gospel—something which the law of Moses could not do. Moses' law pointed out and condemned sin, but had no provision for forgiveness.

Freedom from **the** law of the Mosaic dispensation does **not** mean we are free from **all** law under the system of grace. Nor does God's grace permit Christians to continue living in sin. The fact that immediate punishment for sin, such as stoning for adultery under the law of Moses, is not part of the grace system under which we live does not mean God has no law prohibiting adultery. That is made abundantly clear in passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21. The grace of God teaches us to live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12), and a violation of His law of grace will bring eternal punishment. God's grace does not mean an absence of law or that He tolerates sin, and Christians cannot and **must not** use their liberty in Christ as an occasion to the flesh.

Self-indulgence, or pursuit of fleshly lusts, naturally excludes others. That is the contrast Paul draws in Galatians 5:13 between using our liberty in Christ to indulge self and love of our neighbors. The self-centered person who indulges in sin, saying, "God wants me to be happy," is not one to consider the needs of his neighbor. One of the first and fundamental precepts in following Christ is self-denial. "And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). No man is a follower of Christ who has not first denied his own will and said, "Lord, thy will be done." Spiritual egocentrism denies the welfare of others and seeks the good of self. That is the appeal of many so-called "Community Churches," which pander to the "felt needs" of their members. The fun, games, concerts, ski trips, dramas, and other worldly pursuits provided by modern religionists result from an inward, self-centered focus. Like Judas, people are asking, "What will ye give me?" instead of following Him who looked outward to fields white unto harvest, and **gave** His all that we might live. This egocentric Judas syndrome is that which Paul combats in Galatians 5:13 when he says, "but by love serve one another."

CHANGES WROUGHT BY THE GOSPEL

Three fundamental changes are wrought in the soul when a man obeys the Gospel of Christ—the love, the practice, and the dominion of sin all cease in the soul of the obedient. In submitting to God’s grace expressed in the Gospel, the heart is changed or purified by faith (Acts 15:9), the life is changed or purified by repentance (2 Cor. 7:10; Mat. 3:7-9; 21:28-29), and the relationship is changed by baptism (Gal. 3:26-28; Rom. 6:3-5).

The Inner Man

All of these changes take place within the soul of man and are manifested in a changed manner of living. None alter the physical characteristics. It is the soul which is purified and which passes from Satan’s dominion or rule into the kingdom or rule of Christ. Obedience “from the heart” brings about a change of the inner man—a death to sin in all of its aspects—and that is what Paul addresses in answer to the question posed in Romans 6:1. The control which the converted inner man exercises over the flesh is Paul’s subject in Romans 7:25: “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” The Gospel is God’s law of the mind because it is directed to the mind of man. The change or conversion of the sinner to Christ is a conversion of the soul, an inner change which is wrought by the new birth (John 3:3-5) and issues in a changed life. In the life of the sinner, lusts of the flesh dominate, and the inner man controls and gratifies those. In the life of the Christian, those lusts are put to death by the inner man.

Faith Purifies The Heart

Of the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, Peter said, “And God...put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9). The first change brought about by the Gospel is purification of the heart, and all subsequent steps in conversion are inner changes that issue from this one. When the heart is purified by faith, the love of sin is destroyed, the human will, or spirit, submits to the commands of God, and the second change naturally issues from this change of heart.

Repentance Purifies The Life

Repentance is the change in the inner man that issues outwardly in a changed manner of living. Simply put, repentance is a change of mind. That is seen from Jesus’ parable of the two sons. “But what think

ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went" (Mat. 21:28-29). Repentance is the difference between *will* and *will not*. The son at first said, "I will not," but later, Jesus said, "he repented and went." Now, his going to work in his father's vineyard was not repentance, for it says, "he repented **and went**." What, then, constituted repentance on the part of the son? Obviously, it was a change of mind. He changed his mind, then went to work in the vineyard.

Paul explains repentance in these words: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). It is obvious from this passage that repentance is not sorrow, for it is "godly sorrow" that leads to repentance. Therefore, connecting Jesus' parable in Matthew 21 with Paul's statement here, we have this Bible definition of repentance: "A change of mind that is prompted by godly sorrow and issues in a change of life." That is exactly what John the Baptist charged the Pharisees who came to his baptism when he told them to "bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Mat. 3:8). The life is changed by repentance when the inner man repents or changes his mind, determines to serve God rather than sin, and in so doing submits to the command of God to be baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38).

Baptism Changes The Relationship

A man may believe in God and in the Deity of Jesus Christ, change his mind toward sin, and determine to live a clean and morally upright life, but until he is baptized into Christ, he remains in Satan's kingdom and under his dominion. Neither faith nor repentance takes one from Satan's kingdom and places him into Christ's, and so long as he remains in Satan's kingdom, he is under his dominion—even if one lives an upright moral life. Baptism is the consummating act of salvation that destroys a servant of Satan and makes him a servant of Jesus Christ. The love of sin is killed by faith, the practice of sin is killed by repentance, and the dominion of sin is destroyed in baptism. Hence, man becomes a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), and that is exactly the point Paul made in answer to his question in Romans 6:1, and which he further explains in that chapter.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into

Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin (Rom. 6:1-7).

When a person is baptized into Christ, he is separated from his old life of sin which held him in bondage. He is no longer a servant of sin but a servant of Christ.

If we keep in mind what Paul had been saying, we will see that to crucify the old man is the same thing as to die to sin. Of himself, Paul said, 'I have been crucified with Christ' (Gal. 3:20). Paul the sinner died. What was true of him is true of everyone who becomes a Christian. The old man, the body of sin, is the sinner. Every time a person becomes a Christian, a sinner dies. We die as sinners and are raised up as saints.... We are then no longer the bondservants of sin. When a bondservant, or a slave, dies, he passes from under his master. His master no longer has dominion over him.... If a slave of sin dies to sin, he is free from service to his master. Sin rules him no more (Whiteside 133).

The deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage illustrates how we pass from under sin's dominion to that of Christ. The Israelites had heard Moses, believed him, and changed their minds in following him to the banks of the Red Sea; so we hear, believe, and repent. Although the people of Israel had believed and followed Moses, they remained under Pharaoh's dominion so long as they remained on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea. If a modern Baptist preacher had been leading them instead of Moses, he would have said, "Now, you folks don't have to cross over this Red Sea. You've already believed; so you're safe from Pharaoh's army. Just sit still on the banks of this sea because there's no way you can be harmed. Being baptized in the cloud and the sea isn't necessary." However their deliverance was not complete until they passed through the sea on dry land and were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and the sea (1 Cor. 10:1-2). The waters of the Red Sea separated them from their old life of slavery and placed them under Moses' leadership where they were free from Pharaoh's reign. So it is with us. Paul says God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). So long as we believe and repent, yet remain unbaptized, we remain under

the dominion of Satan and are citizens of the kingdom of darkness just as surely as Israel remained under the power of the Egyptians until they were separated from them by the waters of the Red Sea. That which saved Israel—their baptism in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:2)—was also that which destroyed Pharaoh's army. So it is with us. When, by faith, we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), we are translated from the bondage of sin into Jesus Christ, the old man of sin is destroyed, and we are free from that former life. To continue in sin after one becomes a Christian is as foolish as Israel's desire to return to the bondage of Egypt after they had been delivered from it. Baptism is that line of demarcation, a dividing line, between the reign of sin and the reign of righteousness through Jesus Christ.

Have you ever noticed where Satan and his denominational ministers stage their greatest fight against Christ? Why, it is at the waters of baptism. Satan does not mind if one wants to believe Christ is God's Son. Even the demons believe and tremble (Jam. 2:19). Satan does not mind if one wants to confess that Christ is God's Son. Even the demons did that (Mark 1:23-24). Neither does Satan mind if one wants to live a morally upright life. Cornelius was such a man (Acts 10:1-2), but Cornelius, who was under Satan's dominion and in a lost state, was told to "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:13-14). Denominational preachers will tell people to believe. Some even say they should repent, and others say some kind of confession of faith should be made. However, with few exceptions, they all say baptism is not necessary to salvation, which is where Satan makes his final stand, because he knows that one who is baptized into Christ has passed from his dominion into the dominion of Christ and under His reign, and that is precisely the point Paul makes in answer to his question in Romans 6:1.

God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also

live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:2-11).

The soul who has been converted to Christ through the Gospel plan of faith, repentance, and baptism has died to sin. Sin no longer reigns in his life. It is dethroned in the heart of the believer, and righteousness is enthroned in its place.

A person is either dead to sin or he is not. If he is dead to sin, he is admonished to so consider himself. If we have not died to sin, we cannot in truth reckon ourselves dead to sin; but the person who is dead to sin should so count himself and act accordingly. We are also to reckon ourselves alive to God in Christ. We are, therefore, to reckon ourselves as both dead and alive—dead to sin and alive to God. Hence, we cannot continue in sin (Whiteside 135).

In Romans 6:12-13, Paul instructs those of us who have been saved by God's grace to abstain from sin and to submit our bodies as the instruments of righteousness. As our physical members have been used in the past as instruments through which we committed sin, so they are now to be used as instruments of righteousness. While the physical body is not altered in conversion, there **is** a **new** use made of it, and that is what Paul addresses in these verses.

The body is a mere instrument to be used by the inner man, the spirit, for good or bad. The spirit is charged not to let sin control the body. Our natural appetites and passions are not evil within themselves. They are God-given and become evil only when they become the master, and thereby lead us into sinful thoughts and deeds. Now, since we died to sin, we are not to allow sin to reestablish its reign in our bodies. We must control the lusts of our bodies, not obey them. The mortal body, the body which must die, must not be allowed to cause spiritual and eternal death. This language shows plainly that when we sin, the members of our body are mere instruments through which the inner man accomplishes its purposes. The instrument used in committing a crime cannot be blamed for the crime. God gave the human being certain appetites and passions for his own preservation and for the perpetuity of the human race; but the purpose to hold them in check, or the plans to gratify them either in a lawful or unlawful way, are formed in the heart. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Obedience is from the heart. The spirit expresses itself through the body. Not one thing can be done in service to God without the use of the body. Hence, we are commanded to present our "members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

And so also does the spirit sin through the instrumentality of the body. Though committed through the instrumentality of the body, sin comes from the heart. "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23) (Whiteside 136).

The entirety of Romans 6 is a refutation of the philosophy of self-indulgence—continuing in sin that grace may abound. Through the death of Christ and his obedience to the Gospel, the Christian has left the kingdom of Satan and entered the kingdom or dominion of Jesus Christ. His service in either kingdom is a willing service, for Paul asks, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). While one remains under Satan's dominion, he is a bondsman of sin and doomed to eternal death. Freedom **from** Christ leads to eternal loss, but freedom **in** Christ brings life. There are only two spiritual kingdoms—Satan's and Christ's. Every person on earth is in one or the other, and each of us is there as a result of our free choice. No one is coerced to serve Satan as a sinner. Each subject in his kingdom is there because he has been "drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jam. 1:14). Neither does Christ coerce men to serve Him. Each of His subjects is drawn to Him through his own free will. "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). That is why Paul plainly declares that we are the servants of him whom we **choose** to obey. We either choose to crucify the old man of sin, or to continue gratifying the lusts of the flesh, but we cannot do both at the same time. We either serve Christ as servants of righteousness or we serve Satan as slaves of sin. He who has been made alive in Christ has died to sin, and he who is alive to sin is dead to Christ.

CONCLUSION

The person who is converted to Christ is changed. That is what *conversion* means. We convert wood pulp to paper, crude oil to gasoline, animal skins to leather. When those things are converted, they are no longer the things they once were. They have been changed from their former state into a new one. So it is with the one who is converted to Christ. He is no longer what he once was. He has died to sin and been raised to a new life in Christ Jesus and is no longer dead in

trespasses and sins. He is now alive in Christ and Christ is the ruler of his inner life which has been changed, or converted, by obedience to the Gospel. If that man believes he can continue to live as he once did while he was dead in sin, he has not been converted, his inner man has not been changed, and he is still under the dominion of sin. Conversion of the inner man will result in a changed life—one lived by the faith of Christ under the Lordship of the Son of God. The converted soul's heart has been changed by faith, his life by repentance, and his citizenship by baptism. If he continues to live in and serve sin, none of those inner changes have been wrought, he is unconverted, and still in Satan's kingdom. No, beloved, we cannot continue in sin, for in obedience to the Gospel we have died to sin. To "continue in sin that grace may abound" is to return as a dog to its vomit and as the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:21-22).

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Whiteside, R. L. *A New Commentary On Paul's Letter To The Saints At Rome*. Denton, TX: Miss Inys Whiteside, 1945.

“IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?”

ROMANS 8:31

Paul Vaughn



Paul Vaughn was born in Maysville, Kentucky. He is married to the former Ricki Jett, attended Maysville Community College, Lexington Technical Institute, and is a 1986 graduate from East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions.

Paul worked in mission fields in Ohio and Kentucky for ten years, helping to establish a congregation in Brown County, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky; he presently is working in a new mission field in Hancock County, Kentucky. Paul is a debater, editor, and publisher. He edited a book on the history of the church in Eastern Kentucky and has written lesson commentaries on the books of Hebrews and Daniel. He writes a monthly article for

Contending For The Faith on Restoration History. He is a speaker in the television broadcast, “What Does The Bible Say,” sponsored by the Southwest Church of Christ in Clinton, Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

In life there is always the door of suffering and pain to walk through. Sometimes we open the door ourselves, and at other times we are pulled in the room of anguish by events beyond our control. A husband and father may lose his job with no means to provide for the family he loves. A young mother’s heart may break because her baby has stepped too quickly into eternity. She will never see him grow or hear words of love from the child she brought into the world. The knowledge of suffering is distressing and disturbing to all traveling life’s highway. Yet, there is hope and encouragement for every person, if he seeks to find it in the Word of God.

It is written, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). This precious promise is the certification of God’s providential care. No amount of suffering or pain can tarnish or discredit God’s magnificent, marvelous, and majestic promise.

One of the most encouraging and comforting verses in the Bible is in Paul’s letter to the church of Christ at Rome. He wrote, “What shall

we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The questions draw a conclusion from the impetus given to Christians to triumph over suffering in verses 19-30. It is an affirmation of God's power in the care of and for Christians. It is soul strengthening to have the knowledge of God's vigilance in the life of His children. It is a source of great joy because of the promises covered and the hope it bestows. God is the greatest power in the universe. The world was created by His wonderful and unlimited power. The Bible starts with the declaration of His power to create. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). He did not seek knowledge from man, but through His power and knowledge He made man. Therefore, the promises made in Romans 8:31 are not empty words spoken by one who cannot deliver protection, but by the One who can be trusted to keep His Word. Christians have a shelter, a safe place of refuge while facing the afflictions and storms of life.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, GOD CAME TO THE AID OF HIS PEOPLE

The Old Testament is a bulwark that can fortify man's faith in God's care for mankind. Paul wrote: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Through faithful attention to God's will man may find encouragement as he looks to the Old Testament examples of God's care for His people. "For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance" (Psa. 94:14).

Joseph

God protected Joseph providentially. Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and the first son from his beloved and cherished Rachel. He was Jacob's favorite son. Favoritism opened the door of jealousy in the family of this godly man. Joseph's brothers resented the special treatment given to Joseph by their father (Gen. 37:3-4). They sold him to a band of Ishmaelites who were nomadic merchants. The Ishmaelites sold Joseph to an Egyptian named Potiphar who was the captain of the guard (39:1). The events that happened to Joseph up to this time in his life would be devastating to most people and would cause many to turn from God. But Joseph never stopped trusting in God. Soon Potiphar's wife began to tempt Joseph to commit adultery. Because he would not sin against God or Potiphar, he was put in prison (39:7-23). Yet Joseph

remained faithful to God through all those trials and afflictions: his brothers were against him, the Ishmaelites were against him, Potiphar’s wife was against him, but God was for him, and he became third in power in all Egypt. God was completely in control: Pharaoh was king and Joseph second in power in the land.

After the death and burial of Jacob, Joseph’s brothers needed to be encouraged that he would not harm them. They sent a messenger to Joseph saying:

Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father (Gen. 50:16-17).

The verse goes on to say, “Joseph wept when they spake unto him” (50:17). Joseph uttered one of the most wonderful expressions of trusting in God recorded in the Old Testament in his reply to his brothers. “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive” (50:19-20). Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery as a result of envy and treachery, yet God protected him and delivered him from slavery to second in command of Egypt. What the brothers did was evil towards Joseph, but it worked out for good. This is one of the most obvious affirmations in the Bible of Divine providence at work. God’s purpose will always eclipse the plans of evil men. “What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Ruth

The period of the judges gives a picture of a troubled epoch in the history of God’s people. The Book of Judges covers the period from the death of Joshua until the time of Samuel. Throughout this period of history, Israel turned from God and went into apostasy. God brought harsh oppressors who afflicted the Israelites greatly until they repented of their sin and returned to God. During this time, a Moabite woman named Ruth came to prominence. She was married to Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, but soon widowed. Ruth, widowed and without children, cast off her country, her family, and the religion of the Moabites to be with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and serve Naomi’s God. These two women without husbands and children suffered extreme hardships during this period of Old Testament history.

When Naomi told Ruth to return to her people, Ruth refused.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

The faith of Ruth is seen in the very words she spoke to Naomi. She was committed to take care of her mother-in-law and confirmed it by an oath before the Lord.

Ruth's commitment to the security of Naomi and her faithfulness to God led her to the difficult work of gleaning in the field of a wealthy landowner in Bethlehem of Judah, named Boaz. Boaz ultimately married Ruth, and they had a son whom they named Obed. Obed had a son whom he named Jesse, and Jesse had a son whom he named David (4:21-22). It is through David, Ruth's great-grandson, that Jesus Christ was born.

Ruth was free to go home to her people and serve the idols of the Moabites, but she decided to serve the one true God. When she chose to follow and obey God, she came under His protective care. Everything that happened to Ruth was not good, but God was on Ruth's side looking out for her working through His providence. "What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Joseph and Ruth are but two examples in the Old Testament of people that God protected and delivered from extreme hardship and trials. Other people He protected in the Old Testament were Elijah, Hezekiah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. There are also a great number of Old Testament examples of people that God did not come to their aid and did not protect or deliver from hardships. They were of a contrary character to God's faithful people and received the wrath of God.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, GOD CAME TO THE AID OF HIS PEOPLE

The lives of Christians in the New Testament overflowed with hardships, suffering, and even death. The Roman government and the Jewish leaders unleashed legions of attacks against them. At times it looked as if the enemies of Christ would prevail, but God's vigilant care gave hope in the face of pain and death.

Living the faithful Christian life does not mean that one will be protected from temptations, trials, suffering, or death. The examples of God's children in the Old Testament teach all people that they are not freed from trials just because they are faithfully following God. As seen previously, Joseph suffered many things at the hands of his enemies, yet he trusted that God was watching over him. This enabled Joseph to add godly character to his life, as he patiently lived each day seeking to please God. It must be noted that Joseph died in Egypt. His faithful life did not keep him from death, but it did prepare him for death. Where he died, because of his trust in God, Joseph knew that God would take care of His people.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence (Gen. 50:24-25).

The same is true in Christianity. Christians are not promised that they will never go through harsh troubles or difficult problems in life. However, they are promised that God will be with them through the trials of suffering. "What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The key to success is one's faithfulness to God.

Paul

The apostle Paul suffered considerable affliction and anguish for the preaching of the Gospel. He relates much of the hardship and persecutions he went through to the church at Corinth. It is written:

Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In journeyings often*, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by *mine own* countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:22-28).

The rewards of the faithful Christian life cannot be purchased at bargain prices. The cost of following the message Paul proclaimed was measured in stripes on his body, the bruises caused by being stoned, suffering shipwreck, and much pain. Going through all the hardship that man can inflict on another human being did not keep Paul from following the Master, Jesus Christ. He said, "For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain" (Phi. 1:21). Therefore, one can learn that trusting in the power of God does not stop opposition from adversaries, enemies of God.

Paul understood that living the faithful life means that God's vigilant care is never blinded by sin. The victory belongs to all who remain dedicated to the Word of God. Just before his death Paul understood that all life's struggles did not compare to the victory that belonged to those who trusted in God. He said:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL MANKIND THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

There can be no greater example of God's vigilant care than in the life of Christ Jesus. His life was a paradox. Being God's only begotten Son, Jesus had more power and wisdom than any man who ever walked upon the earth. However, His life was one of suffering leading up to an agonizing and harsh death on the cross. When Jesus was taken before the high priest and was struck by one of the officers, He felt the pain (John 18:22). When Jesus was taken before Pilate and whipped with a Roman scourge, He felt every sensation from each stroke of the whip (19:1). When Jesus was taken to Golgotha and crucified, every stripe inflicted upon His body left the same wounds it did on all men who were under identical circumstances.

The Jewish leaders thought they had won the victory over Jesus by having Him killed, but God was working against their sinister motives and evil actions. "What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (Rom. 8:31). The world hated Jesus and His teaching. He said, "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). God was

not going to let the evil acts of some men destroy His plans for the salvation of sinners. God's actions of love turned the accomplishment of Jewish hatred into victory for all. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32). Christ died for all the sins of the world, but His death is effective unto salvation only to those who obey His commands. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8).

There is no good thing that God will not do for His Children. His love is demonstrated in the death of His Son. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). The enduring effect of such great love is that one can become a child of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1).

NOTHING WITHIN THE REACH OF MANKIND CAN SEPARATE CHRISTIANS FROM THE LOVE OF GOD

It is extremely important to note that through God's wisdom and wonderful plan no one can bring an accusation or impeach God's chosen so as to condemn them. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33). No accusation is admissible, because it is God who pronounces one righteous through the death of His Son. There are multitudes who try to justify the false teaching of "limited atonement" (the view that Christ died only for the elect) using this and other verses. The preceding verse teaches that Jesus died for all. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (8:32). His death was for the sins of all mankind. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus' death was for the salvation of all men. However, only those who obey His plan of salvation will have access to the soul-saving power of His blood: "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

The Christian's relationship with God and Christ cannot be changed by external forces. A Christian may be going through traumatic health problems, but the sufferings of poor health cannot separate the faithful child of God from His love. A Christian may be going through difficulties on the job, but this will never separate him from the blessing in Christ Jesus. A Christian may be facing the trials of death, but even death cannot separate God's children from His wonderful and magnificent love. When Paul was about to be killed for his faithfulness to Christ, he wrote words of encouragement.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The crown of righteousness belongs to all faithful Christians, and no one has the wisdom or power to take it away! The apostle Paul was totally persuaded that nothing had the power to separate him and all faithful Christians from God's love. There can be no greater solace for the soul than the affirmation of God's love for His children. Paul wrote of this wonderful blessing from God in Christ Jesus.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

CONCLUSION

One's relationship with God cannot be frustrated by external forces. This does not mean that unity with God cannot be broken by internal pressures. The church at Laodicea had been lukewarm and therefore incurred the disfavor of God.

God has many blessings for His faithful children. The key to success is that all Christians remain faithful to their Lord and God. In doing so they can forcefully say: "If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?"

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“BUT WHY DOST THOU JUDGE THY BROTHER?”

ROMANS 14:10

Tom Wacaster



Tom Wacaster is a native of Texas. He is a graduate of Brown Trail School of Preaching and attended East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. Tom began preaching in 1972 and has served congregations in Oklahoma and Texas. He has done mission work in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Russia, and Ukraine. Tom is now doing Gospel meeting work and going on mission trips overseas.

Tom and his wife Johnnie Ann have two children and five grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

On January 25, 2004, there was a meeting in the Titus County courthouse in downtown Mt. Pleasant, Texas. A number of concerned citizens from Cookville (a smaller town in Titus County) had come to register their complaints regarding the intended opening of an adult book and video store in that small community. When I was given the opportunity to speak, I asked the lawyers representing the city and county what recourse we had to prohibit the sale and distribution of pornographic material in any city, whether it be Cookville, Mt. Pleasant, or Talco. Here in effect was his answer:

The state and federal governments have enacted laws that protect the sale and distribution of pornographic material under the protection of freedom of speech granted by the first amendment to the constitution of the United States. While we cannot prohibit the sale of these materials, we can, as citizens of Titus County regulate the location and operation of those businesses.

I can just see it now: the framers of the Constitution sitting around a table with a copy of Playboy in hand discussing the right of each individual to enjoy the pleasures of pornography in the pursuit of happiness. Close on the heels of the Constitution came the very first amendment protecting the right of every citizen to speak his mind without fear

of persecution by the government. Was it their intention to allow some filthy minded individual the *right* to set up and sell pornographic, XXX-rated material, and “sex-toys” in the name of *liberty*? For some reason I simply cannot conceive of the framers of our Constitution even remotely giving consideration to this kind of unrestrained, unethical, and ungodly behavior in the name of civil rights and/or liberty. I cannot conceive of the framers of the Constitution sitting around a table and discussing the first amendment with the view in mind that such “freedom of speech” included such things as the sale of pornographic material. However, let the concerned citizens raise a question regarding the immorality of such material, and the opposition is quick to throw the Word of God back in their face with a quote from the lips of our Lord or one of His inspired apostles: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mat. 7:1), or “Why dost thou judge thy brother?” (Rom. 14:10).

Did our Lord (or His inspired apostle, Paul) intend that we not judge any action? Was it our Lord’s intention that the Christian stay completely out of the judging business altogether? Are we not to call attention to moral inequity or doctrinal error? Are we to be so open-minded and so tolerant that we never voice opposition to the things being taught and practiced, no matter how immoral or how opposed to the truth they might be? Have “pluralism” and “political correctness” enslaved our sense of reasoning so as to render us completely captive to the foolishness of this modern age?

Alan Bloom, in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, wrote:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative... The students’ backgrounds are as various as America can provide. Some are religious, some atheists; some are to the Left, some to the Right; some intend to be scientists, some humanists or professionals or businessmen; some are poor, some rich. **They are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality** [emph. mine—TW] (25).

This particular philosophy (if we can call it that) has literally saturated the American society, yea, the whole of the western world. The first plank in this insidious philosophy is the desire for unity at any cost. Bloom calls it “allegiance to equality.” On the moral front this battle is being waged against those who want to “impose their morality upon others” (have you ever noticed that certain words and phrases have a connotation that will actually bias the thinking of otherwise reasonable thinking men and women? *Homophobia* is a good example here). The

homosexual community is presently pushing for this particular *equality*. It is not an equality with regard to human rights but an equality that wants acceptance regardless of lifestyle. The bottom line is that they desire a muzzle be placed on the mouths of all those who oppose their practice. This, my friends, is the kind of equality under consideration. If law-makers can be convinced that opposition to ungodly behavior is really inequality gone to seed, then they will succeed in muzzling the mouths of those who presently oppose their practice by passing laws favorable to immorality. On the religious front, it is toleration and agreement to disagree. It is not so much the desire on the part of the leaders to become united in practice as it is the desire to muzzle any opposition. "You do your thing; I'll do mine, and let's not criticize one another."

To attain such *equality*, it is necessary that there first be a removal of any absolute standard. Hence, the second plank: the modern gospel of relativism. "Nothing is absolute; nothing is certain; you cannot know anything for sure." Now, one might expect the world to think this way. Wickedness and error have always sought to cast off the restraints of God's will (Psa. 2:3). We might even expect liberal theologians to think this way. An article in the *Dallas Morning News* (A18-19), titled "Colleges With Religious Ties Must Balance Secular And Spiritual Interests," illustrates the degree to which even theological schools have gone to maintain an appearance of tolerance and acceptance in this pluralistic society. The article targeted three Dallas/Forth Worth area universities for their *open-mindedness*. First, it tells how Southern Methodist University in early 1999 announced a \$1.5 million dollar endowment to establish a faculty chair in Jewish studies. William Finnin, the chaplain at Southern Methodist University, stated: "The church [Methodist] doesn't seek to be the arbiter of different forms of truth" (Huh? This author thought truth, by its very definition was absolute). In that same article the vice president of Texas Wesleyan University, also a Methodist school, stated that Texas Wesleyan University "stands apart from other universities because its philosophy emphasizes respect of world faiths." Likewise, Texas Christian University spokeswoman, Kelli Horst, said:

TCU does not offer a religious environment. We follow the principles of the Disciples of Christ ecumenicalism and inclusiveness and welcome and encourage a variety of religious and cultural beliefs... TCU differs from other area religious universities because of its lack

of religious intent. We are an independent, self-governing university with no evangelical mission. We have a historical, intentional relationship with our founding constituency, the Disciples of Christ, a church that emphasizes inclusiveness and a broad, nonsectarian approach to matters of faith.

Unfortunately, the Lord's church has not escaped the ravages of this *pluralistic* mentality. Some of our brethren advocate the same kind of thinking. On the far left we find those who are nothing more than relativists. They have climbed aboard the bandwagon of relativism and proclaim without fear of God or man: "You cannot know anything for sure!" (I wonder how they can be so sure about that!) What is it that has caused them to take this position? This author believes it is the desire for the kind of equality spoken of above—equality to do as they please, and simply agree to disagree, while muzzling the mouths of those who might criticize. Again, to accomplish their desired end, there must be a removal of any absolute standard. We are presently witnessing a headlong plunge into a full acceptance of this two-planked error. First, there is the desire for some kind of unity, a noble desire based of course upon the prayer of our Lord recorded in John 17, but alas not the type of unity of which Jesus spoke. Enter plank one: "Let us agree to disagree." Workshops are organized which invite men of every shade and color (doctrinally speaking) with no intention of addressing error, but rather presenting a "united front," regardless of differences in doctrine. Known false teachers are not rebuked but revered and respected. Opposition is squelched by subjective thinking rather than objective reasoning. No longer is it the false teacher who is the enemy, but those who cry out for truth and justice.

Enter plank two: remove or ignore the standard. Lip service is given to a "thus saith the Lord" while sound, biblical arguments are ignored. The *fruit* which error bears is looked at through colored glasses, and the circle of relativism and equality is now complete. If someone attempts to call attention to the absence of authority in God's Word or the illogical position that may have been taken, there is a quick appeal to the words of our Lord: "Judge not that ye be not judged." Yes, some are like the politician who was asked where he stood on a controversial issue. He paused for a minute and then said, "I have friends who are for it, and friends who are against it, and I always stand with my friends!"

Pluralism! Relativism! Our age hates absolutes. They dislike terms like *pattern*, *doctrine*, and *authority*. Love, peace, and harmony **at any**

cost are preferred over controversy, examination, and exposure. Pluralism is a scourge that robs men of the ability to think clearly. It holds that there are *many* truths, even *contradictory truths*. If you want to believe that the moon is made out of cheese, that is truth to you. Pluralism is the absence of absolutes, and the acceptance of anything and everything. One fruit of this *pluralistic* mind-set is "**non-judgmentalism**." The only "negative judgment" is aimed at those who will not tolerate every belief and lifestyle. The end result is a philosophic foundation that results in a lunacy culture with strange contradictory behavior. If one wonders why homosexuality was abhorred in years gone by but is now an acceptable lifestyle by better than 50% of those surveyed, the reason is that no one dares be *intolerant* or *controversial*. **Disdain for confrontation** is another fruit of this pluralistic mind-set. The late Guy N. Woods addressed the importance of wielding the sword of the Spirit with courage and conviction:

Denominationalism is the curse and bane of the age. So long as it remains to mislead and deceive the people, our work will not be finished. It is our duty to fearlessly unsheath the sword of the Spirit, boldly go forth to battle, and plunge it into the very heart of sectarianism, until, mangled and bleeding, it is left to die in its own shame. Let the Lord's disciples learn that their master came not to bring peace on earth, but a sword... Christianity is, in its very nature aggressive, and its friends must never succumb to that maudlin pietism that trucks to the popularity of the world (16).

Friend, go back and take a look at the men and women of the Bible. They were controversialists. One outstanding example is the record of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kin. 18:1ff). With a heart of courage and a love for the Lord, Elijah asked his opponents: "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 him not a word" (18:21).

Another fruit of pluralism is the idea that the **real enemy is the one who actually loves the truth**. Our recent conflict with Iraq is a good example of how some folks think when their minds are filled with relativism. Protestors around the world, with placards, slogans, and speeches actually made Saddam Hussein to look like some innocent pawn in a power struggle for oil. Rather than demonstrate against a man whose tyrannical rule had killed and tortured untold thousands, they demonstrated against the United States. President Bush was portrayed as something akin to Adolf Hitler. The world is confused.

Good is called evil, and evil is called good. Abraham Lincoln once said, “The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep’s throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as a liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act as the destroyer of liberty.” Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Jeff Walling, and others of their ilk have done a remarkable job of convincing a multitude that the **real** troublemakers in the church are those who take a stand for truth. **We** are the sectarians; **we** are the ones who never preach on God’s grace; **we** are the ones causing division in the body of Christ. Those who have believed their lies are the victims of pluralistic thinking.

What does all this have to do with our assigned question? Hopefully it has provided us with a little background that will help us see why the question is so important. Now let us address the question assigned: “But why judgest thou thy brother?” We will approach our study under three headings: (1) Judgment in Context, (2) Judgment that is Condemned, and (3) Judgment that is Correct.

JUDGMENT IN CONTEXT

To appreciate the question for this study and the point Paul was seeking to make, it might be good to consider the context of the question. This is true with regard to the study of any Bible subject or passage, for it is still true that any text taken out of context becomes a mere pretext. Here is our question as it appears in the text: “But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God” (Rom. 14:10). The verse is within the larger context of Romans 14:1 through 15:13. The section we are concerned with begins in Romans 14:1 and extends through Romans 15:6. A closer look will reveal the following: (1) Paul writes with regard to those who are “weak” in the faith and admonishes the brethren to “receive” them, yet not for the sake of “scruples.” (2) There are at least two specific areas that come to the forefront, both having to do with delicate matters that might cause conflict between brethren who are weak and those who are strong. Those two areas have to do with the eating of meats and the observance of certain days. (3) Judging a brother over a position he has taken on these issues is strictly forbidden. (4) Each man is to give an account to God for the decisions he makes with regard to these matters.

There is a similarity between what we find in this section and other epistles of Paul. Paul addressed this matter of eating meats in 1 Corin-

thians 8:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-33. There are also similar topics dealt with in Galatians and/or the Colossians. In Romans 14:5 Paul refers to a brother who esteemed "one day above another," while in Galatians 4:10 he wrote, "Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years." Also, in Colossians 2:16 something is said concerning things which the brethren were to "touch not; taste not; handle not" (2:21). It is not so much the **similarity** that is so apparent as it is the **attitude** on the part of Paul in addressing these matters. There is in Galatians and Colossians a *polemic severity*, while here in Romans there is a *tenderness* that suggests an entirely different attitude. Why is there this difference? Murray suggested:

In Galatians Paul is dealing with the Judaizers who were perverting the gospel at its centre. They were the propagandists of a legalism which maintained that the observance of days and seasons was necessary to justification and acceptance with God.... In Romans 14 there is no evidence that those esteeming one day above another were involved in any respect in this fatal error.... There is not the slightest evidence that the asceticism of the weak in Romans was bound up with the heretical speculations of the Colossian heresy (172-73).

In Romans 14 we find conciliatory language regarding the brother who was abstaining from meats and the brother who set one day above another. Here are a few samples:

Let not him that eateth set at nought him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth... to his own lord he standeth or falleth.... none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself.... Let us not therefore judge one another... Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died.... So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another (14:3-4, 7, 13, 15, 19).

It is important to keep the purpose of the author in its proper context, or we will end up drawing some unwarranted conclusions that could lead to toleration where God intended no toleration. Some preliminary remarks are thus in order before we examine the verses themselves.

First, the admonitions within this passage regarding tolerance for the *weak* brother do **not** apply when it comes to taking a strong stand against error. The things addressed in this passage **cannot** refer to things of a doctrinal nature. To apply the principles in this chapter to things of a doctrinal nature would put us in contradiction of other passages: especially those dealing with (1) withdrawal of fellowship, (2) marking the false teacher, (3) and proving the spirits. When a false

teacher has entered in among the flock and is determined to undermine the faith of those who are weak, then a strong stand must be taken. When the Judaizing teachers sought to overthrow the faith of some in the matter of circumcision, Paul refused to give “place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal. 2:5). Consequently he adamantly refused to have Titus circumcised. In the case of Timothy, however, there were no Judaizing teachers threatening the church, so Paul could (and did) circumcise Timothy as a matter of expediency (Acts 16:1-3). In one situation the truth was threatened; in the other there was no threat.

Second, there is another point of interest regarding this *weak* brother of which the apostle writes. There are three passages which address this matter of offending the weak brother: Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8, and 1 Corinthians 10. The question that must be entertained is: “Who is the weak brother?” What is it that makes him *weak*? Consider the circumstances: A Jewish convert, believing that some meats are unclean, is now taught that these meats are to be received with thanksgiving. A Gentile, having offered in times past meat unto idols, may be offended in certain meats. *Offended* is not to be taken in our ordinary sense of the word. It is not so much the idea of “upsetting” the brother, as it is the idea of causing him to “stumble” or “fall.” Roy Deaver addressed this very point:

We need to understand the matter of “offense.” If a brother thinks it is wrong for me to eat meat, and if I eat meat in his presence—this is not the offense talked about in these verses. My action (thus described) could be an evidence of lack of brotherly consideration, but it would have no bearing upon his soul. It would not jeopardize his soul. However, if I—by my example, or otherwise—persuade him to eat meat when he thinks such is sinful, then I have offended my brother in the sense discussed in Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8, and 1 Corinthians 10. I would have sinned for persuading him to violate his own conscience (538).

Paul is addressing the participation in **something** that would bring upon the weak brother the guilt of sin, and thereby weaken his faith, and eventually lead to his stumbling. Since the chapter closes with a contrast between doing something of *faith* versus *doubting*, it would seem that the “offense” under consideration is that of causing a brother to participate in some action about which he has doubts, thereby causing him to sin!

We now turn our attention to an analysis of the text itself. In Romans 14:1-12 Paul discusses (1) the weak in faith, 14:1-4; (2) tolerance in opinions, 14:5-8; and (3) giving an account to God, 14:9-12. Let us note each section.

The Weak In Faith (14:1-4)

The man who is strong in faith is to *receive* the brother who is "weak in faith." It is important to note how *faith* is used in the passage. The KJV reads "the faith." How is *faith* then used in the passage? The later portion of the chapter uses the word in contrast with "doubt," and it would seem, therefore, that Paul did not intend for it to refer to the faith as revealed in the Scripture, nor would it refer to the faith that one has in Christ as the Son of God, but rather to one's confidence in the fact that what he is doing is acceptable in the sight of God. There were some who had certain doubts; they were **not** sure about certain things. How am I to treat that man? I am to *receive* him, i.e., extend the hand of fellowship. *Proslambano* means "to receive kindly and hospitably, to admit to one's fellowship and friendship" (Deaver 535). A recent Jewish convert might have had some opposition to the eating of meats due to his conviction that such was *unclean*, or a Gentile might have some objection to the eating of meats due to its having been offered to idols. Both are, as we will learn in this chapter, to extend the fellowship one to another and not draw lines one against another, nor are they in any way to attempt to get the other to engage in that which their conscience would not allow. The acceptance of the weak brother, however, is not to be for the purpose of "fanning the flames" of dissension over the matters in question. The word here translated "scruples" is sometimes used to refer to evil thoughts (cf., Luke 5:22; 6:8; 9:46-47; 24:38; Rom. 1:21; 1 Cor. 3:20; Phi. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:8). Vine defined *disputations* as "an inward reasoning, an opinion; doubtful, unsure." A. T. Robertson concluded, "The 'strong' brother is not called upon to settle all the scruples of the 'weak' brother" (412). Brother Deaver puts it this way:

The brother is not to be received for the purpose of or to the end that others may pass judgment upon him, condemn him, and engage in profitless and sinful disputes with and about him. His conscience is to be respected. Brethren can and should seek to instruct him (wherein he is wrong), but they should not attempt to persuade him to violate his conscience (539).

In verse three Paul warns, “Let not him that eateth set at nought him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.” We learn that (1) those who eat meats are not to despise or in any way look down upon the brother who chooses not to eat; (2) the one who eats not (the recent Jewish convert) is not to judge the other (cf., 2 Tim. 4:3). The prohibitions are present imperatives and prohibit actions that were already going on. The strong must stop treating the weak with contempt, and the weak must stop criticizing the strong. “Set at nought” translates *exoutheneito*, and means “to make light of, to treat with contempt, to scorn” (Deaver 536). By the use of the present active imperative, the injunction is: “Stop; quit, or cease.”

The reason the stronger brother is to receive the weak brother is bound up in the truth that “**God hath received him.**” Some have concluded that the *him* under consideration applies to both the strong and the weak brother, but the context seems to point more to the weak brother. One important truth we derive from the passage is this: when God receives a man, we have no right to reject that man.

What, then, should be the weak brother’s attitude toward the strong brother, and what should be the strong brother’s attitude toward the weaker brother? First, the *scruples* of the weak brother should not become the rule of the congregation. Second, the strong brother should not try to dispute with the weak brother regarding the weak brother’s opinion. Third, the things under consideration are **not** of such nature as to cause God to reject him (cf., 1 John 1:6-8). That being the case, it is apparent that the principles set forth in this chapter **cannot be referring** to (a) things of a doctrinal matter, or (b) things of a moral nature. Paul was addressing matters of opinion and the harsh, impatient attitude that one brother has toward another in such matters. When someone rips verse ten from this context and applies it to judging any action at all, he has wrested the passage to his own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

Tolerance In Opinions (14:5-8)

Leaving the matter of eating meats, Paul turns his attention to another area that falls in the realm of opinion, i.e., esteeming one day above another. There were evidently some brethren who attached special significance to certain days, while others esteemed every day alike. “Esteem” is from *krinei* which means to judge. Here is a brother who sets one day above another day, but another brother esteems every

day alike—nothing special about any one day over another. But whatever position each man may take toward each day, he is to be *assured* in himself regarding that day. "Assured" translates *plerophorethesis*, which means "to bear or bring full (full measure), to settle fully" (Robertson 353-54). Where is it to be settled? "In his own mind." His conscience is not to be violated. This helps us determine what matters are being discussed here. Were Paul discussing matters pertaining to doctrine, or areas where God has legislated, it would already be settled. However, in those areas where God has **not** spoken, we are at liberty to take whatever course of action we deem expedient, the only restriction being that we must not violate our conscience; that we be settled in our *own mind*. As was the case in the eating of meats, brethren are not to judge one another in this matter of esteeming or not esteeming one day above another.

One reason why we are to maintain the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) is that "none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself" (Rom. 14:7). Our eating, our work, our social relations, are "**unto God.**" Failure to recognize this principle is probably the major factor in failure to reach out to our fellow man. Our living is to glorify God. In the context, this admonition suggests that we are to respect the decisions of others rather than pressing our own wants and opinions. The child of God has a different attitude with regard to life, but he also has a different attitude with regard to death. He seeks to glorify God even in his death. There may also be a reference here to our dying to sin. We put the old man of sin to death (Rom. 6:6) by being baptized into Christ's death (6:3-5). Having died to sin, we no longer live for self, but for God and for others. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me: and that *life* which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, *the faith* which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). "But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (6:14). Whiteside has these comments:

The point in verse 7 is generally missed by assuming that Paul was speaking of our relations one with another. It is true that we cannot cut ourselves off from all relations with our fellow men, but that is not the lesson Paul is teaching. He was speaking of our relations to the Lord. The connection shows this plainly. Verse 8 really explains verse 7. None of us lives to himself, for "whether we live, we live unto the Lord..." No one lives to himself, but to the Lord, for he is the Lord's

servant. Paul was speaking of Christians. The Christian cannot cut himself off from any connection with the Lord and live his own life as he pleases (269-270).

The complete sovereignty of the Lord is expressed here. The reason why Jesus has complete authority in our lives will be expressed in the next section.

We Shall Give An Account To God (14:9-12)

This brings us, then, to the passage containing the question for this study. Verses 9-10 make specific reference to a truth stressed in a number of other passages, namely that “we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God” (14:10). Seeing that God is to be our Judge, we must exercise extreme caution in those matters where we are tempted to judge our brother. In view of the fact that God is to be the Judge of each of us, why would anyone think it his prerogative to judge his brother in matters of opinion? The question Paul asks in verse 10 is quite emphatic: “But **thou**, why dost **thou** judge thy brother? or **thou** again, why dost **thou** set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God.” In view of the truth that “each one of us shall give account of himself to God” (14:12), what makes us think that we have the authority to judge a brother in those matters where God has not legislated? What standard shall we use in such judgment? If God has not set forth legislation on a certain action, and we presume it our right to judge a brother in this matter where God has not legislated, are we not placing ourselves above God? Indeed we are, and therein lies the error in this **kind** of judging.

Before we leave this point in our lesson, it should be emphasized that Romans 14 is **not** a prohibition against any and all judging. It is obvious from the context that Paul was addressing matters of expediency. He was **not** discussing matters of doctrine—matters where God has legislated. With this contextual background before us we are in a better position to examine the kind of judgment that is condemned, the kind of judgment that is correct.

JUDGMENT THAT IS CONDEMNED

At this point one may be thinking: “If Paul was condemning judging in matters of opinion in Romans 14, then what **kind** of judging is prohibited in our Lord’s injunction, ‘Judge not that ye be not judged?’” It should be noted just here that the injunction in Matthew 7:1 is **not** without any limitations whatsoever. Let us assume, for a moment, that

it is **without** any limits—that our Lord’s injunction applies to any and every kind of judgment. We could not, with the Lord’s approval, discipline the unruly brother (1 Cor. 5:1; Mat. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 The. 3:6). Upon what grounds would we have the authority to withdraw fellowship from the unruly brother? Any grounds we use for that withdrawal would entail some kind of judgment on our part. Again, we could not, with the Lord’s approval, conduct any sort of judicial system whereby we try and convict the evildoer. Society would be in complete turmoil and confusion if no one was to be *judged* as an evildoer (cf., Rom. 13:1ff).

If our Lord’s injunction in Matthew 7:1 is without limits, there would be no way to faithfully come to any conclusion regarding what is right and wrong spiritually, morally, or doctrinally. When men examine the deeds or doctrine of others, they do so (or should do so) with a critical eye toward whether or not that deed or doctrine aligns with the standard our Lord has given to us (Col. 3:17). We are actually judging a deed or doctrine to be right or wrong when we search “the scriptures daily” to see “whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). If our Lord’s injunction that we “judge not that ye be not judged” is without limitations, it would render His admonition in Matthew 7:6 of that same chapter null and void: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you.” How are we to determine if someone is a *dog* or *swine* (figuratively speaking, of course)? Finally, if our Lord’s injunction that we “judge not that ye be not judged” is without any limitations, then the man who would try to **enforce** this injunction upon another would be guilty of violating the very principle itself, since to accuse this man of “judging another” is to, in fact, “judge that man that he is judging another” (each of these matters will be discussed in greater detail in the next point). It is obvious therefore, on the very surface, that the Lord’s injunction in Matthew 7:1 is **not** without limitations. Let us suggest at least some **kinds** of judging that **are** condemned in Scripture.

First, judging in **matters of opinion and expediency** are condemned. This was the force of Paul’s argument in Romans 14, covered in the first point of this study.

Second, we cannot judge the **motives** of another. None of us can know for sure the motives of another unless that man reveals his motive to us (1 Cor. 2:11). Who among us has the power to see into a man’s

mind and know why he is acting the way he acts? None of us! Thus, to presume to read a man's mind is to claim a power that none of us possesses. We must, therefore, refrain from judging a man's motive. Permit this writer to temper this explanation with an additional comment. Though we can judge improper motives (hate, greed, covetousness, etc.) as being sinful, unless it becomes apparent that a man is acting out of hate, or greed, or covetousness, we cannot specifically say: "I know why you are doing this," for the simple reason that we do not know.

Third, we cannot judge a man's **heart**. A man may be sincerely struggling with himself, desperately attempting to overcome a sin. While we can judge sin as being sin, it is not within our scope to judge his heart. Again, let this writer temper this with a comment: There is a difference between sin that arises out of occasional stumbling, weakness, or spiritual fatigue and that which arises from a heart that is in open rebellion to God. We should go the extra mile and give a brother the benefit of the doubt until all evidence to the contrary convinces us that he is not going to repent. Yes, we judge the action as sinful; yes, we seek to instruct; yes, we warn him of impending discipline if he continues in the course upon which he has embarked. And while blatant sin and high-handed rebellion is an **indication** of a heart out of tune with God, we must make sure that we do not judge his heart until all evidence forces us to conclude that his heart is hardened and he is solidified in his opposition to God.

Fourth, we must not judge **based upon hear-say, innuendoes, gossip, or guesses**. There is a need to warn the brotherhood of false teachers. There is a need to make known those who would lead disciples away (Rom. 16:17), but, beloved, on many occasions we have been quick to rush to judgment without sufficient evidence. We must exercise caution and make sure that we do not strike first and ask questions later. Such irresponsibility could do irreparable damage to a faithful brother. Let us be patient with one another and be very cautious when it comes to marking a brother as an "enemy of the cross." Let us be willing to go "the second mile," realizing that our longsuffering may give us the opportunity to rescue that brother from a course that will lead him to ruin.

Finally, we must not judge others **when we are guilty of the same sin** in our own lives. Our Lord's admonition is clear: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam

that is in thine own eye?" (Mat. 7:3). When the antinomian condemns us for appealing to the law of Christ, he has violated this injunction in that he has appealed to law to condemn appealing to law. What hypocrisy! Before we attempt to correct the spiritual course upon which a brother has embarked, let us carefully examine ourselves and make sure that we are walking in the light before attempting to "cast the mote" out of his eye while ignoring the "beam in thine own eye."

JUDGMENT THAT IS CORRECT

Having determined that there is a kind of judgment that is incorrect, and having determined that there is at least some kind of judgment that is necessary and essential to proper discernment, the responsibility rests upon us to determine precisely what kind of judgment is correct. Before we set forth some specifics, we want to consider some matters that will provide a foundation upon which to build. One of the basic tenets of the Christian faith is the importance our Lord and His apostles placed upon faithful adherence to the Word of God. Being *religious* is not sufficient. Our Lord taught us that there are *many* who are religious, but religiously **wrong** (Mat. 7:13-14, 21-22). Jesus specifically stated that, "if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24—KJV). He also taught us that "no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The very nature of Christianity (true Christianity) is exclusive, which implies that absolutes must be accepted as a condition of salvation.

Consider the exclusive nature of the message that Jesus, the apostles, and the first century church brought into the world: the law of Moses is out, there is only one God, idolatry is a sin, there is to be no fellowship with error. In addition, Christianity affirms that truth does exist and that it is attainable.

Buy the truth, and sell it not (Pro. 23:23).

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

The judgment of God is according to truth (Rom. 2:2).

It affirms that there is an absolute body of truth that is both knowable and attainable. It is objective in nature, capable of being examined, searched, sought out, and learned. The Bible affirms that it is God's divinely revealed will to man (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 The. 2:13-15; 2 Pet. 1:3), that Jesus is the Christ, the only Savior of the world (Acts 4:12; John 1:1-2, 14, 18), that all men must make a choice between right and wrong and live or die with the consequences of their choice (2 Cor.

5:10). The Scriptures teach that there is only one body (Eph. 4:4), that body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23), and that salvation is in that one body (Eph. 5:23).

What does this have to do with judging? When men appeal to Matthew 7:1 as **authoritative**, are they not implying that the words of Jesus are important? (Now, they may not realize what they imply, but they imply it just the same.) Why is it that men appeal to Matthew 7:1, and then ignore the rest of the precepts and commandments of Christ and His apostles? When men ignore the plain teaching of Scriptures with regard to what is right and wrong morally and/or doctrinally, they manifest that they do not respect the authority of our Lord, and hence, they do not really believe and respect what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1. Why is it that some will cry *foul* when we judge certain of their actions as being wrong, then appeal to the words of Jesus: "Judge not that ye be not judged," while ignoring other plain and simple teachings of the Savior? It is the height of inconsistency to scream: "Judge not that ye be not judged," while ignoring the truths set forth in God's Word. With that in mind, let us turn our attention to some **kinds** of judging that are correct.

First, we must judge righteous judgment. One of the outstanding features of our Lord's ministry was the abundant evidence that accompanied His teaching and preaching. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). The unbelieving Jews had the same evidence at their disposal, but rather than admit that Jesus was the Messiah, they accused Him of having a demon (John 7:20). This incident in John 7:14ff gave occasion for our Lord to admonish all men: "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). The sin of these unbelieving Jews was that they simply ignored the evidence. We judge righteous judgment when we are honest with the evidence. Righteous judgment harmonizes with the truth of God's Word. When men pit the Lord's words in Matthew 7:1 against other plain passages of Scripture, they are not judging righteous judgment. Judging homosexuality as sin is righteous judgment; judging the use of instrumental music as being sinful is righteous judgment; judging scanty attire as immodesty is righteous judgment. Why? Because our conclusions are based on the truth of God's Word.

Second, we are to "prove the spirits." This is a correct form of judging. John wrote, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). How is a man to "prove the spirits," if all judging is prohibited by the Lord? When we take our Bible in hand, and compare what a man teaches with the Word of God, we are judging that man's teaching as to whether it is true or false.

Third, marking those who cause divisions and occasions of stumbling is correct judgment. Two passages come to mind right here.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us (2 The. 3:6).

It should be noted that both of these passages imply some degree of judgment on our part with regard to those who are not living as they should. Consider the following. First, there is a **standard** by which that judging is to be exercised. This standard is variously designated as "the doctrine which ye learned" (Rom. 16:17) and "the tradition which they received of us" (2 The. 3:6). Likewise in 2 Thessalonians Paul wrote, "So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2:15). W. E. Vine says *tradition* means "a handing down or on, to hand over, deliver" (147). Perhaps it would be good to distinguish between the different **kinds** of traditions of which the Bible speaks. (1) There are the traditions of men (Col. 2:8). This would include the vain imaginations of superstition and darkness. (2) There were the traditions of Judaism which were of human origin (Mark 7:7-13) and which were bound upon men **as if** they were as authoritative as God's Word. (3) There are traditions that develop of doing a thing God commanded in some way which He has not specified. (4) There are also the **traditions** given by the apostles, which tradition we are to faithfully follow.

It is not only important to note the standard set forth in Romans 16:17 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, but it is equally important to notice the **authority that underlies the command** to withdraw. It is to be "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 The. 3:6). When discipline is admin-

istered, it rests upon divine authority, not human emotion, subjective feelings, or popular vote. Likewise, there is a specific **action** that is to take place. We are to *mark*, *withdraw*, and/or *turn away*. This author confesses his inability to disassociate the action of withdrawal from some degree of judging. When we consider the **standard**, the **authority**, and the **command to withdraw** as a unit, there is no way we can get around our obligation and responsibility to judge both the actions and the individuals who are participating in those actions. If we claim that we can only judge actions, then wherein is the authority to take action against the individual? No, we judge more than the action; we judge the ones participating in that action as worth of discipline. Such judging is correct.

Fourth, we are to “discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:12ff). The full context of this admonition is located in Hebrews 5:11-14:

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food is for fullgrown men, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.

Please observe the following relative to our subject of study. First, there is a difference between good and evil, pluralism, relativism and situation ethics notwithstanding. We noted in our introduction the concentrated effort on the part of society to make all moral actions equal, with no distinction between that which is right and that which is wrong. The Bible opposes such thinking. God’s inspired writers spoke of (1) the works of the flesh as opposed to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-23), (2) that which is clean and that which is unclean (2 Cor. 6:17-18), and (3) that which is light and that which is darkness (Eph. 5:8). When we seek to discern between good and evil, we are doing what the Bible itself does. Hence, such judging is in accord with God’s Word. Second, any failure to make such a distinction is an indication, not of maturity, love, and patience (as pluralism would have you believe), but rather an indication of immaturity. Such are in need of “milk” and not “solid meat” (Heb. 5:12). Discerning between good and evil is judgment that is correct.

Fifth, we are to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (1 The. 5:21-22). The admonition to first "prove all things" requires judgment to "hold fast that which is good" and "abstain from every form of evil." Each part of these two verses demands some sort of examination and scrutiny of both actions and individuals.

Sixth, we must beware of false teachers. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do *men* gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Mat. 7:15-16). When we are cautious and careful with regard to men who do not "handle aright the word of truth" we are, to a certain degree, judging them. Implied in this passage is (1) the responsibility on our part to examine the *fruit* of each and every teacher, and (2) to determine by that fruit whether such a one is a "false prophet" or a faithful teacher of God's Word. Once we have determined whether the individual is a false teacher, we have, in effect, judged the individual as having placed himself in the category of the lost, as per Matthew 7:21-23. Judging an individual as a "false teacher" is correct judging.

Seventh, we must not cast our "pearls before swine" or give "that which is holy unto the dogs" (Mat. 7:6). Before we can fulfill this admonition of our Lord, it is imperative that we *judge* an individual as to whether or not he belongs in the class of individuals referred to by our Lord as *dogs* or *swine*. *Dogs* signify people who spurn, oppose, and abuse the Word of God. They meet the Word of God like a growling dog (cf., Phi 3:2; 2 Pet. 2:22; Rev. 22:15). *Swine* denotes those who would trample underfoot the precepts of God. Such are people of impurity of life; those who are corrupt, polluted, profane, obscene, and sensual; those who would not know the value of the Gospel, and who would tread it down as swine would pearls (cf., 2 Pet. 2:22; Pro. 11:22). Jesus tells us that we are not to waste our time with those violent and abusive people who would growl and curse us, nor to those especially debased and profligate who would not perceive the value of the Gospel, who would trample it down and turn and abuse us. To fulfill this admonition of our Lord there must be some degree of judging of character. This kind of judging is correct.

CONCLUSION

We have sought to provide a biblical answer to the question presented by Paul in Romans 14:10. Having examined (1) Judgment in Context, (2) Judgment that is Condemned, and (3) Judgment that is Correct; perhaps it would be good to close with a consideration of the Judgment that is Coming. The theme of the New Testament is this: “Jesus has come, and He is coming again.” His first coming was a coming of mercy, with the purpose of “seek[ing] and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). When Jesus said, “I came not to judge, but to save,” He defined the purpose of His first coming. Though His purpose was to save, He most certainly judged both individuals and actions in the process. He pronounced a *woe* on the hypocritical Jews and offered salvation to the penitent thief on the cross. We must not lose sight of the purpose for which Jesus came to this earth: to save lost humanity. However, there is a day coming when Jesus will come again. This time He will be coming in judgment. The time for mercy will have come and gone; it will be a time for judgment.

So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12).

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

The young man was swimming alone at his favorite swimming hole. Underestimating his own strength, he swam out too far into the deep, and was struggling to make it back to the bank. He would have drowned had it not been for a passing hunter who saw his situation and rescued him from the waters. A few weeks passed by, and this same young man got in trouble with the law. When the time for his hearing and punishment had arrived, he was relieved to see that the Judge was that same man who had saved him from drowning in the not too distant past. The Judge was severe. After hearing the evidence, the Judge pronounced the sentence and fine. The young man could not understand, and said, “But your honor, I’m the young man you saved from drowning. Why are you treating me so severely now?” The Judge answered, “Young man, I was your savior then; I’m your judge now.” My friends,

Jesus is your Savior now. There is a day coming when He will be your Judge. Please let His Word judge your life now, make appropriate response, and submit to His will, that His mercy may save you in the day of judgment.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Bloom, Alan. *The Closing Of The American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988.
- "Colleges With Religious Ties Must Balance Secular And Spiritual Interests." *Dallas Morning News* 14 Sep 1999: A18-19.
- Deaver, Roy. *Romans: God's Plan For Man's Righteousness*. Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary, 1992.
- Murray, John. "The Epistle To The Romans." *The New International Commentary On The New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984.
- Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*. Vol. 4. "The Epistles Of Paul." Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931. 6 vols.
- Vine, W. E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1961.
- Whiteside, R. L. *Commentary On Romans*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, n.d.
- Woods, Guy N. "A Voice From The Past." *Contending For The Faith*. Ed. David P. Brown. July 1997.

“IS CHRIST DIVIDED?”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:13

Michael C. Shepherd



Michael Shepherd is a native Alabamian. He attended the International Bible College in Florence, Alabama. Michael has preached for the Westside Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, for the last ten years. He speaks on numerous lectureships and in gospel meetings each year.

Michael and his wife Luverne have two children: Eunice and Michelle.

PREFACE

Questions are one of the most effective ways of teaching and learning. Great teachers use questions to impart knowledge, provoke thought, and teach the Word of God. Questions are designed to cause one to think and evaluate information, from the very first question in Genesis 3:1 to the very last question in Revelation 17:7.

The theme of this lectureship *Great New Testament Questions* causes us to admit, confess, and acknowledge their importance, but also gives us the opportunity to analyze and discuss the answers. It is our prayer that the question that has been assigned to me will be profitable in its application to those of us living today.

INTRODUCTION

The question, “Is Christ Divided?” is especially appropriate and challenging today in view of the existence of thousands of religious sects, cults, doctrines, and denominations that are in the world today. It is interesting that all of these religious persuasions claim to be various ways of getting to heaven, yet they are so different:

1. Different names
2. Different ways of worship
3. Different in organization
4. Different days of worship
5. Different men started them

6. Different times they were started
7. Different places of origination
8. Different plans of salvation
9. Different faiths
10. Different missions
11. Different destinations
12. Different headquarters

Certainly, Christ is not divided. Those who follow Him are not to be divided. When people are divided, this means that some of them are not following Christ.

IS CHRIST DIVIDED?

This query was first raised by the apostle Paul and directed to a divided congregation—the Corinthian church. What Paul addresses with the brethren at Corinth should have put this question to rest. This is really a rhetorical question in that it contains a built-in answer. We sincerely plead with, as we pray for, every recipient of this dissertation to read every essay carefully and honestly in the fear of the judgment (Heb. 9:27) and eternity which faces each one of us (Mat. 25:46).

The Bible is God's perfect pattern by which we get divine instructions. Jesus said, "Learn of me" (Mat. 11:29), and it is therefore essential that we look to Christ for direction in religious matters. Those directions have been revealed to us. The righteousness of God has been revealed (Rom. 1:17). For us to know that God approves, accepts, or acknowledges any religious matter, that information has to be published in the pages of Inspiration.

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

The question, "Is Christ Divided?" comes from 1 Corinthians 1:13. In the first letter that Paul wrote to these brethren, he dealt with a problem in each of the sixteen chapters. The occasion of the first epistle lies upon the very surface of the letter from members of the household of Chloe. Paul makes it plain that word had been brought to him regarding the Corinthian's contentions, and he identifies the source. Now, because these brethren were divided, that very attitude would cause other problems.

Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ *our*

Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house of* Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect (1:1-17).

1 Corinthians 1:10

Here Paul sets forth the answer to the assigned question. Let us notice each phrase within this marvelous verse.

“Now I beseech you, brethren.” Paul is appealing for unity among brethren. Various problems troubled the Corinthian brethren, including division.

“By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This appeal for unity is what Jesus Christ Himself authorized and commanded. Paul does not emphasize his apostolic authority, he rather begs them, by the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

“That ye all speak the same thing.” Those who were departing from this united proclamation must return to speaking the Truth. All the Corinthians had heard the same Gospel (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:6-7; 4:15; 15:1-4); if all had continued therein, unity would have continued. Brethren are to be directed by the teachings of the Holy Spirit, not one’s own thoughts.

“And that there be no divisions among you.” The Greek term translated “divisions” refers to a faction or spirit within the church

itself. Division is sin and those who cause division are guilty (Pro. 6:16-19; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 5:19-21).

“But that ye be perfectly joined together.” They were to restore the perfect unity of the body of Christ. This requirement—that the church be perfectly joined together—translated the present active subjunctive verb *be* and the periphrastic perfect passive participle *perfectly joined together*. The present views action as continuing while the perfect views action as completed in the past once and for all and not needing to be repeated. It, thus, carries the meaning, “You may continue to be perfectly joined together” (i.e., you were perfectly joined together in the past, and you are to continue to be such). Factions and divisions must be removed; differing individuals must come together; strife must end!

“You must have the same mind.” The brethren at Corinth were to have the same thoughts and same attitudes. They were to be united in both the inner state of mind as well as in the outer exhibition of it. Mind is a particular way of thinking: The mind, attitude, way of thinking, as well as the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being, specifically the Christian attitude or way of thinking.

“You must have the same judgment.” *Judgment (gnome)* is that which is thought or known, one’s mind; view, judgment. When people have the same mind and judgment about the doctrine and structure of the Lord’s church, unity is the natural result. Brethren at Corinth were to be united in their thinking concerning the instruction they had received in the Gospel.

Why They Should Be Unified

Paul now will give the reasons why the brethren at Corinth should be unified. The plea for unity in 1 Corinthians 1:10 is predicated upon what Paul had already said in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. He said it was “through the will of God” (1:1)—that is, under the authority of Christ. Paul did not seek to dominate them but to be their fellow helper in joyous service (2 Cor. 1:24) and to encourage their perfection (2 Cor. 13:9).

Paul says they have been “called *to be* saints” (1 Cor. 1:2) and that they have called on “the name of Jesus Christ” (1:2). That means that they have obeyed the Gospel (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 4:15). They had received grace and peace from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:3).

Paul says that the grace of God had been given to them, and it is by God's grace they were called (1:4). They had been enriched in all utterance and knowledge (1:5), and they were confirmed in the testimony of Jesus Christ by miracles authenticating the message which Paul preached (1 Cor. 1:6; cf., Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4).

The Corinthian brethren lacked no spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1:7; 12:1-14). Paul tells them that through those spiritual gifts they were equipped to remain faithful to Christ until His Second Coming (1 Cor. 1:7-8; 11:26).

God Will "Confirm You unto the End" (1 Cor. 1:8)

Paul says that God, who is faithful, had called them into the fellowship of His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (1:9). Paul presents the idea of what the church once was and what it should be again in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. What the church should be had been ignored or laid aside by some at Corinth. Now the church needed to be restored to its true nature to be pleasing to God.

Paul lists fourteen affirmations in these first nine verses to answer the question of verse thirteen: "Is Christ Divided?"

"Is Christ divided?" You know the answer: No! Then why are you? Divisions depict a divided Christ. Paul appeals to Christ's authority to substantiate first his apostleship (1:1). This fact establishes his apostolic authority. Paul was called by Christ; therefore, he was under the authority of Christ (1:1; 9:27). Paul also appealed to Christ's authority when he says "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:10). Jesus Christ is the one that says, "No Divisions!"

JESUS' PRAYER FOR UNITY: JOHN 17

Jesus prayed about the unity of Christians before going to the cross. Religious divisions mock our Lord's prayer for unity. As one looks at the question, "Is Christ Divided?" and then looks at the divisions in the religious world today, he might be made to believe that Jesus Christ *is* divided, or Jesus had something to do with the divisions that exist today. Unity starts with Christ Himself and is produced by the Word of God.

A couple of questions are in order: (1) Is Christ divided? (2) Are God and Jesus divided?

Jesus came to do the Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38-40) and not seek His own will (John 5:30).

The verbal environment in which Jesus prayed is that God the Father and God the Son be glorified (John 17:1). Jesus uses the words *glory*, *glorify*, and *glorified* eight times in His prayer, showing the certain type of oneness that exists between Him and His Father. This is the type of unity that is to exist in the religious world today.

Jesus said, "I and *my* father are one" (John 10:30). When you look at Jesus, you see God (14:9). Jesus said, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (8:19), and to receive Jesus is to receive the Father (Mark 9:37). To honor Jesus is to honor the Father (John 5:23). Jesus taught that He and the Father are not divided (cf., Mark 3:24-25).

We see Jesus' ultimate and universal authority in John 17:2. Jesus has all authority (Mat. 28:18). He offers salvation (Mark 16:15-16) and eternal life (John 3:36; 17:3) to all those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9).

Jesus' Prayer for His Immediate Disciples (John 17:6-19)

Jesus prayed that His apostles may know, keep, and believe the truth no less than nine times in this prayer. He made reference to the Word of truth in the Scriptures (17:1, 6, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20). Keeping God's Word is a condition of biblical unity. The apostles continued in fellowship with Christ, and thus with the Father, as is noted by, "They have kept thy word." Jesus did not intend for the twelve apostles to preach different doctrines. Instead He prayed that they would be one, and He expects that same kind of oneness from those who preach today.

Receiving God's Word is a condition of biblical unity (17:8). Men must do today what the apostles did and believe the Word of God.

Jesus' Prayer for Future Believers to Be One (John 17:20-26)

Oneness is produced as a consequence of God's revelation to mankind. Jesus prayed that the hearers of the sacred message should be one. Certainly, if the hearers hear many different messages, it is impossible to be one.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (17:20).

Unity for which Christ prayed is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Paul affirms this truth by saying, "So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). As long as followers of Christ are led to faith by the written Word, Jesus' prayer will be appropriate. Unity is with those through whom God has

revealed His message (as the message given by Jesus to the apostles). There is no way that anyone could misunderstand that for which Jesus prayed.

Jesus prayed: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (17:21). Jesus and His Father serve as an example of the kind of oneness that Jesus desires His people to possess. What kind of unity did Jesus and the Father have? Did they speak different things? Did they do and practice different things? No, indeed! The Godhead was one in purpose, in action, and in Word (Col. 2:9; 1 John 5:7-8).

We see the unity that exist not only between God and the Son, but now the disciples are also included. They too are to be one with God and Christ. There is to be no more divisions among the disciples than there is between the Father and the Son. In God and Christ there is unity! When some are in Christ and some are not, there will surely be division.

There is nothing more contrary to the prayer of Jesus than a divided condition among His people. Such division is testimony to the world that something is wrong, while unity is indeed testimony to the world that God sent His Son into the world to save the world. Religious division is a real cause of infidelity. If all professed believers would put aside their own likes and dislikes, and stand united on the Bible, then we would have influence and success in convincing unbelievers. Also, Christ’s prayer would be answered.

JESUS’ PLAN FOR UNITY CAN BE SEEN FROM EPHESIANS 4:1-6

If the purpose of all men would be to return to this simple, yet perfect, plan of God, unity would be possible. The Bible is God’s perfect pattern by which to build Christ’s church and the Christian life. If this plan was accepted and followed by all professing believers today, there would be no divisions, no rivaling groups or religious parties, no strife and no factions. This divine plan for unity contains seven essential links, and in these we find the only basis for Christian unity.

God’s One-derful Plan

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Here we find the Holy Spirit’s plan for unity. These seven pillars of unity are the undergirding of the super-structure of the *oneness* of Christianity. As we study this text, we will see that in the very middle of God’s plan for unity in Christ. Now if Christ is divided, then every one of these fundamental links (*ones*) will be more than one. If the world would accept this plan today, there would be no divisions, no rivaling groups of religious parties, and no strife and factions.

God’s plan for man is characterized by distinctive exclusiveness. The God of the Bible is not a god among many gods. The Christ of the Bible is not a christ among many christs. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is not a spirit among many spirits. The hope of the Bible is not a hope among many hopes. The faith of the Bible is not a faith among many faiths. The baptism of the Bible is not a baptism among many baptisms. The church of the Bible is not a church among many churches. The message of the Bible (the Gospel of Christ) is not a message among many soul-saving messages. The Bible is not a book among many books. The Bible talks about the God, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Gospel, the hope, the faith, and the church.

God’s platform for unity of all believers has seven unique, distinctive planks—each being absolutely essential! No other link can be added; and none of these can be ignored or obliterated!

The Seven Links Connected

Before an analysis of the seven are given, Paul tells how these links may be held together. “I...beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (4:1). This is **unity of vocation**.

When those who claim to be Christians walk in an unworthy manner, they destroy the unity for which Jesus prayed. The Ephesians were to walk worthy in this vocation of Christianity. At one time they had been walking unworthy (2:1-13), but they had changed; they had a new vocation!

Vocation means “a calling.” A man’s calling signifies his trade or occupation in life. It demands the idea of that which his life is centered around. Our vocation of calling is Christianity. That vocation demands we live in a certain way, and when we become a Christian, we agree to live that way.

Paul also describes the Spirit that must characterize this worthy walk (4:2). This is unity **with brethren**.

We must have the proper attitude toward brethren for unity to exist. The words in verse two are important to our understanding the unity that exists with brethren. *Lowliness* relates to humility. *Meekness* is “strength under control” and includes suffering wrongfully for Christ’s sake. It is that unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind, which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults of others. *Longsuffering* means “slow to anger and patience.” *Forbearing one another* explains what it means to be longsuffering. It is to be patient with the faults and weaknesses of others. All of this is motivated by love!

Unity of determination (4:3). It takes determination to maintain the kind of unity God demands. *Endeavouring* means “to make haste, give diligence, and to exert one’s self.” Unity is something we must *keep*. *Keep* means “to watch over, preserve, and guard carefully.” A failure to heed this admonition often creates divisions among brethren. These Ephesians were to endeavour to preserve the unity (the oneness) of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The basis of this unity is found in verses 4-6.

For us to rid ourselves of divisions in and outside of the church, we must embrace the seven ones of unity. Notice these seven ones:

One body	—	unity in organization
One spirit	—	unity in life
		unity in God’s Word
One hope	—	unity in goal
		unity in aspiration
		unity in desire
		unity in expectation and purpose
One Lord	—	unity in authority
One faith	—	unity in message
		unity in doctrine
		unity in speech
One baptism	—	unity in practice
		unity in induction
One God	—	unity in worship

This is God’s One-derful Plan. This is the great prayer of Jesus in John 17. Question: “Is Christ Divided?” No! No! No! It is man; it is the

world; it is denominationalism that makes the attempt to slice Christ into pieces.

There must be **unity of organization**, because there is “one body.” This one body is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23); and all the saved are *added* to this one church (Acts 2:47). By accepting this truth that there is only one spiritual body, we are assured of unity of organization even though some teach that there are many different bodies and different heads as well. The Bible emphatically teaches that there is just one body! Notice Paul’s statement, “He is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). There is only one body, which is the one church, of which Jesus Christ is the only head. Paul wrote, “But now *are they* many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). To spell it out fully, he added, “Now are ye the body of Christ, and members in particular” (12:27). Jesus had promised, “I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). He purchased only one church with His blood (Acts 20:28), and thus He gave Himself for that one church (Eph. 5:25): the church of Christ.

This one church, the church of Christ, must be scripturally organized with elders and deacons and without any earthly headquarters. Denominationalism is a division and rival to God’s plan of organization and thus His plan of salvation (Eph. 2:16). It does not answer Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17:20-21. Imagine what the practice of Ephesians 4:4 would do to the concept of denominationalism. It would cause all man-made Churches to cease—thus, leaving only the Lord’s church.

There must be **unity of life**, because there is “one spirit.” As the natural body is animated by one spirit, so is the spiritual body—the church. This one spirit directs the activity of the one body, not through latter-day revelations, but rather through that revelation which was “once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Paul again says, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). The Christian life is in harmony with all others in the body of Christ while we are “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Thus, the one spirit promotes peace and unifies us in that one life in Christ!

One spirit emphasizes the **unity of revelation**. The Holy Spirit is a divine person and is responsible for revealing the basis for unity (1 Cor. 2:7-13; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). He made it possible to have the unity of the *one faith* (Eph. 4:13). Paul said that there is only one Spirit! If what is going

on in the denominational world is approved of God, then there must be more than one Spirit. Whose *Spirit* are we to believe?

There must be **unity of purpose**, because there is “one hope.” This is that heavenly goal which serves as “an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Heb. 6:19). Thus, the eyes of each saint looks “for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5). Despite this, there are religious groups that deny we can ever get to heaven for the fulfillment of this hope. In this one hope we find the unity of purpose. This one hope pertains to the future (Rom. 8:23-25; 1 John 3:2-3). Hope enables us to endure stedfast unto the end and lifts us up when discouragement arises. The ultimate hope of every Christian is heaven.

There must be **unity of authority**, because there is “one Lord.” There can never be unity among those who recognize a diversity of authorities. Jesus Christ is Lord! He has all authority (Mat. 28:18)! If all recognized Jesus Christ as the **sole** source of authority, all false doctrines would be destroyed. When all are willing to “hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5) and “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Pet. 3:15), then true Christian unity can be attained.

There must be **unity of speech**, because there is “one faith.” This one faith is that one body of truth which is designed to make the man of God “complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17—ASV). This is our basis for unity of doctrine and refers to the body of saving truth (the Gospel, the Word, the Faith). When we all preach or teach this “one faith” (Gal. 1:23; Jude 3), then we will all “speak the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10). When we all “*speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), we can have unity of speech.

There must be **unity of practice**, because there is “one baptism.” This one baptism is a burial in water “for the remission of sins” (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:4). It is a baptism “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). This highlights the unity of practice. The true intent of water baptism is for the remission of sins, to be saved, upon which the Lord adds us to the church of Christ. The religious world is divided over what baptism is, why it is to be practiced, and to whom it is to be administered. The one faith settles that. Unity of induction is achieved when all enter into Christ in the same way.

There must be **unity of worship**, because there is one God. How can there be many ways to worship when there is only one object of worship? All that we know or may know about worshiping this one God, we must learn through a study of the “one faith.” The Father has

revealed in His Word how men are to worship Him. The New Testament reveals five aspects of worship:

Singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16-17)

Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2)

Partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-29)

Teaching God's Word (Acts 2:42)

Praying (Acts 2:42)

When we all worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), we shall be united in our worship.

God our Father is the source of unity. Christ's prayer in John 17 was answered on Pentecost of Acts 2, and God's obedient children have been inevitably and automatically united since that time (1 John 1:3-7). Christian unity exists now and has existed every moment since the first Christians were made.

IS CHRIST DIVIDED?

Christ is not divided, and those who follow him are not to be divided. When people are divided it simply means either that some of them are not following Christ, or it could mean that none of them are following Christ. Even common sense cannot endorse the divided state of religion. We must believe that God is in no way responsible, because He is the author of peace, not confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

God has given the divine solution to the problems confronting the divided religious world:

The	ONE God
Sent the	ONE Jesus Christ
Who sent the	ONE Spirit
Who give us the	ONE Faith
That teaches the	ONE Baptism
That ushers us into the	ONE Church
Wherein we enjoy the	ONE Hope

If we all teach the same thing, there would be no divisions. So, why do we not teach the same thing to everyone since we all have the same Bible that says the same thing to everyone.

CONCLUSION

May we consider the religious situation as it is? The world is lost in sin. Men who claim to believe the Bible are tragically divided into thousands of different religious bodies. In the midst of it all, there are still those who are pleading for "unity in Christ Jesus" upon the terms

of the Gospel of Christ. The noble plea of the church of Christ in your community is for a complete return to the Bible. We plead with men to turn away from Romanism and Protestantism and to restore the church of the New Testament. We call upon men to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent; to do Bible things in Bible ways; to have no creed but Christ, no name but the divine name, and no book but the Bible; to do what the Bible says to do, and in the way the Bible says to do it; to do nothing in matters religious excepting that for which there is a “thus saith the Lord.” This is God’s plan for unity—God’s One-derful Plan!

There being only one church, the Bible emphasizes repetitiously the reasons for and importance of unity:

1. Unity is good and pleasant (Psa. 133:1).
2. God hates the sin of discord (Pro. 6:16-19).
3. Christ prayed for unity (John 17:20-21).
4. Inspiration commands unity (1 Cor. 1:10).
5. Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:11-13).
6. Division is a mark of carnality (1 Cor. 3:1-3).
7. Division is contrary to the doctrine of Christ (Rom. 16:17-18).
8. The early church was united (Acts 4:32).
9. Division is destructive (Mark 3:24-25).
10. Christ died for unity (Eph. 2:16).
11. Division will keep one out of heaven (Gal. 5:19-21).
12. We are to strive together, not apart, for the faith of the Gospel (Phi. 1:27).
13. God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).
14. The Holy Spirit desires unity (Eph. 4:1-6).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“O DEATH, WHERE IS THY STING?”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:55

Michael McDaniel



Michael McDaniel has been preaching the Gospel full time for eighteen years. He preached his first sermon at fifteen at his home congregation in Dyer, Tennessee, and graduated from Memphis School of Preaching at the age of twenty. He has done local work in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri. He is presently working with the Central Church of Christ in Caruthersville, Missouri.

Mike is the editor of the best-selling two-volume set: *Expositions of the Expositor*—J. Winfred Clark. He is an instructor for the Online Academy of Biblical Studies.

Mike is married to the former Martha Wallace, and they have two children, Ryan and Kayla.

INTRODUCTION

Dalton Key was once given a business card which had a picture of a hearse on one side. The caption read, “You may tie your shoestrings in the morning, but the undertaker may untie them before night” (20).

Death is our enemy. “The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death” (1 Cor. 15:26). Until that time, death is the common enemy of every person, whether young or old, male or female, righteous or unrighteous. Everywhere we look, there are reminders of its presence: the ringing of the telephone in the middle of the night, the obituary section of the morning paper, or the funeral procession we meet on the street. As David said, “Truly *as* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, *there is* but a step between me and death” (1 Sam. 20:3).

It has been said that there are two things which man cannot view with a steady gaze—one is the sun, the other is death. Job’s friend, Bildad, described death as the “king of terrors” (Job. 18:14). Death is fearful because it is an untried adventure which none of us have experienced. A bizarre example of the fear of death is the Winchester Mansion in Santa Clara, California. Mrs. Winchester, the widow of the man who invented the Winchester repeating rifle, left behind a monstrosity of a mansion. She supposed that as long as she kept adding on to her mansion, she would not die. She had hundreds of stained glass

windows installed, inverted pillars, and almost countless rooms. She kept on adding to the house until it covered several acres of floor space. She slept in a different room each night, so, if death entered the house, it could not find her. At last death did enter the blue room where she slept one night, and all her efforts to escape were for naught. Only Jesus can prepare us to face death. Paul wrote in our text:

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

These words point to the end of death. Verse 54 includes a quotation from Isaiah 25:8. Isaiah foretold of victory over our enemy. Then in verse 55, Paul utilizes the words of Hosea 13:14. He sings a song of triumph over death and the grave.

When did death become our enemy? What happens to us at death? What has Christ done to defeat death? What is meant by the removal of the sting? What will happen at Christ's return that will mean the end of death? These are the main questions we seek to answer.

THE REALITY OF DEATH

It is important for us to realize that death entered this world as the result of Satan and sin. Paul wrote, "The sting of death *is* sin" (1 Cor. 15:56). Death entered our world as the consequence of the sin of the first couple in the Garden of Eden. When God created man, it was His desire that man would be truly happy. He put him into a situation where he was in possession of everything he needed to make him happy. He was free from everything that could make him unhappy, except as he by his own wrong choice would make it so. Man lacked for nothing in the Garden. It was an ideal, perfect situation. At this stage of his life, man endured no pain, no sorrow, no tears, no disease, no worries, and no death. God loved man and wanted him to have this kind of perfect situation. Yet, for man to love and serve Him as He desired, He had to give him freedom of will or choice to not love and serve God (Warren 17-18).

Before the first sin, death was under the dominion of man.

Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put

all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.
But now we see not yet all things put under him (Heb. 2:7-8).

Notice that all things, which would include death, **were** under man's feet, but they are not **now**!

Satan had rebelled against God and become His enemy. He desired to thwart God's cherished plan for man's great destiny. He knew God had forbidden man to eat of the tree of knowledge. Here was God's law. "The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law" (1 Cor. 15:56). Sin is the transgression of God's law. Paul states, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). This author is convinced that the law of sin and death is just what it says. The law of sin and death declares, "You sin, you die." That was God's law first set forth in the Garden of Eden. Paul said, "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (6:23). James made a similar statement in James 1:15: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

It was into a perfect world that the devil entered in Genesis 3 and exercised his powers of bringing death upon all mankind by tempting our first parents to sin. Man, being human, was susceptible to temptation. It was at this point that Satan attacked. Man sinned and was expelled from the garden and from the tree of life. He was separated from God, and that is spiritual death. He was condemned to fatigue, pain, and eventual physical death (Gen. 3:17-19). Death was no longer under man's subjection any more. Man did not live up to his opportunity, for his sin separated him from his Holy Creator. Since then, all have sinned, but God graciously provided a way for us to be saved and to reach our ultimate destiny through the voluntary sacrifice of Christ.

THE RESIDENCE OF THE SPIRIT

The Bible informs us as to the origin and nature of man. Paul teaches that man's whole nature is **body**, **soul**, and **spirit** (1 The. 5:23). The *body* refers to the physical tabernacle of clay in which the immortal part of man resides. The *spirit* of man refers to the immortal part of man. *Spirit* is a **specific** term for that part of man given directly from God (Zec. 12:1; Heb. 12:9) and not susceptible to death. The prophet Daniel said, "I Daniel was grieved **in my spirit in the midst of my body**, and the visions of my head troubled me" (7:15). The *soul* is harder to define because it is a **generic** word which refers to different

things in different contexts. It can be used to describe the whole person as in Exodus 1:5. It can be used to denote the life that animates the physical body as in Psalm 78:50. In other places, *soul* and *spirit* are used interchangeably and seem to refer to the same thing (cf., Luke 1:46-47). In Acts 2:27, it is obvious that *soul* is used to refer to the spirit or immortal nature of the Lord—that part which did not die (Woods, *Questions* 2:101-102). So in most places, any distinction between soul and spirit is very hard to make. However, Hebrews 4:12 states:

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, **piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit**, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Evidently, while such a distinction can be made, this verse also expresses the difficulty of doing it. It is compared to dividing the joints from the marrow.

Understanding some of these things about the nature of man is vital to understanding death. James says, “For **as the body without the spirit is dead**, so faith without works is dead also” (2:26). James tells us that the body without or apart from the spirit is dead. *Death* means separation. Death involves the separation of the spirit from the body. Life is their union; death is their separation. Throughout the Word of God, the departure of the spirit is regarded as the time or occasion of death. Abraham died when he gave up the ghost (Gen. 25:8). Rachel died when her soul departed from her body (35:18). The child for which the prophet Elijah prayed was dead and revived when his soul returned to his body (1 Kin. 17:22). The conclusion to be drawn from these Scriptures and others is that death refers to the separation of the spirit (or soul, when it is used synonymously) from the body. Life is the union of the spirit with the body; death is their separation.

Solomon says, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). The body is mortal (Rom. 8:11). It returns to the dust from whence it came (Gen. 3:19). However, the inward man does not perish as does the body (2 Cor. 4:16). The inward part of man does not continue its union with the body at death. After our earthly existence, a separation takes place. The body returns to the earth, but the spirit returns to the Father of spirits who gave it (Heb. 12:9). The Sadducees denied the spirit (Acts 23:8), but Jesus plainly demonstrated to them that those whose bodies

had long since decayed were themselves **still alive** because, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" "God is not the God of the dead, but **of the living**" (Mat. 22:32).

Since the spirit of man does live on after death, we are ready to ask the question: Where does the spirit go when one dies? Some say the spirit is unconscious in the grave. Scriptures which speak of death as a *sleep* are used to support this position. *Sleep* when used of death, has to do with the state of the body, not the soul. Advocates of *soul sleeping* overlook the very meaning of death. This view often puts the body and the soul together in the grave. However, the meaning of *death* is separation. Death is the separation of the soul or spirit from the body. How then can they remain together in the grave? The fact is that Ecclesiastes 12:7 affirms the act of separation, of the body going to one place, and the spirit going to another place designed of God.

The experience of the man related in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, probably Paul, clearly teaches conscious existence outside of the body.

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) (12:2-3).

Paul says there were things *seen* and *heard* which could have been experienced "out of his body." Therefore, he teaches us that it is possible for one to see and hear when "out of the body" as well as "in the body." If this were impossible, then he would have known *automatically* that he was in the body when these things happened. How devastating these thoughts are to the "soul sleeping" doctrine! (Woods, *Questions* 1:121).

Where are the dead? Have they already gone to their ultimate eternal destiny, either to Heaven or to Hell? Many teach just that. However, it is at the Day of Judgment that Jesus will say *come* or *depart* (Mat. 25:31-46). If people were sentenced at death and sent immediately and directly to Heaven or Hell, **there would be no purpose for the judgment!** If we go straight to our eternal reward at death, **why even have a resurrection?** The incorruption, immortality, glory, and power of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 will occur *after* the resurrection. We do not know fully the nature of our new *spiritual body*, but for some reason **it is necessary**.

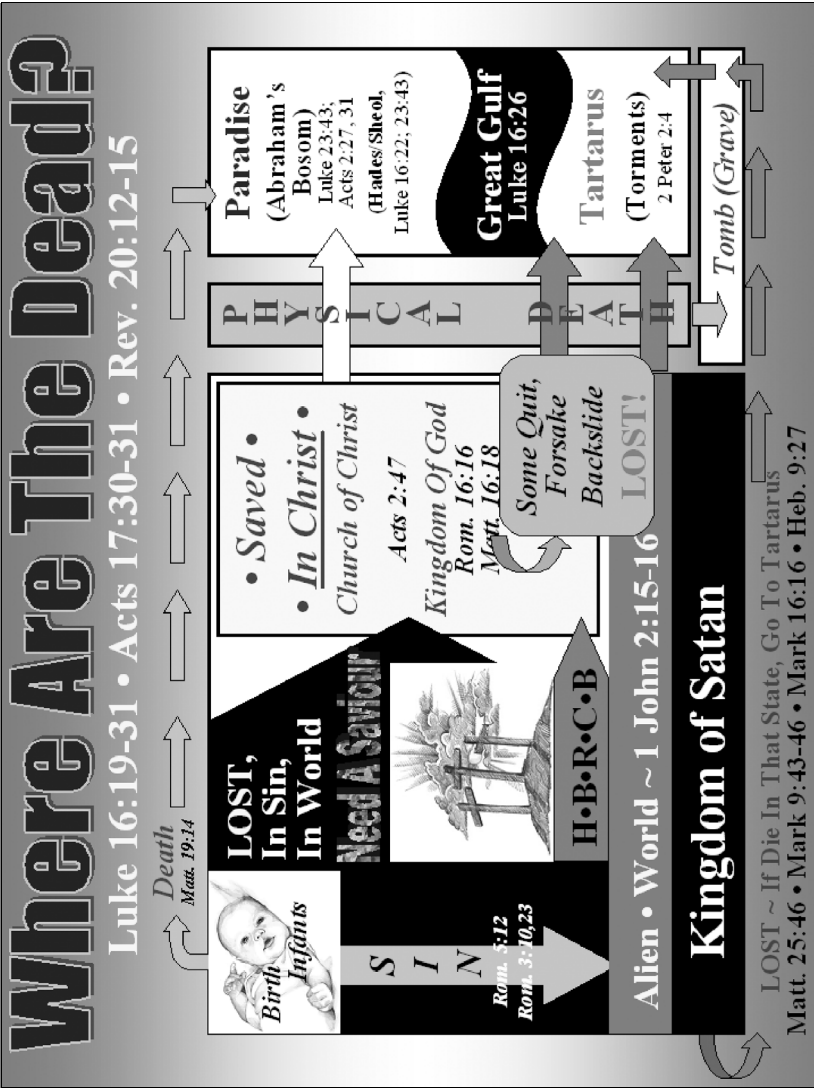
Where then is the residence of the spirit after death? In Luke 16:19-31 we have the record concerning the rich man and Lazarus after death. In this passage the Lord gives us a glimpse of the unseen place of the dead called *Hades*, the place departed spirits go to await the resurrection, the judgment, and their eternal reward. The Hebrew, *Sheol*, and the Greek, *Hades*, are words used to refer to the place of disembodied spirits. When the King James Version was translated, the English word *Hell* meant both the unseen place of the dead (*Hades*) and the place of eternal punishment after death (*Gehenna*). So the King James Version translators used *Hell* for both words. The American Standard Version translators of 1901, knowing that *Hell* no longer has the meaning of the Greek word *Hades*, and realizing that there were two different words and concepts in the original Greek (*Hades* and *Gehenna*), gave *Hades* an English spelling and left it in the text where it occurs.

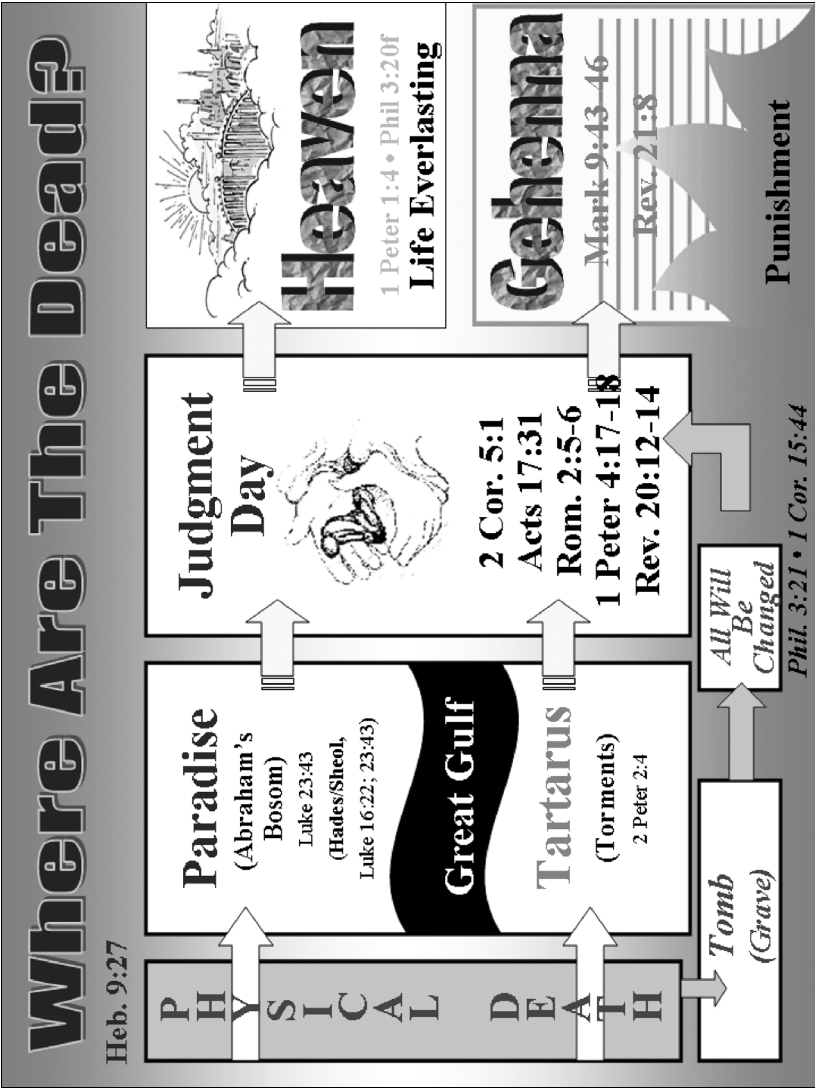
Some say this is a parable. However, it does not have the form or characteristics of a parable. For instance, it uses proper names of people known to have existed. Even if this were a parable, remember that parables are always based on things that did or could happen. So if this were a parable, it would still be an actual picture of life after death! To deny it is to deny God's Word!

In Luke 16, please consider that Jesus used specifics to make it clear that He is describing the experiences of disembodied spirits. The rich man died and was buried. His body was still in the ground when he realized he was in a conscious state of torment. After death, the rich man and Lazarus were in very different circumstances, but both were in a conscious state of existence. The rich man was in a place of torment while the beggar was in a place of comfort and happiness called Abraham's bosom. There was a great gulf fixed between the two compartments, so fixed that eternity-bound souls could not cross from one side to the other. It should also be pointed out that the circumstances of the rich man and Lazarus were circumstances **prior** to the resurrection and judgment. Their bodies were still in the ground (16:22), and life was still continuing on the earth (16:27-31).

To summarize, death is the separation of the spirit from the body (Jam. 2:26). At death, the body returns to the dust of the earth, and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecc. 12:7). The temporary place which the Lord has designed for the spirit is the Hadean realm. This

intermediate realm has two compartments, Torment or Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4) for the wicked and Abraham’s bosom or paradise (Acts 2:47) for the righteous. This is where the dead are, and where they will remain to await the resurrection, the judgment, and their eternal reward.





People often ask, “What is the use of having a judgment day if the spirits of men are already separated and are being rewarded or punished?” First, a judgment day is necessary so God may convince all that His sentence upon them is just and right (cf., Mat. 25:11, 24, 34-46; 7:21-23). Jude 1:14-15 says:

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

In the final analysis, all will be convinced that the Judge of all the earth will do right.

Second, brother G. C. Brewer believed that our degree of reward could not be properly reckoned until the end of time because our influence for good or evil does not end at death. Our works follow us after death (Rev. 14:13) (260).

Third, while there is some degree of happiness and misery experienced by the disembodied spirits in Hades, the ultimate pleasures and punishments must await the reunion of the spirit with the resurrected body. The emphasis given to the promised resurrection of the body implies that there is something lacking **without the resurrection!** It is when the graves are opened and our bodies are changed (Phi. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:42) that full and eternal rewards are given. At that time, Hades will give up its dead, and death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-14—ASV). There will no longer be a need for this place, as there will be no death; hence no more disembodied spirits to populate it. Its purpose having been fulfilled, Hades will be no more.

THE REMEDY OF CHRIST

What has Christ done to remedy what Adam caused and to conquer Satan and sin, the Devil and death?

Think about His Revelation

Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:10: "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Jesus brought life and immortality to light by revealing how such might be achieved. Gospel obedience is the glorious gist of that revelation. What had been concealed or hidden in ages past has now been made known (Taylor 93). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He also said:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have

done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

A man and his wife were driving through the country one muggy Sunday afternoon. Haze filled the air. Rain was imminent. All at once, they came upon a typical old country cemetery. This particular graveyard had one striking feature. Bordering one side was a gravel road, and on the corner was this sign: "Dead End." What a graphic reminder that is of how some people view this life. To them, their existence on this planet is just a brief drive through time that leads to a dead end. To them, death ends all. However, Jesus revealed that such is not the case.

Think about His Redemption

Hebrews 9:12 says: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*." By the blood shed on the cross, Jesus redeemed man and conquered sin. The old rugged cross that made salvation possible presents one of the most startling paradoxes known to man. As brother George Bailey said:

It was the most tragic event in history, Yet it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened. It was the saddest spectacle mankind ever beheld, Yet by it came the greatest joy. The old rugged cross was Satan's greatest victory, Yet by the cross Satan suffered his most stunning defeat. The cross was the greatest exhibition of Divine Justice, Yet it was the most wonderful demonstration of Divine mercy. It was through the cross that God condemned sin, Yet by it He forgave the sinner. The cross stands for God's hatred of sin, Yet it was the greatest proof of His love for the sinner. The cross was mankind's darkest hour, Yet it was the greatest of all lights. On that day the sun, The SUN, refused to shine at midday, But on that day the sun, the SON, became the light of the world (qtd. in Smith 60-61).

Hebrews 2:14 states: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Jesus used the devil's greatest weapon against him! The law said, you sin, you die. Jesus did not sin. Yet He died so that we might escape the condemnation of the law under which we live through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:25).

Think about His Resurrection

Christ gave man the victory over death by His resurrection from the dead. It is reported that, at the close of the battle of Waterloo, upon

which hung the very destinies of the nations of Europe, the English people were anxiously awaiting news of the result. Their only means of communication was a system of signal lights flashed across the English Channel. The fog became so dense that only a part of the message was made out. It read, "Wellington defeated." The sorrow of the English turned to joy when the fog lifted, and they received the whole message: "Wellington defeated the enemy" (Stacy 92). When Christ was crucified, the disciples wept in thinking that Christ was defeated, but their sorrow turned to joy when they learned of Christ's resurrection. That meant that Christ had been victorious over the devil and death! Christ's revelation and redemption depended upon the resurrection. "Paul declared that 'if Christ be not raised [perfect tense—was raised and *stayed* raised], your faith *is* vain [futile, leading to no valid result]; ye are yet in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17). The Christian religion stands or falls on the evidence for Jesus' resurrection" (Jackson "Notes" 37:11. 4). It declared Christ to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4).

God said, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This verse is the first prophetic announcement of the coming of Christ, His virgin birth, and His mission of overcoming the devil. Christ was born of the seed of woman and not of man. His birth was a virgin birth—hence *her seed*. Satan would bruise the heel of Christ when he nailed Him to the cross, but Christ would bruise his head, give him a blow from which he would never recover, when He rose from the grave. Satan did all that he could to prevent Jesus from entering the world, but years later, a child was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, just as Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2 had predicted. The devil knew this was the one! He used Herod the Great to kill all the male children in Bethlehem, but Jesus was taken to Egypt through God's providence (Mat. 2:11-19). The battle reached a fever pitch as Satan attempted to seize our Lord's allegiance and thwart the scheme of redemption. The battle between the Son of God and the devil raged bitterly throughout Jesus' ministry, but the devil working through Judas, the Jewish leaders, the mob, and the Romans, killed the seed of woman. How happy the devil must have been! He thought he had won! He thought he had prevented Genesis 3:15 from coming to pass. However, what appeared to be certain victory for the devil turned out to be a deathblow to his head when his happiness changed to sorrow,

and Christ was risen from the grave! John presents a beautiful picture of Christ:

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth (Rev. 5:6).

This Lamb looked as if it had been slain.

Interestingly, the verb is in the perfect tense form, suggesting that the *benefits* of that death were perpetual.... Amazingly, this lamb was “standing.” Again, the perfect tense suggests that it stood up and *remained standing* (Jackson “Notes” 37:11. 4).

Our Savior was the slain Lamb, but He is now the standing Lamb. He arose! He stands victorious and so do those who stand with Him (Rev. 17:14)!

Think about His Removal of the Sting

There are different views of the sting. Rex Turner said, “Death still has its sting, and a horrible sting it is. Any person who thinks otherwise has not yet been stung by death” (7). However, is it the case that death still has its sting for everyone? Again, Paul wrote, “The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:56-57). If the sting of death is sin, then those who have taken care of their sin problem have had the stinger removed. If not, why not? As Morris wrote, “Where sin is pardoned, death has no sting. But where sin has not been dealt with, there death is a virulent antagonist” (235). Even though death will not be swallowed up in victory until the resurrection of all (15:55), Paul says in verse 57 that God giveth us the victory through Christ. In *giveth*, he uses the present participle and not the future tense. We are being granted victory every day as Christ’s blood remits our sins (Willis 591).

Jimmy Allen misses it when he says, “Sin’s power is derived from law. Faithful Christians are not under law (Rom. 6:14; 7:1-7). Since they are not under law, they are not held guilty for having violated law. Therefore, there is no sting in death for faithful Christians” (Allen 202). This author believes brother Allen’s conclusion is correct, but his means of reaching it is erroneous. Faithful Christians are not under the law of Moses, but we are under the law of Christ (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2; Jam. 1:25; 2:12). Without law, there is no sin (Rom. 4:15). How then can he say we are not under law? It is true that we are not under the law

of Moses, but it is not true that we are not under any form of law. Could Paul have been any plainer when he said, "Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21)? It is because of the law of Christ, and specifically, God's laws of pardon to the alien sinner and the erring child of God that we can enjoy the remission of our sins. Our obedience to the conditions of the law grants us forgiveness by His wonderful grace.

A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful Spring afternoon. Suddenly out of nowhere a bumblebee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he became petrified. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. However as soon as he let it go, the young son became frantic once again as it buzzed by the little boy. His father saw his panic-stricken face. Once again the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his hand. There still stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "Do you see this?" he said. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you" (Hewett 167). Why does the faithful Christian fear death? Jesus faced it, and Jesus has taken the sting!

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

What will happen at the return of Christ?

There Will Be the Reuniting of the Soul and the Body

It is at Christ's second coming that the Hadean realm will be opened, and the graves will be opened, and the sea shall give up her dead (Rev. 20:13—ASV). The earth and the sea will give up their bodies while Hades shall give up her souls. Jesus shall personally bring the spirits of those in Him with Him (1 The. 4:14). This is the case because Jesus has the keys! "*I am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades—ASV] and of death" (Rev. 1:18). *Keys* is a figure of speech suggesting that one possesses the authority to open (Mat. 16:19). Notice that *keys* is plural, indicating that there is a distinction between death, the state of the body, and Hades, the abode of the soul. Some good brethren suggest that Hades was emptied when Jesus ascended into Heaven following His resurrection, and it is unoccupied today. How can this be harmonized with this passage and Revelation 20:13-14? The truth is that the keys will be used by Christ when the Lord comes with the clouds (Rev. 1:7) to destroy death (1 Cor. 15:24-25) by

emptying both the grave and Hades. Then bodies and souls shall be reunited in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-38), a changing shall take place, and we shall have a new spiritual body. Yet, there will be an identity continuum between our present body, and the new resurrected one (cf., Woods, *Know* 8-25). It will be identical in form to the glorious body of our resurrected Lord (Phi. 3:21).

Among us, there are those who have been duped into thinking that the resurrection is past already (2 Tim. 2:17-18), having occurred in a spiritual way in A.D. 70. They think that the resurrection is simply an allusion to the resurgence of Christianity from an era of persecution. Paul said in Acts 24:15: "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Since this rising involves **both** the just and the **unjust**, the doctrine of "Realized Eschatology" is shown to be false (Jackson, "Notes" 35:6. 4).

There Will Be the Repeal of Death

"The last enemy that shall be abolished is death" (1 Cor. 15:26—ASV). In one sense, Jesus has already abolished death (2 Tim. 1:10). As our forerunner, He has entered heaven (Heb. 6:20) and prepared the way for us. He has helped to remove our fear of death, but in the literal sense, death will not be abolished until Christ's return (Jackson, "Abolished"). Then death and the Hadean world will cease. "And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, *even* the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14—ASV). It is when the graves are opened and our bodies are changed (Phi. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:42) that full and eternal rewards are given. At that time, Hades will give up its dead, and death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-14—ASV). There will no longer be a need for Hades as there will be no death, hence no more disembodied spirits to populate it. Its purpose having been fulfilled, Hades will be no more. It is at this point that death and Hades are destroyed. They are cast into the lake of fire. Since from the final Day of Judgment onward we will be dealing with the eternal state, there will no longer be a need for the Hadean or intermediate state. Since death is the last enemy to be destroyed, Revelation 20:14 must be picturing the end of time when the last enemy of God and the Hadean realm associated with death is done away.

There Will Be the Reward of the Saved

Part of that reward includes the fact that there will be no more death. "And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). Graves will never be dug. Flowers will not be sent. Condolences will not be expressed. Funerals will not be conducted in the land beyond. There are no cemeteries on the hillsides of glory.

Neither will there be any spiritual death. There will be no separation from God. "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God" (Rev. 21:3). In heaven, God's presence will be visibly real to us just as the tabernacle in the wilderness was a visible sign of God's presence with Israel (Lev. 26:11-12) and just as Christ on earth was a visible presence (John 1:14). We shall live and serve in the very presence of His glory. Our every need will be supplied.

There Will Be the Recompense of the Wicked

Our Lord Jesus could not have been any more plain about the fact that ungodly men will go into eternal punishment than He was! "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mat. 25:46). The Bible teaches that there is a place of suffering appointed for the wicked. It is a state of trouble and sorrow (Psa. 116:3), shame and contempt (Dan. 12:2), punishment (Mat. 25:46), torment and anguish (Luke 16:23-24), and suffering (2 The. 1:9). All of these terms imply consciousness. They are meaningless applied to an alleged state of extinction.

The duration of hell is clearly said to be eternal. In Matthew 25:46, the same Greek word is used to describe both the punishment for the wicked and the life or union with God of the righteous. What one is, the other is. It follows therefore that the punishment which the lost will suffer after this life will be as endless as the future happiness of the people of God.

In a recent book published by Star publications titled, *Immortality: Only in Christ*, the author contends that the second death constitutes the events "in which [wicked] man is annihilated" (Collins 44). F. LaGard Smith has been teaching the annihilation view at least since his lectures at Pepperdine in April of 1988. In January of 1994, this scribe wrote him and asked him six simple questions about Hell. In a note dated February 17, 1994, he refused to discuss the subject in private corres-

pondence or to attempt to answer my questions. He told this writer that he hoped some day to share his understanding about death and the afterlife in a book. This author has been praying that this book would never materialize, for he foresaw the damaging effects it could have on the church. Nevertheless, *After Life* (Nashville: Cotswold, 2003) is now being purchased by unsuspecting brethren who may be led astray by his soul-sleeping and extinction doctrines. We must warn our brethren.

Keep in mind that the Bible speaks of the ungodly being consigned to “everlasting fire” (Mat. 18:8), “eternal punishment” (Mat. 25:46), and “everlasting destruction” (2 The. 1:9). Be aware also that the Bible speaks of Hell as being a place of “torment.” Revelation 14:11 describes the “smoke of their torment” as going up forever and ever. This is not the smoke of their annihilation, but “the smoke of their torment” that will go up forever. Friends, the only logical conclusion is that the torment will last as long as the smoke! We know that they will be in conscious torment since, “They have no rest day and night” (Workman 504). Hell is terrible. It was originally prepared for the devil and his angels, but the lost will go there to receive everlasting punishment. God has no choice but to remain true to His holiness and justice and, therefore, punish in Hell all that oppose Him. It is not a question of God being unmerciful; it is a question of His justice and holiness. It should reveal to us how horrible sin really is!

For those who die in a lost condition, death still has its sting. Spiritual death in this life leads to the second death in the next. John says:

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Death is a separation (Jam. 2:26). Hell is spoken of as the second death, because sinners therein will be eternally separated from God (2 The. 1:7-9; Mat. 25:32).

Thankfully, the love of God has provided the means of escape from the penalty of sin. Men are doomed without it. God’s grace is only extended to those who have faith in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess Christ (Acts 8:37), and are baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 22:16).

There was a time when Italy was struggling under the iron rule of European forces. A man named Giuseppe Garibaldi was an Italian patriot, soldier, and freedom fighter who had been forced to flee Italy

to save his life. He went to this country in 1848 and settled in Staten Island, New York, working as a candlemaker. Back in Italy, the people looked to Garibaldi as their only hope. They waited for him to return to Italy and throw off the yoke of the oppressor. When they were carrying prisoners to the dungeons, their friends would whisper in their ears, "Courage, Garibaldi is coming." Men would slip out at night and write on the walls and pavements, "Garibaldi is coming!" In 1860 Garibaldi did come back, and leading a force of a thousand men who were all wearing bright red shirts. He crossed the Italian mainland, took Naples, and defeated the Neapolitans in a decisive battle on the banks of the Volturno River on October 26, 1860. When he approached Naples, the people broke out in a shout, "Garibaldi is coming." He came and broke the chains that bound the country and set her free.

Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also" (John 14:3). Jesus is coming to take care of His last enemy. In that day, death will be swallowed up in victory. What a glorious day that will be!

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Allen, Jimmy. *Survey Of First Corinthians*. Searcy, AR: Jimmy Allen, 1975.
- Brewer, G. C. *Christ Crucified, A Book Of Sermons*. Cincinnati: Christian Leader, 1928.
- Collins, Dyrel. *Immortality: Only In Christ*. Fort Worth: Star, 2002.
- Hewett, James S. *Illustrations Unlimited*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988.
- Jackson, Wayne. "In What Sense Has Christ Abolished Death?" Internet. 3 Feb 2004. Available. <http://www.christiancourier.com/penpoints/christAbolishedDeath.htm>.
- . "Notes From The Margin Of My Bible." *Christian Courier*. 35.6 (1999): 4.
- . "Notes From The Margin Of My Bible." *Christian Courier*. 37.11 (2002): 4.
- Key, Dalton. "Death." *Four State Gospel News*. 38.1 (1999): 1.
- Morris, Leon. *The First Epistle Of Paul To The Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983.
- Sain, Paul. *Visual Sermons For Use With PowerPoint, Transparencies and Computer Presentations* Vol. 1. Computer software. Sain, 2003.
- Smith, Kelby. "The Old Rugged Cross Of Jesus Christ." *The Cross Of Jesus Christ*. Pulaski, TN: Sain, 1994.
- Stacy, John. *Exhort, Brother*. Rutherford, TN: Stacy, 1978.
- Taylor, Robert R. *Studies In First And Second Timothy*. Shreveport: Lambert Book House, n.d.
- Turner, Rex. "Victory Over The Last Enemy Through Our Lord Jesus Christ." *Sound Doctrine*. 8.1 (1983): 5-7.
- Warren, Thomas B. *Our Loving God—A Sun And Shield*. Jonesboro, AR: NCP, 1963.

Willis, Mike. *A Commentary On Paul's First Epistle To The Corinthians*. Fairmount, IN: Cogdill Foundation, 1979.

Woods, Guy N. *Questions And Answers Vol. 1*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1976.

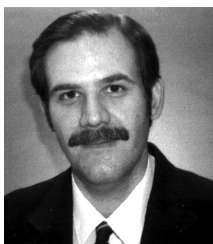
- - -. *Questions And Answers Vol. 2*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1986.

- - -. *Shall We Know One Another In Heaven? And Other Sermons*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1988.

Workman, Gary. "Discussion Forum No. 1-B: Eternal Punishment." *Studies In The Revelation*. Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid, 1984. 492-508.

“WHAT FELLOWSHIP HATH RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH UNRIGHTEOUSNESS?” 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14

Tim Smith



Tim Smith was born in Clay County, Arkansas. He began preaching the gospel, with the encouragement of his maternal grandparents, in 1981. Tim attended the Bellview Preacher Training School and pursued further studies at Alabama Christian School of Religion in Montgomery, Alabama and at satellite classes in various cities. His first full-time work as a preacher was with the church of Christ in McLellan, Florida.

Tim has worked with congregations in Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Missouri, and is presently working with the Enon Church of Christ in Webb, Alabama. He is the editor of *The Enon Endeavor* and is responsible for writing the

poetry of H. L. Gradowith.

Tim is married to the former Freda Sue Gott, and they have one daughter living at home, Amanda. Freda is in her ninth year of teaching elementary school.

The question of fellowship has, for many years, been one around which much controversy has centered. It was addressed in the New Testament in many ways, it presented itself in the beginning of the restoration movement in the United States, and it continues today to be a question to be reckoned with. In the course of this study, we shall endeavor to gain a better understanding of what fellowship is and is not, who may and may not enjoy it with God's approval, the process by which it is withdrawn and restored, and some specific things which destroy fellowship between brethren in our day.

Fellowship is defined by Thayer as: "To come into communion or fellowship, to become a sharer, be made a partner... joint participation, intercourse... a collection, a contribution" (351-52). The idea is that two persons or groups of persons who enter into an agreement, share a common goal and work together to attain it, jointly participate in a given work, and pool their resources or efforts are in fellowship. To illustrate this, we look to the local congregation in a given community.

The fact that they are, as Christians, working together to accomplish the work of God and worshiping together indicates that fellowship exists between them. They have agreed to labor side by side under the oversight of the eldership in an effort to obey the commands of God. They are partners in a common work. They are each participating with the other to realize the common goal.

The assigned text is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and reads as follows:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (6:14-16).

It should be noted that in verses 13-16 questions are put concerning the faithful Christian and an involvement with someone who is not a faithful Christian. Various images are used, but the point of each rhetorical question is the same: The faithful Christian has no business entering into fellowship with anyone or anything that is not a faithful Christian. Can we answer the questions with anything but a negative? What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? None. In fact, the answer to each query posed by the inspired penman is and must be in the negative. The reason is given in verse 16, that being the presence of God within us. How can we expect Him to dwell alongside of His opponents? How can He help us while we walk hand in hand with those who have set themselves to defeat His Will?

The injunctions of the remaining verses of our text give us the positive requirements of fellowship:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (6:17-7:1).

Some interesting questions for those who believe that fellowship is not an important issue would be: How can you come out from among them while walking hand-in-hand with them? How can you be separate while joining yourselves with them? How can you cleanse yourself from their

filthiness while wrapping yourself up with them in the bond of fellowship?

Fellowship may be had with the Father and the Son, for we read, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Fellowship may be had with the Holy Spirit, for we read, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14). Fellowship may be had with the apostles, for we read, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). In this connection, we read again, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Fellowship may be had with faithful saints of God, for we read, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Thus, we fellowship the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the apostles, and the faithful saints of God. As we shall notice, this is the exclusive realm of our fellowship. We shall set forth the fact that faithful Christians may not have fellowship with any one else with the approval of God.

This fellowship that we have is both a working relationship and a relationship which depends upon shared beliefs. Paul wrote, “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, *ye are* God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9). In 2 Corinthians, Paul spoke of the fellowship that was to exist between the apostles and the Corinthians on this wise: “Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (2 Cor. 8:4). This depicts a working relationship which was entered into between Christians who, at the time, were separated by many miles. They agreed to pool their resources and efforts to accomplish the common goal of ministering to the saints. This was a fellowship that exhibited itself in actions. Paul also spoke, “That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom. 1:12). This dealt with another aspect of fellowship, without which fellowship is incomplete—their common faith. He told Timothy, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,

which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). This spoke to the common faith that exists between all the faithful of God. Our fellowship is not solely predicated on what we do together, but also on holding the same truths. So, fellowship is shared by those who act together to accomplish a specific work or a set of godly works and those whose beliefs are in the truth of the Gospel.

There are many who sorely misunderstand or intentionally subvert the biblical teachings concerning fellowship. Some would have us to think that fellowship is predicated solely upon baptism. They contend that when a person obeys the gospel, God adds them to the church and the fellowship (a point so far with which this author does not argue), and that once they are so added they are forever within that fellowship (a point which this writer denies based on the teachings of the New Testament). They argue that, because we cannot be certain of what truth really is, we certainly cannot withdraw fellowship from someone based on our uncertain understanding of what truth is. This is not only false, it is ridiculous. How can we *know* that they are added to the fellowship upon obedience to the gospel and not *know* what God would have us to do thereafter? If we are sure about the one, we may be sure about the other! Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). If we cannot know when to break fellowship, can we know when to extend it? Is it not just as wrong to extend fellowship to those who are not eligible for it as it is to withhold it from those who are eligible for it?

With respect to fellowship and faithfulness, we would do well to learn a lesson from the brethren at Corinth. The record reads:

It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.... Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 6-7).

Their problem, like many of ours today, was that sin was in the camp, and they failed to act properly concerning it. To tolerate sin is to corrupt the church. They should have acted to correct the problem that the sinners involved might be saved and that the purity of the church might be maintained. Paul said that they should have been ashamed of

themselves, but they, like many today, thought themselves to be taking the high road of tolerance. Hear another case:

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev. 2:14-16).

They had sin (false teaching) among them, and they failed to act properly concerning it. Jesus demanded that they repent or lose Him as an ally and face Him as an enemy. How our people need this lesson today. It is our duty as Christians to oppose and no longer extend fellowship to all who have deviated from "the way," whether in word or in deed. Hear again another case:

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (Rev. 2:20).

Their sin was that of harboring and failing to discipline an unrepentant sinner. This unrepentant sinner, like those of our day, spread her sin to others; and, so by the neglect of discipline, the church allowed the sin to infect others who should have been protected by the proper practice of biblical discipline. Brethren, many of our day shall answer for the same offense. As to where the idea that we may tolerate sin, do nothing about it, and even glory in our liberality concerning it came from, this writer does not know. This scribe does, however, know where it did not come from. These false concepts of fellowship will not help the church grow; they will pervert and corrupt it. Churches who fail to discipline may get more people, but they will not produce more Christians. One of the duties of a Christian is to discipline properly, therefore one failing to do so is guilty of violating God's law and is no longer walking in the light (1 John 1:7). A dead animal on the roadside will swell, but who would call this growth? So it is with churches: some will swell because they fail to get the rot of sin from their midst, but in eternal terms they do not grow.

We now turn our attention to the questions of who may and may not be "fellowshipped" by the faithful Christian with the approval of God. It should be noted that we are dealing with the actions of faithful

Christians and with actions that warrant and receive the approval of God. Many claiming to be faithful routinely violate the commands of God with respect to fellowship (and a host of other matters), and we certainly do not uphold nor support them in their sin. The fact that unfaithful Christians extend fellowship unlawfully to those who do not qualify for it changes in no way our lesson.

Who is to be included in the fellowship of the New Testament Church? Those who are included in the fellowship of God are those whom we should include in our fellowship. This would include those who having heard and believed the gospel (Heb. 11:6), repented of sins (Luke 13:3), confessed Christ before men (Acts 8:37), and were immersed in water unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). These are they who were added to the church (Acts 2:38-47), they who “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42), and they whose works would follow them and be remembered by God (1 Cor. 15:58). We are to fellowship those who walk in the light of God’s Word (1 John 1:7). We are to fellowship those who “abideth in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). We are to fellowship those who hold fast the faithful Word (Tit. 1:9). In the beautiful and rich 119th Psalm, we read, “*I am* a companion of all *them* that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts” (63). *Companion* means “one who agrees.” The Psalmist said that he was “in agreement” with those who fear God and keep God’s commandments (precepts). Such is a good rule of thumb for us to apply today. We, too, are in agreement (companions, partners, in fellowship with) them that fear God and keep His commandments.

Just as we are in fellowship with those listed above, we must not be in fellowship with all who fall outside those lines as drawn by God in Scripture. One is as obligated to reject a brother whom God rejects as he is to receive a brother whom God receives. There is a point at which, according to the New Testament, fellowship may (and indeed must) be broken (withdrawn) between brethren. God revealed this clearly for us. It is possible for a child of God to so live as to remove himself from the fellowship of God and the church. Paul spoke of one being “delivered to Satan” in 1 Corinthians 5:5. Paul, himself, feared being overcome and rejected because of sin (1 Cor. 9:27). He spoke of some who had made “shipwreck of their faith” and were delivered to Satan (1 Tim. 1:19-20). Of the lazy man, Paul wrote that he “hath denied the faith,

and is worse than an infidel” (5:8), and then spoke of one turning aside after Satan (5:15). Hebrews 6:1-6 speaks of one who fell away from the truth and was never restored. James speaks of one who erred from the faith being restored (5:19-20). Second Peter 2:20-22 speaks of one becoming a Christian, apostatizing, and then being in a worse condition spiritually than he was in before becoming a Christian. All of these verses point to the fact that there is the possibility of a Christian leaving the fellowship of God and His people. Such persons so living are still brethren—but brethren from whom the faithful have withdrawn their participation.

Having established that faithful Christians may fellowship God and other faithful Christians, let us notice specifically some of those with whom faithful Christians may not (with the approval of God) have fellowship. Faithful Christians may not have fellowship (with the approval of God) with persons in the world (i.e., those who have never obeyed the Gospel). Our fellowship is hinged to our common actions and faith. Those in the world do not share with us in either; else they would not be in the world but in the church. We may not fellowship them because they are not in fellowship with God. Those in the denominational world are persons whom we may not (with the approval of God) fellowship. They have not obeyed the Gospel, and they are not in Christ; therefore they are not in fellowship with God. Both of these cases cited heretofore (those in the world and those in denominations) are examples of people who have never been in our fellowship, therefore we cannot *withdraw* our fellowship from them.

The following cases will deal largely (unless otherwise noted) with brethren, unfaithful members of the church, with whom we may not (with the approval of God) have fellowship, and from whom we must (to maintain the approval of God) withdraw our fellowship.

The Bible tells us that those who teach things contrary to the doctrine of Christ are people from whom we must withdraw our fellowship. Jesus told of the awful aftermath of false teaching when He said, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat. 15:9). Herein we see that those who teach error pervert or make vain (meaningless, to no avail) the worship of God. May we with the approval of God extend fellowship to those who render vain the worship they offer to God (and the worship offered God by their followers)? Hear John:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

To transgress is to go beyond. This is seen clearly in the phrase, “and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ.” John (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) tells us that one teaching something not found in the doctrine of Christ (the New Testament) is a person with whom we are not to have fellowship. We are not to welcome them (“receive him not into your house”), and we are not to encourage them in their error (“neither bid him God speed”).

Are not many of our brethren guilty of welcoming them when they invite these false brethren to preach, teach, and pray in their midst? We read of some who recently “traded pulpits” with sectarian preachers (those who never were in fellowship with God or His faithful). There are churches having known false teachers (such as Max Lucado, Reubel Shelly, etc.) for “Seminars” (they are certainly not Gospel Meetings) and the like. All such practices violate the teaching of God in these verses. If one is not teaching the truth, we have no right to have him teach, preach, or pray for us. Is it possible for us to invite one who is teaching error to conduct a “Seminar” for us and in so doing not give him the impression that we support him? Brethren, these things are not optional. John uses words hard to be misunderstood; they are emphatic declarations prohibiting us from extending fellowship to those who are teaching things that are wrong. It matters not the circumstances; to extend fellowship to brethren who teach error is sin.

We find another passage which warrants our consideration in Romans 16:17-18, wherein Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Those under consideration here were ones who, by their error, divided the church. We have those in our midst today. Consider those who suggest that we should “re-unite” with the Independent Christian Church. They suggest that we should just overlook the fact that they use the

mechanical instrument of music (among other false doctrines) and accept them "as God has accepted us." When they preach and practice this error, they force faithful Christians to oppose them, thus causing division with their error. What should be done with them (and with all who teach any error causing division)? They should be **marked** as false teachers and **avoided**. Do we mark and avoid them when we invite them to preach, teach, or pray in our midst? We mark them all right, and we should be marked and avoided for doing it! Teachers of error divide the church and fail to serve Jesus. We must, therefore, according to these verses, withdraw our fellowship from all who divide the church with false teachings.

Paul tells again of what is to be done with false teachers: "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Tit. 3:10-11). Herein the church is obligated to *reject* a man that is an *heretick*. A *heretick* is one who teaches something that is wrong, an error. If a man is known to have taught error, should we invite him to teach, preach, or pray in our midst? When they are invited to preach, teach, or pray in a congregation, may it properly be said that the congregation has *rejected* him? It is incumbent upon us to withdraw our fellowship from the teachers of error.

There are many errors taught in our day, largely because we have failed to obey the commands of God concerning withdrawal of fellowship. Among them we see that we are still having to fight the battle over the mechanical instrument of music. We have some *Johnny-come-latelies* in our midst that would have us relegate the mechanical instrument to the level of a matter of opinion. They speak of "instrumental brethren" and "non-instrumental brethren." Based on the above cited verses, we must withdraw our fellowship from these false teachers because they are *transgressing* the law of Christ. We are told plainly in the New Testament what kind of music to offer in worship to God, and they are guilty of going beyond that for which we have authority and adding another kind to the worship. It is not possible for us to extend fellowship to those who teach that the mechanical instrument of music is acceptable in Christian worship with the approval of God. May we obey God's Word with respect to this matter and withdraw fellowship from all who teach this error.

There are those among us who advocate the use of women teachers and preachers in the presence of men. The Bible is plain concerning this, for we read, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Again we read, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34). Those who use and advocate the use of women teachers/preachers must be opposed, and we must withdraw our fellowship from them to maintain the approval of God.

There are still those among us who advocate the tired old error known as “unity in diversity.” They *contend* that it is all right to agree to disagree. Their argument bases itself on the contention that we can never say that we have an absolute knowledge of the truth on any given subject; therefore, if we see it differently, we see it differently—there is no reason to divide. This author wonders if Paul knew this when he withstood Peter to the face? Why did Jesus not take this approach in dealing with the Pharisees? If it be retorted that Paul was inspired and Jesus was God on earth, remember that Peter was not inspired in his error, and the Pharisees were not “Gods,” and yet both Paul and Jesus expected them to know what to do and to do it! When one decides to “agree to disagree” over the plan of salvation, the proper items of worship, the work of the church, or any other matter about which God (in His Word) has spoken, we must withdraw our fellowship from him until such time as he repents of his heresy.

There are many in our midst who need to be withdrawn from based on their perversion of the work of the church. It appears that some congregations are going about to do everything except what they should be doing. We now have gymnasiums and sports complex buildings (usually called office complexes or family life centers) which house our “church league” ball teams. To begin with, there is no authority in the Bible for the church to engage in recreational activities. We are authorized to save souls (Luke 19:10). To accomplish this one task, the church is authorized to preach to the lost (Mat. 28:19), edify the saved (Rom. 14:19), and help the needy (Jam. 1:27). The church is not given the responsibility of providing for the physical fitness or psychological happiness of the world or membership. These actions are not sinful in themselves, but they are not the responsibility of the church but of the

home. Since such things are not works of the church, they should not be engaged in. With respect to churches of Christ having *teams* in “church leagues,” the very subject we are studying precludes us from doing so. To enter into an agreement, a partnership, a league with denominationalists for the purpose of playing ball games is to enter into fellowship (which means joint-participation) with them and is sin. It is time that we mark and avoid, withdraw from, and reject those who pervert the work of the church by dragging us into every evil alliance that comes along. We need to be reminded that the church is not God’s little country club; it is a working institution. May our erring brethren give up these unscriptural practices and be restored to faithfulness, and may the faithful refuse to fellowship them until such time as they do.

We are told in the New Testament that open sins break fellowship between brethren. Remember the case in 1 Corinthians 5, wherein fornication was the sin? Paul commanded that the fornicators be put away from among them that the sinners might be saved and the church purified. Churches today must learn this lesson: If you have open sins committed by your members, you are obligated to first try and restore them to repentance and, if they fail to repent, then withdraw fellowship from them. God did not leave this to the discretion of the individual congregation any more than He left baptism to our discretion. Those who practice public sins are not in fellowship with God, and neither will we be if we maintain fellowship with them.

Personal offences may break fellowship between brethren, as Jesus said:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

Basically, as we conclude our look at the issue of fellowship, the matter may be summed up as follows: We may (and indeed must) extend fellowship to all who are faithfully walking in the light of God’s Word, having obeyed the Gospel and continued therein; and, we may (and indeed must) withhold/withdraw fellowship from all those who have not obeyed the Gospel or are not being faithful to it, either by word or deed. These are serious matters, and it is needful for us to deal

with them now, lest we be carried away into the errors of denominationalism by our neglect.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

Bennett, C. P. Sermon.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.

“WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW?”¹

GALATIANS 3:19

Michael Hatcher



Michael Hatcher was born in Pensacola, Florida, the son of a gospel preacher. He is married to Karen (Savage), and they have two sons. He has done local work in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and is presently working with the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida. He has spoken on several lectureships, gospel meetings, to youth groups, and has done radio and television work. He also taught in Texomaland School of Biblical Studies in Denison, Texas, and was the educational director at State Street Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

Michael directed the North Texas Lectureship and currently is director of the Bellview Lectures. He has written articles for several brotherhood publications and a weekly newspaper (from 1987-1994). He was the associate editor of the *Shield Of Faith* and now is editor of *Defender*, the *Beacon*, the Bellview Lectures book, and is on the Board of Directors for *The Gospel Journal*. He is co-author of a book, *Hatcher/Schweitzer Exchange*, an exchange of letters with a Lutheran minister on the subject of Total Hereditary Depravity and other subjects. He also had a debate on the subject of instrumental music in worship with Baptist, Bob L. Ross. He is an instructor for the Online Academy of Biblical Studies.

INTRODUCTION

“You are the ones who do not believe in the Old Testament!” This is an accusation which many in the Lord’s church face on a regular basis. Sometimes it is as a result of direct misrepresentation to prejudice people against the Lord’s church, and other times it is simply as a result of misunderstanding what is taught without any intended dishonesty. Either way this accusation is a false one. The sad thing is that some members of the Lord’s church do not understand the Old Testament, and they often leave the wrong impression. However, let this writer assure you that we do believe in the Old Testament; we simply understand that the Old Testament is not the law to which we are subject today.

OLD TESTAMENT ABROGATED

It is not the purpose of this chapter to show that the Old Testament has been taken away, but in a study of the purpose and design of that

Testament, it is a necessary part of this study. The Old Testament Law of Moses was never intended to be a universal law. In a discussion of the Sabbath Law, God states, “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Exo. 31:17). As Moses gives the Law to the nation of Israel after the wilderness wanderings and prior to going into the land of promise, he states:

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even* us, who *are* all of us here alive this day (Deu. 5:1-3).

Moses states specifically that the Law of Moses was made with the ones who were there: that is the Israelites. Therefore, the Law of Moses was never a universal law; it was a Law dealing with the Jews. The Gentile world was never subject to that Law.

When Christ died on the cross, He fulfilled the Old Testament Law and thus abrogated it. Jesus stated:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Mat. 5:17-18).

When Jesus fulfilled the Law, it did pass away. That certainly is one of the aspects of Jesus’ statement upon the cross when He cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He had finished fulfilling the Law, thus it passed away.

Paul often spoke to the fact that the Old Testament Law had been taken away; so we are no longer subject to it. “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace” (Eph. 2:15). The “law of commandments contained in ordinances” has reference to the Mosaic Law. It was that law which was a dividing law between the Jew and the Gentile. Jesus abolished that law so that both Jew and Gentile could be one and thus have peace. In a parallel passage Paul wrote, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:14). Those ordinances are “the rules and requirements of the law of Moses” (Strong G1378). Paul

clearly states that these ordinances have been taken out of the way permanently at the cross of Christ.

The Hebrews writer shows that the Christian system is superior to any other religious system and in particular the Mosaic system. In this he shows that we have a greater priesthood than the Levitical priesthood: the priesthood of Christ. However, Christ could not be a priest on earth because He was not of the tribe of Levi—He came from the tribe of Judah. For Christ to be a priest there must be a change in the priesthood which was brought about by a change in the law.

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.... For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof (Heb. 7:12, 18).

That change in the Law was a change from the Old Testament Law, the Law of Moses, to the Law of Christ.

As Paul writes to the Roman brethren, he argues that we are free from the Mosaic Law in Romans 7. He begins by saying, "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?" (Rom. 7:1). He then uses an illustration to show the point. A woman is married to a man as long as he lives, and if she is married to someone else while he lives she is an adulteress, but if he is dead she is not an adultress. He then makes the application:

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:4).

To what law are we dead? "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7). The law which said, "Thou shalt not covet" is the Mosaic Law and specifically the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20:17). Therefore we are dead to the Mosaic Law so we can be married to (subject to) the Law of Christ.

Some might be led to ask: "If we are not subject to the Old Testament, then of what use is it?" This author sees four purposes of the Law of Moses, but these four purposes are intertwined. In the next section, it will be our intention to look at these four areas, then we intend to go

into the Old Testament Law to show application of these four principles.

DEFINE AND HIGHLIGHT SIN

What is sin and how do I know if I have sinned? These are important and great questions that each person needs to know and understand. If a person does not realize that he has sinned, he will see no need for a Savior. Thus, there is a great need for a person to know what constitutes sin and thus to realize that he has sinned. One of the great purposes of the Old Testament Law is to define and highlight sin. Notice in Paul's writings how he, by inspiration, emphasizes this point. As he writes to the Roman brethren, he states: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Here we have the clear statement of one of the purposes of the Law. The knowledge of sin comes by the law. The context shows "the law" refers to the Mosaic Law. Thus, the purpose of the Law of Moses is to give man a knowledge of sin. Later, in this same book, Paul emphasizes this again when he writes:

What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.... Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful (Rom. 7:7, 13).

Paul has shown that we are no longer subject to or amenable to the Mosaic Law (7:1-4). We have been delivered from the Old Testament Law so we can live according to the instructions of the Spirit as revealed in the New Testament (7:6). Thus, Paul, responding to any possible arguments, asks the question concerning the Law: "Is the Law sin?" Was the Mosaic Law evil or sinful? Of course not! Then what was the purpose of the Old Testament Law? Instead of the Law being sin or causing man to sin, it revealed sin to us. Paul writes that he would not know sin, specifically the sin of coveting, if sin had not been revealed to be sin in the Old Testament.

In writing to the Galatian brethren, Paul would write, "Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19). Paul discusses the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and shows that the Law of Moses could not disannul those promises and that the inheritance did not come through the Mosaic Law. Then of what purpose is the Law?

It was added to the Abrahamic promise because of sin. It served the purpose to reveal sin to man.

SHOW MAN'S INABILITY TO SINLESSLY KEEP THE LAW

As the Old Testament Law revealed sin to man, it also reveals to man his inability to sinlessly keep the Mosaic Law. When one is born into this world, he is born without sin (Ecc. 7:29; Psa. 106:37-38; Eze. 18:4, 20; Mat. 18:3; 19:13-15) (Hatcher 379-94). As they grow, they reach, what we generally call, an "age of accountability" (Deu. 1:39; Isa. 7:16). When they reach the time in their life when they know to choose the right and refuse the evil, they do that which is wrong (Eze. 28:15). The Law of Moses did not make provision for man's weaknesses and sin. Yet, one must keep or obey the Law sinlessly to be justified by the works of the Law.

Paul would write:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is* evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:10-13).

He points out that those who are of the works of the Law are under a curse because they must continue in all things which are written in the Law. This simply demands too much because no one can sinlessly obey all the Law. Previously in this letter Paul had written, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Gal. 3:22).

In writing to the Roman brethren he states that God's wrath is revealed against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). He goes on to show that the Gentile world was under the wrath of God because they had transgressed God's will (Rom. 1:18-32). He then points out that the Jew is no better than the Gentile because they had the Law and did not keep it (Rom. 2). Then he concludes by showing that since Jew and Gentile did not keep the Law, that all men are under the condemnation of God. Notice as he writes, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10, 23).

There is no one who can stand in a right relationship with God through their sinless obedience to the Law of Moses. This is the reason that the Law of Moses was a “law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2) instead of a Law which produces life. Since all are under the curse (Gal. 3:10), the Law cannot justify, but it does show our need for someone who can justify. This leads us to the next purpose of the Law of Moses.

PREPARE THE WORLD FOR CHRIST

With the knowledge of what constitutes sin, and the knowledge that each person has sinned, and knowing that no one can save themselves nor sinlessly obey or keep the Law, there is the realization that man needs a Redeemer or Savior. Therefore, one of the purposes of the Law of Moses is that of preparing mankind for the Messiah. It does this by first making us realize our need for the Messiah. The Law lets us know what constitutes sin and that we have committed sin in our life. The Law also reveals to us that we cannot sinlessly keep the Law, and, therefore, we are under a curse. With this knowledge, we now know that we need someone to save us from our sin—thus the need for the Messiah. However, God had to prepare the world for the coming of the Savior. Paul wrote, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). From the time of man’s first sin (Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden), God began preparing the world for the coming of the One who would destroy the power of Satan (Gen. 3:15) and take away man’s sins.

The Law of Moses was given to prepare man for His coming. A part of this was telling about Him so, when He came, all would know that He is the One. As Jesus spoke to the two disciples while on the road to Emmaus, Luke records, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament Law was speaking about Christ, His coming, and the kingdom He would establish.

The prophets foretold many aspects of the Messiah’s life (His birth, life, death, purpose, etc.). When Jesus came, He fulfilled all these prophecies. Jesus reminded His apostles of His fulfilment of the prophecies:

And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Notice that the Old Testament was written about Him. They were preparing the way for Him so all would come to Him. Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:39-40).

When Jesus came and established His Law (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; et al.), He abrogated the Old Testament Law. To take away the Law of Moses, He had to fulfill it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mat. 5:17). He came with the utmost respect for the Law and fulfilled the Law so it could be taken away. However, we should understand that the Law was prophesying of Jesus. In prophesying of Him, it was foretelling and preparing the way for Him.

PROVIDE HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Often when we discuss the purpose of the Old Testament, this is the main aspect which is discussed. Paul wrote, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The things which were "written aforetime" are the Old Testament Scriptures. They provide historical examples for us so, as we study them, we can learn. As we look at the examples provided for us, we learn patience, which is the quality of being steadfast. We also are comforted as we look at the Scriptures. These qualities which are learned by studying the Law of Moses produces within us hope. As we examine the lives of the great men of faith, we observe their steadfast reliance on God which then inspires within us that same desire. After the Hebrews writer records many of the heroes of faith (Heb. 11), he then states:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1).

James, the half-brother of our Lord, encouraged us to consider the prophets as an example:

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of

Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (Jam. 5:10-11).

What a great hope this provides for us, that if we have that steadfast reliance upon God, we then have hope.

Paul speaks of his need to continue in faithfulness to God lest he become a castaway (1 Cor. 9:26-27). In showing the possibility of apostatizing from God, he uses physical Israel as an example for us. He shows how that all of them enjoyed spiritual blessings (1 Cor. 10:1-4), but that God was not pleased with many of them (10:5). He then states: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (10:6). He continues to give illustrations of the lack of faithfulness to God, then states: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (10:11). We need to learn from the examples given to us in the Law of Moses to remain faithful to God to inherit the promises of God.

ILLUSTRATED

God created man and placed him in a marvelous garden. During this time, God and man possessed a sweet fellowship one with another. Adam and Eve communed with God as He would come in the "cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8). God had given them His laws for them to continue to enjoy that fellowship. He placed them in the garden to "dress it and keep it" (2:15). They were to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (1:28). God also informed them what not to do: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (2:17). The serpent came tempting Eve to do what God had instructed man not to do (3:1-5). Eve took of the fruit and ate it and also gave it to Adam who also ate of it (v. 6). We learn the nature of sin; that it is a transgression of God's law: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). We also learn of God's dealings with man regarding sin and the separation which sin brings (Isa. 59:1-2) as Adam and Eve are cast out from the presence of God (Gen. 3:23-24). Since sin has come into the world, we learn the need for a Savior to redeem man back to God, thus God gives the promise of the Messiah. "And I will put enmity between thee and the

woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (3:15). Thus, in these first few chapters of the Bible we see all four aspects of the purpose of the Old Testament.

As one continues looking at the Scriptures, he observes the proliferation of sin as he reads of Cain murdering his brother Abel and Lamech with his polygamy and murders (Gen. 4). Then we read how that "GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually" (6:5). We learn of God's attitude toward sin as He sends a flood upon the earth to destroy man. However, we find that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (6:8). We learn why Noah found grace in God's eyes when we read, "Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God" (6:9), and "thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (6:22). In all of these accounts, we are learning about sin and what constitutes sin. God is also showing man that he cannot live a sinless life and therefore he needs a Savior. They are also historical examples for man to learn about God's dealings with man.

As we come to Abram (Abraham) in Genesis 12 we find three great promises made to him.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed....And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him (Gen. 12:1-3, 7).

There is (1) a land promise, (2) a nation promise, and (3) a spiritual promise that through Abraham's seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Concerning this last promise, Paul wrote: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). These promises are repeated several times first to Abraham, then to Isaac and Jacob. Twelve sons were born to Jacob. Ten of the sons envied Joseph and sold him into bondage. He was taken to Egypt and through the providence of God arose to second in command only under Pharaoh. Because of a great famine, Joseph's family moved to Egypt where they were made a great nation numerically. Moses would write, "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons;

and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude” (Deu. 10:22).

At the appropriate time, God called Moses and had him go to Pharaoh and tell him, “Let my people go” (Exo. 5:1; 7:16; 8:1; et al.). When Pharaoh refused, God brought them out of Egypt with a powerful hand. He then led Israel to Mount Sinai and there gave them His Law (the Law of Moses). In giving them this Law, God was revealing to them in a codified way what constitutes sin. They were being instructed out of the Law regarding the things of God: “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest *his* will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law” (Rom. 2:17-18). They were being instructed how to be in a right relationship with God, but the Law of Moses ended up convicting them of sin. “What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:9-10).

As one moves to Leviticus, he sees the theme of man’s need to be holy because God is holy.

For I *am* the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I *am* holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I *am* the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy (Lev. 11:44-45).

All the sacrifices and offerings they brought before God reminded them that they had sinned and were in need of a Savior. Yet, those sacrifices could never take away their sin.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect (Heb. 10:1).

The reason those sacrifices could not take away sin is “for *it* is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (10:4). Thus, we see the Law of Moses teaching man the need for Someone to come Who could take away sins.

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need *was there* that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?... For the law made nothing perfect, but the

bringing in of a better hope *did*; by the which we draw nigh unto God (7:11, 19).

The Law was not perfect because it had no true provision for taking away sin, so it showed the need for a Second greater covenant which had a greater priest than the priest based upon the Law of Moses. "For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second" (8:7).

Moses then led the Israelites to the land of Canaan which was the land God had promised to Abraham. Joshua then led them into the land to take possession of it. A mention of the types found in the Old Testament is appropriate at this point, because so many of them are pointing to and preparing the way for the coming Messiah. Moses and Joshua both are types of the Christ. It is stated that God would send one that was like unto Moses:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.... I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him (Deu. 18:15, 18).

The main part of the Abrahamic promise was the seed promise. The great nation and the land promise were both for the purpose of preserving a people and preparing the world for the Messiah. For the Messiah to come, there had to be a people through whom He could come. Thus, the promise of a great nation to preserve a people or nation through whom the Seed would come. For the nation or people to develop, they needed a land, thus God gave them the land of Canaan. Thus, the nation and the land promises go together, but they both are for the spiritual promise of a coming Seed who would save the world.

After taking the promised land, God raised up judges to deliver the Israelites. Those judges were also types of the Messiah as they were deliverers from the bondage of their oppressors while the Messiah is a Deliverer from the bondage of sin.

At the end of the period of the judges, the people cry for a king to be like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8). God gave them Saul, but after his rebellion against God (1 Sam. 15), God raised up David to be king over Israel. David had the desire to build God a house, but was forbidden by God because he was a man of war and shed blood (1 Chr. 28:3). However, God promises David that his seed would build God a house.

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

God was preparing the way for our Lord and identifying Him as one who would be from Abraham's seed through David. This seed of David would be the King along with being a prophet (Deu. 18:15, 18) and High Priest (Psa. 110:4; Heb. 7:11). He would be the Anointed One—the Christ.

As one studies the prophets, he learns all about the birth, life, and death of the Messiah. We learn of the place of the Savior's birth (Mic. 5:2), the time frame of His birth (Dan. 2, 9), that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), where His ministry would take place (Isa. 9:1-2), that He would speak in parables (Psa. 78:2, 67-68), and that He would work miracles (Isa. 35:5-6). Likewise the details of His death are spelled out in minute detail: that He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zec. 11:12), betrayed by a friend (Psa. 41:9), His disciples would forsake Him (Zec. 13:7), He would be smitten and spat upon (Isa. 50:6), He would be wounded, bruised, and beaten with stripes (Isa. 53:5), His hands and feet pierced (Psa. 22:16), crucified with thieves (Isa. 53:12), et al. Bert Thompson wrote: "Scholars have documented over 300 messianic prophecies in the Old Testament (Lockyer 21). From Genesis through Malachi, the history of Jesus is foretold in minute detail" (13). All these prophecies were preparing the way for the Christ so, when He came, all would accept Him and come to Him to be saved.

All through these times of Old Testament history, we observe God's dealings with man. God was providing man with illustrations of obedience and disobedience. He was showing man His reactions to man and his lifestyle. We witness God's blessings coming upon man when man obeys His will, and God's condemnation upon those who disobey Him. These historical accounts give encouragement to those who read them today, that we can obey even as they obeyed. When we go through trials, tribulations, and persecutions, we know that others have gone

through the same things and remained faithful, thereby receiving God's favors.

CONCLUSION

The man who fails to read and study the Old Testament is spiritually deprived. One cannot have an understanding of the New Testament without knowing the Old. We have some adages to show the connection between the two: "The Old is by the New explained, the New is in the Old contained"; "The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is by the New revealed." While we are not subject to the Law of Moses, we should study and learn from the Old Testament to have a complete understanding of God and His dealings with man, our need for a Savior, and how God would work all things together for the perfect time to send His Son as a Savior of man.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Hatcher, Michael. "Total Depravity." *Denominationalism Versus The Bible*. Ed. Terry M. Hightower. San Antonio: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1992. 379-394.
- Strong, James. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. Electronic ed. Logos Bible Software. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996.
- Thompson, Bert. *My Sovereign, My Sin, My Salvation*. Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1999. As referenced by Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Messianic Prophecies of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973.

ENDNOTE

- ¹Originally this chapter appeared: Hatcher, Michael. "Design and Purpose of the Law of Moses." *Judaism—From God or Man?* Ed. David P. Brown. Spring, TX: Contending For The Faith, 2004. 116-131.

“AM I THEREFORE BECOME YOUR ENEMY, BECAUSE I TELL YOU THE TRUTH?” GALATIANS 4:16

Ronnie Hayes



Ronald E. Hayes is a native of Birmingham, Alabama. He attended Memphis School of Preaching and earned his B.A. from Alabama Christian School of Religion and his M.A. from Freed-Hardeman University. He has done local work in Arkansas and Alabama and is currently working with the Adamsville Church of Christ in Adamsville, Alabama. Ronnie speaks on several lecture-ships and in several gospel meetings each year. He also works extensively with Indian Creek Youth Camp near Jasper, Alabama.

Ronnie is married to the former Cynthia Reeves, and they have three children: Leah, Kyle, and Anna; and one grandchild.

INTRODUCTION

The theme that has been chosen, *Great New Testament Questions* is one that has many interesting subjects. I have been assigned the statement made by Paul to the Church at Galatia: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16). It is as if Paul is amazed that simply for telling the truth someone has gotten angry. This should not be the reaction to the truth, yet, it is the reaction that some will have. Let us see if we can determine why.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

There are at least two words that we need to define. First, we should understand *enemy*. What is one? *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* defines *enemy* as:

ECHTHROS (ἐχθρός), an adjective, primarily denoting hated or hateful (akin to *echthos*, hate; perhaps associated with *ektos*, outside), hence, in the Active sense, denotes hating, hostile; it is used as a noun signifying an enemy, adversary, and is said (a) of the Devil, Matt. 13:39; Luke 10:19; (b) of death, 1 Cor. 15:26; (c) of the professing believer who would be a friend of the world, thus making Himself an enemy of God, Jas. 4:4; (d) of men who are opposed to Christ, Matt.

13:25; 28; 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 19:27; 20:43; Acts 2:35; Rom. 11:28; Phil. 3:18; Heb. 1:13; 10:13; or to His servants, Rev. 11:5; 12; to the nation of Israel, Luke 1:71, 74; 19:43; (e) of one who is opposed to righteousness, Acts 13:10; (f) of Israel in its alienation from God, Rom. 11:28; (g) of the unregenerate in their attitude toward God, Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21; (h) of believers in their former state, 2 Thess. 3:15; (i) of foes, Matt. 5:43, 44; 10:36; Luke 6:27, 35; Rom. 12:20; 1 Cor. 15:25; of the Apostle Paul because he told converts “the truth,” Gal. 4:16 (30).

Is that not interesting? An enemy is one who hates us or is hostile toward us! However, Paul did not hate these brethren, nor was he hostile toward these Christians. What had he done? Brother Lipscomb in his commentary says, “He had told them the truth in reference to their determination to turn to the Jewish law” (*Galatians* 248). When did telling the truth become such a crime? Do we become angry with our doctor when he tells us the truth? This would be silly. It is not his fault that we have a problem. He is simply advising us of a problem. As a matter of fact, it is necessary for him to tell us so he can prescribe a treatment. Is this not what Paul was doing with these brethren?

If Paul is not the enemy of the church, who then is the enemy of the church? Certainly, Satan would be an enemy of the church! Peter warned of Satan our adversary. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan is known by many terms. Notice some which show that he is an enemy of the cross. John says that he was an accuser of brethren:

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night (Rev. 12:10).

John also tells us he is a murderer and a liar.

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

Paul informs us that he is the Ruler of Darkness.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places* (Eph. 6:12).

Christ calls him the wicked one.

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side (Mat. 13:19).

It is easy to see why Satan is called an enemy. It is his desire to destroy the blood-bought institution—the church.

We can also see that those who are friends of the world are enemies of the cross. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam. 4:4). What we love shows our true colors. Many claim to be a child of God but when it comes to our lives, we prove to be friends of the world. John warned, “Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). How can we tell if we love the world rather than loving God? It will be seen in what we do, where we spend our time, and where we spend our money. I like to think of it as time, talent, and tithing. Christ advised, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). We have no difficulty in supporting our children in sports. We will make sure they can be at practice; we buy them a uniform and all of the latest equipment. We will even help them train. The question is, “Will we put this time and effort into serving God?” Yet we hear lukewarm Christians: “**I put God first in my life, right after school, work, family, vacation, etc.**” Is it not strange that many look at their lives and cannot recognize the truth about where they place God? James described this person:

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jam. 1:23-25).

Can we not honestly look at ourselves and determine whether or not we have become an enemy of the cross?

There is another enemy of the cross who is described as one who is an enemy of righteousness. “And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10). Elymas

did his best to destroy the effectiveness of Paul. There are still those today who want to destroy righteousness. Our world seems to be going crazy at this time. The destruction of human life through abortion is demanded as a right! All sorts of perversions have been forced down the throats of those who would stand for everything that is good and moral. It appears that the enemies of the cross have the upper hand, but we need not despair for our God is still in control (Mat. 24:36; 1 The. 4:13-18; Rev. 22:17-20). You may be an enemy of righteousness, but be it known, one day you will stand before a righteous Judge and give an account of your life (2 Cor. 5:10). You will not overthrow the power of God.

The second term we should look at is *truth*. “Truth” comes from the Greek word, *alethes*, which means, “primarily, unconcealed, manifest, hence, actual, true to fact and is used of persons and of things” (Vine 158). Vine goes on to say in Galatians “probably the Apostle is referring to the contents of his Epistle” (159). Paul was not taking pot shots at the Galatians to simply make them mad. He was dealing with a problem, which needed to be corrected. Does we not wonder: “Why did these Galatians have such an adverse reaction to the truth”?

Truth has a great value. Christ gives us some insight to the value of truth when He says, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Solomon advises us: “Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Pro. 23:23).

We can see that God is the source of truth.

He is the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he (Deu. 32:4).

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged (Rom. 3:3-4).

Christ is the symbol of truth.

And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? (Mark 12:14).

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

The Holy Spirit is the supplier of truth. Christ told His disciples:

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me (John 15:26).

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 shew you things to come (John 16:13).

We know that the Holy Spirit has done His work. Jude said:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

The Word of God is the sight of truth. It is God's Word that holds the revealed truth for us.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth (John 17:17).

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

This is the reason Christ could say, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

The world is the subject of truth. Where would we be without truth? It seems that Paul addressed this subject when he said to the church at Thessalonica, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 The. 4:13). Without truth we will find ourselves in ignorance. We will not be able to answer the questions which mean the most to us: "Where did we come from?" "What must I do to be saved?" "Is there a heaven and a hell?" "Where will I spend an eternity?" Without the truth of God's Word how do we answer these questions? Without the Word of God we would find ourselves in the very position of which Paul was warning!

The church is the supporter of truth. In a time and age when the truth is disdained, ridiculed, and denied, the church has to be the support for the truth. Paul wrote, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest

know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Christian is the shiner of truth. The truth is the light in the world of darkness. We must be the instrument that allows it to shine. Christ said:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:14-16).

David wrote, “Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name” (Psa. 86:11). John said that he had “no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4). David also told us that he had chosen the way of truth (Psa. 119:30). If this is the way that we have chosen, then we have to live by it; otherwise, we become hypocrites.

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

DILEMMA OF RESPONSIBILITY

Paul faced a dilemma. There were some who were upset because he had spoken the truth. However, what individuals do with the truth does not lessen our responsibility to the truth. As Christians, we must be proclaimers of the truth. Paul told the church at Ephesus, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even Christ*” (Eph. 4:15). Paul tells Timothy:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:2-5).

It is our responsibility to preach the Word. Some will turn their ears from the truth, but we cannot run after them and say, “Come back and

I will not teach the truth on that any more.” Christ taught the truth, and some decided that they would not follow Him any more. “From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). Even though these left, it did not change what Christ taught, nor did He run after them to compromise the truth!

We also have a responsibility to be protectors of the truth. It is always amazing to this writer that some feel that we cannot speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) and defend the truth at the same time. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jude wrote:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

It is interesting that, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he said speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and on the other hand he warned of those that would “deceive you with vain words” (Eph. 5:6) and that we were to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). How can this be? Is it possible to be both a protector of the truth and to present it in a loving way? **Absolutely!** The Lord knew that the truth would have to be defended—defended from those who would change truth into a lie (2 The. 2:8-17). There will be those who try to change the Word of God. “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7). Paul said there would be those who would not rightly divide (handle aright—ASV) the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). It is your part and mine to defend the integrity of the Scriptures. There will be many who are determined to destroy the effectiveness of the Word of God. How many will stand for the truth (Eph. 6:11-17)?

We must be partakers of the truth. Paul wrote:

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:6-8).

Vine says *partakers* means “partaking together with, a joint-partaker” (162). Certainly, we are partakers of Gospel. We are commanded to

preach the Gospel to a lost and dying world (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It will extremely hard for us to be in fellowship with Christ and not to be a partaker of truth (1 John 1:6-10). It appears that John would even say in strong words that this would be a lie (1 John 1:6).

When we accept our responsibility toward truth, we will be pillars of the truth. Paul told Timothy, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). David Lipscomb wrote:

The church is the foundation and support of the truth. God has given the truth to the world and has established the church for the upbuilding, maintaining, practicing that truth in its purity in the world. Its duty is to do it by precept and example. In precept it proclaims the truth just as God gave it. Changed or modified it ceases to be truth or the truth. It compromises nothing. Its divine mission is to bear that truth in its divine purity to the world. It must present to the world what the truth is when practiced (*1 & 2 Timothy* 152).

Burton Coffman writes:

Paul had seen the marvelous colonnade of pillars which was the principal feature of the great temple of Diana at Ephesus; and something of the meaning of such pillars is inherent in this. A pillar supports and upholds, exactly what the church does for the truth of God. The word “grounded” in this connection has the same meaning (186).

The problem with some in the church is that they have become the very ones who want to destroy the truth. The truth which has been proclaimed, protected, and partaken of by many faithful Gospel preachers throughout the years is now being given over for a watered-down, socialized, imitation representing the Gospel. May we recognize the importance of the truth before we give it away.

DETERMINE YOUR REACTION

Our reaction toward truth will fall into one of two categories: hostile or humble. There does not seem to be much middle ground with the truth. There have always been those that are hostile to the truth. When man becomes hostile, he will begin to make excuses. Let us point out from the very beginning that these excuses do not, never have, and never will represent a reason why man should be allowed to disobey God. There will be those who say it is too hard. “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60). This is very common today! *It is too hard* is

code for, “I don’t want to!” Listen closely to how God responds to this. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). His commandments are not grievous. *Grievous* denotes “heavy, burdensome” (Vine 179). In other words, you and I can do the commandments of God. Christ said some would become angry toward the truth.

Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Mat. 5:11-12).

Others will simply refuse to obey the truth. “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 The. 1:8). Man may be totally hostile toward the truth, but it does not change it.

Then there are those who will hear the truth and receive it. This is the reason Christ said, “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). We are the disciples of Christ if we continue in truth. We have no guarantee if we leave it. Paul wrote:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

The question remains: “What are we going to do with the truth?” We can be like those in Galatia who became angry (Gal. 4:16), or we can be like Apollos who knew only “the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25), and Aquila and Priscilla took him and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). Apollos appeared to accept this teaching in a humble way. It is either hostile or humble. You choose!

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 & 2 Timothy and Philemon*. Austin: Firm Foundation, 1977.
- Lipscomb, David. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles; 2 Corinthians and Galatians*. Ed. J. W. Shepherd. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1968.
- - -. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles; 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Ed. J. W. Shepherd. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1968.
- Vine, W. E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1966.

“HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE, IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION?”

HEBREWS 2:3

Gary Colley



Gary Colley, Sr., was born in Vernon, Texas, in 1934. He and his wife, Maggie, have three children and six grandchildren. All are members of the Lord's church.

Gary began preaching the gospel in 1954 and has done local work in Texas, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. He has done radio and television work and has taught in preacher training schools in Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee. He is doing full time meeting and lectureship work and teaches at the Middle Tennessee School of Preaching and the Online Academy of Biblical Studies. He worships with the Collierville Church of Christ in Collierville, Tennessee.

He has written for many brotherhood publications, and he was the past editor of the *Christian Worker*. Gary has written several books, *Down Front and Ready*, *Bible Class Notes on the Ideal Home*, *Lessons You Can Develop*, *Fundamentals of Christianity*, along with four tracts, *New Translations: "What Is Wrong With Them?"* *The Masonic Religion*, *Only In Thee*, and *The Standard of Morality*.

INTRODUCTION

Our assigned Bible question for this lecture has several important thoughts impregnated within its bounds! *How* means in what way, or by what means will we be able to accomplish the task. *Shall we escape* directs our thoughts to the fact that we have a need to escape, realizing that we are under a sentence of death from which we want to escape, and therefore want to know the way of escape. *If we neglect* puts our question on a very personal basis as we press for the answer. All under the sun are responsible, accountable, and liable because of God's sovereign right to call every mortal into account. It implies that a Way has been secured and offered which demands our closest attention, and which is possible for us to overlook or slight to our own detriment. *So great* expresses the scope of importance of what has been offered for our deliverance. *Salvation* or deliverance gives the complete answer to our need and desire. The answer to this question should be sought diligently by every individual on earth (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

SALVATION MOST IMPORTANT

The Bible makes it clear that if one misses Heaven, he has missed the highest object of living and everything that is important in life! Missing Heaven means it would have been better had one never been born and lived on the earth! We refer to the loss of the soul in an eternal Hell (Mat. 10:28)! Sin is the destructive cause of our lost condition. It has removed us from the Father's favor just as it did Adam and Eve in the beginning of time. Sin separates us from the blessings of our Father in Heaven (Isa. 59:1-2). No well informed and right thinking person would want to live eternally in Hell, or "everlasting punishment" (Mat. 25:46). Yet, this is where we will be in eternity unless we escape from sin. Knowing that the Judgment Day will come (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Pet. 3:9-10), we must escape from the punishment promised to the wicked. This is done only by entering into and living faithfully in the church prepared for our salvation (Mat. 16:18-19; Acts 8:12; Rev. 2:10). Our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared a Way of salvation which each individual must obey to have His salvation (Mark 16:15-16; John 14:6). He wants to be our "author" or captain Who leads in the Way of righteousness, and ultimately into Heaven.

"GIVE THE MORE EARNEST HEED"

When someone great is speaking, whether our earthly father, a statesmen, or the President of our nation, the wise and intelligent listen with great interest. A greater One than any of these mentioned has spoken. Especially is this true when we know this One who has spoken has our best interest in mind. We have been introduced to the One here referred to with these words:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

The salvation offered is called *great* because of its author, its scope (for all the world), the pardon it offers, the cost paid that made it possible, the promises therewith connected, and the hope it gives. God has spoken today in the Holy Spirit delivered Word. God's Word is the means and manner of our salvation and shows clearly how our hope is through His Son Jesus the Christ. He is the One, and the only One,

through whom God speaks today, and who can be depended on for our salvation from sin (John 1:29; 6:44-45; Acts 4:12). How very important for each individual to hear “the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15) in all that He commands. By His death on the cruel cross, His burial, and resurrection, Christ has opened the Way of redemption in which all must walk for salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-3). There is no other way except His Way (Isa. 35:8; Mat. 7:13-14). Herein lies the importance of the reason why we should give the more earnest heed to the things He has spoken (Heb. 2:1).

ALL THINGS CONFIRMED

When a thing is *confirmed* it means that it is established, proven, or verified. Whether it may have been or is doubted by some, it should be no longer called in question after it has been confirmed. *Things* in this and other places in the Bible is not a word to be overlooked. God had meaning in every word which He spoke (Mat. 4:10; Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). We must ask here, what are the *things* now confirmed? The *things* referred to are the facts, oracles, commands, promises, blessings, warnings, the threatening of punishment to the wicked, and hope of eternal reward to the righteous found in the Gospel. These are the *things* also to which we are to give the more earnest heed! A like thought may be seen in Romans 8:28 where Paul writes, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” Thus, we should learn, that all of the *things* confirmed in the Gospel work together for our salvation. The way these *things* have been confirmed, or established, were not simply by the word of men, but by “signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his [God’s] own will?” (Heb. 2:4). When the Lord and the apostles spoke Heaven’s Will, they did not have the written Word, as we do today, with which to prove what they affirmed. Hence, they confirmed it with a miracle (John 20:30-31; Acts 2:43). No man today can preform miracles since the purpose of miracles have been completed, and they have been done away with or removed (1 Cor. 13:8-10). So we understand, once a thing is confirmed, it does not need to be confirmed again.

“LEST AT ANYTIME WE SHOULD LET THEM SLIP”

A definite danger is affirmed here! There is a possibility that we may allow these *things* to slip away from our thinking and action! How dreadful to think that we are able to find salvation in Christ and then

have the possibility of losing our hope by letting them slip away from us (Heb. 4:1)! This danger is not an idle thought in God's mind. One may be overtaken in a trespass (Gal. 6:1), he may err from the Truth (Jam. 5:19-20), and if he falls completely away (Heb. 6:4-6), he will be in a worse condition in sin than when he heard (Rom. 10:17), believed (John 8:24), repented (Luke 13:3, 5), confessed the name of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and was baptized for the remission of his sins (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21). We are raised from the waters of baptism to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4). Peter said it would have been better for one to have never heard and embraced the Gospel, than to do so and then let these things slip away and lose his soul (2 Pet. 2:20-22). Without strong and abiding conviction, we may be unconscious of drifting. We may become so accustomed to sin that our conscious is hardened and nothing becomes really harmful. At last we are ready to excuse and forgive ourselves for the most heinous sins (1 Tim. 4:1-3)!

THE DANGER OF DRIFTING

We are constantly in danger of drifting! As anyone knows who has any boating experience, no exertion is necessary for drifting. If there is no anchor steadying, or power holding us on course, we will be drifting! The Truth, or those *things* which we have heard from the Gospel, should not be allowed to pass us as a stream that does not benefit us! We must endeavor to drink deeply of those *things* to secure our souls. This is accomplished by embracing and abiding in the Gospel, retaining in our minds all of the Truth possible. This is the only safe course (Psa. 1:1-3; John 15:1-6). Paul does not point to any definite sin, but mere drifting and letting them slip away from us. Hence he is pointing to simple careless, thoughtless, gradual drifting. It is not necessary to positively reject or despise God's offer of mercy; we can simply neglect it to the loss of our soul. In the powerful currents of sin, carelessness plus lapse of time will carry us away from God! We soon find ourselves beyond the limits of safety and security. We may become like the dead fish being carried down toward the sea of death, being battered against the rocks, with no effort exerted or resistance practiced.

DAILY CROSS BEARING

Though the religious world attempts to go to Heaven in the broad way, they seem to take lightly the personal obligation and responsibility.

ity of being saved, while the Bible emphasizes the great difficulty. Jesus never made it easy for drifters or would-be followers. Not only does he command all to enter into the narrow way, and walk therein, he also states, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). Again He says, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). This strongly agrees with our text that we are to “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip” (Heb. 2:1). We must be prepared to “be hated of all *men*” (Mat. 10:22), to be misunderstood, have wrong motives ascribed, but to still follow our Lord. There must be strength and effort on our part without drifting from the Lord’s authority (Mat. 28:18-20). Jesus said to the one who asked, “Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:23-24). *Strait* means difficult, and is not the same as *straight*. Hence we should see the importance of our steadfast obedience, without letting any of the certain “things which we have heard” drift from us.

“HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE?”

The punishment for disobedience as a result of drifting, is evident in the Scriptures (Rom. 1:18-22). The “dead, small and great” (Rev. 20:12) shall stand in the presence of God, before Jesus who will be the judge, and give an account of the deeds done in the body while on earth (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). John showed our personal responsibility when he wrote:

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost [in harmony with the Holy Spirit’s revelation], Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 20-23).

We must be careful to build ourselves up in the most Holy Faith, lest we become separated from God, from the faith, and from the fellowship of the saints (1 John 1:7). The faithful stand with the Lord and His teaching, cheerfully, steadfastly, preserving in obeying the commands of the Scriptures. “How shall we escape,” or by what means or in what way will we be able to escape God’s wrath and eternal punishment?

With the dignity, glory, and sovereign right of the Almighty who has spoken to us in the Scriptures: “How shall we escape?” We need these warnings! There is even the danger that we may be tempted to return to the world of sin by neglecting the things we have heard (1 Cor. 10:12-13; 1 John 2:15-17). On the sea of life we have the guidance of Truth to guard us against the submerged rocks, unseen reefs, and treacherous banks. We must not ignore the warnings or ignore the pitfalls of error in our walk toward Heaven (John 8:31-32).

CONCLUSION

Let us guard against drifting away from the all-sufficient, all-authoritative and powerful Gospel. Let us uphold with all of our power the New Testament church of which Jesus is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), the builder (Mat. 16:18), for which He died (Acts 20:28), and in which He has all authority (Eph. 1:22). The one church revealed in the pages of Holy Writ is the only plan given by God for our salvation (Eph. 5:23). The worship in which we “must worship *him* in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), must be respected and upheld. If we go beyond the things which are written, we will lose our hope (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11). Let us obey to enter the body of Christ, where we are added to the “called out” by the Lord (Acts 2:41, 47). Then let us live for Him who died for us. It is the devotion of a constant life that God requires and not the observance of human display (2 Pet. 1:5-11). The drift of compromise has affected so many today in the religious world and even at times in the Lord’s church. All too often the church is being swayed by outside influence, instead of taking a stand, and lifting the world to its own standard of Truth. It is only happening when the spiritual vitality is lowered that infidelity gets in, and we are willing to believe a lie (2 The. 2:10-13). No one ever drifted into Heaven, but many today have drifted away from their once-enjoyed hope (Rom. 12:12). Hence we see the need to heed what the inspired writer said when he wrote:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2:1-4).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“FOR WHAT SON IS HE WHOM THE FATHER CHASTENETH NOT?” HEBREWS 12:7

Gary W. Summers



Gary W. Summers has been preaching for 31 years. He holds a B.A. in English and an M.A. in Literature from Illinois State University. He was involved in Christian education for nine years as board member, teacher, or principal in the Peoria, Illinois, area. He and his wife Barbara have two children and three grandchildren.

Gary speaks on several lectureships a year and a number of his articles appear in various brotherhood publications. He has recorded two series for World Video Bible School—one on “The New Age Movement” and the other on “Angels.”

INTRODUCTION

Suppose that a father had a son whom he really loved. The lad, while growing up, was very moral and obedient; he never rebelled against him all through the teenage years. He loved his father, trusted him implicitly, and would do whatever he was bid. In return, the father lavished upon him great affection, and a strong bond existed between the two. But then, as the son reached middle age, he behaved in a manner totally unlike himself. He violated one of the most respected family tenets and then compounded the situation by doing something even worse—something so horrendous that the good name of the family was forever besmirched. How the father’s heart ached for what had been done. How should he respond to it? What should he say? What should he do? Can he still love his son—with all the shame that had now been brought upon their name? Should he cut him off entirely from the family? What is the appropriate reaction?

In this instance the Father sent Nathan to illustrate the situation with a parable and then to inform David, “Thou *art* the man” (2 Sam. 12:7). God also expressed disappointment with the one whom He had anointed king, telling him:

I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? (2 Sam. 12:7-9).

How sad for the youth who had loved and followed God so closely all of his life to allow himself to be turned away by fleshly lusts, which resulted in murder! What could God do? Would He be content to simply be sorrowful and let David apologize? Or would His wrath be aroused against David to the degree that he would be immediately removed as king and made an example out of?

Two things stand out in God's handling of this situation: (1) He forgave David of his sins (12:13); and (2) He informed him of his punishment: (a) the sword would never depart from his house; (b) evil would arise against David from his own house; (3) his wives would be humiliated in the sight of all Israel; (4) the child Bathsheba had conceived would die (12:10-14).

These two reactions of God toward David remind us of the verse that describes His dealings with the Jews and the Gentiles: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22). Whereas the Jews received the severity and the Gentiles the goodness, David received both. God did not utterly reject David or his descendants from being king (as He had Saul); He continued to love him, but that love could not exempt David from judgment for his sins. “For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Heb. 12:7).

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

Christians in the first century were threatened with persecution, which caused some of them to be reluctant about meeting with their brethren on the first day of the week. After exhorting them to “hold fast the profession” of their faith, which involved not forsaking the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:23-25), the writer of the letter provides example after example of their spiritual counterparts under the old covenant who remained faithful to God despite all of the obstacles, concluding with a section showing ways in which they were killed.

He concludes this point by calling attention to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Who “endured the cross” because of the joy (reward) that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). After reminding them that they had

“not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (12:4), he then suggests another possibility—that some of the adversity that had come their way was the result of their own sins: “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (12:5).

This thought is not a pleasant one—that some of our problems, even forms of persecution, have been brought upon us by ourselves. However, as we picture Absalom pursuing his father out of Jerusalem to kill him, lying with his concubines in the sight of all Israel, or (even before those acts of treachery) killing his brother Amnon, we know that David suffered these humiliations due to his own sins.

Of what were the Hebrew Christians guilty? If we do not know anything else about them, at least we are apprised of the fact that the faith of some of them had weakened. In fact, after this exhortation about chastening, the first thing the writer records is: “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (12:12). Other warnings in the letter include: giving the more earnest heed to the teachings of the Gospel, lest some “drift away” (2:1—NKJ); not allowing the Word of God to be “mixed with faith” (4:2); not drawing back “unto perdition,” having once believed (10:38-39); and not refusing Him who speaks from Heaven (12:25).

THE MEANING OF THE QUESTION

The words recorded in Hebrews 12:5-6 are a quotation from Proverbs 3:11-12; verse 7 asks the question that is the subject of this chapter: “For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” The writer is appealing to the natural order of things to establish his point—the discipline that a father exercises toward his son. Was it customary for an earthly father to chasten his son when he needed it? Yes. Then we can expect the heavenly Father to treat us the same way. Although this point seems obvious, various factors must be present, or we will not be able to apply the verse properly.

Fathers Must Discipline Their Children

If for any reason this action is not carried out, this passage (although still intelligible) loses some of its force. First, the *father* is the one God expects to do the chastening. In many homes today, the absence of a father automatically causes this duty to fall upon the mother, which weakens God’s plan. Of course, it is God’s design for children to have

two parents, but the reality of war, a tragic accident, or divorce may make the ideal situation unattainable. What flies in the face of the Divine pattern is the woman who defies God by having children outside of marriage with a view toward living off the government. She has not only chosen to live immorally (the non-husband comes around occasionally to satisfy his fleshly lusts), she is robbing her children of the male influence they need in their lives.

Almost as reprehensible as the "absent father," however, is the husband who is there but *delegates* all of his disciplinary authority to his wife. God requires the **father** to chasten his son. It is to **men** that Paul wrote: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The male in the household is in charge of the spiritual development of the children. How often today has this burden been borne by godly women whose husbands have abdicated this responsibility?

Second, of paramount importance is the definition of *chasten*; what does it mean? It refers to both instruction and discipline (including physical punishment). *Paideia*, the noun, is translated "nurture" in Ephesians 6:4, "instruction" in 2 Timothy 3:16, and "chastening" or "chastisement" four times in our text (Heb. 12:5, 7-8, 11). These are its only appearances in the New Testament. A related word, *paideutas*, is found twice—once in Romans 3:20, where it is translated "instructor," and once in Hebrews 12:9, where it is rendered "which corrected."

Another related word, the verb *paideuo*, appears 13 times. Eight of these are rendered "chasten" or "chastise"; the other five involve education: "learned" (Acts 7:22), "taught" (Acts 22:3), "learn" (1 Tim. 1:20), "instructing" (2 Tim. 2:25), and "teaching" (Tit. 2:12). In other words, the father is expected to teach the important spiritual principles that children need to know, and when they are rebellious, careless, or slothful, he needs to teach them the advantages of being compliant.

Third, what is the father's motive in chastening his son? "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). Some *child experts* today are discouraging punishment in general and spanking in particular. These approaches are not realistic. Some of them would probably recoil in shock if a child were touched lightly, but they sound as if they would enjoy throttling the adults who are just doing their duty. Winford Claiborne republished a letter that appeared on page 12A in *The Tennessean* on May 8, 1999:

There are only two reasons why a parent spansks a child: Either the parent is mean in the heart or ignorant in the head. So what is your excuse? Never mind, we have probably heard it lots of times before (179).

Such is doubtful; the writer does not sound as though he has read the Bible lately (Pro. 22:15; 23:13-14; et al.). He makes no effort to hide his verbal belligerence. How can he advocate reasoning with a child while ignoring logic altogether with adults? The irony is just delicious.

The fact is, however, that discipline plays an important role in child development. One advises: "Discipline should begin when the child is in the cradle. An infant knows whether or not he can manipulate his parents, and if he can, he will" (Christenson 93). On this same page he also affirms: "Children need to know there is someone stronger and wiser in the family." In response to those who might argue that the child should be indulged, he states: "The child who has everything done for him, everything given to him, and nothing required of him is a deprived child."

The father disciplines his children because he loves them. He knows that they cannot have everything they want when they want it and that they cannot be allowed to control the home. They need to be taught to discern what are acceptable actions, which is accomplished by rewarding correct conduct and discouraging (even punishing) bad behavior.

Fourth, to accomplish the desired result requires effort. Discipline must be consistent. Little ones cannot be ignored for breaking the television one day and trounced for spilling milk the next. As much as possible, children should not be punished out of anger (which leads to inconsistency because the parent's fuse may be shorter one day than it will be at other times). Neither can chastisement be administered without plenty of other evidence that the child is loved, or they might mistake the motive behind it. With respect to Ephesians 6:4, James Dobson writes:

A parent can absolutely destroy a child through the application of harsh, oppressive, whimsical, unloving, and/or capricious punishment.... However, you cannot inflict permanent damage to a child if you follow this technique: identify the rules well in advance; let there be no doubt about what is and is not acceptable behavior; when the child cold-bloodedly chooses to challenge those known boundaries in a haughty manner, give him good reason to regret it; at all times,

demonstrate love and affection and kindness and understanding (*Dare* 29).

God's Discipline of Us

All of the things that have been presented about how fathers are to discipline their children must now all be transferred to the way the heavenly Father chastens us. We who are adults to our children, as well as to our contemporaries, are nevertheless children in the sight of God. As a loving heavenly Father, He has the task of bringing us all up in His nurture and admonition. We are all at different places spiritually, and even when we seem fairly well-developed, we still run the risk of disappointing Him, as David did.

While we are totally willing to submit ourselves when we obey the Gospel, which implies that we always will want to humble ourselves and trust in God, the fact is that many Christians begin having second thoughts. Like Peter looking at the waves all around him, we view some of the problems that loom before us with trepidation. Rather than remaining focused on Jesus, we begin to consider how **we** are going to deal with these things. Unfortunately, we often use principles of the world in resolving problems instead of the Scriptures; we also think at times that everything depends on us, thus leaving God out.

Then there are the times that we flat-out disagree with God and His Word. Of course, we would not say it quite that way, but our actions confirm that we feel that way. What were David's thought processes in sending for Bathsheba? Did he not know she was married? Could he not remember that he had several wives of his own to satisfy his fleshly desires? Had he never heard the command, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exo. 20:14)? How could some of these things fail to run through his mind? If they did, his response had to be: “Yes, but...” There was no Dr. Laura there to interrupt him by saying, “There is no ‘Yes, but...’” David disagreed with God's judgment concerning the seventh commandment *at this moment*.

It is interesting that the two passages we have been studying are both 12:7s (making it easy to remember them together). In 2 Samuel 12:7, David is told, “Thou *art* the man!” and in Hebrews 12:7 is stated our question about despising the chastening of the Lord. Since the chapter and verse divisions were done by a man, it is probably a matter of coincidence.

God is concerned about our spiritual development. Parents, in disciplining their children, are instructed by James Dobson and others:

“Define the Boundaries Before They Are Enforced” (*Strong-Willed* 31). No one can question that God has defined our boundaries: He has taught us what sin is and what acceptable behavior is. Another principle is: “Distinguish Between Willful Defiance and Childish Irresponsibility” (32). Since God is omniscient, He knows what our motives are for our disobedience.

God’s love is beyond question. He gave His only begotten Son for us (John 3:16). Jesus laid down His life for us (John 15:13). Jesus cares about the church as a whole: “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Eph. 5:29). Many still believe that God created the world and then stood back to see what would happen (as if He would not know); this philosophy is Deism. Others would take a modified view—that since Jesus established the church, everyone in Heaven is just sitting back, observing.

Although some might fear that the alternative is Calvinistic control, it is not. Jesus cares about the church—nourishing and cherishing it. The inspired apostle exhorts: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*” (1 Pet. 5:10). If all members of the body of Christ were as concerned about their spiritual development even a fraction of what God is, what mighty spiritual giants would walk among us! God works providentially to bring us along into maturity.

Furthermore, like the good shepherd, He guards us from wolves and keeps us securely in the fold (John 10:10, 27-29). The only way we can depart is out of our own stubborn will—by disregarding His love and protection. Even against the temptations of the devil He sets limits—not allowing us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. With the temptation He provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Satan made the request to have Peter that he might sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31); that request was denied, although he was allowed to reveal Peter’s weakness to him.

And, because God loves us, He also chastises us. It is His means to show us that we are wrong and in need of repentance. If a child is found playing with matches, his father is likely to spank him to: (1) show his displeasure with this action; (2) demonstrate that pain is associated with disobedience; (3) prevent him from doing so again (repentance). He may also reason with him that by playing with matches

he could injure himself and/or others. The father is motivated by love for his son.

God chastises us for the same reasons—because He loves us. When we choose sin, He is displeased. Sin violates and wars against the holy nature of God. Sin merits death—eternal separation from God, Who has done everything in His power to keep us from that eventuality. He chastens us so we will be reminded of this reward for sin, the goal being our repentance—a change in behavior. David played with fire and suffered massive burns—both he and his descendants. We are all grateful that he repented and did not ever repeat this behavior again (Psa. 51).

How God Chastises Us

Cain was “a tiller of the ground” (Gen. 4:2). When God punished Him, He took away that which he loved most; God told him: “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (4:12). Rebekah helped Jacob deceive his father Isaac into giving him Esau’s blessing. Because Esau determined to kill him, Jacob was forced to flee; so far as the record indicates, mother and son never saw each other again (Gen. 27). Jacob supplanted his brother by tricking his father; he himself was tricked when he married Rachel. The next morning he discovered he had spent the night with her older sister Leah (29:21-25). He was also deceived by his own sons, who allowed him for years to think that Joseph was dead (37:32-35).

God possesses a keen sense of irony. Ananias and Sapphira desired the praise of the church for their generosity; they are forever associated with ignominious motives (Acts 5:1-11). The rich farmer had one main goal—the accumulation of wealth; when he died, the wealth stayed behind, and he was spiritually impoverished (Luke 12:15-20). When Israel rebelled continuously against God, He took away the things they delighted in the most: the temple and the land. These may sound like drastic measures, but they are the most likely punishment to make us consider the enormity of our departure from Him.

For this reason, the withdrawal of fellowship in the New Testament is prescribed. When members of the church all participate in withholding fellowship from the Christian who has become overcome by sin, it removes from him that which he should regard as most precious. The action is designed to hurt, as all chastening does. With our own chil-

dren we either spank (depending on their age) or we ground them from some activity they love. These actions are designed to hurt them to the point of evaluating their behavior. God deals with us in the same way.

Anyone who is sinning (and getting away with it) should immediately beware and ask: “Why doesn’t God love me?” Whom the Lord loves He chastens (Heb. 12:6). Suppose a preacher is committing adultery with a secretary or another of the members. The best thing that could happen is that he is confronted by someone about this sin (the woman’s husband, his wife, etc.). Even if everyone learned of it and he suffered great shame, it would still be better than committing the sin in secret and no one finding out about it. Unless he is called to account for his actions, he cannot repent (and perhaps will not do so on his own).

Those who have acted out of pride God has a way of humbling. A preacher or an elder should accept the chastening and profit from it. The other alternative is to take the course of Pharaoh—and harden one’s heart even further. If various punishments do not alter behavior for the better, God will sometimes use a major event (even the death of a loved one, in the case of Pharaoh) to drive someone to his knees. How we ought to appreciate God’s chastening and heed it before we stray too far away or sear our conscience! We ought to recognize that God works providentially to correct us because He loves us.

CONCLUSION

Some may refuse to humble themselves before God—to their own detriment. If we genuinely love God, we will appreciate being chastened. In *The Strong-Willed Child* James Dobson explains that even children understand the need for discipline. He explains what happened with a five-year-old in a restaurant:

This lad was sassing his mother, flipping water on his youngest brother, and deliberately making a nuisance of himself. After four warnings which went unheeded, the father took his son by the arm and marched him to the parking lot where he proceeded to administer a spanking. Watching this episode was a meddling woman who had followed them out of the restaurant and into the parking lot. When the punishment began, she shook her finger at the father and screamed, “Leave that boy alone! Turn him loose! If you don’t stop I’m going to call the police!” The five-year-old, who had been crying and jumping, immediately stopped yelling and said to his father in surprise, “What’s wrong with that woman, Dad?” He understood the purpose for the discipline, even if the “rescuer” didn’t (38).

If we are as sharp as that little tyke, we will be grateful that God loves us enough to chastise us; we will humbly submit to His correction.

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Christenson, Larry. *The Christian Family*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1970.
- Claiborne, Winford. *Restoring God's Pattern for the Home*. Fayetteville, TN: International Gospel Hour, 2001.
- Dobson, James. *Dare To Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1970.
- - -. *The Strong-Willed Child*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982.

“ARE YE NOT THEN PARTIAL IN YOURSELVES?”

JAMES 2:4

John West



John West was born in Aberdeen, Mississippi. He comes from a preaching family—his father, brother, uncle, and three cousins, as well as his father-in-law are Gospel preachers. He is married to the former Sonya Caudle, and they have three children: Lauren, Jonathan, and Joshua. He is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching, earned his B.A. degree from Faulkner University, and a M.Min. degree from Freed-Hardeman. He directed the annual Millport Lectures and currently hosts the “Back to The Bible” television program which airs three days a week. He currently preaches for the Spring Valley Church of Christ in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

INTRODUCTION

Prejudice is a problem which plagues our society in all walks of life. It may be based on money, the color of his skin, the type of house in which a he lives, the car he drives, etc. According to James, to show prejudice is a sin that will cost a person his soul in hell. The Christian today will not have this sin in his life, but will exhibit love to all regardless of money or color of skin. “The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God!” (Wiersbe 64). John writes, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20). We cannot say we love God and pre-judge our fellow man based on outward appearance. Douglas Moo states two reasons why the Christian should not engage in prejudice:

First, preferential treatment of the rich stands in stark contrast to the attitude of God, who has chosen the poor to be ‘rich in faith’ (vss. 5-7). Secondly, *any* manifestation of favouritism is condemned by the ‘royal law’ that demands love of the neighbour (vss. 8-13) (87).

This chapter will show that James teaches the Christian to avoid being prejudiced (Jam. 2:1); prejudice is often practiced (2:2-4); God teaches

the truth about the matter (2:5-7); and not to violate the “royal law” (2:8-13).

PREVENT PREJUDICE

James begins verse one by saying “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons.” Although he begins this chapter with a rebuke of these people, he entreats them as *my brethren*. The world is full of prejudice and hatred, but it should not characterize the Christian. This makes this lesson even more important because, from time to time, we see those who call themselves Christians showing partiality. The Bible from Old Testament to New Testament condemn the practice of prejudice. Since James is probably writing to mainly a Jewish audience, they know that the Law and Prophets condemns it, yet some are guilty of being partial.

“Respect of persons” is from the Greek word *prosopolempsia* which means, “respect of persons, partiality, to accept or respect the person of any one, to pay regard to external appearance, condition, circumstances, etc.” (Mounce 400). “Respect [respector] of persons” is found nine times in the Bible (2 Chr. 19:7; Pro. 24:23; 28:21; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; Jam. 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:17). There are many other verses in the Bible that condemn this practice that are not listed. Since James is writing to a primarily Jewish audience, they should know better than to show partiality. Moses writes, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: *but* in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15). In Leviticus 19:18, he writes what James refers to as the *royal law* when he said, “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” If a person loves his neighbor, he will not engage in pre-judging his neighbor based on the outward appearance. Moses goes as far to say in this chapter that he shall neither look on the outward appearance of the poor nor of the rich, but be righteous in his judgment. Samuel writes:

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Jesus states, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). The Scriptures are clear that it is wrong to judge someone based on the outward (clothing, skin color, social

standing, etc.). J. J. Turner lists ten things which contribute to prejudice:

1. Background (what we hear in our home, community, school, office, etc.).
2. Misunderstandings (some think God created some people superior and others inferior).
3. Pride (having the attitude: "I am better than others").
4. Indoctrination (having been taught to "look down" upon others because they are poor, uneducated, a different color, etc.).
5. Fear (do not want to be marked off of the "social register"; do not want people to reject them).
6. A Bad Experience In The Past (they had an unfortunate experience with a poor man, rich man, white man, black man, sailor, policeman, etc.).
7. Hasty Reactions (premature jumping to conclusions).
8. Satan and Sin (it can destroy compassion for others).
9. Blindness (will not admit prejudice).
10. Do Not Know Any better (have never been taught properly) (69-70).

Human beings are all too prone to make judgments about the worth and value of others on the basis of whether they wear the right clothes, speak with the right accent, live at the right address or have the right colour of skin (Townsend 34).

This is a foolish way to behave:

But for James it is more than human foolishness, it is a denial of the reign of Christ. If Jesus the Messiah really is the crucified Lord then he was crucified for all. If he now reigns in glory then his reign is for all (Townsend 34).

Jesus is the greatest example of one who was impartial in His judgments. "He was not impressed with riches or social status. The poor widow who gave her mite was greater in His eyes than the rich Pharisee who boastfully gave his large donation" (Wiersbe 65).

PREJUDICE PRACTICED

In James 2:2-3, James gives the illustration of a rich man and a poor man entering the assembly to worship. While this may only be an illustration, it appears to be similar to what is taking place in their assembly. The first man pictured is a rich man with a "gold ring, in goodly apparel." The second man is a poor man wearing "vile raiment." "Poor" in this passage is from the Greek word *ptochos* which means, "reduced to beggary, mendicant; poor, indigent" (Mounce 404). This man is literally a beggar. He depends on others for his survival. This picture is quite a contrast. "The 'millionaire' and the 'bum' both come into the assembly. One smells of sweet cologne; the other smells of dirt and perspiration; one is at the top; the other is at the bottom, etc." (Turner 71). How would we react to such a scene? Would we be any different than the people of the first century?

Our faith is being tested by how we react and act toward these two—which hand shall I shake first? which one do I want to sit beside? Today, it may not be a rich and poor, but a black and white, a yellow and brown, etc. etc. (Turner 71).

This chilling illustration reminds us of our own attitude toward those who are different.

James 2:3 tells how those Christians treated both men. The rich man is told to sit in the good seat, while the poor man is told to stand or sit on the floor. The ones to whom James writes is giving "respect to him that weareth the gay clothing." This respect is purely outward due to the way the man is dressed. What does he know about these men? James shows the way the rich treats the Christian (2:6-7), but points out that the poor will more readily obey the Gospel (2:5). However, this person thinks "cash is more important than character" (Roper 41). He displays an unloving attitude toward the poor man.

They sought to make a floor mat of him!! They were suggesting by their cold and calloused attitudes that the latter visitor was unworthy to be **beside** the brethren; he was worthy only to be **beneath** them! (Taylor 27).

This attitude is

especially humiliating since the man cannot help the circumstances that apparently cause the discourtesy. To make a man suffer humiliation because of circumstances beyond his control is so completely unjust that the Christian, of all people, should recognize the inconsistency with Christianity (Fream 73).

Today, the issue that plagues us most is the color of one's skin. This issue is something that we all deal with in the local church. While in my first local work as a young preacher, a shocking statement was made by one of the members. The subject of prejudice was being studied in Bible class, when a man spoke up and said, "I would rather my daughter go straight to hell as to marry a n_____ [rest of word left out intentionally—JW]." It is unimaginable that a person can be so prejudiced that he will wish his own child to go to hell rather than her marry someone with a different skin color. While on a restoration trip as a student of the Memphis School of Preaching, the students visited many restoration sites, including the old Cane Ridge meeting house. The guide for the day was showing the balcony and an entrance on the side. He stated that at one time the blacks were required to climb up a ladder from the outside to enter the balcony where they would sit for worship. He stated that they were not allowed to enter with the whites.

His next statement both shocked and embarrassed many because there were several black students present. He said they were not allowed to enter with the whites or sit with them, and it should be the same way today. We need to learn to get past this prejudiced attitude that plagues our society. We need to look at the souls of men rather than the color of the skin. Do we deem a person unworthy of the Gospel if he does not have the same skin color? James shows in this passage that a person sins when he is prejudiced (2:8-9). Racism, however, is not a one-way street. There are also blacks who are prejudiced against whites. Someone said in a private conversation that a black person cannot be prejudiced because he is in the minority. He believed that a person had to be in the majority to be prejudiced, but this could not be further from the truth. For years, Louis Farrakhan spread a message of hate and prejudice. He thought all whites and Jews must be punished or killed for the treatment of blacks in the past. **Any** person who pre-judges an individual based solely on the outward is prejudiced and is violating James 2.

Dress, color of skin, fashion, and other superficial things carry more weight than the fruit of the Spirit that may be manifest in their lives. We cater to the rich because we hope to get something out of them, and we avoid the poor because they embarrass us (Wiersbe 66).

Jesus did not practice this kind of sin, and neither should the Christian today. "If a visitor is a Christian, we can accept him because Christ *lives in him*. If he is not a Christian, we can receive him because Christ *died for him*" (Wiersbe 66).

James asks a rhetorical question which condemns the attitude of prejudice. "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" (2:4). The Greek word in this passage is *diekrithete*, aorist passive indicative, from *diakrino* which means: "to separate, sever; to make a distinction or difference." This distinction is not one of evidence based on facts, but on the outward, which makes him a "practitioner of partiality" (Taylor 27).

James now convicts him of being a "judge of evil thoughts." This presents a number of problems for the Christian in James' epistle. (1) He sets himself up as a judge above God. God commands impartiality in judgment, but the *partial* person veers from it. He is like the judge of Luke 18:1-8 who neither feared God nor had regard for man. He is referred to in verse six as an "unjust judge." This is the same condemnation placed on the "judge of evil thoughts" of James' day.

(2) He also changes God’s authority to his own authority. Instead of following God’s Word, which teaches impartiality, he violates it with his own standard. Isaiah writes that God is greater than man both in ways and thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). Why should the Christian want to use a worldly standard of judgment when God has given a far greater one. (3) A final problem is that he does not practice the *golden rule*. The golden rule teaches that we treat a person in the same manner that we want to be treated. The person in James 2 is not treating the poor visitor in the manner he would like to be treated. How would we like to go to a place and be treated poorly based solely on our outward dress or features? How would we like to go before an unjust judge and have an unfair verdict rendered? Since we want to be treated fairly, then we should treat others in the same manner.

POVERTY OR PRIVILEGE—GOD’S VIEW

James begins 2:5 with: “Hearken, my brethren.” “Hearken” is from the Greek *akousate*, aorist active imperative, of the Greek word *akouo*. This word means: “to hear, hearken, to listen to; to heed, obey” (Mounce 60). James wants his audience to pay close attention to what he is going to say. He asks another rhetorical question as he did in verse four. “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (2:5). This person is poor according to worldly and material standards, but is rich toward God spiritually because he follows Him. In this passage, James is not stating that God arbitrarily chooses the poor and condemns the rich. He states it is “promised to them that love Him.” Since God is no “respector of persons” (Acts 10:34), He does not show partiality based on riches or the lack of it. However, the poor will more readily obey the Gospel than the rich. Jesus states:

Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Mat. 19:23-24).

The reason Jesus makes this statement is because the one who is rich will trust in his riches rather than in God. Jesus teaches this lesson in Matthew 19 because the rich young ruler comes, but then goes away sorrowfully “for he had great possessions” (19:22). He is not willing to give up this world’s goods for the riches of heaven eternally. The same is true today with the rich man. He often wants gold over God, jewels over Jesus, and this world over His Word.

James begins verse six with a condemnation of the sinful prejudicial attitude the Christian is exhibiting when he states: “But ye have despised the poor.”

It signifies to put the poor in a state of degradation and to withhold from them the respect which they deserve. The attitude was more than a passive one; these thus rebuked *showed* contempt for the poor, and this involved active disrespect (Woods 115).

James now points out why it is foolish to despise the poor and honor the rich. He asks: “Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?” (2:6-7). The rich refers to rich unbelieving Jews of the day. The unbeliever mistreats the Christian, yet the Christian honors the rich and despises the poor. He also draws (drags—ASV) the Christian before the judgment seat. The judgment seat in this passage probably refers to the synagogue courts. The Romans allowed the Jews “the privilege of conducting both civil and religious courts in which were heard matters of litigation involving the religion and business affairs of the Jewish people.” It appears the unbelieving Jew, under the pretense of legality, is taking from the Christians what little they possess (Woods 116).

They used their influence in the corrupt courts of the day. To “draw...before the judgment seats”, referred to bringing the defenseless man to trial against his will.... The poor man didn’t stand a chance (Roper 42).

The unbelievers also “blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called.” They speak against and slander the very name the disciples wear. *Blaspheme* is a present active indicative verb which shows continuous actions. This simply means that the unbelieving Jew slanders the name of Christ over and over again. “It is hard to imagine a Christian’s honoring someone who had slandered Christ. This shows us the enslaving power of sin and prejudice” (Turner 76).

PREJUDICE PERVERTS THE ROYAL LAW

James provides a powerful argument against prejudice. He tells him to keep the *royal law*: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The reader will not argue with James because he believes he is fulfilling this law by showing kindness toward the rich. However, he fails to show brotherly love toward the poor. However, James convicts him of his prejudice. “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (2:9).

James now strikes the final blow. Since they were practicing respect of persons, they were guilty of **SIN**.... In fact, the very Law they had appealed to is the one that had convicted them of sin. It said love **BOTH**: they violated this by only practicing it toward the rich (Turner 77).

The prejudiced person believes he is being impartial, but James proves otherwise. James then shows that, if he keeps the law, but offends in one point, he is guilty of the whole law (2:10). By showing kindness to the rich and disdain for the poor, he is “found guilty, as charged” by James.

In verse thirteen, James points out that God will show **no** mercy in judgment to the one who has not shown mercy to his fellow man. The prejudiced person shows no mercy to the poor man and, therefore, will have no mercy shown to him in judgment. Today, when someone is partial or prejudiced, he is guilty of the sin of being unmerciful. God, on judgment day, will have no mercy toward this individual.

CONCLUSION

The problem of prejudice is as real today as in the first century. A person can be guilty of prejudice toward wealth, ethnicity, gender, etc. When a person is judged solely on the outward appearance, it is sin. The Christian today must learn to look on his fellow man with kindness and love for the soul without being partial toward a particular group. Remember the words of Jesus: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Fream, Donald. *A Chain of Jewels from James and Jude*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1965.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, James*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon To The Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- Roper, David L. *Practical Christianity, Studies In The Book Of James*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987.
- Taylor, Robert R. *Studies In James and Jude*. Ripley, TN: Taylor, 1987.
- Townsend, Michael J. *The Epistle Of James*. London: Epworth, 1994.
- Turner, J. J. *The Book Of James*. Abilene, TX: Quality, 1976.
- Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Mature*. Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1978.
- Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary On The Epistle Of James*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987.

“WILT THOU KNOW...FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD?”

JAMES 2:20

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr., was born March 7, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lla Laline Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss began preaching in 1942.

Guss attended Pepperdine College and Southwest State Teachers College. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Missouri. He also has preached in over twenty-five countries and twenty-six states. He served as a missionary in Hong Kong for two years. In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home.

In 1995, he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

He conducted the first television program for churches of Christ in Northern California and has conducted weekly programs in California and Texas. He also conducted daily radio programs as well as weekly programs in California, Oregon, Texas, and Louisiana. In 2002, Guss and his wife, Laline, moved to Laredo, Texas.

James, by inspiration of God, asked the question “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren?” (Jam. 2:20). Do you want to know, do you want evidence or proof, O vain man, that faith without, or apart from, works is dead, it is to no avail.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is explained by the writer of Hebrews: “Now faith is assurance of *things* hoped for, a conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is a conviction that we have things even though we have not seen them. We have this conviction because of evidence. This evidence may come in different forms, one of which is testimony of credible men.

Without faith we cannot please God. “And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing *unto him*; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that seek after him” (Heb. 11:6).

HOW DO WE OBTAIN THIS FAITH?

Paul, the Apostle, tells us that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. "So belief *cometh* of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

The child of God must have a powerful and dynamic faith! That faith comes from a study of God's Word. However, that faith must be an active faith. Faith must perform or act for it to profit. One may believe, or have faith that a man is a physician. That belief does not become active, until it is proven. My faith that he is a physician is proven, when I am willing to commit my life into his hands.

The false doctrine of "faith only" is taught by many denominations. That doctrine teaches that all one must do to be saved is just believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The famous passage in John 3:16 is oft quoted as proof: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Another passage is used, but it defeats the doctrine of "faith only." Jesus said, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

Another passage that is used to try to uphold the doctrine of "faith only" is Galatians 2:16:

Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Here we can plainly see that no flesh, Jew or Gentile, can be justified by the works of the law. However, we must understand which law the apostle Paul is speaking of. Anyone who studies the context understands that the law here is the Old Testament Law given by Moses.

Christians are free from the Law of Moses, the Law of sin and death, by another law—the law of the Spirit of Life (Christ's law), which is the law of faith (Rom. 3:27). Paul refers to this law as "God's law, the law of Christ." Notice 1 Corinthians 9:21: "To them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law."

The apostle Paul graphically points out that Christians are dead to the law of Moses in Romans 7. The law of the Spirit of life is referred to as "The perfect law of liberty." "But he that looketh into the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that for-

getteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing” (Jam. 1:25).

However Christians are not under the yoke of bondage, the Mosaic Law, as Paul makes plain in Galatians 5:1-4. Christians are under the law of liberty, which is the teaching and doctrine of Christ. Christians are not going beyond or adding to the Law of Christ, as we plainly see in 2 John 9-11. Jesus stated that we prove that we love Him if we keep His commandments (John 14:15).

The law of Jesus Christ is “the faith” in Jude 3.

Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.

For a person to teach that individuals are saved by “faith only” shows his utter disregard for plain teachings in God’s Word.

One must obey the commands of Jesus to be found pleasing in God’s sight. Notice the sayings of our Lord: “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). In the very next chapter of John, Jesus says, “Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you” (15:14). Jesus Christ says that there are commands to be obeyed. That is plain Bible teaching! There is something that Christians must do to be saved. Jesus said, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (15:10). Read again:

And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him: he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

Yea! It is very plainly taught that Christians must walk as Jesus walked. This means there is something for the child of God to do.

John wrote, “My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7). The Christian must **do** righteousness. Then we learn from the Psalmist: “Let my tongue sing of thy word; For all thy commandments are righteousness” (Psa. 119:172). There is something for the child to do. When one *does* righteousness, he obeys the commandments of God.

LET US LOOK AT WHAT JAMES SAYS

"What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him?" (Jam. 2:14). No doubt, God could foresee that man would teach the false doctrine of "faith only." To prove that such teaching was a doctrine of Satan, James gave much instruction about this subject in the second chapter of his writings. He asked a question dealing with the subject of faith and works. He starts his inquiry by saying, "What doth it profit?" William Beck translates this verse: "What good does it do, my fellow Christians, if you say you have faith but don't have any works? Can such a faith save you?" (649). Additionally Charles Willams translates it this way: "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" (649). James says that faith without works is worthless, it is to no avail.

If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit? (2:15-16).

There is no way James could have used a better illustration to disprove the doctrine of "faith only" to be false than what he writes here. Then he clinches his argument with the following verse: "Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself" (2:17).

To add even more weight to his argument, James presents another case. "Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from *thy* works, and I by my works will show thee *my* faith" (2:18). James says that his works prove his faith.

He next shows that belief only profits nothing. "Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder" (2:19). When Jesus came into Capernaum he taught in a synagogue on the Sabbath day. At that time there was present a man with an unclean spirit. That wicked spirit knew and believed that Jesus was of God. Listen to what that demon said, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Nazarene? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). Here is only one of many cases where demons believed that Jesus was the Son of God. Did that faith save him? Certainly not!

James then draws this powerful conclusion: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren?" (2:20). This great truth is not new, it has been a principle for as long, at least, back to Abraham. Notice what James says, "Was not Abraham our father justi-

fied by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" (2:21). The inspired writer then draws this conclusion:

Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God (2:22-23).

Then James brings his whole argument to this conclusion: "Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (2:24). This is the summation drawn from verses 14, 17, 18, 20, and 22. Then James drives down the finishing point: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead" (2:26).

Abraham is known as the Father of the faithful. Yet, God put Abraham's faith to the test. His faith is tested and proven.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah. And offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. And he clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. And they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father. And he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold, the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son. So they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of. And Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of Jehovah called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him. For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh. As it is said to this day, In the mount of Jehovah

it shall be provided. And the angel of Jehovah called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Because thou hast obeyed my voice (Gen. 22:1-18).

The writer of Hebrews mentions the faith of Abraham:

By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God *is* able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back (11:17-19).

Abraham's faith was proven by his works. If he had not offered Isaac, his faith would have failed the test. It is evident that "faith only" or "faith alone" is a teaching foreign to the Bible.

God's Word teaches that Abraham was justified by faith. "For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). This same truth is taught in Romans 4:9. However, this justification was not by faith only, nor was it by works that man could do of his own (faith that would merit righteousness), but it was a faith that moved Abraham to obey. The works which James speaks about in James 2:24 is not works that man can think of and do. It is the works of obedience, doing what God has commanded. "Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (Jam. 2:24). This is the same kind of obedient faith that other Bible characters possessed. Notice some examples:

By faith Noah, being warned *of God* concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Heb. 11:7).

Noah prepared the Ark as God instructed him; he moved with godly fear. He obeyed God's direction. His faith in God caused his obedience. When we read Genesis 6-7, we find Noah did as God commanded him (6:22; 7:5, 9, 16).

Abel also moved by faith to follow God's instruction.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh (Heb. 11:4).

God told Abel and Cain what to offer as a sacrifice. Abel, by faith offered what God told him. Faith comes from hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17).

Rahab also was justified by faith that worked. "And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?" (Jam. 2:25). The Hebrews writer has a harlot listed with those of triumphant faith. "By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace" (11:31). We must hear her conversation with the spies of Israel to know of her faith:

I know that Jehovah hath given you the land, and that the fear of you is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond the Jordan, unto Sihon and to Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard it, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man, because of you: for Jehovah your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by Jehovah, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a true token; and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death. And the men said unto her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business; and it shall be, when Jehovah giveth us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee (Jos. 2:9-14).

Rahab heard of Jehovah and believed. That faith was proven when she hid the spies. James said her works or her actions justified her. Her faith was not dead, but it was an active faith—it moved her to obey.

In Hebrews 11, we find faith defined. Then the chapter is filled with great examples of faith. Every example of faith has works of obedience to prove that faith. The child of God has faith that the world and all things therein were formed by the Word of God (11:2). "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (11:4). "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death" (11:5). "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (11:7). "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance" (11:8). "By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age" (11:11). "By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac" 11:17). "By

faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau" (11:20). "By faith Jacob...blessed each of the sons of Joseph" (11:21). The parents of Moses, Amram and Jochebed, by faith hid Moses for three months (Num. 26:59; Heb. 11:23). "By faith Moses...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb. 11:24). "By faith he forsook Egypt" (11:27). "By faith Moses kept the Passover" (11:28). By faith Israel passed through the Red Sea (11:29).

By faith the wall of Jericho fell down (11:30). God gave instruction as to how to capture Jericho. All the men of war were to go about the city for six days. On the seventh day they were to compass the city, seven priests were to carry seven trumpets of rams horns in front of the Ark of the Covenant. After the completion of the seventh compassing of Jericho, the priests were to blow the trumpets, and the people were to give a great shout. When they had done as God commanded and the people shouted, the wall fell. The city was taken, but Rahab and all her family and possessions were spared. When God's people had faith and that faith moved to action, God's promises were fulfilled. Thus, faith must have works.

In James 2, it says at least three times that faith without works is dead. He says, "Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself" (2:17). Again, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren?" (2:20). Then again, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead" (2:26). Every person knows that when the spirit leaves the body, the body is inactive, motionless, and is worthless. So faith without works is dead, it is inactive, motionless, worthless, to no avail.

LET US NOTICE WHAT JAMES SAYS ABOUT FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

First of all, let James tell us that faith without works, is without profit, it is to no avail (2:14-16). He asked if a man hath faith without works, "can that faith save him?" (2:14). Then he says three times that faith without works is dead (2:17, 20, 26). He also tells us that faith without works is like the faith of demons (2:19). It is also important to mention that James says that faith without works cannot justify (2:24).

When we understand what Jesus says about obeying, we can understand what James means about faith without works. Our Lord said, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John

3:36). We can also understand what it means to believe. It means to not only have faith, but to obey.

And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed. But the Jews that were disobedient stirred up the souls of the Gentiles, and made them evil affected against the brethren (Acts 14:1-2).

Here we see that the disobedient were those who did not believe or have faith. Now notice that those who had faith were those who obeyed. “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (6:7). Those who were obedient to the faith were those who obeyed. The disobedient Jews were those who did not have faith; so consequently they did not obey.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Beck, William F. *Four Translation New Testament*. New York: The Iversen Associates Producers, Moody, 1966.

Williams, Charles B. *Four Translation New Testament*. New York: The Iversen Associates Producers, Moody, 1966.

“WHO IS A WISE MAN AND ENDUED WITH KNOWLEDGE AMONG YOU?”

JAMES 3:13

Ted J. Clarke



Ted J. Clarke was born in Illinois. He is married to the former Sherrie Mooney, and they have three children and seven grandchildren. Ted has served in local works in Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Alabama, and Arkansas. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1972, has a B.A. degree from Alabama Christian School of Religion, and has done graduate work at ACSR and Harding Graduate School. Ted has conducted meetings in 14 states and has made two mission trips to Jamaica. He speaks on several lectureships, written for brotherhood publications, and participated in several debates. Ted has worked with the congregation in Mammoth Spring, Arkansas since 1991. He

has served as editor of the *Fulton County Gospel News* since 1991.

INTRODUCTION

This author likes having his name following a question like that above, as though it is the answer to the question asked. All of us should desire to be identified as one possessing wisdom and knowledge, but perhaps our names rightly could not be given in response to such an inquiry. Must we have wisdom and knowledge to be pleasing to God? If so, then we definitely want to have our names given in response to the question title of his lesson. How much wisdom and knowledge are enough? What is the answer to James' question and why does he ask it? Does James answer his own question or is he asking those to whom he wrote? James 3:13 is a great question that we will try to answer, and in doing so cover the questions we raised in this paragraph.

DEFINITIONS

The New Testament word, *wisdom* (as a noun), is from the Greek *sophia*. The adjective, such as a “wise” man, is from *sophos* (Vine 678-79). A man is wise because he possesses wisdom, which is an attribute

or quality, not an activity (Brown 3:1026-1033). A wise man or woman will act in a manner consistent with the wisdom they possess.

New Testament meanings for wisdom come from the background of Old Testament Scripture. We will explore these in a minute.

Webster defines *wisdom* as:

1 a: accumulated philosophic or scientific learning: KNOWLEDGE b: ability to discern inner qualities and relationships: INSIGHT c: good sense: JUDGMENT d: generally accepted belief... 2: a wise attitude or course of action 3: the teachings of the ancient wise men.

Such a definition is not altogether helpful in discussing God and wisdom, for God has not *accumulated* wisdom; it is an eternal infinite attribute of God. God is the Source of all Divine wisdom. God's wisdom encompasses His knowledge, insight, and judgment about everything and is unlimited and perfect. "Great *is* our Lord, and of great power: his understanding *is* infinite" (Psa. 147:5). The apostle Paul wrote:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

The fear of the Lord (God) is a key phrase in the vocabulary of wisdom words. The concept is found several times in each of the Old Testament wisdom books. In Job's wisdom poem he said: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom; and to depart from evil *is* understanding" (28:28). The great conclusion to Ecclesiastes states: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man" (12:13). Proverbs' most notable verses claim this as the motto or theme of the whole book. "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7). "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (9:10—ASV). In the final verses of the book we read, "Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised" (31:30).

What is this "fear of the Lord"?

The aspects of fear encompassed by *yr' I* [the transliterated Hebrew word for fear in the passages just cited above, in other resources is printed as *yir'ah*—TJC] include terror, respect, and worship. Terror

and worship are, in some sense, polar opposites; the former is characteristic of complete anxiety while the latter suggests trust. The aspect of respect, however, can be either a weakened sense of fear or worship. Therefore, the concept of terror can be weakened to express respect, which can once again be intensified to express worship. Only by context can the particular sense of each occurrence be determined (Van Pelt and Kaiser 2:528).

When the apostle John said, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18), he was not denying what these wisdom verses affirm as essential. John was speaking of the knee-knocking or quaking terror aspect of fear. No one loved the Father more than the Son, and when Jesus prayed to the Father, He “was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7). There is no incompatibility between a commitment to God out of love and a commitment out of awe and reverence. Thus, *fear of the Lord* is a trusting, faithful obedience that worships God and loves one’s neighbor from a reverent, respectful awe of the Almighty.

GOD—THE SOURCE OF ULTIMATE WISDOM¹

God’s wisdom greatly excels the wisdom He imparts to us as His creation. His knowledge of all things (material and spiritual) and the way they work or do not work together is beyond our ability to fully know or comprehend.

A further factor, in the light of this knowledge, is the wisdom of God. By this is meant that God acts in the light of all of the facts and in light of correct values. Knowing all things, God knows what is good.... When we humans act, we sometimes act unwisely simply because we do not have all the facts. Later developments may prove our actions to have been unwise. Had we known certain relevant facts, we would undoubtedly have acted differently.... God, however, has access to all information. So his judgments are made wisely. He never has to revise his estimation of something because of additional information. He sees all things in their proper perspective; thus he does not give anything a higher or lower value than what it ought to have. One can therefore pray confidently, knowing that God will not grant something that is not good. Even though we are not wise enough to see all of the facts, or the results to which our ideas or planned actions may lead, we can trust God to know what is best (Erickson 275-276).

God’s wisdom flows from His omniscience. He does the right thing every time; He always has and always will. God has given and promises to give sufficient wisdom to His faithful children, according to

their needs (Pro. 2:6). Through prayer we have the promise of God's supply of wisdom for our lack of it (Jam. 1:5-6). The Wisdom Literature of the Bible is an abundant source of God's imparted wisdom that will bless those who study it diligently and apply it consistently.

GOD—GIVER OF WISDOM

Since man is made in the image of an all-wise God (Gen. 1:26-27), He equipped us with the ability to be taught wisdom principles and to grow in our knowledge and understanding of wisdom. Adam and Eve were created with wisdom and capabilities to increase in wisdom when God placed them in Eden (1:28-31). The question God asked Job implies this ability is part of His creation of man. "Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?" (Job 38:36). Furthermore, since the Bible says, "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy [Holy One—ASV] *is* understanding" (Pro. 9:10), Adam and Eve were equipped with the wisdom to obey God's commands and prohibitions (Gen. 2:15-25). "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; *but* he that despiseth his ways shall die" (Pro. 19:16). God would not have given them commandments if they did not have the wisdom potential to keep them.

Eve, then Adam, failed to exercise their *fear of God* wisdom when tempted by the serpent (Gen. 3:1-7), just as we sometimes give into temptation even though we know the wise choice would be to resist it (Jam. 1:13-15). The fruit of the forbidden tree (Gen. 2:16-17), that Eve thought was "desired to make *one* wise" (3:6), did **not** provide what Satan promised. The implication of the Liar's promise was that Eve would become all-wise concerning good and evil, like God (3:5—ASV). What Adam and Eve did receive was an experiential knowledge of good and evil, an understanding of guilt, shame, and the suffering of the penalty attached for this sin (3:7-19). The Devil is a deceiver who never tells the whole truth (Rev. 12:9; John 8:44). Adam and Eve acted foolishly against the wisdom God gave to His human creation. Possessing a knowledge of what is wise does not guarantee wise action. Solomon is a classic example of this, though he warns against it. "Cease listening to instruction, my son, And you will stray from the words of knowledge" (Pro. 19:27—NKJV).

The council [of the Godhead] recognized that man had "become as one of us, to know good and evil." This statement is not made in irony or

ridicule, as some have thought, but in sadness. Man had once known only the goodness of God; but now he had come to know experimentally the evil inherent in rejecting God’s Word, as well as the necessary spiritual and physical suffering resulting from such action, so that he did, indeed, “know good and evil.” His hoped-for “godness,” however, as promised by the Serpent, was indeed a pitiful caricature of what he had anticipated. He had been created in God’s very image, but now that image had been gravely marred and defaced by his experience of evil (Morris 131).

The wisdom Adam and Eve sought from eating the forbidden fruit was both illicit and unattainable. God only is wise in the ultimate unlimited sense (Jude 25; 1 Tim. 1:17). Man possesses wisdom capabilities from God and as one’s mind develops can, by observation, experience, prayer (providence), and heeding revelation increase in legitimate wisdom (Pro. 1:5; 2:6; 6:6-8).

God our Creator has endowed us with the tools necessary for learning in three areas. First, we have from God the ability to know Him and in wisdom serve Him with fear (reverent awe), although many reject Him (Pro. 1:7; 9:10; Rom. 1:18-21). Second, God gives us, in the ways mentioned above, the wisdom we need to treat our fellow man in the best possible manner (Pro. 3:1-4; et al.). All of the Proverbs deal with the **way** we should love and serve God and our fellow man. As such, the Proverbs are a reflection of the first and second great commandments: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:29-31). In this way the books of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament are inseparably connected with the Law and the Prophets. The Old Testament Law revealed God’s will as Christ stated it above (cf., Deu. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18), and the Prophets kept calling people back to that Law (Dan. 9:11-15; Mal. 4:4). The Wisdom Literature of Scripture simply gives additional revelation from God for instruction and encouragement as to how to keep God first in one’s life and some very specific and practical instruction of how to conduct one’s life in dealing with the good and evil found in others. Third, God has endowed us with the wisdom we need to live in our physical environment (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15). This natural realm is also an area where Solomon’s famous wisdom excelled (1 Kin. 4:33). Wisdom Literature also addresses our need to be good stewards of God’s gifts in this area and sometimes uses the order in the natural field to teach us lessons (Pro. 27:23-27; 30:15-31).

Although man's wisdom has increased through experience, providence, and God's revelation, there is surely a base or body of wisdom, revealed to our original parents and built upon by their experiences, that God intended to be passed from one generation to another throughout the history of men. This is the stated reason for Solomon giving us Proverbs, to pass on to others the wisdom he had (Pro. 1:1-9; 2:1-5; et al.).

There is a fourth type of wisdom the Bible mentions, which is not from God. It is the type Eve followed in Eden. James 3:15 states: "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish." This *worldly wisdom* is contrasted with God's wisdom most eloquently by Paul.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Worldly wisdom is falsely called *knowledge*; it ignores true **insights** into man's life and needs; and its **judgments** are based on improper reasoning from inadequate information.

WISDOM LITERATURE IN SCRIPTURE

Old Testament scholars generally assign to Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs the classification of Wisdom Literature. Additionally, there

are Psalms that have characteristics of wisdom themes and style (Psa. 1, 14, 19, 36-37, 49-50, 53, 73, 82, 91, 101, 112, 119, 125, 127-128, 133) (Berry 107-110, 211). Some see far fewer wisdom Psalms. There are 37 references in 42 chapters in Job (KJV) to the wise or wisdom, 125 such references in 31 chapters in Proverbs, 54 references in 12 chapters in Ecclesiastes, and 21 references in 150 Psalms (*PC Study Bible*).

One of the major emphases in Wisdom Literature is contrasting the value of wise men and wisdom versus fools and folly (foolishness). This latter group of words is found 9 times in Job, 18 times in Psalms, 97 times in Proverbs, and 32 times in Ecclesiastes.

It may be that certain wise men already had certain skills and abilities in their particular areas, whether weavers and tailors selected to make Aaron's priestly garments (Exo. 28:3), or artisans for working in metal, stone, or wood for the tabernacle (31:1-6). However, God gifted them with additional wisdom to perform these tasks specifically as He wanted them. Likewise, we have God-created abilities for wisdom, as stated above: the wisdom contained in God's Word—plus the promise of additional wisdom God will supply in answer to our prayers, to equip us to accomplish our tasks as God desires.

Types of Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament intends to deal with both hard puzzling questions (Job, Ecclesiastes) and the practical matters of how to get along in everyday life (Proverbs).

Job knows nothing of the events between God and Satan that brought on his suffering (1-2). He simply feels or knows that, while he is not perfect, he is suffering beyond any deserved punishment. Job's supposed friends believe they are wisely instructing him and admonishing him that he is indeed getting what he deserves. We know from the opening chapters Job's friends are wrong; Job rejects their self-proclaimed wisdom, but he cannot get God to respond to him (3-37). When God answers Job (38-41), he is forced to admit that he spoke in the ways he did because he truly did not understand God's majesty and wisdom (42). Wisdom is an important theme in Job, and there is much about wisdom worthy of our attention, but this type of wisdom is more philosophical, in contrast to the observational and practical wisdom of Proverbs. We are not given a specific clear-cut answer as to why the good innocent people of the world suffer and why some terribly wicked

people seem to be exempt from suffering. The short and difficult answer is that God is Sovereign and can do as He knows best—and that man cannot, in this life, always know why. Psalms 37 and 73 also deal with this type of question, perhaps giving a more satisfying answer in their pronouncements of God's final judgment upon the wicked and vindication of the righteous. God's greater blessing of Job in the end than he had before does suggest a greater final reward for those righteous who have had to suffer in this life (Job 42).

Ecclesiastes is a work of Solomon that also resents philosophical pondering (1). While Job asks why innocent people suffer in a world created by a Benevolent and Almighty God, Ecclesiastes asks, "What is the meaning of life on earth?" Solomon assesses his practice of using (or abusing) his wisdom and wealth to find happiness and meaning to life in pleasure, work, possessions, and self-indulgence of every kind (2-11). His conclusion is that all such efforts are vanity: meaningless and worthless. He uses this *vanity* 37 times before coming to his reassessment of life and his encouragement to youth (and to all) in the conclusion of the book to: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole *duty* of man" (12:1-7, 13-14).

Proverbs is also a product of Solomon, but it is more a book of practical wisdom, with its brief and forceful sayings, designed to give guidance in dealing with everyday situations in one's relationship with God and man. Its design is to impart wisdom and understanding to those who consider its words and to encourage the practice of those principles taught. The Proverbs, particularly, are concerned with wisdom as people skills: learning and doing those things in dealing with one's own life and interacting with others to make one's life the best it can be.

WISDOM LITERATURE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

No study of the Wisdom Literature of the Bible would be complete without a consideration of wisdom in the New Testament. In Matthew 2:1-12 wise men from the east (non-Jews) came to see Christ and worship Him. We are not told how their wisdom played a role in their knowing about Jesus' birth. At twelve years of age, Jesus' wisdom astonished the doctors of the Law of Moses at Jerusalem (Luke 2:46-47). Luke 2:52 states that Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man," which were precisely those areas intended by Wisdom Literature to improve in a person. In Luke 4:32 Jesus

quoted a familiar proverb to His audience: “Physician, heal thyself.” While an entire lesson could be presented on this topic, we can only give a brief overview.

In Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31 (cf. Acts 7:22) the word [*sophia*—Greek] is used as a secular term to praise the wisdom of Solomon. Jesus’ wisdom is extolled in a similar way (Mark 6:2; Luke 2:40, 52). The wisdom of God is referred to in Luke 11:49; Eph. 3:10, and also in doxologies (Rom. 11:33; 16:27; Rev. 7:12). The wisdom of God speaks to the world (Luke 11:49) and sends messengers (Matt. 23:34). The wisdom of the risen Christ is also praised (Rev. 5:12); in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:3).

The faithful have received wisdom as a gift from the Spirit (Eph. 1:8; Col. 1:9); therefore, they should strive for wisdom (Eph. 5:15; Col. 4:5). There are excellent people of wisdom in the communities (Acts 6:3, 10), and wisdom should be taught in the church (Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:28; cf. Jas. 3:13).

The most important discussion of how divine and earthly wisdom contradict each other occurs in 1 Cor. 1-2 (with 3:18-19, cf. II Cor. 1:12;...*See also* Mat. 11:25; Col. 2:23; Jas. 3:13-18 (Conzelmann 957).

Sections of the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7) show Wisdom Literature characteristics, as does much of Christ’s teaching. What else could we expect? Jesus said of Himself, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; **and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here**” (Mat. 12:42). Solomon excelled in wisdom over any before him or after him among mere men (1 Kin. 3:12; 4:30; 10:23-24), but Jesus was the Son of God in the flesh, the very image of God’s person (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2-3), who is all-wise (Pro. 2:6; Jude 25).

We commented previously concerning the elaborate contrast Paul proclaims between godly wisdom and the foolish wisdom of the world in 1 Corinthians 1-2. Those chapters are so instructive on God’s wisdom being rooted in Christ and His cross. The same wisdom is reflected in God’s purpose for Christ’s church (Eph. 3:9-11). Ultimately, we are told by Paul that **it is Christ in “whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Col. 2:3).

The epistle of James is considered to be the most wisdom-oriented book of the New Testament.

As might be expected, the Epistle of James, in which one of Jesus’ brothers writes in a manner as that of the Sermon on the Mount,

contains words of proverbial nature. Among these are such expressions as “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22) and “faith without works is dead” (2:20 KJV).

Peter’s word, “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8) is one of the most familiar Biblical proverbs, and in 2 Pet. 2:22, he concludes his scathing denunciation of false teachers by referring to two maxims, the first being from Proverbs 26:11, although the source of the second is unknown. It is significant that Peter introduces this reference by calling it “the true proverb” (Gaebelein 4:914).

The New Testament has much to contribute to the Wisdom Literature of the Bible.

THE WISE MAN IN JAMES

Does James answer his own question in 3:13 in a manner consistent with the information we have noted in previous Scriptures on wisdom? Indeed, he does. He writes:

Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation [manner of life] his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (3:13-18).

Wisdom is to be ***shown*** by one’s manner of life in works that bear the marks of the “meekness of wisdom.” James deals with a number of problems too numerous to mention, but one theme he emphasizes throughout is that Christianity is a ***doer*** religion; there are things one must ***do*** for personal improvement and work to be ***done*** on behalf of others. There are too many references to cite them all, but note 1:2-6, 12, 19-27; 2:1, 14-26; 3:10, 13, 4:6-11, 15, 17; 5:7-9, 12-16, 19-20. **A wise person is one who is actively trying to become a better Christian and one who diligently pursues helping others meet their needs.** All of this is to be done without a “Hey, look at me. See what I am doing?” It is an active but humble faith; one that knows with full assurance that if we “draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (4:8). Others will take note of one who is a humble doer of the word and work (1:22, 25), and that person will be worthy of being identified as being ***wise***.

James delays saying more about what being wise **is**, so that he can say what it **is not** (3:14). Those who "have bitter envying [jealousy—ASV] and strife in your hearts" are warned against boasting, thus lying against the truth that wisdom is accompanied by humility. One who harbors bitter jealousy against others and is engaged in self-seeking ambition, while bragging about how wise and good he/she is, is one who is flat out lying against the truth of what real wisdom is in the sight of God! James also points out that this so-called wisdom is not from heaven, but is "earthly, sensual, demonic" (3:15—NKJV). James uses *earthly* in the sense of worldly (4:4). This is the type of thinking and conduct characteristic of people who care nothing about God's will or their fellow human beings. This way of thinking and acting does not come from prayer to God for wisdom (1:5). This earthly wisdom comes from one having one's mind set on earthly things, not heavenly things (Phi. 3:19; Col. 3:1-3). This earthly wisdom is also *sensual*, referring to attitudes and actions that are *unspiritual* (RSV, NIV), not being under the control of God's Holy Spirit-revealed Will. Spiritual values are suppressed and feeding fleshly appetites become one's goal. Such earthly, sensual wisdom is *demonic*. Its focus on worldly, fleshly lusts is precisely what demons, the devil's workers, would seek to have people think about and do. If only people realized that such conduct places them in the company of Satan and characterizes them as being just like him and under his influence! "The wisdom of those in 3:14 is characterized by the world, the flesh, and the devil" (Martin).

The results of this earthly, sensual, and demonic wisdom are "confusion and every evil work" (3:16). In place of peace and strength, which the body of Christ needs, worldly wisdom brings disorder, chaos, unrest, and instability, opening the door for the entrance of every evil work. The Greek word for "evil" is *phaulos*, meaning "worthless, paltry or contemptible, belonging to a low order of things" (Vine 212). Nothing good comes from this type of wisdom. Think back at the times you have seen worldly wisdom exhibited and ask yourself if any good came from the use of it.

James returns with a description of those who are guided with "the wisdom that is from above" (3:17). In furthering answering the question James asked in 3:13, he states that the one who is wise will first be *pure*.

The word “pure,” (*hagnos*, from *hagios*) denotes that which is uncontaminated, without fault, wholly good. It is a kind of goodness which shrinks from any pollution whatsoever. It is such a state of mind and heart without which one cannot see God (Matt. 5:8) (Woods 191).

A person who practices wisdom from God is free from earthly, sensual, or demonic influences or contamination. Purity in one’s heart leads to a disposition that seeks *peace* in place of strife. The Lord pronounced a blessing upon the peacemakers, for “they shall be called the children of God” (Mat. 5:9). While there can be no compromise with religious error that will damn men’s souls, the wise Christian will “seek peace, and pursue it” (1 Pet. 3:11—ASV) whenever possible. “And **let the peace of God rule** in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col. 3:15). Wisdom seeks accord in place of discord, though not peace at any price. The wise person can make the distinction, for he knows how to apply the truth of God’s Word to each situation.

One who has God’s wisdom with a pure heart, seeking peace, will also be one who is *gentle*. Woods says this refers to

a disposition which does not *demand* its rights, but is willing, if necessary, to suffer wrong in the cause of right.... Some shrink from gentleness on the ground that it is weakness under another name; but, the truth is, a gentle disposition results from strength, and is maintained thereby (192).

With such a spirit of gentleness one is “easy to be entreated,” that is, willing to listen to reason and be persuaded, agreeing to a course of action he believes to be right. Wise Christians are not stubborn and unyielding, demanding all things be settled their way or else. From these attitudes of the heart will flow *mercy* and all kinds of *good fruits*. *Mercy* is “kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them” (Thayer 203). Mercy extends to the giving to those in need, such as the widows and orphans (Jam. 1:27), and to those who need our forgiveness whom we are tempted to judge harshly (2:13; Mat. 6:12-15; 7:1-5). Wisdom evaluates the needs of others and dispenses mercy accordingly, remembering the Golden Rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12). These dispositions of the heart lead to good fruits of all kinds and point to a person who is being influenced by the wisdom which is from above.

James closes his description of who the wise person is by saying that there are two things the wisdom from above is without. It is *without partiality* (variance—ASV). “The word means ‘a lack of discord,’ then ‘lack of uncertainty or partiality.’ Here the word seems to mean ‘not vacillating, not acting one way in one circumstance and another in a different one’” (Roberts 148). Woods says such a person “does not doubt, is not drawn by divided opinions, and is stable in his views regarding religion” (194). A truly wise person may change his position if he discovers he is in error, but he spends a sufficient amount of time in prayer and study before he changes, so he does not flip-flop back and forth and lose the trust of those whom he can influence for good. Wisdom from above is also *without hypocrisy*, meaning it is not two-faced or deceptive. A wise man will study or think about how to answer (Pro. 15:28) any given situation, but he will not give contradictory answers to different people to appease them by deceiving them. Some of our Lord’s most severe denunciations were heaped upon the Pharisees because of their hypocrisy. Read Matthew 23! Wise men and women speak and act as they do because they seek to do the will of God, not because they seek the favor of men (cf., John 5:44; 12:42-43; Gal. 1:10; 1 The. 2:4).

The conclusion James draws about who is truly wise involves the interplay between righteousness and peace (3:18). Since *righteousness* is right doing, that is, doing what God has revealed in His Word as right conduct (Psa. 119:172; Acts 10:34-35), the *fruit* of righteousness

is the good which righteousness prompts its possessor to do.... All the good we do issues from righteousness, which in turn, flows out of the wisdom which is from above. All that is bad issues from that “wisdom” which is from below, and which is earthly, sensual, devilish. Isaiah said, “And the work of righteousness *shall be peace*; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence for ever” (Isa. 32:17) (Woods 195-196).

Godly people live righteous lives and sow the seed of good deeds that produce peace. Peace again produces more righteousness and good deeds. “Peace is conducive to the spread of the truth and contributes to it; whereas strife, division, faction and partyism hinder and restrain it” (Woods 196).

Where you see righteousness and peace prevailing, you will see those who are endowed with wisdom from above sowing the seeds from which these things grow.

PRAYING FOR WISDOM

James 1:5-8 promises:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

The promise that God will bless one with wisdom in answer to one's prayer is not unlike our requests for other blessings that God promises. We pray for our daily bread (Mat. 6:11), but we do not sit down at the table with empty plates and bowls before us and expect that God will miraculously fill them. We pray for ourselves and others who are sick (1 Tim. 2:1; Jam 5:13), but we do not expect an instantaneous miraculous restoration to health. God provides responses to our prayers, according to His will (1 John 5:14-15), without the manifestations of miraculous workings. God has promised that He will *give* wisdom in liberal measure to all who ask in faith, nothing doubting. The manner in which God bestows this wisdom is not specified, but the passing of the miraculous age (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-16; et al.) precludes any direct miraculous imparting of the gift. God may teach us wisdom through the wisdom in His Revelation, through living wise men, through our own experiences, or other ways not obvious to us. The promise is that He will give wisdom to those who ask in full faith. Be wise! Believe it!

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Berry, Donald K. *An Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995.
- Conzelmann, Hans G. "Wisdom In The New Testament." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. Keith Crim. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962. Supplemental Volume.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985.
- Gaebelein, Frank E. "Proverb." *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Ed. Merrill C. Tenney. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975, 1976.
- Goetzmann, J. "Sophia." *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Ed. Colin Brown. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978.
- Martin, R. P. *Word Bible Commentary on James*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems.
- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition*. 1993.
- Morris, Henry. *The Genesis Record*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

PC Study Bible. Seattle, WA: Biblesoft.

Roberts, J. W. *A Commentary on the General Epistle of James*. Abilene, TX: J. W. Roberts, 1963.

Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.

Van Pelt, M. V. and Kaiser, Jr., Walter C. “yr’ I.” *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Ed. Willem A. VanGemeren. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.

Vine, W. E. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984, 1996.

Woods, Guy N. *Gospel Advocate New Testament Commentary on James*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1965.

ENDNOTE

¹The material in pages 2-13 is edited from a previous manuscript by the author titled, “Introduction to Wisdom Literature.” *The Sayings of Solomon: Pearls From The Proverbs*. Ed. B. J. Clarke. Southaven, MS: Southaven Church of Christ, 2003. 25-81.

“WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?”

JAMES 4:14

Lynn Parker



Lynn Parker is a native of San Marcos, Texas. He has a B.A. in Bible from Southern Christian University and graduate work from Ft. Hays State University. Lynn has been preaching the Gospel since the age of 14 and is working with the church of Christ at New Braunfels, Texas. He is the Assistant Director of the Spring Bible Institute and a staff writer for *Contending For The Faith*. Lynn has also done local mission work in Virginia.

He and his wife, Mary Ann, have five children: Caroline, Hannah, Garland, Rebekah, and Elijah.

INTRODUCTION

Because a heavenly home is of the greatest importance, you want to know how to live the Christian life. Among your other Christian duties and obligations, you study through your Bible diligently; you make notes; you research words and phrases; you make careful application of the principles and facts learned; and during the course of this study you come to the wonderful epistle we call James. James is indeed the “Gospel of Practical Christian Living.” As you study through James, you note that every chapter—every verse—has something applicable for this day and its myriad of situations.

James 4:13-17 and Daily Planning

Like every day, this day has a “to do” list a yard long. The phone rings repeatedly and each call asks for time and planning on your part: there are bills to pay, children need rides to school and to soccer practice, the grass needs to be cut, the house must be cleaned, the car needs repair. It has been a busy day, and it is not yet over. Thought must be given for the next day’s chores and challenges. Business planning takes a logistics wizard nowadays. Ah, a vacation is only three months away—two weeks of relaxation in a tropical climate! The sun sets on our typical day. Finally, we take a breath and sit down to continue our study in James. Arriving at chapter four in our study, we are reminded of prayer’s restrictions. “Ye have not because ye ask not.”

And so we pause to pray. Reading the next few verses of this epistle, you are brought face to face with the stark reality that life's daily activities will one day come to a screeching halt!

Come now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that. But now ye glory in your vauntings: all such glorying is evil. To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

We have plans for tomorrow, the day after, and well into the future, but this passage in James puts everything future into proper perspective. One might say, "I am going to move to Chicago and make a fortune!" James might reply, "Oh really? Do not be so sure of that."

They had no means of ascertaining what would occur; whether they would live or die; whether they would be prospered, or would be overwhelmed with adversity. Of the truth of the remark made by the apostle here, no one can doubt; but it is amazing how men act as if it were false. We have no power of penetrating the future so as to be able to determine what will occur in a single day or a single hour, and yet we are almost habitually forming our plans as if we saw with certainty all that is to happen (Barnes 78).

Men and women foolishly boast of past accomplishments—and oftentimes of those milestones, yet in the future, which they say they will accomplish. Keeping with the practical nature of this epistle, the passage under our consideration makes the following points:

1. Humanity makes grandiose plans for the future without regard to life's uncertainty or its end.
2. Mankind has no way of knowing what will occur tomorrow.
3. By means of a poignant question and its accompanying statement of fact, James emphasizes the brevity of life.
4. Our every plan must be made with the understanding that, "if the Lord wills," this is what we will do.
5. Boasting in mundane matters is sinful.
6. Do all the good you can, while you can, wherever you can, recognizing that less than this is sin.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

Now we concentrate even more specifically on the question of James 4:14: "What is your life?" Views of life certainly affect the way

folks live. Conduct is restrained or set at liberty based on how one views the blessing of life.

If you look at each day as a something you've earned,
And take for granted each sunrise you see,
Then the way of truth likely you'll spurn,
And you'll squander your hope for eternity.

James makes clear to young and old alike this sobering, stark fact: life is certainly uncertain!

In answering this question—what is your life?—Leroy Brownlow listed seven answers (150-153). Let us paraphrase his fine points:

1. Life is a gift and must be used to glorify God (Mat. 5:16).
2. Life is a preparation and, like a dressing room, it is where man *dresses* in preparation for Judgment Day (2 Cor. 5:10).
3. Life is a period of building and we must build wisely and on a firm foundation (Mat. 7:24-27; 1 Cor. 3:10).
4. Life is conflict or war and there is no neutral ground in this great battle (Mat. 6:24; Eph. 6:11-17; 2 Tim. 2:3).
5. Life is a multiplicity of choices, and the decisions we make when faced with these choices decides our eternal destiny (Jos. 24:15; Heb. 11:24-25).
6. Life is something that must be lived one day at a time (Mat. 6:34).
7. Life is a vapor and fleeting (Jam. 4:14; Psa. 90:10).

Life's Little Day Soon Ends

The earthly sojourn undertaken in life's little day will swiftly draw to an end. We say with Job of old: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (7:6). And further, "Man, that is born of a woman, Is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (14:1-2). The Psalmist wrote, "Oh remember how short my time is: For what vanity hast thou created all the children of men!" (89:47)!

You must view your life as a collection of individual days. The days are made of hours and minutes, and finally, seconds. There will be a time in your life in which only five seconds remain. Will you know when to begin the five-second countdown? Extremely unlikely. Indeed, you have no lease on life, or promise that future days, hours, minutes, or seconds will be yours to use profitably or to squander. "My dwelling is removed, and is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent: I have

rolled up, like a weaver, my life; he will cut me off from the loom: From day even to night wilt thou make an end of me" (Isa. 38:12).

Henry Drummond provided some enlightening thoughts on the question, "What Is Your Life?"

TO-MORROW, the first day of a new year, is a day of *wishes*. To-day, the last day of an old year, is a day of *questions*. Tomorrow is a time of anticipation; to-day a time of reflection. To-morrow our thoughts will go away out to the coming opportunities, and the larger vistas which the future is opening up to even the most commonplace of us. To-day our minds wander among buried memories, and our hearts are full of self-questioning thoughts of what our past has been.

But if to-morrow is to be a day of hope, to-day must be a day of thought. If to-morrow is to be a time of resolution, to-day must be a day of investigation. And if we were to search the Bible through for a basis for this investigation, we should nowhere find a better than this question, "*What is your life?*"

We must notice, however, that life is used here in a peculiar sense—a narrow sense, some would say. The question does not mean, What quality is your life? What are you making of life? How are you getting on with it? How much higher is the tone of it this year than last? It has a more limited reference than this. It does not refer so much to quality of life as to quantity of life. It means, How much life have you got? What value do you set upon your life? How long do you think your life will last? How does it compare with eternity?

Death is approaching each of us with breakneck speed. Here we have an appointment that must be kept by all. Death is the common lot of man (Heb. 9:27). Chairs that yesterday were full of mirth and song may be empty and quiet before this week ends. We say this not to be morbid, but rather to encourage all toward a proper view of life's (1) brevity and (2) uncertainty. The heart that recognizes this truth is wise, and will handle life far differently than the soul who carelessly gulps down each day like a pig at the trough.

As a result of our study in James, and thoughtful contemplation of James 4:14, there are certain things we will do with our lives.

First, because my life is like a vapor, I will constantly recognize my dependence on God. I need guidance, comfort, and hope for tomorrow and eternity. Guidance, comfort, and real hope are only in God. It is our gracious God "Who holdeth our soul in life, And suffereth not our feet to be moved" (Psa. 66:8-9). "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). In the uncertain, treacherous waters of life,

we must have a Guide on whom we can depend. Our Christian hope is the blessed anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:19). The child of God moves from one minute to the next not knowing what life has in store. What a great consolation to know that God cares for each of His faithful children. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, And though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas" (Psa. 46:1-2). "Miss Cleo" notwithstanding, we do not know the future, but we know the One who holds the future in the palm of His hands. He says everything will work out just fine. Every Christian simply must memorize Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose" (KJV). Let these passages serve as a balm for the heart:

For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1).

For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is (1 John 3:2).

Then shall mine enemies turn back in the day that I call: This I know, that God is for me (Psa. 56:9).

Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19).

Of course, realizing our dependence on God means that we will be prayerful.

In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Phi. 4:6).

Pray without ceasing (1 The. 5:17).

And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

Dependent on God, we make all our plans with the principle in mind, "If the Lord will." **"For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that"** (Jam. 4:15). Paul told certain brethren, "I will return again unto you if God will" (Acts 18:21). Note this practice in several of the epistles of Paul:

Making request, if by any means now at length **I may be prospered by the will of God** to come unto you (Rom. 1:10).

That I may come unto you in joy **through the will of God**, and together with you find rest (Rom. 15:32).

But I will come to you shortly, **if the Lord will**; and I will know, not the word of them that are puffed up, but the power (1 Cor. 4:19).

For I do not wish to see you now by the way; for I hope to tarry a while with you, **if the Lord permit** (1 Cor. 16:7).

Short-lived but spiritual people recognize their dependence on God and the natural result is a healthy prayer life.

Second, because my life is like a vapor, I will be thankful for each and every one of God's blessings. The simple command of Colossians 3:15: "And be ye thankful," is oft neglected. "Be not deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning" (Jam. 1:16-17). If we would spend more time counting blessings than counting misfortunes, our lives would be happier as we march on toward heaven. Conversely, lack of gratitude goes hand in hand with worldliness and apostasy (2 Tim. 3:2). Actor Jimmy Stewart played Charlie Anderson, the grizzled and irreligious old farmer and widower, in the movie *Shenandoah*. His prayer before a meal might well express the lack of proper gratitude in many hearts:

Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvested. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn't be here; we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just the same anyway, Lord, for the food we are about to eat, Amen.

Failing to realize life's brevity goes hand in hand with being an ingrate of the highest magnitude.

Third, because my life is like a vapor I "must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49—KJV). Brief lives mean we must be urgent in the most important of life's duties. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

Work, for the night is coming, Work thru the morning hours;
Work while the dew is sparkling, Work 'mid springing flow'rs;
Work when the day grows brighter, Work in the glowing sun;
Work, for the night is coming, When man's work is done.

Work, for the night is coming, Work thru the sunny noon;
 Fill brightest hours with labor; Rest comes sure and soon;
 Give ev'ry flying minute something to keep in store;
 Work, for the night is coming, When man works no more.

Work, for the night is coming, Under the sunset skies;
 While their bright tints are glowing, Work, for daylight flies;
 Work till the last beam fadeth, Fadeth to shine no more;
 Work while the night is dark'ning, When man's work is o'er.

(Walker).

Paul emphasized this point when he wrote, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). There is work to accomplish before the vapor of life vanishes.

Before the sun sets on our life, we must seek to save the souls of others. Too much time is wasted talking about the weather and making small talk. Day after day we greet our non-Christian neighbor or an erring brother, and we neglect to discuss the most important things of life. The sands are running out. Our conversations simply must turn to discussions of the Gospel, obedience, righteousness, and faithfulness. Paul reasoned with one ruler concerning “righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). What a wise use of an opportunity to teach the truth!

If the souls all around you are living in sin,
 If the Master has told you to bid them come in,
 If the sweet invitation they never have heard,
 O will you not tell them the cheer-bringing word?

O will you not tell it today?
 Will you not tell it today?
 If the light of His presence has brightened your way,
 O will you not tell it today?

(Pounds).

Fourth, because life is like a vapor, I must live righteously and godly. “What is your life?” Life is a pilgrimage—a sojourn. “Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). The earth was never created to last forever—it will one day be burned up (2 Pet. 3:9-10). “Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in *all* holy living and godliness” (3:11). When we keep in mind life’s brevity and the certainty of Judgment, it is a powerful incentive to live a pure life.

Pilgrims live apart from the world—in the world, but not of the world (John 15:19; 17:14). We are to remain “unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27). The world may indulge in passions of sexual lust, but Christians keep themselves pure.

For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who know not God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter: because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified. For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth his Holy Spirit unto you (1 The. 4:3-8).

Sexual obsession is evident throughout our society, from the youngest to the oldest. Hugh Hefner has no concern for life's brevity and the coming judgment. His unconcern is illustrated by his unbridled sexual appetite. God asks, “What is your life?” Hefner and a large portion of society answer: “It is a barn yard where we fornicate like farm animals in heat.” God does not smile or wink at sexual immorality. “*Let marriage be* had in honor among all, and *let the bed be* undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4).

While we are talking about fornication, we need to discuss pornography. It is a multi-million dollar industry in the United States. The pay-per-view television channels (practically any television station, for that matter) and the internet have helped send illicit, nasty material into the privacy of homes. Americans that watched the Super Bowl XXXVIII half-time production saw Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake perform a pornographic, lewd sexual number that culminated with Jackson flashing her breast for the world to see—on network Television. Is anyone thinking about life's brevity or uncertainty? Not if they support, publicly or privately, pornography.

We are too comfortable with this old world when the young people from supposedly *Christian* homes are picking out prom dresses or tuxedos. Love not the world (1 John 2:15)! Christians do not sanction, condone, endorse, support, participate in, or attend dances. Period! Lascivious activity and James 4:14 are incompatible (Gal. 5:19). Dancing feet really are not concerned with righteousness or the Judgment to come. Christianity and dancing (such as the Prom) are diametrically opposed, and they represent adversarial life-styles—ditto for immodest apparel.

Fifth, because life is like a vapor, I will assemble with the saints (Heb. 10:25). We wonder how many folks, professing to be Christians, would forsake the assemblies of the saints if they knew they had just one week—seven short days—to live? The pews would be full and the golf courses empty! Every preacher and elder has endured this telling question from a carnal heart: “Do I have to attend every worship assembly?” Perhaps we should respond: “No, not if you want to burn in hell.” Christians do not view assemblies as entry into the doldrums! Assembling with the saints is no burden but rather a special privilege and opportunity. My life will not last long here on earth; so I will avail myself of every assembly and Bible class. Why would we not want to praise in worship the God who soon we will see at that Great Day?

The congregation with which this author worships expects members to be present at every assembly of the saints because God does. Some cannot drive at night; so a concentrated effort is made to provide transportation to the elderly or anyone else who needs a ride. After this was announced, one woman was asked if she wanted a ride to worship assembly on Sunday evenings and Wednesday nights. The ensuing conversation, in part, went something like this:

Lukewarm Woman: “No, I don’t want to come. I’ve never attended Sunday night or Wednesday night anywhere I was before, and nobody ever gave me any grief about it.”

Preacher: Don’t you realize you’re sinning by forsaking the assemblies of the saints, Hebrews 10:25?

Lazy Woman: “I’m not worried about that.”

Preacher: “You’re hurting your influence.”

Ungodly Woman: “That’s my business.”

Preacher: You’re not really interested in going to heaven, are you?

Was this woman concerned about life’s brevity and its uncertainty? Hardly! She was bold enough to state what many practice but are too embarrassed to articulate: they just do not really want to be in worship assemblies. Sure enough, it shows in that they miss for the most petty of reasons and employ the most pitiful excuses. A list was once made of excuses used by those who forsake. We can give the list to those who forsake so they can refer excuses by number for brevity’s sake. Here are some common excuses, used with relish by many church members:

1. Company came; so I had to stay home.
2. A child was sick; so everybody stayed home.
3. The kids had homework.

4. The kids had _____ [band, basketball, football, T-Ball, basket weaving, etc.] practice; so we could not attend.
5. I was there on Sunday morning, and that is enough.
6. I was tired.
7. I did not have a ride.
8. I had a headache (wonder if they miss work for the same reason?).
9. It is my only day off from work.
10. We had a family reunion.
11. We were traveling.
12. My wife was out of town, and I did not want to go by myself.
13. I visited a denomination with my friend so she would attend with me.
14. I was shopping and got back too late.
15. I was chaperoning an out of town school field trip.
16. It is only this one time—it does not happen often.
17. The building is too _____ [cold, far, hot, uncomfortable, etc.].

Frankly, the list could go on and on, *ad nauseum*! Folks that employ such tactics are deceiving themselves into thinking that God approves of their absence. He does not. There is still the principle of seeking the kingdom first (Mat. 6:33). A study with the lukewarm might very well begin with a study of James 4:14 and a plain discussion of life’s brevity and uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

Psalms 90 is a beautiful commentary on James 4:13-17. Write this reference down in the margin of your study Bible.

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: We bring our years to an end as a sigh. The days of our years are threescore years and ten, Or even by reason of strength fourscore years; Yet is their pride but labor and sorrow; For it is soon gone, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger, And thy wrath according to the fear that is due unto thee? So teach us to number our days, That we may get us a heart of wisdom (90:9-12).

“What is your life?” It is short. It is unpredictable. It is fragile. It is challenging. It is an opportunity—a proving ground—but brief in duration. Someone said, “Life is a school house: the Bible is the textbook, and the Lord is the teacher.”

So we come to the end of our daily study in James, and at the close of the day we close our Bibles. The night is upon us. The house is quiet. We pillow our heads and contemplate on what we have just learned. We are wiser servants of God because of this passage from James. We dare not let a day pass without reflecting on its principles. With our final thoughts of the day, we pray: "O God, we thank thee for this day, and its opportunities. If it is thy will that we see another day, may we use it to thy glory. Keep before our eyes the brevity and uncertainty of life so we will use our days wisely." "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Pro. 27:1).

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the New Testament: James to Jude*. Ed. Robert Frew. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983.

Brownlow, Leroy. *Greatest Questions in the New Testament*. Fort Worth: Brownlow, 1961.

Drummond, Henry. "What Is Your Life?" Christian Classics Ethereal Library. 13 Feb 2004. <http://www.ccel.org/d/drummond/ideal_life/ideal17.htm.

Pounds, Jessie. "Will You Not Tell It Today?" *Songs of the Church*. Ed. Alton Howard. West Monroe, LA: Howard, 1977.

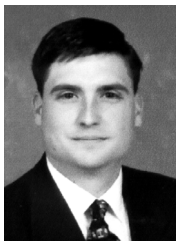
Shenandoah. Dir. Anthony Mann. Perf. James Stewart, Patrick Wayne, Doug McClure, and Katharyn Ross. MCA Universal Home Video, 1965.

Walker, Annie. "Work, For the Night is Coming." *Songs of the Church*. Ed. Alton Howard. West Monroe, LA: Howard, 1977.

“WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?”

2 PETER 3:4

David B. Smith



David Smith is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is the son of an elder of the church of Christ. David served in the U.S. Army for five years. He has done local work in Tennessee and Georgia and is currently working with the Northside Church of Christ in Calhoun, Georgia. David directs the Annual Northside Lectures. He speaks on numerous lectureships and Gospel meetings each year and writes for brotherhood publications. David is an instructor for the Southeast School of Biblical Studies.

INTRODUCTION

In the hustle and bustle of life's routines, people have the proclivity to become so saturated by the present that they give little, if any, thought to the future. It is true that unnecessary worries about the future are forbidden by God, since this type of worry calls the ability of God into question. Also "the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof" (Mat. 6:34). Now some might object here, and suggest that people are entirely too worried about things in the future. However, these worries typically concern financial matters or matters of health—not that these are *bad* worries intrinsically, since these matters involve the principle of biblical stewardship. However it is rare indeed to find people who can see through the thought-consuming affairs of the present and contemplate future events relative to the souls of men. There is a difference between frivolous worries about the future (which are forbidden) and serious contemplation about future actions of the Lord. To be sure, the only time many people stop to think about what comes next is in the case of death, and even then such thoughts are provoked generally in the death of someone especially close, like a family member or cherished friend. Consider these truths: (1) if people reflect upon the future,

it is typically born out of the wrong motivation; (2) most thoughts about things to come are limited to the physical and temporal elements of the world, on those things that provide no real foundation or lasting benefit; and (3) even when people think about life beyond this one, it is generally speculation about things the Sacred Text simply does not reveal. This leaves only one ultimate and shocking conclusion: people generally think nothing of the Lord's return.

First century Christians, however, set the model of consistency in this regard. As a matter of fact, some took the constant expectation of the Lord's return to an extreme—like those few in Thessalonica, who fell under the severe rebuke of the apostolic pen (2 The. 3:6-14). However, generally speaking, each moment was lived with the understanding that Jesus could return at any moment. The repeated use of comparisons like “thief in the night” no doubt drew the greatest word pictures in the minds of the earlier saints, and perhaps no single person emphasized this more than Paul, who wrote often on the matter of the Lord's return and the nature of said return.

The entire point of starting this way is to prove that people today are incredibly gullible regarding false doctrines on the Lord's return. Lack of study has incapacitated the church to a large degree, and no small number of saints have either adopted unhealthy views of the Lord's return or know little about what will surely happen some day. People in the world typically think nothing of the end of all things. So it might be said, especially in a modern context, that the world was prime for theories like Premillennialism that mar the precious truth of God.

If this principle is reversed, looking back to the first century, the difference would be that Christians were not gullible to the types of theories that now plague mankind (even though the basic structure of false doctrine has never changed). The suggestion that the kingdom had not been established or that the Christ did not fulfill His mission, would have been met with fierce opposition from the higher percentage of the members of the church. The only way to attack the church in this realm was to suggest that the religion of the Christians was faulty because they obviously served a deity who did not follow through on promises. This is exactly the reason for Peter's discussion in 2 Peter 3 and the demonstration on the absurd position of the scoffers.

THE QUESTION

The question of the scoffers: "Where is the promise of his coming?" is something of a debate proposition. It was their way of saying, in a sense, that the religion of Christians was invalidated by a lack of proof—that they were guilty of faulty claims. To substantiate their own argument, they (i.e., the scoffers) claimed: "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). Barnes seems to capture the idea of this argument better than most commentators. He writes:

Perhaps the meaning may be thus expressed: "Those old men, the prophets, indeed foretold this event. They were much concerned and troubled about it; and their predictions alarmed others, and filled their bosoms with dread... But those good men have died. They lived to an old age, and then died as others; and since they have departed, the affairs of the world have gone on very much as they did before" (255).

To be sure, scores of men are labeled *fathers* throughout Holy Writ. But the contextual limitation demands that these men be identified as Christians—or more precisely, older Christians who had (by now) spoken for years regarding the Lord's return and who had *fallen asleep* (i.e., died).

Peter's line of defense for this ridiculous claim is now set forth in the remainder of the discussion, and essentially points to the fact that the scoffers had obviously forgotten (willfully forgotten) one distinct item in their argument—the evidence. In fact, the text is clear that the evidence against their words was so glaring that they were required to play ignorant regarding the information on purpose. In a sense, their problem could be described as *selective memory*.

The rebuttal to their blasphemy—which they state primarily in the form of a question—starts with their own comment about the *unchanging* world in which man lives. It is necessary here to pause and suggest that the reader pay special attention to the scoffers' definition of *continue*. By this they did not have reference to the consistent elements of nature upon which man depends, like the existence of the greater and lesser lights in the heavens, or the rotation of the earth upon its polar axis. Their argument suggested that no major cataclysmic event has ever occurred, that God has never disrupted the cycle of the earth, not one since the foundation of the world. It was, in a sense, their strike against the power of God to do something beyond the laws of the creative order.

The answer begins with a reference to the flood, a fact which cannot be denied and a fact that proves that God can interrupt life's processes to accomplish His goals in the Scheme of Redemption. Peter declares, "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Pet. 3:5-6). Only a naive or dishonest man would suggest that either the universal flood did not happen or did not change the world significantly. Even without the technical side of the issue, one could know practically that the flood must have been (and was) the cause for the difference in the age-spans of human life.

If God is responsible for the flood (and He was), then why would it be impossible for Him to accomplish the task of "coming again" (3:4) or destroying the world (3:10-13)? Peter's point works on principle, this principle: the coming of the Lord in Final Judgment is not unlike the coming of the Lord in judgment against the contemporaries of Noah. Admittedly the extent of the destruction is slightly different, but if He can cover the entire world in water, then He can equally destroy the entire physical universe by fire. This is Peter's point: "But 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" (3:7).

What follows in Peter's argument is more of a rebuke for the scoffers. And the argument from this point centers on two features in God. Note the following:

1. God is not bound by time. He is an eternal being, without beginning or end; Moses even stated that He is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psa. 90:2). Because He transcends the physical universe, the world which operates within time, He cannot be placed into a paradigm which holds Him (or binds Him) to time. Other than those occasions wherein God has revealed the *when* of an event, men should be satisfied to know that God will always engage some activity at the exact moment it needs to be accomplished. The *thousand years* illustration is simply a simile that equates to this very notion, that time means nothing to a timeless being.

2. It is clear that questions about the Lord's delay in coming are answered by His long-suffering. The fact that the *coming* of the Lord in Final Judgment has not yet occurred does not entail that He is "slack concerning his promise" (2 Pet. 3:9). The time is delayed only because

of His desire to see all men saved—to give men more time to come to their own spiritual sense and respond to the book He breathed out for mankind.

With this, the question is sufficiently answered by the Spirit through the apostle Peter. There are, however, a few principles worth mentioning—principles that flow from the main question: "Where is the promise of his coming?"

(1) God can never be reckoned or examined by human standards. Men must admit that, while creation reveals a great deal about the nature of God, and special revelation offers the exegesis of God, finite men will fail to know the full ramifications of the attributes of deity. Man can only know what he can know (Psa. 19).

(2) God's power never diminishes. Simply because He worked great wonders in the Noahic flood does not suggest that He is now therefore incapable of destroying the world with such equally great power.

(3) Longsuffering and tolerance are completely contrasting concepts. While God is longsuffering toward the sinner, He cannot tolerate the sins in which men engage.

(4) The longsuffering of God provides opportunities for salvation to all men. There is, however, a time limit, but only the Father knows when this time will end.

(5) God is faithful, and never fails His Word.

DIFFICULT PHRASES IN THE CONTEXT

There can be no doubt that 2 Peter 3 is one of the more controversial chapters of the Bible, simply because of the number of hotly contested phrases which appear therein—three to be exact: *last days*, *day of the Lord*, and *new heavens and new earth*. The cloud of controversy exists only because these phrases are subjected to the severe twisting of the Premillennial theory.

Last Days

The phrase first appears in Genesis 49:1, where it is used of the distant future of the sons of Jacob. After all, the term only refers to the *furthestmost point*. Hence, the context of the term determines its application. However, in other passages, the phrase becomes standard language of the prophets to denote the days wherein Messianic prophecies were fulfilled. Both Isaiah and Micah offer prophetic statements on the church's establishment, that it would come to pass "in the

last days” (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). The New Testament offers unambiguous confirmation of the fulfillment of this time period (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2). Here are a few points worth noting:

1. Peter quotes Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:14-21.; Joel 2:28-32) and applies the prophecy to the day of Pentecost and the beginning of the church/kingdom. Some have expressed curiosity about Joel’s prophecy (at least the time element considered), but whatever questions exist are quickly answered by the pointed application from the inspired Peter.

2. Hebrews 1:2 (along with 2:3) demonstrates that the “last days” includes the time of the Lord’s own personal ministry. While it is true that the apostles were the representatives of the Lord, the language is too plain to explain in any way except that the reference is to the Lord’s personal labors on earth.

3. Verses like 2 Timothy 3:1 can be easily connected to the horrid events leading up to and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, which seems to be the same application in James 5:3. Still, the principle of suffering bad times could be applied to any stage during the tenure of New Testament Christianity.

With that, several conclusions are derived—with special relation to the question in 2 Peter 3:4. For one, everyone can agree that the phrase entails the period of New Testament Christianity. Most are of the sound conclusion that the phrase has exclusive reference to age of the Gospel. However the phrase could possibly have an even more specific reference to the last days of the Jewish state, which would include the Lord’s ministry, the establishment of the church on the first day of Pentecost following the Lord’s ascension, and culminating about forty years later in the destruction of Jerusalem. Whether one or the other view is adopted, it cannot be anything else.

This offers the power of the point at hand: *last days* is **not** a reference to the end of the world. It is impossible then for men to apply this passage in such a way as to endorse or support the theory of Pre-millennialism; this passage does nothing of the sort. If anything, it proves that no man can point to the scoffing of others as an indication that the world will shortly come to an end; no man knows when this will be, and there are no signs to forewarn of the beginning of the event (Mat. 24:36). How can there be, since the events relative to that great last day happen in the blink of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52)? Peter’s point is that the Christians recognize that these perilous times are standard trials

to be faced as the people of God. The immediate application in the question under consideration was for the people of Peter's own day, who were living in the *last days*.

Day of the Lord

Like "the last days," the "day of the Lord" is an equally controversial phrase. It is important to the discussion at hand since the question under review is connected in context to *day of the Lord* in a later verse in the passage (2 Pet. 3:10). In fact, the question defines the application of *day of the Lord* as the Final Judgment (or the end of the world). Nevertheless, the reader should be aware that commentators with severe religious bias assume that every use of this phrase in the Sacred Text regards the same event. So, by the time comments are supplied for Peter's defense of the Lord's faithfulness here, the phrase is carrying the baggage of poor hermeneutics. As one can deduce from the following list, the phrase generically refers to God's judgment upon nations/people.

Isaiah 2:12: Babylonian Captivity

Isaiah 13:6, 9: The Destruction of Babylon

Isaiah 34:8: Judgment Against Edom

Jeremiah 46:10: Judgment Against Egypt

Lamentations 2:22: Destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.)

Ezekiel 13:5: The Coming Judgment on Jerusalem

Ezekiel 30:3: Judgment Against Egypt

Joel 1:15: Judgment Against The Nation of Israel

Joel 2:1, 11; 3:14: Judgment Against The Nation Of Israel

Joel 2:31: Destruction Of Jerusalem (A.D. 70)

Amos 5:18, 20: Threat Of Assyrian Captivity

Obadiah 1:15: Judgment Against Edom

Zephaniah 1:7-8, 14, 18; 2:2-3: Judgment On Judah/Jerusalem

Zechariah 14:1: Destruction Of Jerusalem (A.D. 70)

Malachi 4:5: Destruction Of Jerusalem (A.D. 70)

Acts 2:20: Destruction Of Jerusalem (A.D. 70)

1 Corinthians 5:5: Final Judgment/End Of The World

2 Corinthians 1:14: Final Judgment/End Of The World

1 Thessalonians 5:2: Final Judgment/End Of The World

2 Peter 3:10: Final Judgment/End Of The World

Hence, the *day of the Lord* can have numerous applications (historically). In each instance, however, it refers to a **judgment by God**, but

it is left to the context to determine the specific judgment in mind. To be sure, the applications cannot be combined to create a mysterious order of events. Again, Peter is clear that the application here is to the end of the world since the question of the Lord's coming is identified as "the day of the Lord."

New Heavens and New Earth

The third phrase, connected to the question under review, is *new heavens and new earth* (2 Pet. 3:13). Following the flow of the passage carefully, the *new heavens and a new earth* are things to be anticipated now preceding the *coming* of the Lord. The real question is, to what does this refer?

Most people are familiar with this phrase, not because it has been discovered through Bible study but because it is intrinsically connected to the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witness movement. There is, in fact, a large amount of printed material which displays the supposed future utopia in vivid detail—to which they (*i.e.*, the Jehovah's Witnesses) apply *new heavens and a new earth*. Alternate versions of Premillennialism do much the same, by applying this phrase to the condition of the earth (as they say) when Jesus reigns for a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem. However, the Bible is not so ambiguous in its application of the phrase; in fact, the teaching of the Bible is incredibly distinct in this regard.

Like the other two phrases, and as with all language in the Bible, context is the key to interpretation; and context determines the application of this phrase. For example, Isaiah records a prophetic description of the church and the age of Christianity: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17). The prophet records again, "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain" (66:22). A comparison of related passages will help to establish a basic definition (or application) of the phrase—a change in the spiritual order of things. In this case, it is the change from life under the Mosaic legislation to life under the Gospel of the Christ.

The context of 2 Peter 3 disallows the notion of a renovated earth. Peter clearly establishes that the *coming* of the Lord is attended by the destruction of the material universe. The basic rules of hermeneutics must be honored here as in any passage, especially the rule which states

that language is to be taken literally unless the context forbids a literal interpretation. Because the context regards events concerning the end of the world, the *new heavens and a new earth* refer to the change in the spiritual order of things from a material, temporal universe to a spiritual, eternal home.

CONCLUSION

The matter of the Lord's return cannot scripturally be reduced so as to ask "will He come again?" He **is** coming. Nor can man blaspheme the God of heaven by implying anything akin to the question asked in the passage for this particular discussion. The question is full of distrust and pretense.

There is no doubt that faithful Christians wonder about the growing wickedness of the world and the extent to the longsuffering of God. Nevertheless even if the Lord's coming is delayed by the Father for another two millennia or beyond—Jesus is coming. Until then, Christians should act as that preserving salt for the world mentioned in Jesus' mountain masterpiece (Mat. 5:13-16). May each saint of God take each step of the day in anticipation of the coming great last day of the Lord.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the New Testament: James to Jude*. Ed. Robert Frew. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983.

“WHO SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND?”

REVELATION 6:17

Tommy J. Hicks



Tommy Hicks was born on June 21, 1947. He is married to the former Nina Sue Cave, and they have two daughters.

Tommy graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, with a B.A. degree in History and Political Science; College of the Sequoias, Visalia, California, with an A.A. degree; the Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas; and Lubbock Christian College, in Lubbock, Texas.

He has worked with local churches in Texas, New Mexico, California, and Arizona, as well as teaching part-time at the Brown Trail School of Preaching. Tommy speaks at Gospel meetings and has appeared on lectureships in several states, England, Mexico, Philippines, Romania, Scotland, Singapore, Thailand, and Wales. He has 16 years of radio experience and has written articles for various brotherhood publications.

INTRODUCTION

The immediate contextual setting for the question, “Who shall be able to stand?” is Revelation 6:12-17. There, John wrote:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Before attempting to answer the question: “Who Shall Be Able To Stand?” a survey of the interpretations men have given, relative to *when* and *where* the things mentioned in the passage will (or have) come to pass, should prove interesting.

CONFLICTING IDEAS ABOUT *TIME* AND *PLACE*

John's Book of Revelation has the undeniable reputation of being difficult to understand. Evidence supporting the justification for that reputation is plainly obvious from the cacophonous confusion emanating from those who make the effort to extract and express its meaning. Relative to Revelation 6:12-17, no fewer than five distinct, contradictory, and widely divergent postulations are prevalent among those who attempt to discern its meaning and application. These are: (1) The destruction of Jerusalem, (2) The overthrow of the Roman Empire, (3) The end of time and the final Judgment, (4) The applicable principle concept, and (5) The premillennialists' "Great Tribulation."

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Commenting on the opening of the sixth seal, Tidwell remarks: "This shows the great upheavals and darkness that took place over Judea," and then adds, "Under this seal in Revelation it pictures the fall of figurative Babylon; namely Jerusalem" (9). Agreeing, but being much more specific by giving dates, Taylor asserts: "The sixth seal represents a day of wrath which I believe to be the destruction of Jerusalem, climaxing the Jewish rebellion which lasted from the Spring of A.D. 67 to the Autumn of A.D. 70" (54).

It should be noted that one does not have to be a preterist to think Revelation 6:12-17 applies to the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, not all preterists think it so applies. However, one among the group of preterists who adamantly insists that the passage includes in its fulfillment Jerusalem's destruction is Foy E. Wallace, Jr. About it, Wallace says:

The appeal of the great and mighty was for covert from the face of Him that sat on the throne and from the Lamb who was in the midst of the throne, which means that both God and Christ joined in the events of visitation in this pageant of retributive judgment on the nations. It places the passage where it belongs, not to the final judgment nor to a future procession of events, but to the period of the struggle and triumph of the early church with and over the Jewish and Roman persecutors of the apostolic and post-apostolic period (156).

From that quote, it might appear that Wallace's position allowed the overthrow of Rome as a part of the passage's meaning. However, such is not the case. Rather than permitting Revelation 6:12-17 a broad possibility of consummation, Wallace, connecting it to Jerusalem's destruction, pinpoints its timing. He avers:

This recess between the sixth and seventh seal [sic] signifies a lapse between the announcements of judgment and the execution of them, and corresponds to the period of escape promised the disciples by Jesus, in Matt. 24:15-25 and Luke 21:18-19, in his description of the siege of Jerusalem; and it was fulfilled in the withdrawal of the Roman armies, and under the command of the Roman general, Titus, after the siege had commenced (157).

The Overthrow of the Roman Empire

Many will concur with Wallace's assessment that the final judgment is not the subject of the passage, but will disagree with him and with others who see Jerusalem's destruction as its target. For example, agreeing with Wallace, Hinds writes:

Since the seventh seal, under which there are seven trumpets, must intervene between this seal and the end of time, the language of this text cannot refer to Christ's coming and the end of the world (107).

Yet, Hinds teaches that the overthrow of Rome, not Jerusalem, is the point being conveyed in Revelation 6:12-17. Hinds comes to the conclusion:

Clearly this is symbolic language, and plain proof that the emblems of the sixth seal may be applied to the overthrow of the pagan Roman Empire rather than to the changes in the material elements mentioned (109).

Shelly thinks: "When the sixth seal is opened in this unfolding drama (6:12-17), there begins to be predicted the fate of Rome" (50). Comparing the apocalyptic language of Acts 2:20 with that of Revelation 6:12-17, Shelly explains: "The Acts reference points to the passing away of a Jewish religious order, and the Revelation reference has its fulfillment in the passing away of the Roman political order" (50). Moreover, Shelly adds:

It is definitely a mistake to take these events to refer to the time and circumstances of the final Judgment of the world.... The judgment here is judgment in ongoing events in history, much like "the Day of the Lord" in the Old Testament prophets. Rome is not going to stand forever and continue to persecute the church without end; God is going to shake the wicked empire to its very foundations and shatter it (50).

Admitting that he is somewhat eclectic in his approach to interpreting Revelation, Hailey nonetheless uses word and apocalyptic language comparisons in reaching his conclusions that God's judgment upon Rome, not the final judgment, is the significance of Revelation 6:12-17. Hailey advances:

Here is further evidence that this is not the final judgment, but the judgment of a kingdom in time; for when the Lord comes, it will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor. 15:52), "as a thief; in the which [day] the heaven shall pass away...the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Peter 3:10); at the Lord's coming there will be no time to seek a hiding place. Furthermore, this description of men seeking refuge in the caves and rocks and calling for mountains to fall on them, occurs three times in previous history; in each instance it refers to national calamity. Hosea used this language to describe the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians (Hos. 10:8); Isaiah used it in prophesying of Jerusalem's fall at the hands of Babylon (Isa. 2:9); and Jesus said this same thing would occur when the Romans came upon Jerusalem (Luke 23:30). It is clear that the use of such symbols at the opening of the sixth seal points to the judgment of a persecuting world power. Later in Revelation it will be revealed that the Roman Empire suffered such a calamity. By divine judgment God will vindicate the cause of His saints (198-99).

The End of Time and the Final Judgment

Denials by Wallace, Hinds, Shelly, Hailey, and others to the contrary, Coffman boldly insists that Christ's Second Coming and the final judgment are exactly what the passage is discussing. He declares:

That a visible coming of Christ is taught here is certain; because the unbelieving populations would never acknowledge the existence of any other evidence than his appearance in glory (149).

Building on that, Coffman reasons:

It is the Lamb of God whose sudden appearance in glory has signaled the close of earth's probation. Instantaneously, there's not an infidel anywhere in the universe anymore. It is this colossal scene that requires our understanding of it as the Second Advent and judgment (149-50).

Once more, Coffman affirms:

This glimpse of the Second Advent and final judgment is brief and fragmentary, as must needs be with all such glimpses; but the picture will be filled out in subsequent chapters of Revelation where are to be found other visions of the Great Day (150).

No less a scholar than Hendriksen agrees with Coffman's view that Revelation 6:12-17 is applicable to the final judgment. Issuing his thoughts concerning the passage's meaning, Hendriksen pens:

The sixth seal, accordingly, introduces the judgment day. It describes the one great catastrophe at the end of this age. The dread and terror, the awe, and consternation of that day is pictured under the two-fold

symbolism of a crashing universe and a thoroughly frightened human race (129).

However, after saying that, Hendriksen also accepts the principle that God's judgments come in "this present age" upon those who stand in opposition to God's faithful children and to all who resist His will. Hendriksen elaborates:

But although final and complete retribution will not be rendered until the judgment day, even now during this present age judgments are sent upon the earth because the wicked persecute God's children. Throughout history the seals of persecution ever give rise to the trumpets of judgment. This is a principle in the divine moral government of this world. We should read the events of the day in the light of this principle (132).

The Applicable Principle Concept

Hendriksen's above statement about "present age judgments" introduces the need for a brief statement about what is sometimes called "the applicable principle concept." Like Hendriksen, most, if not all, are persuaded that in the *here* and *now*, judgment, if only in part, may come upon the wicked who war against the righteous and righteousness. When the applicable principle concept is the overriding hermeneutical approach utilized to interpret isolated passages or the entirety of Revelation, its major thrust is the same. The theory behind this hermeneutical approach is that, while the things mentioned in Revelation may have had a historical fulfillment—which was recognized and/or understood by those living in the first three centuries—the *principles* conveyed in Revelation are applicable when like situations arise at any time in history. Elkins' statements about the phrase, "the great day of his wrath" (Rev. 6:17), illustrate this principle. He explains: "'The great day of his wrath—,' not the final judgment day alone, but all through the gospel day until the last day will God be seen visiting destruction upon them that destroy his vineyard" (92).

The Premillennialists' "Great Tribulation"

However, some refuse to admit that "the great day of his wrath," mentioned in Revelation 6:17, has really come in any way whatsoever. Tying the *great tribulation* (7:14) to "the great day of his wrath" in their explanation of the passage, premillennialists proclaim that the events described in Revelation 7:12-17 will transpire during the seven years immediately preceding the Lord's return (when they claim He will set up His kingdom on earth and reign from His throne in the

physical city of Jerusalem for one thousand years). Evidently of this persuasion, Tenney imparts: "If the trumpets and the bowls are to be subsumed under the seventh seal, or between the sixth and the seventh, then 'the great tribulation' begins with the sixth seal" (74).

Rarely is a premillennialist of Dwight Pentecost's ability to be found. Therefore, his comments about Revelation 7:12-17 should be of particular interest in understanding what they say about this passage. First, consider how he celebrates:

From these Scriptures it cannot be denied that this period is peculiarly the time when God's wrath and judgment fall upon the earth. This is not wrath from men, nor from Satan, except as God may use these agencies as channels for the execution of His will; it is tribulation from God. This period differs from all preceding tribulation, not only in intensity but also in the kind of tribulation, since it comes from God Himself (236-37).

Now, notice how Pentecost separates this period of tribulation from "all preceding tribulation," and then weaves into it the concepts of the premillennialists' "Period of Great Tribulations" as he states:

These seals, then, are the beginning of God's judgments upon the earth. They are the successive unfoldings of the judgment program, although they may continue throughout the period when once unfolded. They are mainly divine judgments through human agencies. They fall upon the earth in the first portion of the tribulation, and they will continue on through the period (360-61).

In recent times, the only brighter star than Pentecost in the premillennialists' *scholarly circles* has been John Walvoord. Corresponding with Pentecost's comments, Walvoord propounds: "The seventh trumpet of Revelation is near the end of the great tribulation, not at its beginning, as the day of wrath has begun much earlier (Rev. 6:17)" (*Jesus* 264). Knowing that Walvoord is a pretribulationist regarding his *rapture* doctrine (i.e., he has the church *raptured* before the *great tribulation* begins), one is not surprised that he says:

Further, the tribulation concerns Israel and the Gentiles, not the church, and the church is promised deliverance from the time of tribulation (1 Thess. 5:9, cf. Rev. 6:17; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; Rev. 3:10) (*Millennial* 252).

Studying the varying ideas about Revelation 6:12-17—that it is describing the destruction of Jerusalem, or describing the overthrow of the Roman Empire, or describing the end of time and the final Judgment, or that it is stating a principle which is applicable as the circum-

stances warrant—one may investigate those views with the understanding that holding to any one of them, *right* or *wrong*, will not effect his salvation. That is not true of premillennialists' stance on the passage. Premillennialism is a system of false, soul-damning doctrines, from beginning to end. Thus, the whole premillennial system of doctrines, which includes the premillennialists' interpretations of Scripture (Old and New Testaments, and especially Revelation), should be rejected because of the dangers it poses to one's soul.

The Time and Place Unattainable

After considering all the plausible explanations men, even scholarly brethren, have given Revelation 6:12-17, one may not be able to definitively declare: "This is the correct one!" One may conclude with Summers: "Under any condition this part of the pageant symbolizes God's destructive power against those who reject him and his plan of salvation" (145). Since John includes the "kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man" (6:15) among those who reject God, one must understand that this passage applies to individuals (regardless of their station in life), as well as to nations. Whether it is thought that Revelation 6:12-17 is speaking of the end of the world and the final Judgment or has a particular nation in its cross-hair, no one can successfully deny that the passage follows God's processes of righteous judgment. That being said, bear in mind that nations can suffer God's destructive punishments in this world only; however, individuals may suffer God's wrath in this life and in eternity.

PAST EXAMPLES OF THOSE UNABLE TO STAND

Bible accounts make it clear that God's judgment has been rendered upon individuals, cities, nations, and upon the whole world. Untold numbers of examples of such judgments are available; however, for the purposes of this study only one from each category will be considered here.

Babylon's King, Nebuchadnezzar

Boastful Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, learned how powerful God's judgments can be upon an individual, even one as great as he. Daniel records:

While the word *was* in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, *saying*, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men,

and thy dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' *feathers*, and his nails like birds' *claws* (Dan. 4:31-33).

Compared to other individuals who met with God's judgment, such as Herod (Acts 12:21-23), Nebuchadnezzar was fortunate. Pompous governmental leaders would do well to take heed to such Bible examples and then give due reverence to God. Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor any other governmental powers could, can, or ever will be, able to stand when bearing the immeasurable forces of God's judgment.

Sodom and Gomorrah

Cities noted in the Bible which fell under the wrathful hand of God's judgment include Tyre and Sidon, and Sodom and Gomorrah. Because of their evil

the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground (Gen. 19:24-25).

Today, it appears that San Francisco and other AIDS-infested *homohavens* are not willing to learn from the things written aforetime (Rom. 15:4; cf., 1 Cor. 10:11). Even so, when God's judgments come upon it, no city, regardless of its size, splendor, and accomplishments, will stand.

Some, with unmitigated gall, announce to the world: "God made me a homosexual" and/or "God does not condemn homosexuality, He only condemns being unfaithful to one's mate." Shameless pronouncements such as those are nothing short of attempting to stand against God and His Word. Such ungodly efforts fail regarding homosexuality and every other sin which one attempts to justify and from which one refuses to repent (cf., Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:27, 32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). The populace and the officialdom within a city providing aid and abetting that which is against God will not be able nor permitted to stand. Individuals and cities alike need to take into account Numbers 32:23: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

The Nation of Israel

Replete with examples of God's fierce judgment being executed upon sinful nations—such as Babylon (Isa. 13:1, 13), Idumea (34:4-5), and Egypt (Eze. 32:7)—none compare to that of Israel. Her history repeatedly shows that when Israel was faithful to God, He blessed her; but, when Israel was unfaithful to God, He punished her. Finally, after Israel had rejected God's prophets down through the centuries and then committed the ultimate rejection of God's Son, Jesus Christ, God was through with Israel altogether, except for the punishing judgment He would deliver to her.

Jerusalem, being the capital city of the nation, is representative of the whole nation. Thus, Jesus is speaking about Israel as He says:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Mat. 23:37-38).

Then, following a description of the intensifying woes which would befall Israel, Jesus let it be known: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (24:21). According to Josephus' history of Israel, what Jesus said did come to pass and was absolutely correct. Following Rome's invasion of the land and the destruction of the entire city of Jerusalem, Israel's land, government, and religion—her whole economy—was gone. If God rendered such devastating judgment on Israel, every other nation should take note. Every nation should know and understand: "Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD" (Psa. 33:12).

The Whole Earth

Only once in the past has God condemned and punished the whole population of the earth. Why? Because "GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Write it down! Sin, wickedness, evil will not go unpunished. Even those who have had their sins forgiven and will enjoy the privileges of heaven throughout eternity may have to suffer the consequences of their sins in this life (Pro. 13:15).

Refusing to repent, the sinful men of Noah's day were not able to stand against God. God chose to use water as their means of punishment, i.e., a flood, a *universal* flood (Gen. 6-8). Every man, woman, and child in the world, except for Noah and his family (1 Pet. 3:20-21) lost their lives in that flood.

Pointing to another time, one yet in the future, when the world will be destroyed, Peter reminds his readers of the flood. He prophesies:

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But 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, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 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. *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness (2 Pet. 3:5-11).

When this fiery judgment and destruction come to this sinful world, no one will be able to withstand it! The question is: Will men refuse to heed this warning given by Peter as they evidently refused to heed the warning given by Noah (cf., 2 Pet. 2:5)?

THOSE UNABLE TO STAND NOW OR IN THE FUTURE

The Atheists

Not only do some now refuse to appreciate God's warnings, the atheists make their *stand* in opposition to Him and to His very existence. Atheist intellectuals, such as Bertrand Russell, allege: "The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms" (23). However, man is the conception of God, not God is the conception of man. "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). A world renowned philosopher though he was, Russell said, "I see no reason, therefore, to believe in any sort of God, however vague and however attenuated" (33). This will not stand, for Paul answers:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools (Rom. 1:19-22).

Before his debate with Thomas B. Warren was over, Antony G. N. Flew regretted that he signed his name to affirm the proposition: “I Know That God Does Not Exist.” He cannot deny that he knew what he was signing, for in his opening speech, Flew said:

What is to the present point is that some people, both those inclining to Dr. Warren’s side in this debate and those inclining to my opposite side, have been surprised and even a little shocked to find me proposing a straight atheist resolution—“I know there is no God”—rather than something more cautiously agnostic—“I do not think the thing is proved, or even can be proved, either way; and anyway do not expect me to stand up to be counted” (1).

Flew’s attempts to prove that God does not exist were so pathetically miserable that they were embarrassing. Those present to hear the debate, those who heard the tape recordings of the debate, those who read the debate book, and Antony Flew himself all know that he failed to prove his proposition. How could the Professor from Reading University, the man ranked among the top five atheist intellectuals in the world, so wretchedly fail to disprove that God is? He failed because God **does** exist and because the proof of His existence is so overwhelming as to be undeniable. God said, “I AM THAT I AM” (Exo. 3:14).

Dying with cancer, Carl Sagan wrote a book titled *Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death at the Brink of the Millennium*. It was published the year following his death. An atheist, Sagan had no hope beyond the grave. From that book, Thompson quotes Sagan saying, “I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue,” and then Thompson adds, “Dr. Sagan went on to note, he could not make himself believe such, and felt it was nothing more than ‘wishful thinking’ to do so” (82). How sad! Jesus Christ came to this world and died on the cross, shedding His precious blood, that Carl Sagan “might have life, and...have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). Instead, because

Sagan denied his Savior, as well as His Father in heaven, in the final judgment Jesus will have to deny Carl Sagan (Mat. 10:32-33).

Madalyn Murry O’Hair is proof that one does not have to be intelligent to be an atheist. Thinking of O’Hair, one cannot help but recall: “The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God*” (Psa. 14:1; 53:1). Of course, that statement is equally true of all atheists, regardless of their intelligence quotient. What O’Hair did prove is that even an atheist of her *low ranking* can have a detrimental influence on a nation. O’Hair’s claim to fame (infamy is a better word) is the June, 1963, decision handed down by the Supreme Court of the United States of America which *outlawed* Bible reading and *open* prayers be said in the public schools of this nation. This, too, led to her untimely death, as well as the deaths of her son and granddaughter.

Controlling tens of thousands of dollars in the treasury of her organization (the American Atheists Association), O’Hair, her son, and granddaughter became crime victims. They were kidnaped, murdered, and dismembered. Their remains were found in a shallow grave in Real County, Texas. What a price to pay. One can see how that O’Hair’s atheism directly led to her horrendous death. Thus, it might be concluded that she suffered and was ultimately unable to stand against God in this life.

Madalyn Murry O’Hair ceased to be an atheist the day she died in 1995, but it was too late. After December 20, 1996, the day that Carl Sagan died, it was too late for him to cease being an atheist, but he did. Bertrand Russell ceased being an atheist the day he died, February 2, 1970—too late. After the atheist dies, he is an atheist no more. There will be no atheists in the hereafter because atheism cannot stand against God.

Those Who Persecute the Church

Christians will suffer persecutions for the Cause of Christ. Paul declared, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Jesus was speaking of persecutions when He said, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). *Cross-bearing* means suffering because one is an adherent to Christ’s doctrine. There is no shame in being persecuted for Christ’s sake, for Peter said, “If *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God

on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:16). Speaking of their being persecuted, Jesus gave blessed assurance to His disciples when He said:

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mat. 5:10-12).

Regardless of the types of persecution a Christian must face, whether physical, mental, or emotional, the child of God will be triumphant. Those who persecute the church cannot stand against God.

Saul of Tarsus inflicted members of the church with physical persecutions. He consented to Stephen’s death (Acts 8:1), and “he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison” (8:3). Furthermore, we read:

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem (9:1-2).

On his way to Damascus, confronted by the Christ, Saul learned that when one persecutes the church, he persecutes Jesus Christ—and that the persecutor cannot stand against Christ and His church (9:3-6). Later, after Saul became the apostle Paul, he wrote encouragements to show the ultimate triumph of Christians over their persecutors. To the Roman church he penned:

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:31-39).

Paul told those at Thessalonica:

Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (2 The. 1:6-10).

No! Persecutors will not be able to stand against God's faithful. For that reason, Christians should be bold in their proclamation of God's Word.

Called before the Jewish authorities of their day, Peter and John remained bold (Acts 4:13). Their detractors wanted the apostles to stop preaching the Gospel and would have had physical persecutions administered to Peter and John. However, they could not do so because the people had seen the undeniable miracle Peter and John had performed upon the lame man at the Temple's Beautiful gate (3:10; 4:16). Thus, the Jewish officials attempted to intimidate the apostles *via* the use of mental persecutions, i.e., threats (4:17, 21). Instead of the apostles and the church being intimidated, they prayed: "Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (4:29). That was in keeping with the Lord's will, for "when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (4:31). Timid, compromising, fearful *Christians* of today need to learn that they are to be firm in their convictions and bold in their stand for Christ's Gospel. Weak-kneed members of the church, like those who intimidate them by whatever means, will not stand now or in the judgment to come.

Yes, the church was persecuted, but the persecutions, rather than stymying the progressive spreading of the Gospel, only served to help in expanding the borders of the kingdom (8:1, 4). Jewish and Roman persecutions brought all the power that evil men, governments, armies, and hell together could muster upon the infant church, but they lost the fight. Just think, from its meager beginning on the day of Pentecost with only 120 disciples (1:15)—mercilessly, violently, universally, and endlessly persecuted though she was—by the early fourth century it is estimated that over half of the Roman Empire professed to be Chris-

tians. From her beginning, there have been those who have made every effort and used every means imaginable to man to cause the church to cease to exist, but the church remains (cf., Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28). The persecutors come and go; they cannot stand against Christ and His bride.

Wicked Brethren and False Teachers

Apostate, evil, wicked brethren can be meaner and more vicious than even the atheists and others who are not Christians (including the pagan persecutors). Thus, not all persecutions and obstacles which faithful Christians must face come from *without*. Some brethren, such as Hymenaeus and Alexander, “concerning faith have made shipwreck” and have to be “delivered unto Satan” (1 Tim. 1:19-20). About Alexander, Paul would later lament, “Alexander...did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:14-15). As Ira Rice used to say: “You just can’t warn some people.” Many, like Alexander, simply refuse to heed God’s warnings, but they will not be able to stand against God.

Warning after warning is sounded in Scripture about the dangers posed by false teachers and false doctrines. Yet, today, in spite of the wholesale apostasy that is happening all around them in the congregations where they attend, some so-called *knowledgeable* and *mature* Christians (this includes preachers and elders) seem oblivious to the fact that false teachers are having a field day and that their false doctrines are running rampant throughout the church. What book have these brethren been reading? If they are reading the Bible, its message certainly is not soaking in. Have they not read the following?

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Mat. 7:15).

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7).

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you (1 Cor. 11:18-19).

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.... Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them* (Eph. 5:6-7, 10-11).

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (Phi. 3:17-19).

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 (Col. 2:8; cf., 2:20-23).

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved (2 The. 2:3-10).

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;... If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained (1 Tim. 4:1-2, 6).

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake (Tit. 1:10-11).

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*" (Heb. 2:1-3).

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were

before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 3-4).

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

Brethren, false teachers and their false doctrines are not to be tolerated (Gal. 2:4-5). "After the first and second admonition" the heretic is to be rejected (Tit. 3:10). They are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17). The faithful are to have no fellowship with them (2 The. 3:6). To do so is to become a partaker of their evil deeds (2 John 11).

David, noted as a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), said, "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:104). Again, he stated, "Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way" (119:128). In Psalms 97:10, the writer admonishes: "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil." If association and fellowship with the false teachers of today mean anything, then many who claim to be Christians do not love the Lord (cf., John 14:15, 21; 1 John 2:3-5); or, if they hate evil and every false way (doctrine) at all, they do not hate them enough.

False teachers wrest the Scriptures "unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). The anathema of God Almighty is upon them (Gal. 1:8-9). Describing the fate of the false teacher and that of those he has duped into believing his false doctrines, Peter reveals:

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:19-22).

If the Bible teaches anything at all, it most assuredly teaches that God will permit neither false teachers nor their false doctrines to stand. Those who do not agree with false teachers or their doctrines, but

tolerate them or go along with them will not be permitted to stand, either.

Nominal and Indifferent Church Members

Edmund Burke is credited for the saying: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” This axiom has a serious problem which makes it fallacious. It assumes that men who do nothing when confronted by evil can be good, which just is not true. Good men do not sit idly by and watch evil triumph. There is neither a neutral position nor middle ground when it comes to good and evil. Jesus made that clear when He expressed: “He that is not with me is against me” (Luke 11:23). Unfortunately, cognizant of the fact or not, many *church goers* are against Christ because they are not nearly as good as they think they are.

Too many members of the church think they have performed all the service that God requires of them when they attend one or two *church services* a week and put their *offering* in the collection plate. Somehow they have failed to understand that they have been bought with a price and are no longer their own (1 Cor. 6:19-20). They have not denied themselves (Mat. 16:24) and given God and Christ first place in their hearts (Mat. 22:37). This is easily perceived because their lives testify to the fact that they are not putting the kingdom of God (i.e., the church) and His righteousness first in their lives, contrary to Matthew 6:33.

Nominal, indifferent, and *remote* Christians need to answer Jesus’ question: “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). No doubt, Jesus included such members as these in His pronouncement: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). It is easy to see that *Christians* who are not wholeheartedly committed to Christ and His church will not be able to stand acceptable to God on judgment day. Nothing illustrates and proves this better than God’s message to those at Laodicea: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15-16).

CONCLUSION

Now that some who will not be able to stand have been considered, the question: “Who shall be able to stand?” remains. Those who put

their faith in the power of God, not in the wisdom of men, will be able to stand (1 Cor. 2:5). Those who watch and stand fast in the faith will be able to stand before God (1 Cor. 16:13). Those who put on the whole armor of God and fight the good fight of faith will be able to stand (Eph. 6:11-17; 1 Tim. 6:12). Those will be able to stand who, when they come to the end of their life on earth, can say with Paul:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

WORKS CITED

- All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary on Revelation*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1979.
- Elkins, Tice. *The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1942.
- Flew, Antony G. N. and Thomas B. Warren. *The Warren-Flew Debate*. Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1977.
- Hailey, Homer. *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979.
- Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967.
- Hinds, John T. *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1968.
- Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Why I Am Not a Christian*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957.
- Shelly, Rubel. *The Lamb and his Enemies*. Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1983.
- Summers, Ray. *Worthy is the Lamb*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1951.
- Taylor, Donald R. *Commentary on Revelation*. Winona, MI: J. C. Choate Publications, 1982.
- Tenney, Merrill C. *Interpreting Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957.
- Thompson, Bert. "I Wish I Had A Belief System" Part I. *Reason & Revelation*. 23 (2003): 81-87.
- Tidwell, Byron. *The Unveiling of Revelation*. Pamphlet. N.p.: n.p., 1982.
- Wallace, Foy E., Jr. *The Book of Revelation*. Nashville: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1966.
- Walvoord, John F. *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. Chicago, IL: Moody, 1969.
- - -. *The Millennial Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974.