

Back to the Bible

BACK TO
TIME

BIBLE

Michael Hatcher, Editor

Back To The Bible

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Back To The Bible

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Back To The Bible	
Tim Cozad	4
Back To Biblical Authority	
Daniel Denham	13
Back To Biblical Grace	
Dub McClish	23
Back To Biblical Faith	
Charles Pogue	32
Back To Biblical Repentance	
David P. Brown	42
Back To Biblical Confession	
Gene Hill	55
Back To Biblical Baptism	
Lynn Parker	62
Back To Biblical Living	
John Rose	70
Back To Biblical Music	
Michael Hatcher	79
Back To Biblical Prayer	
Lee Moses	90
Back To The Biblical View Of Communion	
Ken Chumbley	100
Back To Biblical Giving	
Wayne Blake	111
Back To Biblical Preaching	
Danny Douglas	119
Back To The Biblical Organization Of The Church	
John West	127
Back To The Biblical Work Of The Church	
Dennis “Skip” Francis	135

Back To The Bible

Tim Cozad

FIRST WEEK

It is a custom in many small towns throughout America for the older men to arrive early in the cafes and have breakfast and talk about politics, the planting of crops, the price of livestock, other business related items and sometimes just old fashioned gossip, although they would never admit to that. In Silver Wells, Colorado, out on the Northeastern Plains, it was no different. John Conrad and Bill Logan were born and reared in the community, and after high school they chose to stay, work, and raise a family in Silver Wells. They had known each other all of their lives and were inseparable through the years. Now that they were in their late seventies, they were both retired and spent many of their mornings at the local café. A few years ago John had given up the reins of his ranch to his son to continue the work and Bill had handed over the family farm to his son. Although they were retired, a title both hated, they still occasionally helped their sons, mostly giving advice. This way they were able to tell everyone in town they were only semi-retired.

John and Bill usually arrived at the local café around seven o'clock in the morning, but the morning of November 6, 2009, they arrived even earlier. The talk that morning in the café and in many places throughout the country dealt with the shootings that took place at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas the day before. Everyone in town and throughout the nation was shocked and saddened by the news and questions were being asked how such an incident could have taken place. As they sat down at their usual table and the waitress poured their coffee, they and the other patrons watched the local news out of Denver with the most recent information about the shooting. They were already calling it another mass killing in the United States, but

this time it was on an American military base. The news had mentioned that the perpetrator was one of the Army's own, an Army Major serving as a psychiatrist, but as yet they were not sure of the motivation behind the killings (Ft. Hood).

"Here we go again," John stated as the news shifted to the days weather. John was referring to another mass shooting which took place in their home state of Colorado at Columbine High School in April 20, 1999. Twelve students and one teacher were murdered and more were wounded before the two killers, also students, shot themselves on that fateful day (Columbine). "When will this country understand that until it turns back to God and His Holy Word, these things will continue and only escalate?" John asked his friend. "We need to get back to the Bible and start doing what God says and these things will stop" he declared. "The Bible states that 'Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people' (Pro. 14:34), and right now America is a reproach to God."

John was a member of the local church of Christ and believed deeply in the teachings of the Bible. Bill on the other hand was not very religious at all. He was not an atheist; he did believe in God but simply had not given God much thought as he had lived his life. "Now John, please do not go off on another one of your lectures about how the Bible could reduce crime and violence and other social ills in this country. There have always been radical extremists in the world, religious or otherwise, who have taken the law into their own hands. I believe that crime and violence in this country has increased over the years, but I am not sure that getting back to the Bible is the answer."

In response Bill asked, "Do you believe these shootings would have taken place if this man believed and practiced what the Bible teaches?" Bill would not respond to the question for he knew where it would lead. John did not wait for his friend to respond but continued, "Do you believe that the Columbine Massacre, the attack on the country back on September 11, 2001, and the shootings at Virginia Tech, to name just a few, would have taken place if those individuals had been faithfully practicing what the Bible teaches?" "Bill, Jesus taught, '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). This basically means that how we would like to be treated is the way we will treat others first, which would eliminate many things like, greed, jealousy, and hatred that will lead to violence and murder."

Bill did not always agree with his friend's beliefs, but he did respect the fact that John actually practiced what he preached. "John, when you put it that way, it is difficult to argue against, but history shows that most people do not want to live by that Golden Rule of Jesus. Let's take a break from this discussion and continue it next week," Bill replied.

THE NEXT WEEK

The following week found John and Bill at their usual table in the local café and by this time more information had come to light about the shooting at Ft. Hood the week before. The Army Major behind the shooting turned out to be of the Muslim faith, and this fueled fear in many Americans that more of these events would take place in the country. Unlike the Muslim hijackers that flew the planes into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, this man was an American. Bill wanted to know what kind of religion would ask the believer to take up a weapon and strike down his fellow man in cold-blooded murder.

John explained that there was a great difference between the Bible and the Koran. John believed that only the Bible, Old and New Testaments were inspired. In other words, only the Holy Bible held the words of God that had been given to man to teach him how to live in a godly way and attain eternal life. John quoted from 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "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, throughly furnished unto all good works." He explained to Bill that those two passages of Scripture meant that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that the New Testament law, which man is under today, is the only Word man needs today.

“Bill, it will provide man with everything he needs to be a complete Christian and will thoroughly furnish man for every kind of good work so he can attain eternal life,” John explained. John also stated that the Koran was not inspired, but simply the work of a man called Muhammad who lived between A.D. 570 and 632 (Muhammad). Although some converts to Islam do not believe in Jihad or Holy War, there are numerous converts who do. The Koran actually taught Jihad and how it was the responsibility of every Muslim to fight against the unbeliever, even to death (Koran). He explained to his friend that the Bible teaches just the opposite—that the Christian should live peaceably with everyone, even his enemy.

“Bill, Jesus, the Prince of Peace taught, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you’ (Mat. 5:44). Now does that sound like someone who would kill you if you did not agree with their religious beliefs?” John added, “Earlier in that same chapter Jesus said, ‘Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God’ (5:9).” John went on to explain that Jesus also taught, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

“Bill, the Bible teaches us that not only are we to love God with our very being, but we are to love our fellow man with the same fervor as we love ourselves. If man followed Jesus’ teaching on love there would be no senseless slaughter of innocent people, terrorism would cease, and the world would be a much better place for it.” John continued to explain that the apostle Paul also wrote, “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:17-18). John added that these teachings were only a small part of how Christians were to treat each other and non-Christians. Even though self professed Christians had used religion as a tool to wage war for their own greedy desires in the past, it was not true Christianity.

Throughout the conversation Bill had listened attentively to John's explanations of the differences between the Koran and the Holy Bible. Even though Bill had not been very religious in his life, it did not mean he had rejected the Bible as God's Word; as a matter of fact, he did believe it was God's Word, but he simply did not follow it like many of his fellow Americans. Now, as he was in the twilight of his life, he had begun more and more to wonder about his own immortality. He had attended church services and Bible classes with his friend at the church of Christ a number of times over the years and had actually paid attention to what was taught. He had appreciated that what they taught was straight from the Bible and the members were actually striving to live by what it taught. He could see the love the members had for one another and had asked John about it once before, and John had simply quoted from John 13: 34-35: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

John explained that Jesus taught the way He had loved them was exactly the way they were to love each other and by so doing the world would be able to perceive they really were His disciples. His friend had quoted from Matthew 5:16 so often he could quote it himself now; Bill remembered it stated, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

One thing he could say about John is that he lived that verse. John was always involved in helping others and never took the credit but always made sure that people knew he was simply doing what the Bible taught. Even though he did not attend much, John had never given up on inviting him to services to learn more from God's Word and was always teaching him something from the Bible just about every week.

Both of these long time friends, now almost in their eighties, had seen violence escalate over the years and remembered when Americans had lived a more peaceful life than many were doing now. However, it was not only violence, but both had seen a drop in morality and a great increase in immorality over their lifetime. Before they departed

the café, Bill had a suggestion for their next meeting, and that was that they should talk about the lack of morality in this country and what, if anything, could be done about it.

THE THIRD WEEK

It was another beautiful day in Silver Wells when John and Bill arrived at the café. Silver Wells in many ways had been sheltered from a lot of the crime and violence seen in the big cities due to its secluded geography and a population of only about 900 people. However, the inhabitants saw it on television, and even in Silver Wells morality was not what it used to be. There was always the sad news of a young couple getting divorced or another couple living together and not seeing the importance of marriage as taught in the Bible (Mat. 19:3-9; Heb. 13:4). Even in a small town there were drunks and kids who were trying their hand at drugs, there was occasional vandalism of private property. Sometimes the news of a teenage girl that had gotten pregnant out of wedlock and had an abortion, which was a terrible sin in God's eyes for God does not differentiate between life outside the womb or life inside the womb (Jer. 1:5; Psa. 22:9-10; Luke 1:41-44). In God's eyes the babe in and out of the womb are full of life and precious.

After the two men had their coffee, Bill spoke first about morality or the lack of it in America and even in Silver Wells. "John, I can remember the day when people were more morally minded than they are today. Even folks who were not religious were more morally minded than many religious folks are today. The way people dress and the offensive language they use troubles and sickens me. The utter filth you see in the movies and even on television is disgusting compared to the time we were growing up. How did we get in this state of immorality?"

John could see his friend was visibly upset; so he chose his words carefully. "Bill, it is a fact that when people turn from the Bible, they turn from God's moral compass, and without His moral compass to guide them they must turn elsewhere for guidance. Our society has been following after the philosophy of men, as in Situation Ethics and Humanism, instead of the Bible. We have allowed God to be removed

from the classroom in our schools and replaced Him with Humanism, a philosophy that refutes the existence of God and basically teaches that man is the supreme being on earth and he defines morality.” John mentioned that the prophet Jeremiah long ago wrote, “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). John explained that the verse meant that man would be foolish to try to follow after his own wisdom, he must follow God’s wisdom recorded in the Bible.

“Bill, the very idea of morality comes from God’s Word. Man did not come up with the concept of morality—teaching man how to live in harmony with God and his fellow man. God taught that concept to man through His Holy Word.” John went on to explain that Jesus came and died for the sins of man as John 3:16 teaches, but He also came to teach us how to live a moral and godly life. “Bill, the apostle Peter wrote, ‘But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy’ (1 Pet. 1:15-16). *Conversation* in that verse is talking about our manner of life or our conduct, and our conduct should be patterned after the life of Jesus.”

As they began to walk outside, Bill had one more question to ask John. “So you are telling me that when this country departed from the teachings of the Bible, they lost their moral compass?” John answered in the affirmative, “Bill, the average person has no concept of what is right or what is wrong because they have no or very little knowledge of the Bible. Because of that there is no real shame or disgrace felt even when the most blatant sin has been committed. For example, it used to be when someone was accused of sexual immorality they and their family would be ashamed, but not anymore. Now they make the headlines in a newspaper or they are on the nightly news and are proud of it.”

John gave an example of the nation of Judah that had become so wicked that they did not feel shame, neither could they blush anymore (Jer. 6:15), because sin was so common place to them. “Bill, this nation and the world in general, is just like Judah of old, and unless this nation gets back to the Bible our outcome will be like Judah’s?”

Bill asked, “What happened to Judah?” John replied that God had destroyed the nation for their sins against Him (25:8-9). This statement worried Bill and made him wonder if this really could be the outcome of America.

Later that evening Bill stopped by John’s house to finish their conversation. “John, if you were trying to put the fear of God in me earlier today, you succeeded,” Bill stated. “I am worried about this country and I do believe the Bible has the answer, but what good can one man do?” John explained to his friend that with God and His help all things are possible (Phi. 4:13). “Bill, the key is remaining in Jesus, the vine, and doing His will because man can do nothing by himself (John 15:5).” John went on to explain, “The means to saving this country is to get back to the Bible. Jesus taught, ‘Ye are the salt of the earth’ in Matthew 5:13, and salt is a preserver. It could be the reason God has not destroyed this country is that there are still a number of Christians that are preserving this nation.”

Bill replied, “If I understand what you are saying, you are telling me that I must first become a Christian to really make a difference in the direction this country is heading?” John answered, “Not only to preserve this country, but to save your own immortal soul.” Bill understood exactly what this meant for he had heard the instructions from John many times over the years of what the Bible taught in how one became a Christian. One had to hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) and believe Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24; Mark 16:16). One had to also repent of his sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30), confess that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10), and then be baptized for the remission of those sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Bill’s eyes began to fill with tears as he realized what Jesus had done for him to make all of this possible—the giving of His life that he, Bill Logan, could be saved (John 3:16). Bill’s voice began to quiver as he told his best friend, “John, I have delayed long enough, I want to become a Christian to help preserve my country, to set the right example before my family, and to save my own soul.” John had prayed for this very moment for many years that his friend would obey the Gospel, and the day was finally here. John with tears in his eyes said, “I am so

glad to hear that; let's go to the church building and take your confession of faith and baptize you into Christ.”

CONCLUSION

Getting back to the Bible implies this country has left it and that is a true assessment. Becoming a faithful child of God can rectify the crime and violence and the lack of morality that is prevalent in our country and the world. Most important is that the Bible is the only hope mankind has to save its immortal soul.

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Back To Biblical Authority

Daniel Denham

Charlie Flowers grew up in a semi-religious household. While his father was a border-line agnostic, his mother was religiously-minded, though she rarely attended services anywhere when he was growing up. As with so many Protestant households, the Flowers' children were made aware of the Ten Commandments, being often assured that observance of these would please God and keep them safe. Pictures depicting Bible scenes ornamented the homes of his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. One of his favorite as a little child was a picture in his paternal grandmother's house of a scene of Jesus as a shepherd holding a small and helpless lamb.

Charlie's own religious experiences not only involved his familial connections to the sundry prominent denominational groups in his region of the country—Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Holiness, and Pentecostals, it also included his own discussing beliefs with other more esoteric groups like the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and the Armstrongites, who were beginning to exert influence there. Charlie's own family boasted some seven Pentecostal or Holiness preachers, four Baptist preachers, two Methodists, and even one Presbyterian “theologian,” or so the latter called himself.

Charlie's extended family was predominantly involved in the Pentecostal-Holiness Movement over much of the preceding 150 or so years and also with the Baptist church, especially the Southern Baptist. Charlie, growing up, visited a United Pentecostal church near his home with his paternal grandmother, but having an intellectual bent of mind made him wary of the hyper-emotionalism of the religion from the start. Early on he found Baptist forms more appealing and fulfilling, and grew up in that religious persuasion becoming a member, at a fairly

young age, of a hyper-Calvinistic congregation to which his maternal grandparents and uncles belonged.

Periodically, he would still visit the other denominations of his area, especially a United Methodist church frequented by a maternal aunt and her family. Sometimes he would listen to the Methodist minister in special youth programs express his fondness for humanistic psycho-babble, but he determined that such was not for him. It seemed contrary to a genuinely serious religious belief system to the youngster. After the Methodist preacher was caught by his wife in bed with two of the young girls from the youth group, the church virtually disbanded overnight, and some of Charlie's thoughts about the problems of such teachings by the minister were confirmed. The years only further strengthened his convictions that these human-based theories were destructive rather than beneficial to one's spirituality, not to mention his family. He knew all along from his own studies that as one "thinketh in his heart, so *is* he" (Pro. 23:7). Both common sense and the Bible made that fact plain!

THE FIRST CHALLENGE TO CHARLIE'S CALVINISM

The cold and calculating logic of Calvinism, however, was not fulfilling. Even as a young teenager, he had problems reconciling the Biblical message of God's love, as seen in one of his favorite verses of the Bible, John 3:16, with the teaching of Calvin that God ordains absolutely everything that comes to pass. The death of his beloved maternal grandfather and equally-beloved paternal great-grandmother within a year of one another created a moral dilemma in his young mind. The horrific Calvinism-based thought that "God killed my grandfather and great-grandmother" haunted young Charlie's mind.

These two people had been at the center of his young world almost every day, as they had each lived within one block of his childhood home. Many a day he had begun his mornings as a small child eating scrambled eggs with biscuits covered with syrup while seated beside his grandfather, who often shared with the lad from his own plate. Many a day he had slipped over to his great-grandmother's yard to follow her around as she pattered in her garden and raked her leaves. He loved to pick blossoms off her flowers and smell them. He sometimes went

around as a small tike with a rose blossom or petal partially adhering to a nostril. His great-grandmother had also been his protector on more than one occasion, for often when young Charlie had gotten into trouble by his own mischievous nature with his mother, Great-grandma had come to his rescue with the words, "Please, don't spank the little darling!" He had found her one Mother's Day in her dining room weeping over a photograph of her own mother. She was at that time about 86 years of age. He was but seven, but it touched his little heart deeply to see her so sad. Both she and his grandfather had been exemplary in their own moral conduct in the eyes of the lad, and now they were gone—killed by God for whatever reason that seemed to please Him, according to the teaching of Calvin!

EMOTIONALISM AND SUBJECTIVISM

The familial connections had been very strong in Charlie's earliest days. In fact, both sides of the family had settled principally within an area of one square mile, which made family get-togethers, outings, and activities a common experience of life. It also brought together the sundry denominational groups in settings where frequently religious themes and subjects would be discussed, but in so many cases the most often form of reasoning were the personal feelings and beliefs of the participants rather than any appeal to some more objective basis of authority. Charlie lived in a loving family, but they were a family of "heart-patters" when it came to their differing religious beliefs and practices. The sight of Methodist uncle, patting his heart was a common one. He would say, "I don't know where it says it in the Bible, but I feel right here that it's right!" on virtually every topic of discussion from the work of angels to the sons of Zebedee.

But somehow in all of it, Charlie found a comfort in his Calvinism, uneasy as it certainly was, that transcended the generally calm bubble that was his life. Despite the death of loved ones, tragedy was not something the young man had had really to face. After all, those who had died from his family in his life experiences had all been elderly, and had lived a seemingly good life. They had never been rich, but always seemed to have plenty. This insulated condition of things suddenly changed.

THE SECOND CHALLENGE TO CALVINISM

In Charlie's 18th year, a beloved maternal uncle, who was several years older and married, moved with his wife and their own young son across town near a lake. The son, Charlie's younger cousin, suffered from a severe form of mental retardation. Charlie had been a protector of him, especially against those who would cruelly tease him. On occasion Charlie would even baby-sit him for his aunt and uncle when they would go out, taking the time to roll a rubber ball back and forth with him, cheering every effort of the cousin to manipulate and coordinate his motions to return the ball.

Then one day, shortly after their move to the lake, Charlie was awakened to the news that early that morning his cousin had managed quietly to leave his room and then the home unnoticed. He had been apparently watching people undo the locks that had kept him safe, and he was able to mimic their motions. He had opened the door and slipped away to the lake to the waters where his dad, Charlie's uncle, had taken him for the first time just the day before for a swim. Somehow the boy found his way in the early dawn down to the boat dock and then stepped off into the lake. His lifeless body was later pulled from the lake. The news devastated Charlie and his family. For the first time in his life, a young person whom he knew had died—suddenly, inexplicably!

Charlie was thrown into depression over his young cousin's death. But more than that, it created an even greater dilemma in his mind relative to his Calvinistic belief system. Just at the time that he seemed to be most comfortable and convinced of its truth, this tragedy threw his thoughts into rapid ferment. How could a loving God ordain the death of an innocent child? And even more disconcerting was the dilemma created by the child's death regarding Calvin's doctrine of total depravity. The child, eight years his junior, had not committed any sin, but under Calvinism was nonetheless a sinner, tainted with Adam's guilt, and subject to the penalty of the same.

Catholics, Methodists, and Presbyterians reconciled this dogma of total depravity, which the former too often call *original sin*, with their redemptive theologies by the adoption of the practice of infant baptism. This supposedly took care of the problem by making it possible

for deceased children to go to Heaven despite having been born with the malignity that they called the “Adamic nature” or “sin nature.” However, Charlie knew enough about Bible teaching on baptism as a Baptist to know that it required one to be a believer (Mark 16:16) and that it was an immersion or a burial (Rom. 6:3-4) in the element of water. While these thoughts crowded his mind and bothered his sleep, he mulled over the meaning of life itself, contemplating texts like Ecclesiastes 12:13: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments.”

Charlie’s uncle and aunt had ceased attending the Baptist church, where they had held membership some years before, and did not know the current preacher of the church. In the intervening years since their departure from the Baptist church, they had come into contact through their work with a man and his wife who were members of the church of Christ. This loving Christian couple had befriended them, and also lived near the lake where their son had drowned. The two couples had become, in fact, the best of friends. As a result of this wonderful relationship, the other couple offered to help Charlie’s uncle and aunt with making some of the funeral arrangements, if they so wished. Through their influence, then, a Gospel preacher was selected to do the eulogy for Charlie’s cousin. From a terrible tragedy, an opportunity for good arose (cf. Rom. 8:28).

Charlie thought that the service was beautifully done and quite memorable. He was especially favorably impressed with the beauty of the singing and the message of the rather large man who did the eulogy. The tenderness and warmth of his message in contrast with his size, his kindness to the family, and the general demeanor and consideration of the members of the church of Christ in attendance impressed Charlie.

The most astounding thing was in the teaching by the preacher that children were born innocent instead of with the guilt of Adam’s sin. The text of Ezekiel 18:20, in particular, was read and commented upon by the preacher. Charlie could not remember ever having heard that text before, and while he did from time to time read his Bible, he had really only read those parts most often stressed by Baptist preachers.

It suddenly hit him that maybe there was more to the Bible than he had been told. Ezekiel 18:20, which implied that sin is not an inherited condition, challenged his Calvinistic foundation. 1 John 3:4, also cited, showed that sin was something which the individual chose to do. It was a transgression of God's law, and thus not something one inherited from his parents or even from Adam. Charlie's cousin had never committed sin because he was a child and, not only that, but had been mentally retarded and incapable of choosing to do evil. Unknowingly to Charlie, what has often been viewed as the bedrock of Calvinism, the doctrine of hereditary total depravity (the T of the famed T-U-L-I-P of the Reformation theologian John Calvin), had been decimated. Charlie's cousin did not need to be saved, because he was, as an innocent child—safe! This thought struck Charlie's mind like a thunder-clap! Even his parents were obviously moved and affected in some measure by the force of this truth. His cousin had not died and gone to Hell. No, he was with Jesus—like that precious little lamb safe in the arms of a loving shepherd, as depicted in that childhood picture of his grandmother's so many years before! The Bible said so!

Here was a real, objective standard, one which the fundamentalist Baptist doctrine of his church had paid lip-service to but had apparently rejected in part when it conflicted with its Calvinistic presuppositions! Here was the Bible, the all-inspired, all-sufficient, and inerrant Word of the living God—truths that had been preached but not really understood in Baptist theology—tearing down in his mind in one majestic stroke the suppositions of a cruel and pernicious dogma that had dressed itself falsely in the guise of Divine authority. Charlie's faith in Calvinism was collapsing in the face of Bible evidence!

THE NEXT STAGE

But this was just the first step to an enlightenment brought about not by some better-felt-than-told experience he had heard preached by Holiness and Pentecostal preachers on occasion, it had come from the Word of God, whose entrance into the heart "giveth light" (Psa. 119:105, 130). Charlie began to read his Bible more frequently and fervently, and, even more importantly, tried to set aside his own presuppositions and biases as he did so. He soon gave up belief in the other

points of Calvinism, and came to a firm conviction in the free will of man. Such passages as Joshua 24:15, Matthew 11:28-30, John 7:17, and Revelation 22:17 confirmed in his mind the fact of the free moral agency of man. How could one will to come, unless he was genuinely free to do so? What kind of obedience is forced obedience? What kind of faith is faith that one cannot help but have contrary to what he might otherwise desire? Or are we to suppose that God even forces the desire upon us contrary to what we might otherwise have done? These and sundry questions rolled aside the errors of Calvinism in order, but Charlie still held firm to other teachings of the Baptist Church on salvation by faith alone and such like, despite his rejection of raw Calvinism.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE—THAT OF INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

The next great shock to his spiritual conscience came a few weeks later, when in discussing the Bible with his maternal uncle he discovered that the latter had with his wife now become members of the church of Christ. They had now left the Baptist Church entirely! But, not only that, they had done so by being baptized in order to receive the remission of sins in keeping with Acts 2:38, according to the uncle! Charlie was set back on his heels. He offered all the usual Baptist quibbles on John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, and so on, but in each point was countered with a logical, textual answer that showed the fallacies of the quibbles.

After discussing with his uncle on another occasion but a few days later, Charlie came to the realization of the distinctions between the Old Testament and the New Testament, which Baptist theology tends to blur or remove. He was then challenged to find one example of a person who became a Christian from Pentecost of Acts 2 onward without being baptized. He took the challenge and over the next three weeks read and reread the book of Acts, as he knew that was the book that recorded the history of early Christianity in a direct way. If the evidence, which he believed existed, was to be found, it would certainly be there! But the more he read, and the fervently he prayed about what he read, the more frustrated he became and the more in doubt of the system that he been taught for years. What had begun with the rejection of the

false doctrine of total depravity had now passed on to a rejection of the entire Baptist system, whether in its Calvinistic or Arminian forms.

Charlie came to the realization that he had never been saved. He was lost and undone! He knew well from his reading of the Bible, as well as from the many sermons he heard over the years what that meant! What would he then do about it? This was the real challenge, because it meant that he had to accept Bible authority above every other standard that one might appeal to in religion, including the good moral examples of many in his own beloved family. Here is the acid test for many as to whether they possess the “honest and good heart” needed to obey God and serve Him faithfully for a lifetime (cf. Luke 8:15). Many people fail this test. Our attitude toward truth will determine our ultimate destiny (John 8:31-32; 2 The. 2:10). Do we love the Lord above all, including our own family (Mat. 10:37)? Here is a real test of one’s honesty in religion.

He continued his discussions with his uncle and aunt, and spent many hours in the solitude of his room reading his now well-worn copy of the King James Version of the Bible. He concentrated his studies primarily upon man’s response to God’s grace to be saved, but also began to read passages pertaining to the worship that God enjoins in the New Testament. He quickly realized that mechanical instrumental music was not utilized by the first-century Christians but the church worshipped acappella (cf. Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), and he noted relative to the organization of the church the offices of bishops and deacons (Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-11). As he considered each area of study, whether on the plan of salvation, the form of worship, or the organization of the church, he would ask his uncle if these things were observed by the church of Christ. His uncle each time answered in the affirmative.

He also came to the realization, through these discussions and his own studies, that Jesus had promised to build but one church and that this church began on Pentecost of Acts 2. He also knew that the Bible taught against religious division (1 Cor. 1:10; Phi. 3:16; 4:2). He came to the conclusion that to obey these texts meant that he had to obey God’s Word (Mat. 7:21-28; Rev. 22:14). If he truly loved God, then he

could do no less (John 14:15, 23; 15:14; 1 John 5:3). Thus, denominationalism was false and those involved were in error being misguided by their subjective beliefs.

Finally, after weeks of almost feverish study, Charlie asked if his uncle would take him to church with him and his wife. He happily agreed to take him. One of the things that impressed Charlie from the start was the friendliness of the people. They made him feel at ease right away. He met a couple of men who were introduced as some of the elders and a couple of others who were deacons in the church. So far, so good!

As the services proceeded, he observed the form of music was indeed acappella—no piano, organ, or any other mechanical instrument intervened in the process of the singing. He marveled at the beauty of the many voices blending the four parts and, for the first time, really concentrated on the words. He was not a spectator, but a participant, which is surely what God intended for His worship to be like (John 4:21-24).

The sermon was poignant and powerfully delivered. It was delivered by a fairly tall, thin man, as the large man who had delivered the eulogy at his cousin's funeral was out of town. The lesson emphasized the scheme of redemption and Jesus' death on the cross, as well as the identity of the church that Jesus built. But what impressed Charlie most was how it was packed with Scripture to establish each point. It was an amount that totally dwarfed that of lessons he was used to hearing in the denominational churches he had attended. Even his own Baptist church did not use so much Scripture to establish or support the truth of any given point (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Further, each passage was dealt with in its context and explained as thoroughly as the time would allow. It was clear that in the church of Christ—at least, in that church of Christ—the stress was upon what God says through His Word, and not what man says (Mat. 4:10). One passage that especially stood out was Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 4:11: "If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God."

OBEDIENCE

As the sermon came to its close, the evangelist earnestly pleaded for those who would choose to be saved by the loving grace of God to come

forward. He emphasized the need to be a member of the body of Christ, which is the church (Eph. 1:21-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Charlie, having never attended a single service of the church of Christ and also having never even studied with a preacher for the church of Christ, came forward. He made the good confession (Mat. 10:32-33; Acts 8:37) and was then baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). He arose from the watery grave leaving his old sins buried and began his walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:17).

CONCLUSION

He had seen and heard enough; he knew from his own studies and from his fruitful discussions with his uncle, this is where he belonged. This is surely God's church, the one built by Jesus Christ as Jesus had promised in Matthew 16:18-19. The authority of the Bible told him so, and he has never backed off from that conviction, lo these 36 years. The answer to Charlie's dilemmas in religion is to go back, all the way back, to the first century A.D. and be just what the early saints were, to do what the early saints did, and believe what the early saints believed. That requires, first and foremost, our going back to the Bible in the matter of authority. In doing less we arrive short of our goal, and in doing more we go beyond and miss the mark yet still. Charlie learned this, and so must we!

We must have faith to please God (Heb. 11:6). But this faith must be a living, active faith, a "faith that worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6; cf. Jam. 2:18-26). This faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). There is no saving faith where there is no obedience "from the heart" of that Word (Rom. 6:17-18). Thus, we of the churches of Christ plead with all men to do all in keeping with the authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord and loving Savior who died to set us free (Col. 3:17; Mat. 1:21; John 1:29). His Word is the final authority in religion (Heb. 5:8-9; 11:1; Mat. 24:35).

WORK CITED

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

Back To Biblical Grace

Dub McClish

While Jerry and Patricia Norton were viewing the latest recorded episode of *24*, they were interrupted by a phone call. Caller ID indicated it was their neighbor, Bobby Crandall, two doors down and across the street. Jerry switched the phone to speaker mode so he and Pat could both visit with him.

“Hi, Bob. How was your day?”

“So-so. About like yesterday and the day before. Not much variety around here till I can get around on my own. How was yours?”

Pat chimed in: “We had to make a run to Kroger for some specials before they expired, and we stopped by Walgreen’s for a couple of prescriptions while we were out. What can we do for you?”

“Thanks for asking; you have been very good neighbors, and I hope I never take your kindnesses for granted. I have an appointment with my orthopedist in Dallas Friday; he wants to check on the progress of my therapy. I need a ride and wondered if you will be available, Jerry.”

Bobby and Sarah were relative newcomers to the neighborhood of long-time residents. Both in their early sixties, they chose for their place of retirement the mid-size city of Denton, Texas, not far from Dallas, where the Nortons had lived for twenty years. The Crandalls bought their retirement home in the Nortons’ neighborhood. Both couples were busy with their own lives, so they had developed little more than a “wave-at” acquaintance—until about seven months earlier. Bob and Sarah were returning from dinner at the local Olive Garden and a movie when a drunk driver ran a stop sign. His Ford pickup hit Sarah’s side of their Toyota Camry with deadly force. She survived only a few hours in the emergency room. Besides his great loss of her, Bob suffered severe leg injuries. Following three major

surgeries and several weeks in the hospital, he was dismissed, facing numerous sessions of physical therapy. Their two daughters and their families lived several hours away, and Bob was unable to drive.

Jerry and Pat learned of Bob's plight as they took dinner to him soon after he came home. While he had mastered his crutches rather well and had a wheelchair, he still had to depend upon others for shopping and for everything else that required driving. Jerry volunteered to be his "taxi service" for follow-up doctor appointments and weekly visits to his therapist.

Pat already had plans on Friday, so Jerry helped Bobby to and in the car that morning as they began their 30-mile drive to his doctor's office. On their way out of town, they passed a denominational building with a very large and attractive marquee sign that was difficult to ignore. It stated a simple message in bold letters:

SALVATION IS BY...

GRACE ALONE!

FAITH ALONE!

SCRIPTURE ALONE!

Bobby remarked, "That's not my church, but I agree with their sign. We are all sinners undeserving of salvation, so we are saved by grace alone. We can't be saved by our own works or goodness, but by faith alone in Jesus as God's Son. We should certainly depend only on the Bible for what we believe."

The Nortons had not discussed religion with Bob to this point, waiting for what they deemed the right opportunity. His comments gave Jerry that opportunity as they merged into I-35. Jerry began, "You have obviously given some thought to religion. I fully agree with you and the sign on the *SCRIPTURE ALONE* statement. In fact, it is the most important statement on that sign. It should be at the top."

"Are you implying that grace and faith are not important?" Bobby inquired.

"Not at all, but my point is that, were it not for Scripture, we would have no knowledge of even the existence of grace and faith, much less our need for them. We must go to the Bible to learn what God's inspired men wrote on these and all other subjects relating to our souls.

We dare not base our concepts of salvation, grace, and faith upon the traditions, doctrines, opinions, and precepts of men. When men do so, Jesus said in Matthew 15:6 and 9 they ‘make void the word of God’ and worship Him ‘in vain.’”

“I somehow get the impression that you don’t agree with the *GRACE ALONE* and *FAITH ALONE* statements.”

“Yes and no,” Jerry responded. “Apart from God’s wonderful grace, no one could be saved. You likely know the statement by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:8 and 9: ‘for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory.’ Many other passages emphasize the saving grace of God. Note, however, that while Paul said we are saved by grace, he did **not** say or imply that we are saved by grace **alone**—nor does any other statement of Scripture. So although the Bible teaches that only by God’s grace we can be saved, that is not the same as saying we are saved by grace only.”

By this time Bobby was obviously confused. “But wait a minute. My preacher and my Sunday school book make statements such as, ‘We are saved by grace plus nothing,’ ‘Salvation is a free gift of God, apart from any human activity,’ and ‘salvation is totally by grace.’ Are you suggesting that this very sincere and zealous man I listen to every Sunday, who studies hard and is a fine preacher, is wrong?”

Jerry kindly answered, “Bob, please understand that it doesn’t matter what I may think or say about the teaching or preaching anyone does or hears on grace or any other subject. Nor does it matter how sincere or zealous a preacher may be. Remember, we agree with each other on the *SCRIPTURE ALONE* statement on that sign. Thus all that matters is what the Bible says about grace.”

“What about the *FAITH ALONE* part of the sign?” With a wry grin, Bob added, “I somehow suspect that you may disagree with it, also.”

“I’ll have to answer ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to this question, too, Bob. The Bible teaches that only those who believe in Christ as God’s Son can be saved. Jesus said, ‘except ye believe that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins’ (John 8:24), and of those who die without believing on Him,

he stated, ‘whither I go, ye cannot come’ (8:21). In John 3:16, a verse familiar to you, I’m sure, the Lord declared that ‘whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.’ These and a host of other passages teach that we are saved by faith and that those who die in unbelief will be lost. But never does the New Testament teach that we are saved by faith **alone**. So, as with grace, yes, Jesus will save **only** those who believe in Him, but **not** by faith alone—if we take the Bible alone.”

By this time they were parking at Bob’s orthopedist’s. Jerry and Bob read the usual waiting room magazines until Bob was called for his appointment. When Bob came out 45 minutes later, he sported a big grin.

“Good news, Bob?” Jerry inquired.

“Yep. Everything is healing well and my doc is pleased with my rehab progress. I don’t have to come back for another month—unless some unexpected problem arises.”

Jerry joined Bob in his elation, “Glad to hear it! Before you know it, you’ll be able to enter a marathon. This calls for a celebration. Let’s stop by that Uncle Julio’s Tex-Mex restaurant we passed on the way in. I could stand a big platter of enchiladas.”

An hour had passed by the time they consumed their orders in the colorfully decorated café and headed back home. As they got back on the Interstate, Bob said, “Jerry, could we discuss that church sign some more on the way home? I’ve been thinking about some of your comments. You said some things I had never thought or heard before, and frankly, you have aroused my curiosity.”

“I’ll be glad to continue our discussion. Is there some question or subject relating to our conversations that are of special interest to you?”

“As a matter of fact, there is,” Bob remarked. “I’m especially interested in the relationship between grace and salvation. I understand that God’s grace refers to His favor that no human being can ever merit. As I told you this morning, my preacher says that salvation is by grace alone, just like that sign reads, but you say the Bible teaches we are **not** saved by grace alone. That seems to imply that men must do

something to receive God's grace. But if men must **do** something to be saved—that is, to receive God's grace—would they not thereby be earning salvation instead of being saved by grace? I'm confused, and maybe you can help me."

"I'll be glad to try, Bob. Let's start by noting that the sign contradicts itself in claiming that salvation is both by 'grace alone' and by 'faith alone.' *Alone* excludes any and all other elements related to salvation. So *grace alone* leaves no need or place for another element, including faith. Likewise, *faith alone* leaves no room for grace. It would be like saying, 'Bob alone is in the car' and 'Jerry alone is in the car,' when referring to the same car. The statement suggests a logical impossibility." Jerry continued, "About like the sign, I once heard a preacher say, 'We are saved by grace, plus nothing. We are saved by faith, period.' Each of his statements directly contradicted the other, just as the sign we saw does. If one could be saved by grace 'plus nothing,' faith would thereby be eliminated. If one is saved by 'faith period,' where does grace fit in?"

"I see your point about the contradiction on the sign; it doesn't make much sense when you think about it, does it? I understand that men must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved and that without God's bestowing undeserved grace upon us in forgiving us of our sins, we are lost. But I still don't see how grace, faith, sin, and salvation fit together."

"Okay, let's start with sin. Bob, how would you define sin?"

"I believe that sin is doing things that God and Jesus don't approve of."

"That's a good way to put it in light of what the Bible teaches. In 1 John 3:4, the apostle wrote that 'sin is the transgression of the law,' referring particularly to God's law, and Paul stated...."

Bob interrupted: "But wait a minute. We don't live under a law from God in the Christian age, do we? One time my preacher said in his sermon that because salvation through Christ is by grace alone, we are not under any spiritual law since He died on the cross. He further emphasized that if Jesus came to save us by grace, we can't earn our salvation by a legalistic system of law keeping. No one could perfectly

keep the law God gave to Moses, and that's why we are in need of God's grace."

"The Bible indeed teaches what you said in your last statement, Bob, but let's explore the first part of it for a moment. If Jesus doesn't have any sort of spiritual law for those who have lived since He died, how does one become a sinner? Just as John defined sin as transgression of the law, as I started to say earlier, Paul stated the logical implication of that truth in Romans 4:15: 'but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.' This principle is indisputable regarding both human and Divine governments: It is impossible to violate law that does not exist."

"Wow! I see your point, and I had never made that connection between sin and law," Bob admitted. "In fact, not only had the logic of the sin-law connection never occurred to me, I obviously was not aware that the Bible plainly states this connection." "Now let's take it a step further," Jerry continued. "Why do we need God's grace?"

"Because we are sinners."

"Bingo, Bob. Can you now see that to suggest that God's grace excludes law actually precludes the need for grace? We need grace because we are sinners, just as you said, but sin does not exist apart from law. Thus *no law—no sin, no sin—no guilt, no guilt—no need for God's grace* is both logically and theologically true."

"Yes, I see that, and it all makes sense. But if we must **do** something in response to Jesus' law, how does that agree with the idea that salvation is a gift of God and that it's not because of our works about which we could boast, as we discussed earlier?"

"That's a good and perceptive question, Bob. In the passage you just referred to, we need to remember that Paul not only said we could not be saved by 'works,' but he specified the **kind** of works that will not save, namely works to which one could point and say to the Lord, 'See here, I've done so many and such good works that I earned salvation—You owe it to me.' None will ever be able to say that, for 'all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God,' as Paul wrote in Romans 3:23. Although we cannot earn God's saving grace by our own good works, this fact is in no way at odds with the Lord's constant demand

that men obey His will. He once asked his listeners, ‘why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?’ as we read in Luke 6:46.”

“So you’re saying that we must engage in works of obedience in response to what Jesus teaches, but that we cannot do enough good works to save ourselves.”

“Yes, that’s what the Bible teaches, and this is why we are in need of God’s grace, which is available only through Jesus. If we dare trust in our own faulty attempts at absolute goodness, we will be lost. But by believing in Jesus, and particularly in the power of His blood to cleanse us of the guilt of our sins, and obeying Him, there is salvation. As I’m sure you know, the Bible teaches that Jesus shed His blood to make salvation possible for all mankind.”

“Does this then mean that all men will be saved?”

“If salvation is by grace alone, as the church sign states, then the answer to your question would be ‘Yes.’ But even those who promote the idea of salvation by ‘grace alone’ indicate—though they are self-contradictory in doing so, as we have seen—that faith is required on our part—again, just as the church sign indicates. As we discussed this morning, the sign is right in stating that faith is required on our part as a condition of salvation or of receiving God’s grace. However it is wrong in stating men are saved by faith alone. Faith on our part is a condition of our receiving God’s grace.”

“I think I see what you mean by ‘conditions,’ but I thought God’s grace was free, which means He gives it ‘with no strings attached.’ I keep thinking about what my preacher said, that God’s grace and our salvation do not depend on our efforts. Are you saying that He bestows grace and provides salvation only to those who comply with certain conditions? If so, does that not keep grace and salvation from being a gift?”

“But what does the Bible say, Bob? Let me put it this way: God’s grace which brings salvation is ‘free’ in that we cannot earn or merit it. However, it is **not** free from the standpoint of God-given conditions men must meet to receive it. If there were no conditions to salvation and grace, then all would be saved. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:4 that

it is God's will that all men would be saved, but Jesus said in Matthew 7:14 that only a few will be saved. We can only conclude that the Lord has conditions for receiving His forgiving grace. Those who meet those conditions He will save; those who fail to meet them will not receive His grace and forgiveness, resulting in their being lost."

"I think I'm beginning to see how these things fit together, but I still can't seem to harmonize the idea of a free gift that is conditional."

"Let's see if I can illustrate the principle. Suppose a rich relative died and granted you \$10,000.00 in his will. However, the will stipulated that you must bring a leather briefcase to the courthouse to pick it up and that failure to do so would cause you to forfeit the grant. The award would be no less free because the will stipulated a condition and you complied with it. Nor would complying with the will's condition in any sense constitute earning the award. Likewise, one does not earn God's grace by merely complying with His conditions for receiving it; salvation is no less free because it is conditional. Faith in Christ is the first and foundation of the other conditions that bring to us the wonderful grace of God. For example, Jesus said in Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.'"

By this time Jerry had driven up in Bob's driveway. Bob rested his hand on the door handle, but did not immediately open the door. Turning to Jerry, he reflected, "This has been a good day all the way around. I got a good report from my doctor, I enjoyed the outstanding dinner, I was in the company of a good friend and neighbor, but most of all, I learned in our discussion that I don't know nearly as much about the Bible as I thought I did. I see that I need to study and restudy some things I've been taught to see if they are in the Bible. I thank you, my friend, not only for devoting most of your day to my physical needs, but more than that, for opening my eyes to some spiritual needs."

"I'm glad I was available to take you, and I hope you'll not hesitate to call on me for your doctor appointment next month. And if you think I can help you further with your study of this great theme of grace and salvation or other Bible themes, I gladly offer my services."

Bob opened the car door, and Jerry came around to help him with his crutches. As Bob entered his front door, he assured Jerry, “You can count on me to call you soon for some further study and discussion of these matters. Good day, and thank you again, my friend.”

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Back To Biblical Faith

Charles Pogue

INTRODUCTION

It was exactly a year ago that Bob's next door neighbor, Jim, had knocked on Bob's door and invited him to the Gospel meeting at the First Street Church of Christ. Bob was no more or any less religious than most of the people he knew, so at first the invitation did not move him very much. He had always believed in God, and that Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. Who didn't believe John 3:16? And was not believing that Jesus was the only Son of God, trusting Him to forgive your sins, and inviting Him into your heart all there was to it? That is what Bob thought, and so did his wife, Jane, who was out of town visiting her mother. So why accept Jim's invitation to go? On the other hand, since Jane was out of town, and he had nothing else to do, why not go just this once to please his friend? Jim said that brother Jones was preaching every night for a week, and that all he preached was what the Bible says. That reminded Bob of another reason for him to hesitate. Weren't members of the church of Christ the people who denied salvation by faith alone, and preached a works salvation? And didn't they think no one was going to heaven but them? However, wanting to please his friend and neighbor, Jim, and being just a little bit curious, as well as a bit lonely, Bob had finally decided to go. After all, what could it hurt?

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT FAITH

Some of the very first things the preacher had said in the sermon that night had caused Bob to start thinking about what he had always believed about the word *faith*. Faith, he had always believed, was the conviction to hold on to what he thought was right for him, regardless of any opposition to it. That meant no one else had the right to criticize what he thought about his personal walk with God, or claim

that anything he believed was wrong. Faith was a private personal matter, and the particulars of it were for each individual to decide for himself. Of course, like everyone else, he knew when someone asked about faith, they really meant, “To what church do you belong?” That is where things got a little antsy for Bob, because he was really not a member of any church; he just had a personal and private faith that God had forgiven him of his sins, because he had invited Jesus into his heart and life. Bob had always thought that neither church attendance, public worship, nor anything having to do with organized religion had much to do with faith. Like the old song said, he had his own thing going with Jesus. Faith was a thing better felt than told, and not something to wear on one’s sleeve, as the saying went.

But then the first verse brother Jones used raised an immediate doubt in Bob’s mind about his preconceptions about faith. The preacher quoted: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). “If that’s true,” Bob thought to himself, “then what I have basically believed most of my life about faith, that it is whatever feels right to each individual, is false.” Two other verses convinced Bob that what the preacher said was something to think about. He jotted them down on a piece of paper. They were: Luke 6:46 and Matthew 7:21. In Luke, Jesus had questioned a company of His disciples about how they could call Him Lord, Lord, but not do the things He said. Then, in the Matthew verse, He said plainly that just to call Him Lord, Lord was not enough to enter the kingdom of heaven; one had to do the will of the Father. These truths were troubling to Bob, but he couldn’t deny them. They were right there in the Gospel accounts. They were the words of Jesus Himself!

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF FAITH

The preacher had said: “Words mean things, and if those words are Bible words, they mean what the Bible says about them.” The Bible word that would be the topic of the evening’s sermon, he announced, would be *faith*. “The world needs to return to the biblical meaning of *faith*,” the evangelist declared. The first point in the sermon was that faith comes from a Greek word which means both **belief** and **trust**. Hebrews 11:6 was used to illustrate the belief aspect of *faith*; “But

without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” A verse Bob had heard in his youth and had almost forgotten then came to his mind. It was the one where Jesus said: “Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Bob seldom remembered where verses were located, but this one, he remembered, was found at John 14:1. Although, it was not part of that particular sermon, the preacher did mention that there were many evidences for God’s existence, such as the argument from design, and the uncaused first cause which could only be God.

The trusting aspect of faith, brother Jones had pointed out, was that God both could and would keep His promises. In the Old Testament, God had, for instance, made a number of promises to Abraham. God promised that Abraham would have a son in his old age (Gen. 18:10-11), and God delivered on that promise (21:1-5). God had also promised Abraham that He would give to his offspring the land in which Abraham dwelt as a stranger and sojourner (12:7; 23:4). When Israel had settled in the land of Canaan, Joshua reminded them just before he died:

And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof (Jos. 23:14).

Brother Jones then pointed out that the prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus’ birth, crucifixion, and establishment of His kingdom (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 53; 2:2-3). All of those things came to pass. Their fulfillments are recorded in the New Testament. Jesus foretold His own crucifixion and resurrection to the twelve apostles (Mat. 20:19). “Jesus,” the preacher said, “arose from the dead on the third day just like He said He would.” Then in a very serious tone, brother Jones said, “God has always kept His promises. In the New Testament, He has revealed there will be a resurrection of the dead. Those who have done good will be raised to life, and evil doers, to damnation.” Bob had no idea Jesus had made such a statement, but the very reference was given. It

was John 5:28-29. Bob made a mental note at this point in the sermon to look that verse up when he got home. This point in the sermon was summarized: “**Faith means both to believe in and to trust in God.**”

ANOTHER BIBLICAL USE OF THE WORD *FAITH*

As discreetly as he could, Bob looked at his watch. To his surprise, the sermon had already gone on for nearly twenty minutes, but it did not seem like it. Also to this point, he hadn’t heard anything that he could really disagree with. Everything had come straight from the Bible. “Now,” the preacher was saying, “there is another way the New Testament uses the word *faith*. It is used in conjunction with the definite article *the*, thereby creating the phrase, *the faith*. The phrase, *the faith* is found 42 times in the New Testament in the King James Version (KJV) and 39 times in the American Standard Version (ASV). “Occasionally,” brother Jones had explained, “the phrase *the faith* refers to personal faith such as in 2 Timothy 2:18, but most of the time, when faith is used with the definite article, it refers to a system or pattern of faith.” One verse brother Jones used to show that usage was Acts 6:7: “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to **the faith.**” Bob had not thought about it much before, and in fact, had not read Acts 2 very often, but now he realized that is what the 3000 who responded to the apostles’ preaching on the day of Pentecost had been obedient to—“the faith.” Peter and the other apostles had preached “the faith” that is in Christ. God had raised Jesus from the dead and made Him Lord and Christ, and those who believed the words on that occasion were obedient to “the faith!” The preacher then made several points about “the faith.”

THE FAITH IS BY CHRIST

That “the faith” is by Christ Jesus (Acts 3:16), is another way of saying, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17—ASV). *System* was not the only word that brother Jones used that evening to describe “the faith” Jesus brought. He also talked about “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9-11) and that that passage as well as Galatians 1:6-9, which used the word

Gospel, was not to be changed or perverted by anyone. “With all kindness,” brother Jones had said, “it makes no difference what any man, whether it is me or some other preacher, your parents, or anyone says; the only place to learn about the faith that saves and that is in Christ (Acts 24:24) is this book (he raised a copy of the New Testament) I am now holding in my hand and waving before you.” The point was really stressed by a reference to Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12).

JUSTIFIED BY THE FAITH

Justification is a legal term referring to God’s declaration that one is free from sin. It is just-as-if-I-had-never-sinned. “It is,” brother Jones pointed out, “the faith by which men are justified (Gal. 2:16). Men are not justified by the law of Moses (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:11), nor by the creeds of men,” he had said. That last was a little bit hard for Bob to accept, until the preacher quoted Matthew 15:8-9: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.” Bob could still remember the next words: “If something says more than the Bible, it says too much, if it says less than the Bible, it doesn’t say enough, and if it says the same thing as the Bible, it is not needed.” Peter said there is no one else to whom one can go. “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

OBEDIENCE TO THE FAITH

Acts 6:7 is not the only passage brother Jones gave that stresses obedience to the faith. In Paul’s greeting to the Romans, he said, “By whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name” (Rom. 1:5). All men, then, are required to be obedient to the faith. Paul rejoiced that the Roman brethren had obeyed from the heart the doctrine that had been delivered them (6:17). The apostle was concerned that the Corinthians be obedient in all things (2 Cor. 2:9). He praised the Philip-

pians for always being obedient (Phi. 2:12). He further told them to “work out” their own salvation. “That doesn’t mean,” brother Jones said, “that it is a works-based salvation or that one can earn salvation, but that a faith without works is a dead faith” (Jam. 2:17-20).

“Faith itself is a work,” brother Jones said, then quoted from 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11. Before leaving this point Bob heard the preacher say that one’s soul is purified by obedience (1 Pet. 1:22). By now, Bob had come to understand that faith does require an obedient response from man, but that when he obeys, that does not mean he has earned salvation, but rather he has just done what God has commanded him do to receive the benefit of the Father’s grace.

After a brief pause, brother Jones cleared his throat and said: “I want to address a claim many people make about John 3:16. The assertion is that obeying any commands of God cannot be necessary for salvation, because that contradicts the idea of salvation by faith alone as taught by John 3:16. A look at the context will show, though, John 3:16 doesn’t teach that at all. Follow along with me as I read verses 16 through 21. We will read there about two pairs; two conditions or states, and two consequences. One state is that of being in darkness and its consequence—condemnation. The other state is being in the light, and its consequence is salvation.”

Pausing to finish turning to the passage, and after reading it, brother Jones continued: “According to verse 17: God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. Friends, the world was already condemned, and men would stay that way unless they believed on the only begotten Son whom John later describes in chapter 8 verse 12 as the light of the world. One who follows Him will not walk in darkness. Now, men, continued to walk in darkness. That is, they remained in their condemned state, because they did not believe on Him who is the light of the world. They loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. But notice what John 3:21 says, ‘But he that doeth truth cometh to the light.’ If you noticed the word *doeth*, you know that there is more to coming into the light where the salvation is found than belief alone. Consequently, by keeping John 3:16 in the context of the chapter, we learn that salvation is not said to be by faith

alone or faith only in this verse, which men often refer to as the golden text of the Bible.”

STAND FAST IN THE FAITH

Most preachers Bob had heard in the past, which admittedly weren't very many, except a few on television, when there was no sporting event to watch, always said that once a person was saved, his salvation was secure, and there was nothing he could do to lose it. Brother Jones argued differently, and he used the Scripture to prove his case. “When Paul wrote to the Corinthians,” the preacher said, “they were to stand fast in the faith, to quit (show ones' self as a man) like men, and be strong (1 Cor. 16:13). Simon, hearkened to the preaching of Philip and obeyed the Gospel, but sinned by attempting to buy the ability to impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. He was told he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and to repent lest he perish (Acts 8:12-24).” Brother Jones also quoted Galatians 5:4 which explicitly says it is possible for one to fall from grace. Even Paul said he brought his body into subjection, so when he had preached to others, he would not be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27). Here was another point that the few preachers Bob had heard in the past always had something different to say than what the Bible did. It was possible for a person who had been saved to sin and be lost. A child of God had to repent and ask the Father's forgiveness or he would suffer the same fate as those who had never been obedient to the faith at all!

THERE IS ONLY ONE FAITH

Now, a year later, Bob remembers that brother Jones had used Ephesians 4 to point out the seven ones, as they are often called. He used verse 5 to show there is only “one faith.” “If there is only one faith,” brother Jones had said, “then there is only one way to heaven.” He showed how Jesus taught this in the Sermon on the Mount with the illustration of the broad and narrow ways (Mat. 7:13-14). “There is only one faith, one system of salvation, one plan of redemption,” brother Jones emphasized. He then pointed out that Ephesians 4 also says there is one body and one baptism. “Let me show you how baptism,” brother Jones told the congregation that night, “is part of the

faith to which men must be obedient. When the Ethiopian nobleman asked what hindered him from being baptized, what was the answer? It was, ‘if thou believest, thou mayest.’ He responded that he believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So there it was in so many words. Bob was convinced, the contrary claims of men notwithstanding, “baptism is an essential part of the faith.” Of course, other passages were given to show the essentialness of baptism—verses like: Acts 2:38, 22:16, Galatians 3:26-27, and 1 Peter 3:21. “I am going to do that tonight,” Bob told himself. But first, there were two other points in the sermon for brother Jones to make.

THE CHURCH IS PART OF THE FAITH

Staying right with the book of Ephesians, brother Jones showed how the apostle Paul not only wrote that there is one body (4:4), but in the first chapter, he showed that the one body is the church (1:22-23). “If there is one body, and the body is the church, then there is only one church,” brother Jones reasoned. Jesus promised to build one church (Mat. 16:18), and that church would be His. That is to what those who were obedient at Pentecost were added (Acts 2:47). But brother Jones also showed how the New Testament connects the church with “the faith.” In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul wrote to the Church of God and called the members “saints.” Then in Ephesians 1:1, the “saints” were called “the faithful.” Bob could reason that out on his own: If those in the church are saints, and the saints are the faithful, those in the church must of necessity be in “the faith.” That makes the church part of “the faith.”

REQUIREMENTS OF THE FAITH

On the rare occasions (once or twice a year) that Bob had attended religious services, the preachers had always said something like, “Invite Jesus into your heart to forgive your sins and save you. And just pray this prayer...” Brother Jones issued the challenge that night that if the New Testament teaches any such thing, he would like for someone to show him the book, chapter, and verse or verses where it could be found. “It isn’t there,” he said. “What is there is that the Gospel produces faith (Acts 15:7). One who hears the Gospel, which is God’s

power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) and believes it, must confess Christ (Mat. 10:32-33). That confession is toward or unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10). That means confession by itself is not enough. Furthermore, one must turn from his sins in repentance, and commit himself to living as God would have him to live. As I have said," brother Jones repeated, "baptism is an essential part of the process. So hear Colossians 2:12: 'Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.'" Bob would never forget what brother Jones said next. "One must come to God with faith that, when he submits to the command of baptism, God will perform the operation that cuts away the guilt of the sins he has committed. That does not speak of baptism as an act wherein one earns his salvation, but an essential part of 'the faith' when the blood of Christ washes away sin."

THE INVITATION

Brother Jones concluded that these were some of the most essential things the New Testament teaches about faith. With words of exhortation, such as warning that one day there would be the judgment of all men, and that those who had not obeyed the Gospel would be lost (2 The. 1:7-9), brother Jones invited those who had never obeyed the Gospel to do so. He also talked about how over the more than 2000 years since the Gospel was first preached at Pentecost, men had corrupted the simple faith revealed on the pages of the Word of God. He also mentioned that, as Paul had implied to the Thessalonians, unless men went back to Biblical faith, they cannot be saved. Brother Jones extended God's invitation to all who were there that night who were in need of responding in faith and obedience to the Gospel. One of those who responded was Jim's friend, Bob. Bob had his sins washed away that night by the blood of Jesus Christ when he was buried with Him in baptism. He rose to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). But it had not stopped there. Bob had lived faithfully all during the past year. One of the reasons he had the will to do so was the last passage brother Jones used in that sermon showing the importance of being faithful. The verses were Colossians 1:21-23:

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

In the year that had passed since Bob first attended the Gospel meeting and surrendered himself in obedience to the Gospel of Christ, he had been faithful. He had faithfully worshipped with the brethren, studied his Bible, prayed consistently, and participated in the works of the congregation. But Bob's greatest joy was that he was also able to teach Jane, and that she, too, had obeyed the Gospel. Like the Ethiopian eunuch who had gone on his way rejoicing, Bob was fully committed to living his life by, and was set to, "earnestly contend for **the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

WORK CITED

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

Back To Biblical Repentance

David P. Brown

Not long ago one of our grand kids, Clayton, came over to our house with a Bible question. He had heard one of his friends tell another child that he was a liar and that his preacher said that, unless liars repented, they would go to hell when they died. Well Clayton is twelve years old and has been taken to Bible study, worship, and exposed regularly to Christian living, but for some reason this bold statement from one of his friends to another had started him thinking more seriously. When Clayton came home from school he asked his mother, Rachel, our daughter, to bring him to our house so he could ask me a Bible question that was troubling him. Rachel phoned Grandma to see if they could come over so Clayton could ask Pop, that's me, his question. Of course she said yes and told Rachel they should stay for supper since James, her husband and Clayton's Dad, was working out of town. Hanging up the phone, Grandma began to hurry up supper and I went outside, sat down on the edge of the front porch, and waited for the invasion.

Grandma had just enough time to finish supper and batten down the hatches before the whole tribe turned from the street into our driveway. Their SUV had barely rolled to a stop when the doors popped open and out came Clayton with his sister, Anna. Their little brother and sister remained strapped in their car seats, crying to be released and struggling to get loose. Grandma came out of the house. Together she and Rachel emptied the car of its precious passengers. As the whole crowd started up the driveway toward the house, Clayton trotted over to where I was sitting on the porch. As he strolled up to me I greeted him with, "Hey ole boy, how are you getting along?" He replied that he was doing just fine. "I hear you have an important Bible question that you want to have answered, is that right?" "Yes sir, Pop, I sure do," he responded. As

the rest of the family crowded on to the porch and squeezed through the door into the house, Clayton and I walked around to the side door of the house. We then entered my study to visit until Grandma was ready for us to eat.

As we settled down in our chairs, I asked Clayton what he wanted to know. He told me that he wanted to know what *repent* means and how a person repents. “Well,” I told him, “to answer it like it should be answered we would need to take some time to study it. Are you willing to do that, Clayton?” He answered me with a simple, “Yes sir, I am.” “Okay,” I replied, “after supper we’ll come back in here and see what we can learn about the word ‘repent.’”

About that time Grandma called us in to eat supper and in the same breath told us to make sure we washed our hands before coming to the table. “Okay,” I said to Clayton, “we’ve got our orders. Let’s get our hands washed before supper gets cold.” Then with clean hands we walked to the table, sat down with the crew impatiently waiting on us. After offering thanks to God for the food, we set about to eat all we could. Having finished a mighty good supper, we left the cleaning up to the ladies of the house and headed back to my study to begin our Bible study.

To begin, I asked Clayton if he had any questions. He replied that he didn’t. So I said, “Let’s see what we can learn from the Bible about what repentance is and what it means for somebody to repent. But, before we do that, let’s see if repentance is really that important a subject for us to study.”

I pointed out to Clayton that the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist (the Immerser, the one sent by God to prepare the Jews for the coming of His Son), Jesus Christ, His apostles, and the First Century preachers in the Lord’s church—every one of them—preached that all those who are accountable to God for their conduct must repent of their sins—that is, if they wanted to be saved from them and in doing so become Christians.

Clayton spoke up saying, “I know we are studying about repentance, but you said something about people being ‘accountable to God for

their conduct.' What does it mean to be 'accountable to God for what we do'?"

In answer to his question I replied: "Well, Clayton, it simply means that not only must a person be able to know right from wrong, it also means that a person must understand he is responsible to God for the decisions he makes and the actions he takes. People must know that God is pleased with those who do what He tells them to do, in the way He tells them to do it, and for the reason or reasons He tells them to do it. They must realize that God is displeased with those people who do not obey Him. Let me see if I can explain it in this way, Clayton. Do you remember that before supper Grandma told us to wash our hands before we ate?" "Yes sir," he responded, "Grandma said both of us needed to wash hands before supper." "That's right," I said.

Continuing, I said: "You knew that you should do what she asked you to do, didn't you?" "Yes sir, I did," he answered. "Okay, does that mean that Grandma knew we could understand what she told us to?" "Yes sir," he answered. "But, what if you didn't wash your hands as Grandma told you to, do you think that she, or I, or your mother have the right to punish you for not doing what you were told to do?" "Yes sir," he responded. I continued, "Also, are you accountable at school to your teachers for your conduct?" "I certainly am," he said. I then asked: "Clayton, are you accountable to your parents also?" He quickly responded, "Certainly I am, Pop."

"Okay, if you understand that you are accountable to those who have authority over you, what about people being accountable to God?" I asked. "I see what you mean—that we are responsible to God for the way we live. Is that right, Pop," Clayton asked?

"You've answered correctly, Clayton" I responded. "Now," I asked him, "would God really love you if He asked you to do something in order for you to please Him, but it was impossible for you to do it? Clayton answered, "No sir. Anyone who loved someone else wouldn't do that." "That's exactly right, Clayton," I replied. "Now let's continue to think together about what we have studied. If you hadn't washed your hands as Grandma told you to do, would you have disobeyed her?" "Yes, sir," he responded. "That, Clayton, is what it means to sin. Sin is

disobeying God. That's what the apostle John meant when he wrote in 1 John 3:4 that "sin is the transgression of the law." To sin is to violate God's law either by leaving undone what God said we must do (James 4:17), or doing something God has not authorized us to do. That's how anyone disobeys God."

"All right, Clayton, since you knew Grandma wanted you to wash your hands before we ate, would it have bothered you to tell her you had washed your hands, when you knew you hadn't done it?" He answered, "Yes sir, it would have."

I continued, "Okay, now continue to follow me as we go further with our thinking about these things." I then posed the following question to him. "Would you have told Grandma the truth if you had told her you had washed your hands when you hadn't?" He replied, "No sir, that wouldn't have been the truth." I then asked him, "If a person doesn't tell someone the truth, what has he told them?" "He would have told a lie," he said. "You're correct, Clayton."

I then said to him, "Using the 'washing your hands' example, if it was a lie to tell Grandma you had washed your hands when you had not, can you tell me the difference in what makes something you say a lie and what makes something the truth?" Clayton answered with, "Well, Pop, to tell the truth is to say what really happened—I actually washed my hands and I told you what I did. But, if I told you I had washed my hands when I really hadn't done it, I would have told you I did something that I actually hadn't done—that would have been a lie."

I said to him, "You are exactly right. So, to do right is to act according to the truth and to do wrong is to act contrary to the truth. Therefore, to be accountable to God for our actions means that someday all people must answer to God for what they did while they were on the earth. So, Clayton, the question we must all ask ourselves is: 'Am I living as the Bible (the Truth) teaches me to live, or am I living contrary to the Bible (living a lie)?' Some day God will sentence to a devil's hell all those who die with their sins unforgiven. Or, if they have been saved by Jesus Christ they will be welcomed into Heaven to live eternally with Him—to enjoy all the peace and happiness that He has in store for those who loved and obeyed the Truth of His Word while they

were here on earth.” I then read to him Acts 17:31: “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Following that passage I read to him Hebrews 9:27: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

I then said to him, “Okay, Clayton, do you think what we’ve studied has helped you to understand what ‘truth’ is, what a ‘lie’ is, and the difference between the two?” He responded, “Yes sir, it certainly has.” Also, I asked him if our brief study had helped him understand what it means to be accountable to God. Again, he replied “Yes sir, it did.”

Then I asked him if he could tell me what God’s standard of judgment would be for everyone on the final Judgment Day at the end of the world. I then directed him to read John 12:48: “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.” Having read it, he spoke up boldly, saying, “God will judge us by the Word of Christ.” “That’s right!” I exclaimed to him.

I then asked him if he knew when the Judgment Day would be and referred him to Matthew 25:1-46 for the answer. He read the lengthy passage of Scripture. When Clayton had finished the reading he declared: “This Scripture says that the Judgment Day will be at the end of the world when Jesus returns and that Jesus will be our Judge.” “Okay, Clayton,” I continued, “we are making good progress.” I then stated to him, “With this background information we are now in a much better position to get more directly into the study of repentance.”

I said to him, “But there are a few things remaining that we need to understand and they will better help us in our study of repentance.” I said to him, “Here’s another question for you Clayton. Do you also remember that we learned that sin takes place in a person’s life when that person disobeys God?” He replied, “I sure do.” I then told him to listen closely to the question I was about to ask him. “Do you know the only thing in this world that can separate a person from God and cause him to lose his soul in hell?” He paused for moment, then his eyes bright-

ened as he blurted out, “Sin, Pop—it’s sin that’s the only thing that can separate anyone from God.”

Smiling at him as I lay my hand on his shoulder, I said, “Do you know what Paul tells us about man and sin in Romans 3:23?” He stammered a bit and replied with, “No, Pop, I don’t know what it says.” “Well” I commented, “that’s the reason we’re having this Bible study, isn’t it, ole bud—to learn something we didn’t already know.” “Why, it sure is, Pop” he answered. “Okay,” I agreed. Then I asked him to read Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” followed by Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Having read the passages, I asked him: “Do you think you understand what the apostle Paul is telling us in the two passages you read? And, if you do, tell me in your own words what you think they mean.” Clayton looked back over the passages for a few seconds, then looked up at me and replied with: “In Romans 3:23 I think he is saying that everybody has sinned or disobeyed God and because they have sinned all people have come short of God’s glory—but I don’t know what *glory* means.” “That’s okay for now,” I replied. “We’ll let the meaning of the word *glory* go by for the present. Let’s go on to the second passage—Romans 6:23. What do you think that verse means, Clayton?” He responded to my question with, “I think it means that a person gets paid for his sins with death. But, Pop,” he said, “what does the word *death* mean?” “Clayton,” I explained, “all that the word *death* means is separation.” “When we sin, we separate ourselves from God.”

I then said to him, “Let’s now learn what that word *glory* in Romans 3:23 means. When it’s applied to God, it means all that it is to be God—His perfection, purity, power, majesty, love, honor and all that is the sum and substance of being holy as God is holy. When men sin—and, remember, Clayton, Paul said every man sins—we fall from that state of purity and holiness that we had before we broke God’s law. This means that when one is guilty of sin he can no longer be associated with God. That is what it means to be lost in sin. And, anyone who dies separated from God cannot go to heaven where God is. There is only one place God has prepared for those people who die with their sins not

forgiven. And, that is the place the Bible calls hell—the place where the devil and all wicked people will go some day to be punished throughout eternity.” I then reminded him of what he had already read in Matthew 25:41 about hell—“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

I continued: “So, because sinners cannot save themselves or others from the consequences of their sins, God loved mankind so much that He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinful mankind according to John 1:1-14, and 3:16. You see, Clayton, that means that Jesus became a human just as we are human. He also lived on earth just as we do. This meant that the devil could approach Jesus as he approaches us and for the same reason—to tempt us and Him to break God’s laws—to sin. The devil knows that when a person sins, he is separated from God and if a person dies with his sins unforgiven he will go to hell. But Jesus did not sin, Hebrews 4:15 tells us: ‘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.’” I then turned back toward the beginning of the Hebrews letter and read 2:18: “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

I paused to let Clayton take in what I had said and think about it. After a bit, I asked him if he remembered from his Bible study that Jesus died on the cross for man’s sins. He said, “Yes sir.” Then I asked him what the Bible meant when it said Jesus died for man’s sins. I could almost see his mental wheels turning as he tried to put together what he knew and arrive at the correct answer. He slowly responded to me saying that Jesus could offer His life for us because He had never sinned. I then said to him, “Also, because Jesus was sinless, He could rise from the dead and offer to all people through His Gospel, not only forgiveness of their sins, but their resurrection from the dead too.” Then I asked him to read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and Romans 1:16.

Following the reading of both passages I said to him, “Clayton, in the light of these Scriptures, do you understand why Jesus said in Mark 16:15 that all people had to hear the Gospel, and if you do understand

it, can you in your own words tell me?” He answered me with, “Yes sir, I think I understand and I can explain it.” He then explained that “the Gospel is God’s power to save the person that believes that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead.” “Okay then,” I said before he could go on, “tell me how what Paul wrote in Romans 6:3-7 and how it ties in with what you said.” He then read the passage. After Clayton finished reading, he said, “Well, we are saved by the Gospel when our belief in Christ leads us to obey Him in being baptized into His death. Then, when we are raised up from our burial in water we are raised to walk a new life because God forgave us our sins when we were baptized.”

I responded with, “But I thought the Bible teaches that it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from our sins.” And then I asked him, “Doesn’t the Bible teach that Christ shed His blood for the remission of our sins?” and then referred him to Matthew 26:28. He replied, “Let me think for a minute.” Then he said, “Jesus died on the cross and He shed His blood when He died; so if we are baptized into His death, it must be that it is in the waters of baptism that the cleansing power of the blood of Christ is applied to the one being baptized.” “Yes, Clayton!” I exclaimed “You’re exactly right and that’s why the Gospel preacher Ananias commanded the believing and repentant Saul of Tarsus to ‘be baptized and wash away his sins’” (Acts 22:16).

After complimenting Clayton on his a great job in understanding what these Scriptures taught, I pointed out that God has given humans the power to think, to reason, to know the truth (John 8:31-32). We can know when we have lived our lives contrary to God’s Will as revealed in His Word, as well as know when we are living as God would have us live. God also gave us the power to make decisions, to change our minds and change our way of living. We can think about our own lives and determine if we have believed in God and Christ on the basis of what God’s Word teaches or not. Then I paused and asked him if he could explain to me in his own words what I had said to him.

Clayton quickly spoke up, saying he could. “Okay then,” I said, “I’m going to ask you some questions to see how well you do understand what we have studied.” I began by asking him, “In view of what we’ve

learned from the Bible regarding how often and how much the subject of repentance was preached, do you think that it is has a big part to play in a person being saved from his sins.” He answered, “Yes sir—it looks like to me that God wouldn’t have told all those different people over all those years that they must repent if it wasn’t really important for them to do.”

“Also,” I asked him—reminding him as I asked him that he had already had this question put to him—“Would God command people to do something regarding their forgiveness of sins if it was impossible for them to do it?” Clayton answered, “Like I’ve already said, He wouldn’t do it.” He continued with, “God loves us and wouldn’t require us to do something to be saved if we couldn’t do it.” “So,” I said to him, “although you don’t know exactly what repentance is, you still think it is very important to and very much involved in a person’s salvation from sin. Is that right?” He answered, “I think it is.”

“Okay Clayton, let’s go to our Bibles and read a couple of passages of Scripture to see if God’s Word commands people to repent. Please read Acts 17:30.” Clayton turned to the passage and read it: “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” When he finished, I said, “Now turn to 2 Peter 3:9 and read it for us.” Clayton, turned to the passage and read it too: “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.”

Having finished reading the Scriptures, I asked Clayton to tell me if God commanded people to repent of their sins. He said, “Yes” and referred me to what he read in Acts 17:30. Then I asked him what he learned from 2 Peter 3:9. He replied that he understood from the Apostle Peter that God desired for all men to be brought to repentance. I then pointed out that when one looked at the context of 2 Peter 3:9 that God was saying that time was allowed to continue because God was giving men time to repent. I then asked Clayton what he had learned about repentance from these two passages. He answered, “I’ve learned that God has commanded people to repent and that He allows the world to continue on for the purpose of giving people time to repent.”

I added to his comments what Jesus said to the Jews of His day in Luke 13:3: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Then I pointed out that the Bible makes it clear that one cannot be saved by Christ unless he repents of his sins. Having said this, I directed Clayton to read what Peter said in Acts 2:38 to those who asked him what they must do to be saved. Clayton read the passage: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Following his reading of the verse, I asked him if he saw anything in the passage about the relationship of repentance to baptism. He replied, "Yes sir, in that verse repentance came before baptism." "That's right," I said, "Before one is ready to be baptized he must repent of his sins."

Clayton went on to say, "Pop, in reading Acts 2, I see that the people came to believe in Christ by the Gospel that Peter and the other apostles preached to them. Then, when they became believers in Christ, they were commanded to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins." My response to his comment was, "Clayton, that's a good observation and you're exactly right."

I continued, "We have reached the point in our study where we are ready to answer the following question: What is repentance? In answering it we will need to ask other questions." Clayton responded to my comment with, "Let's go ahead because I'm really interested in learning what repentance is."

"Okay, Clayton, here is a question for you. Do you think that the Bible teaches that Godly sorrow for sin is repentance? I'm asking you this because of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 7:10: 'For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.'" Clayton again examined the verse. After a few seconds he pointed out to me that Paul said "godly sorrow works repentance" not that "godly sorrow" is repentance. "Okay, then" I asked him, "What is 'godly sorrow'?" Then I told him he also needed to examine verses 8 and 9 to see if they would help him determine the answer to this question. I pointed out to him that he needed to remember that in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth he had rebuked them for several sins of which they needed to repent.

Clayton read the verses and said, “In those verses Paul is saying he did not desire to make them sorry but he had to do it because of the sins in which they were involved. Paul knew they couldn’t continue to engage in those sins and go to heaven. So, he determined to write a letter and tell them what they needed to hear so they would be sorry for their sins and repent of them.”

“That explanation was very good Clayton,” I said to him. “Now, can you tell me the meaning of Godly sorrow?” He replied, “I think I can, Pop. It’s when a person is caused to be sorry to God for the sins he has committed against Him.” “That’s right on target, Clayton,” I responded.

I then pointed out to Clayton that he had figured out what caused repentance, but that we had not determined the exact meaning of *repent*. So, I asked him if he thought that repentance was the reformation of one’s life—that is, the changes people make in their lives? As he had done several times in our study he paused and stared contemplatively at the wall. He then looked at me and said, “I know it has something to do with it, but I don’t know for sure what it is.”

“Okay,” I said. “How about reading the following Scripture and see if it will help you find the answer you need.” Then I directed him to Matthew 3:7-8: “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” After he read it, I asked him what the Jews to whom John the Baptist was preaching understood him to mean when he said: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” He looked at the passage again and asked about the meaning of *meet*. I told him that it meant “suitable” or what a thing should be. Clayton thought a while longer and with knitted brow looked up at me and asked, “Did John mean that when somebody repented, people could tell it by the different kind of life he began to live?” I said to him, “You’re right. When a person repents, he changes the way he lives, or he reforms his life.” Clayton was happy until I reminded him that we still did not know the definition of *repent*.

So, I asked him if he was ready to know exactly what *repent* meant. He replied that he certainly wanted to know and, in fact, he was about to decide we never would get to it. I chuckled at him, reminding him that many times in studying a subject one had to study other topics first. That was the case, I told him, because this preliminary information gave him the necessary background that he actually needed to understand the subject in which he was really interested. I then said to him, “Okay, Clayton, here is the definition of the word *repent*. Repentance is a change of that stubborn will which is the seat of all rebellion and all sin against God.” Since his mouth was agape, I deliberately repeated the definition.

I then said to him, “We are now going to determine what there is in the Gospel message that can create Godly sorrow in a person—the only kind of sorrow that will cause one to repent of his sins. Do you know what those principles are?” To save some time, I decided to cut down on the questions to him and urged him to give close attention to what I was about to tell him.

“The Lord has given men two motives as the means of bringing them to repentance. Fear is the first motive.” I then directed him to read 2 Corinthians 5:10-11: “We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” I then told him that this statement, and all the warnings in the Bible are given to us for the purpose of causing us to develop sorrow toward God for the sins we have committed against him.

The second motive is the goodness of God. I then asked Clayton to read Romans 2:4: “Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” One realizes the goodness of God when he thinks about the life and death of His only Son, Jesus Christ. In studying about the life of Christ we see the beauty of His holiness revealed in His earthly sojourn, His journey to Calvary, and His terrible suffering in shame and agony, nailed to the cross for our sins, making it possible for all sinners everywhere to be saved and to become children of God. Thus, ‘the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.’”

I closed that study of repentance with Clayton by asking him if he thought he could in his own words explain to his friends, not only what repentance is, but the whole plan of salvation. He replied, "Yes sir, I can." "Okay Clayton, that's one of the reasons why we had this Bible study. But before we close. I want to ask you about your own life." As I put my arm around his shoulder and we walked toward the door, I told him that our study was also for his own spiritual good. And, that was because he, too, needed to become a Christian. In a low but steady voice, he replied to me, "I know, Pop. I've been thinking about that all through our study." I responded to his remark with: "I'm glad to hear you say that because when you get ready to obey the Gospel, I want you to know that, if I'm around, I'll be there to help you do it."

As he stepped to the door, Clayton nodded his head acknowledging my comment. As we walked into the living room where the rest of the family waited on us, he thanked me for studying with him and told me that he loved me. I told him I enjoyed the study with him too and that I also loved him. Then, turning loose from Grandma for a moment, his sisters and brother swarmed me. After all sorts of squeezes, hugs, and very wet kisses, Rachel said they had to get on home. Amidst a chorus of good nights, Rachel started the vehicle and drove away. Grandma and I turned and walked back to the house. We then sat down on the couch, and I reported to her about our Bible study.

We decided to call it a day and get some sleep. We had not long retired into our bedroom to settle in for a good night's rest when the doorbell rang. Grandma remarked, "I wonder who that is at this hour of the night." I responded to her, "Well, the best way to find out is to go and see who it is." Slipping on our house coats, we walked together to answer the door. As I walked to it, I paused to look through the peephole to see who was there, but could only see our daughter Rachel's face. So, I unlocked the door and opened it. As I swung the door wide, there stood Clayton in front of his mother. With a big smile on his radiant face that made his big blue eyes sparkle, he looked up at me and simply stated, "Pop, I'm ready."

WORK CITED

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

Back To Biblical Confession

Gene Hill

John reached for the jangling phone across his desk, “Hello, Main Street church of Christ, this is John speaking, may I help you?” he asked.

The voice on the phone responded: “Yes, this is Robert Brown calling. I have been reading your weekly column in the paper with much interest over the years. While we may have some differences, I believe you will give me a straight Bible answer.”

A called like this certainly excited John. It often seemed as though the articles he was taking the time to write each week were simply falling on deaf ears, and he had often thought about simply ending them. So this was a breath of fresh air to him. Trying to hide his excitement, he responded: “Sure, I will do the best I can. What is your question?”

Robert got directly to the heart of his question when he said, “My question is this, what does it mean when Paul says in Romans 10:8-10, that ‘with the mouth confession is made unto salvation?’” Just how, or what, does confession contribute or even help my soul’s salvation?”

John quickly answered: “Good question. Do you have your Bible handy?” He wanted to let Robert know immediately the emphasis that both he and the Lord’s church placed on giving Bible answers to Bible questions. He knew: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), and he wanted to impress this upon Robert.

Robert responded, “Yes I do. It is a King James Version, and if I am correct, that is what you use in your articles.”

John was thankful it was a King James Version so he would not have to go into explaining some of the differences and difficulties that might arise from Robert’s use of some of the modern perversions. So John said, “Great Robert, let’s turn to Romans 10:8-10 and talk about

this. Notice verse 8 which says, ‘The word is nigh thee.’ Robert, for the Jew, if something were difficult, it was said to be far off or away. If it were an easy thing, it was ‘nigh.’ Thus, when Paul writes this, he is saying the process of salvation was, and is, something that can be done, or it is nigh thee.”

Robert then asked, “Why is that important, John?”

John was able to continue: “The Jew knew that no man could keep the law of Moses sinlessly. The prophet Hababukuk said, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ Paul told us that law-keeping doesn’t save, nor can it, according to Galatians 2:16 and 3:11-12. Instead it is faith in Christ that saves us but only when it is acted upon.”

Robert, not totally understanding the import of what John was saying, asked, “Do you mean that all I have to do is to verbalize my faith in Christ, or even merely think it, and I will be saved?”

So John goes on to explain: “No not at all. If such were the case, then devils who believe would be saved. James tells us “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” in chapter 2 and verse 19. James, then, followed that with a statement requiring action and faith. Turn in your Bible and read James 2:20.” So Robert turned over and quickly read to himself verse 19: “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”

Robert began to realize that certain “works” were included or else, as John said, the devils would be saved. So Robert asked: “What sort of things are included?”

John was somewhat expecting a question along these lines; so he said, “Turn in your Bible to John 12:42. You will see that, although many of the Jews believed on Jesus, they weren’t willing to confess Him for fear of the Pharisees and being put out of the synagogue. A mere belief isn’t sufficient.

“In His conversation with the Apostles in Matthew 10, Jesus sends them out to preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand in verse 7. According to verse 1, in the process of their preaching, they were to make use of the miraculous powers that Jesus gave them. This kingdom required repentance from sin, as we see in Mathew 3:3 and 8, along

with chapter 4 and verse 17. This kingdom preaching also required belief in Jesus as Lord and Messiah, as we observe in John 6:44-45 and then in John 8:24. Jesus also told His apostles that some would reject their preaching, which would result in their persecution according to what Matthew records in chapter 10 verses 21-31. However, in spite of the obstacles, the apostles were to continue with the assigned task with no let-up as we find in Matthew 10:32-33.”

This reasoning by John caused Robert to remember some other passages that he had studied; so he said, “This sounds quite similar to what I read in Revelation 3:5, where Jesus said He would confess before the Father the names of those that overcome any temptations that would defile their spiritual garments.”

John began to smile, realizing that Robert is beginning to understand; so he continued the thoughts Robert has introduced by saying, “Exactly. As recorded in Revelation 3:1-6, the brethren in Sardis apparently had to overcome their own fleshly desires. They were told in verse 2 that Christ found their works imperfect and lacking. There were only a few that had garments unspotted. Remember Paul told us in Ephesians 5:26-27: ‘That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish’ and James told us that ‘Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world’ in chapter 1 and verse 27. Both of these stress that we are to be pure, but those in Sardis had not overcome the desires of the flesh.

“Paul told us starting in Romans 7:22, and continuing on through chapter 8 and verse 2, that when we follow the law of God we will be free from the law of sin and death.”

Robert then said, “So it sounds as if confessing Christ and overcoming trial and temptation are very similar.”

John added: “Yes, but in the sense that, when we truly have the Lord in our hearts, as Paul stated in Romans 10:8, then the confession we utter with our mouths will not only be what we acknowledge

as true, but also that which we will perform. John called the practical effect of this saving confession ‘walking in the light’ in 1 John 1:7. James, as we read a moment ago, said it is keeping oneself ‘unspotted from the world,’ as we saw over in James 1:27. Then, Paul said it is yielding oneself a servant, not to sin but to righteousness, according to Romans 6:15-18.”

Robert then asked, “All this is very informative, but I also read about the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:36-38. He confessed Jesus as being the Son of God. Is that what is meant by all of this?”

John was excited, seeing someone so receptive to God’s Word, and wanting to teach him an important lesson about keeping things within the context, added: “It is. We need to keep in mind the whole account though. The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53:7 and the verses following; he wanted Philip to explain it to him. Philip began at that point and preached unto him Jesus.”

Robert interjected, to the surprise of John: “And in preaching Jesus, the eunuch believed and simply acknowledged his faith; then he followed through to the completion of his faith in being immersed by Philip.”

“Exactly,” replied John.

However, John saw that Robert did not totally understand when he asked the question: “But why doesn’t Paul’s statement in Romans 10:8-10 reflect that?”

John began to explain. The first question Robert asked was: “Do you understand the idea of implication?”

Robert was not sure but, not wanting to appear that way, said, “I think I understand it, but I am not positive.”

So John, not wanting to divert too much attention away from the present study gave a short definition of it by saying, “Well Robert, implication is a conclusion that is drawn from what is explicitly stated. It is easily seen in math when one says that a square has 5 inches on one side. Even though it is not explicitly stated that figure has four 90-degree angles. We also conclude or know that it has a perimeter of 20 inches and an area of 25 square inches. We know these facts because

of what was stated explicitly—that it is a square and that one side is five inches in length.”

Robert replied, “Oh, I see what you’re saying about implication.”

So John continued on by saying, “Implication is what we have here. Jesus in His own words told us what He wanted from man. He said that man must hear His Word, as we see in John 6:44-45. The hearing of the Gospel will produce faith in man since ‘faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,’ according to Paul in Romans 10:17. In John 8:24 Jesus tells us: ‘I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.’ Then upon our believing, we must repent of our sins because Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish’ in Luke 13:3.

“Then as we pointed out earlier, man must also confess, according to Matthew 10:32-33 where Jesus said, ‘Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.’ This confession is the same statement the Father made when Jesus was baptized by John in Matthew 3:17 and again on the mount of transfiguration in chapter 17 and verse 5 where He said, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

“When we make that confession of our faith in Jesus as being God’s Son, then we are ready to be baptized according to Mark 16:16 which says, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.’ With the act of baptism, the person is saved or has the remission of his sins, but that is only the starting point of the Christian life. He must live the way God sets forth in His Word; he must be faithful to God throughout his life. John records in Revelation 2:10 that the Christian is to ‘be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.’

“We find those on Pentecost in Acts 2 following through with what we have just said. After Peter proved that Jesus is the Son of God by the apostles’ own eyewitness testimony plus the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the Jews believed on Jesus as evidenced by

their being ‘pricked in their heart,’ according to verse 37. Of course not everyone accepted the testimony of the apostles, but they continued to exhort them as we see in verse 40, resulting in 3,000 obeying the Truth in being baptized to save themselves, as is taught in verse 41, which says, ‘Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.’”

John then added, “There isn’t any one passage that lists all that we are to do in order to obtain salvation—or even all that God does for salvation to take place.”

This statement confused Robert a little bit; so he asked: “What do you mean? I don’t understand.”

John explained: “A rule of Bible interpretation is that you must take everything the Bible says on a given subject and draw a conclusion that is harmonious with all of it. As an example, according to Matthew 26:28, we are saved by Jesus’ shed blood. Then Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches us that we are saved by God’s grace. It would be improper to conclude that, since Ephesians 2:8-10 does not mention the blood of Jesus, we are not saved by that blood. That conclusion would not harmonize with Matthew 26:28 and other passages. The conclusion must harmonize with everything the Bible says on it.

“Likewise, there is not any one verse that lists all of the Divine requirements for man to be saved. No one has the right to leave out any one of the items God requires of man simply because they aren’t all in one verse and still expect to be saved.”

Robert, feeling almost in shock by what John had told him, said, “Oh. I see your point. I hadn’t considered it in that light. So many times I hear someone just quote John 3:16 as if that is the only passage that deals with our salvation.”

John then decided to drive home the idea of implication; he said: “Here is something else, Robert. Since your name doesn’t appear in the text of the Bible, the only way you can know that any of the Bible applies to you is by implication. You and I, as well as all other people are included simply because of the phrase ‘every creature’ contained in

Mark 16:15. Since the Gospel is to be preached to ‘every creature’ and you are a ‘creature,’ then it applies to you.”

Robert decided to see if his understanding was correct; therefore he said: “So then even though we have only one account of someone making a confession of faith in Christ prior to his baptism, as the eunuch did, since Jesus commanded it in Matthew 10:32-33 and Paul repeated it in Romans 10:8-10, all those truly seeking salvation must comply. I think I get it. That makes sense.”

John, realizing that Robert had the correct understanding of the Biblical principles, said, “That is exactly right.”

Then for emphasis sake, John continued by saying, “Every person that has been taught the Way of Truth, and truly wants to receive remission of sin, will come to God as He has directed. This soul will do all that God commands, realizing that God will bless the obedient as we find in Hebrews 5:8-9. God’s grace will be extended to that person, to the saving of his soul, as Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches, upon his confession of his faith in Jesus as God’s Son, according to Romans 10:8-10, and his submission to God’s Will, James 4:7, when he is baptized for salvation we Jesus taught in Mark 16:16.”

Robert then concluded the phone conversation by saying, “Thanks, John. You have been very helpful. I would like to come by your office and study some more in person if that would be okay.”

John was thrilled and could hardly hold back his excitement as he said, “Robert, that would be wonderful. Would it be possible for us to get together this afternoon or evening?” because John realized the need for Robert to confess Christ and be baptized to receive God’s grace in the saving of his soul.

Robert agreed to come by that afternoon for more study of his need to confess Jesus as the Christ and be saved.

WORK CITED

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

Back To Biblical Baptism

Lynn Parker

Jim was a sincere man who really wanted to be a good man. He believed in God and he firmly believed that the Bible was God's Word. His parents, now both deceased, were honest, hard-working people who had good reputations in the community. They had taken Jim to the little community church nearby, where Jim was first exposed to religious training. His parents taught him that all men would stand before God one day and answer for their deeds. He had heard his preacher quote the passage: "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).

Jim also knew that God wants him to be saved. It was comforting to know that the Almighty God of Heaven cares for each of us. God is not indifferent about man's salvation. God "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). And Jim loved to hear the precious words of that Golden Text—"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" (John 3:16).

But Jim was no real Bible student now. He listened carefully to his pastor but seldom searched the Scriptures for himself. He was content in his religious beliefs. For years he had been complacent and satisfied. Jim and his family pretty much accepted what they heard from the pulpit without question. After all, Pastor Johnson couldn't possibly be wrong, could he?

Yes, Jim was a religious man. He was a sincere man. But all was not right with Jim. Lately he had been losing sleep. He was uncomfortable and anxious. Why? A friend at work said something in a conversation during lunch that struck a nerve in Jim. It caused him to question his salvation and what he had been taught. Jim's friend, Mike, was talking with Jim about the Bible one day and asked if he would like to engage in daily Bible study during their lunch break. Jim thought that was a splendid idea. Sure! Why not? You can never know enough about the Bible. So Mike and Jim began a daily study of the Bible. One day Mike read the following passage aloud:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter *said* unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36-39).

"Jim, the Bible is pretty clear," Mike said. He continued, "these people on Pentecost were commanded to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins." "But," Jim replied, "baptism is not essential for salvation—that's what I've always been taught." The wheels were turning in Jim's head. He was no theologian or deep thinker, but this was shaking Jim to the depth of his soul. He knew what his pastor had said, that baptism was an outward sign to the world that you belonged to Christ. Jim was taught that he was saved at the point of faith, and baptism came later. "Mike, I need to talk with my pastor about this. You simply must be wrong." Jim went back to work, but he continued to think about their study. His thoughts were in turmoil.

If baptism is for the remission of sins, then, it is necessary for salvation. And if the Bible teaches that baptism is for the remission of sins then maybe I'm not saved. Is that possible? Have I been taught wrong all of these years, first by beloved parents and then by my trusted pastor?

Jim went home that night and wrestled with what he had studied.

The next day Jim was still uneasy, and at lunch he told Mike that he thought he needed to take a break from Bible studies so he could "sort

things out.” Mike was disappointed but left Jim with this thought: “Jim, the Bible says to ‘prove all things; hold fast that which is good’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Jim, if the Bible teaches that you aren’t saved, don’t you want to be right with God?”

Jim decided to talk with his pastor. The pastor told him not to worry about it, and that if he was wrong, so were millions of other people. And on top of that, Pastor Johnson said, “Baptism can’t be essential for remission of sins because baptism is a work. And you can’t work your way to heaven, Jim.” What the pastor said made sense. And the pastor jotted down a few other notes that made Jim feel more at ease. Among other things, the pastor pointed out that the thief on the cross was never baptized, yet he was saved (Luke 23:43). Jim couldn’t wait to talk to Mike the next day.

Jim was confident that he was saved. His pastor had said so. When lunch time rolled around he met Mike and cheerfully said, “I’m ready to continue our study.” Jim brought up the thief on the cross. Surely the thief was saved, after all, Jesus said, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Mike thoughtfully replied:

Jim, I have no doubt that the thief on the cross was saved. But it’s impossible to say with certainty that he was never baptized since the Bible does not tell us that. He could very well have been baptized with John’s baptism since John the Baptizer was preaching in the region of Judea, and was baptizing for the remission of sins. The Bible states, “John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the country of Judaea, and all they of Jerusalem; And they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:4-5). But besides this, the fact is that the thief lived under a different law than we do today. He was under the law of Moses, and as such, was not obligated to be baptized with the baptism preached on Pentecost. And too, Matthew 9:6 sets forth that “the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins.”

Jim was, for a moment, speechless. He was sure that baptism was not essential to salvation, and the thief on the cross proved that—or so he thought. Mike continued in kindness:

Jim, through the grace of God, a way of salvation has been opened for mankind. Indeed, God’s favor—His grace—is extended to all.

Paul said, “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world” in Titus 2:11-12. Salvation cannot be earned. It is not of human merit. Again Paul said, “for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God” in Ephesians 2:8. So you see a way of salvation, given to you by your loving Heavenly Father, was made possible through the death of Jesus on the cross. His blood cleanses us from sin.

Jim thought that if the grace of God has appeared to all, then everybody is going to be saved. He asked Mike, “Then, all people will be saved, right?” Mike took Jim back to the Bible and said, “The answer to your question is given by the Lord is His Word. Consider these passages:

Matthew 7:13-14 says, “Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.” See for yourself then Jim, that most will be eternally lost. Why? Because they chose a broad road instead of the Lord’s way. Jesus shows us that there is but one way of salvation—through Him when He said, “and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life” in John 5:40. Notice these other passages: “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” and “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me” in John 8:24 and 14:6. Jim, God wants you to be saved. He has given His Son that you might be saved. It is through Jesus that all saved are saved. Now, what must you do to receive salvation that is available only in Christ? It is important to consider the totality of the Scriptures concerning salvation. Do not wrest Scriptures from their context. Let’s not pit one passage against another. Here, then, is the way of salvation—the way to be “in Christ.” Remember, forgiveness of sins is found in Christ (Ephesians 1:7).

Mike pointed out that Jim must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. In John 8:24, Jesus said, “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.” Further, Mike pointed out that the following passages establish that faith (belief) in Jesus Christ is essential to be saved.

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).

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned (Mark 16:16).

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 (John 3:16).

And brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house (Acts 16:30-31).

Jim learned from their study that there is more than one type of belief (faith) mentioned in the New Testament. There is the faith that saves (as noted in previous passages) and there is a dead faith. Read on:

Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *it*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the glory *that is* of men more than the glory *that is* of God (John 12:42-43).

Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? 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. Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith. 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? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead (James 2:19-26).

Jim saw in John 12:42-43 that of the chief rulers “many believed on him.” But their faith was as dead as the proverbial doornail. It did not prompt them to action. It was not a saving faith. James describes it as a “dead faith.” Even the “devils also believe, and shudder” (James 2:19). It is the faith that obeys Heaven’s will that saves! Read Hebrews 11 and see that faith and obedient action are inseparably tied together. For example:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8).

So faith is essential to salvation. Remember, it must be a faith that obeys God—not a dead faith. So then, faith is something that you must do to be saved.

“But Mike,” Jim wondered aloud, “isn’t salvation a free gift of God?” Mike replied, “Jim, you’re exactly right. It sure is. And God tells you how to obtain the gift you cannot earn. It must be through faith—the faith that the Bible describes as active and alive.”

Mike read from the Bible that the multitude on Pentecost asked, “Men and brethren, what must we do?” He then read Peter’s response “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38). What happened then? Jim read the Scriptures:

And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added *unto them* in that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:40-41).

Here the apostle, inspired of God, clearly states that one must repent and be baptized to receive remission of sins. Jesus tied faith and baptism together when He said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16). The account of the Ethiopian’s conversion in Acts 8 should also be considered:

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? *And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:35-39).

You see that the Ethiopian eunuch confessed Jesus Christ as God's Son. Jesus said, "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). Further, Paul wrote, "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

So we have seen that faith—a faith that is active and alive—obeys God's commands. God's commands include repentance (Acts 2:38)—a change of heart which leads to a change of life. They include confessing Jesus Christ as God's Son (Rom. 10:9-10). Included here is being baptized for remission (forgiveness) of your sins (Acts 2:38).

"But Mike," Jim objected, "isn't baptism a human work of merit?" The answer is simple. Mike showed Jim that baptism is no more a work of human merit than is faith or repentance or confession. It is an act of faith—an act of humble obedience to God's commands. Man must believe—he must have faith. But faith is not a meritorious work. Man must repent of sins, but repentance is not a meritorious work. You must confess Jesus Christ, but confession is not a meritorious work. You must be baptized for remission of your sins, but baptism, too, is the response of faithful obedience—not of trying to merit salvation. Baptism is a work only in the same sense that faith is a work. Jim saw it plainly in Jesus' words of John 6:

They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (6:28-29).

Faith is called by Jesus a "work." Jim could see it. It is not of human merit, but the obedient response to God's commands. The same was true for baptism. Mike reminded Jim that one must be "in Christ" to obtain forgiveness of sins? The apostle tells us exactly how we get into Christ: "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).

Baptism is part of God's way of salvation. All together, the Bible teaches that a person must believe, repent, confess, and be baptized to be saved. Yes, baptism is essential to salvation. It is at the point of baptism that one's sins are washed away (Acts 22:16).

Jim further learned that when you are saved, you are added by the Lord to that church of which you read in your New Testament (Acts 2:47). That church is not a denomination. It did not originate with men—it was built by Christ (Mat. 16:18). It is Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23), and there is only one body (4:4). Upon viewing it all, Jim shook his head and realized that he had never been baptized into Christ. He was still in his sins. He was unsaved.

"Mike, could we take the afternoon off?" Jim continued, "Would you baptize me into Christ? And can we go right now?"

Jim and Mike would leave you with this thought: Would you be willing to honestly look at baptism in light of the Bible? "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Back To Biblical Living

John Rose

THE QUESTION

“Hello,” I said, answering the phone.
“Hi, brother Tom.”

I recognized the voice of Justin Nash, one of the members of the congregation of the church of Christ were I preach.

“It is good to hear from you. How was the trip to see your family?”

“It was enjoyable and my uncle is well.”

“I am glad to hear that. How about the congregation there?”

“They seem to be going forward in a united way,” Justin said in a somewhat distant tone. “They are getting over Aunt Molly’s death and really helping one another, I think.”

“I had hoped that there would be a lot of support for your uncle from the members of the congregation.”

Justin signed and said, “There is, but...there are still bad memories in the congregation, about Aunt Molly.”

“Because she was unfaithful?” I offered.

“Yes,” he said with a noticeable weariness in his voice.

“Justin, you know the greatest loss that anyone could suffer is the loss of his soul. Remember the Lord said, ‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’” (Mark 8:36).

Justin paused, then said quietly, “I absolutely believe what the Lord said and accept it, but I am having trouble understanding why Aunt Molly would not hear our pleas to repent and return to faithful service. Why was she not content to live according to the Bible?”

I considered his question for a moment then advised him to study his question with me in light of what the Bible says concerning living

Biblically, “Justin, why don’t we study your question tomorrow. You can come by the office.”

THE BACKGROUND

Justin was an impressive young man. He had overcome a very difficult background. His mother and father had all but abandoned him, from a very young age, to the care of his aunt and uncle. I was very thankful that Jim and Molly were members of the church of Christ, and both were faithful at that time. Justin’s parents became less and less concerned with his welfare, and the courts finally granted full custody to the Nash family, when Justin was eight years old. Many prayers were offered on behalf of the whole family. Attempts had been made to admonish Justin’s parents to correct their behavior, but our attempts fell upon deaf ears. They were not Christians and were very outspoken that they had absolutely no interest in God or His Bible. After custody was granted to Jim and Molly, Justin’s parents soon left, washing their hands of all their responsibilities toward Justin and the rest of their family.

Jim and Molly were fairly new converts when they adopted Justin. They were, however, diligent students of the Bible and grew quickly in the Faith. Jim was especially astute. He was becoming a very capable leader of his family. Molly showed every quality of being a devoted wife, loving mother, and faithful Christian. All seemed joyous. We were very thankful that Justin’s difficult beginnings were being replaced with the love of a faithful Christian home.

Justin was fifteen years old when he came to me to be baptized. He had been hearing the Gospel preached and the specifics of the plan of salvation from boyhood. I talked with Justin and his uncle Jim, realizing quickly that Justin was indeed a Scriptural candidate to be baptized. Justin was soon offering invitations and speaking on occasional Sunday nights. His sincerity and knowledge of the Scriptures were easily seen. Justin was a very promising young man.

Great sadness was about to envelope the Nash family, however. They were faced with a difficult question when Jim was offered a very good job...in another state! Justin had just graduated from high school and was about to enter a local university in the fall. Justin was prepared: he

had his college finances well in hand. He would room with one of the other young men from the congregation in a small apartment, a short distance from the university. He had a solid job with a local business owned by a brother and sister in the congregation. Justin's maturity and fine preparedness prompted his aunt and uncle to take the job offered to Jim, believing that this would be an appropriate time for Justin to start his own life. In many scenarios it would be the young man in college, facing many temptations that would fall into a life of unrighteousness: an anti-biblical way of life. But it was not!

Soon Justin's quick smile was gone and he looked stressed at services. Molly did not have to work; so she was at home during the day, or so Jim thought. Sometimes she was away when he arrived home from work. Before very long she would leave in the evening and not return until late. Jim began hearing rumors from others in the community that she was frequenting bars, associating with others, and engaging in very ungodly behavior. When he asked her about being out at such hours, she said she had been visiting with friends or had gone to see a movie or had wanted to go shopping last minute before the mall closed. At first Jim thought that her behavior was caused by stress from adjusting to a new place, and he thought the rumors he had heard were just that: rumors. However, Justin began receiving phone calls from his uncle that his Aunt Molly was making excuses to miss services of the church. When Jim answered the phone and heard the officer on the other end say that his wife was a passenger in a car stopped because the driver was intoxicated and he could pick her up at the sheriff's office, he realized that his fears had been realized. Molly exploded when Jim asked her what was going on and why she had lied to him. She was abusive and accused Jim of never really loving her. She said she had felt she had been in prison ever since he had started with those "Church of Christ's!" Yelling in a tone that Jim had never heard, Molly screamed that she wanted out, she wanted to be free, and she was going to be free no matter what!

Molly stormed out, leaving Jim to languish in unbelief. Jim was hoping that she would soon calm down and return. The clock ticked by two hours, and Jim began to call their friends. After the second call

brought only statements of concern but no information as to where Molly was, Jim realized that these were **his** friends: brothers and sisters in Christ, but not Molly's friends. She had new *friends*. Jim did not know any of the people with whom Molly was now associating. They lived and reveled in a world devoid of Biblical respect: they were not living Biblically!

Exhausted, Jim had only closed his eyes when he was jerked to his feet by the ring of the telephone. Maybe it was Molly calling! Maybe she was coming home! The news could not have been worse. The voice was that of a sheriff's deputy, who said there had been an accident on the main road out of town. Both of the car's passengers had been killed instantly after leaving the road and striking a massive oak tree. There was a man and a woman in that car. The woman's identification showed that she was Molly Nash.

Six months had passed since Molly's death. Jim was doing his best to regain some normalcy in his life. Jim had close friends in the congregation. They were a sound congregation that had handled Molly's unfaithful behavior just as they should have. They supported Jim in his righteousness and had lovingly but firmly insisted that Molly repent of her wickedness. Jim had spent many hours with the elders of the congregation and they all knew that they had nearly exhausted every possible avenue to get Molly to repent. Now every hope was gone. Molly's life was tragically cut short. She had died in a state of rebellion against God. She had not repented of her sins and had died without any hope of Heaven.

THE ANSWER

Justin sat in one of the chairs we had in the office for visitors. I pulled up another chair as he opened his Bible.

Justin asked, "Where do we start?"

"Hebrews 9. I want to notice a foundational principle."

Justin quickly turned to the ninth chapter. "What does the twenty-seventh verse say, Justin?"

He read, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

“Justin, I know you realize that all men have an appointment with death unless they are changed at the Lord’s second coming (1 Cor. 15:51-52). But that is only a part of what I want you to understand. Men have only one chance to prepare for Heaven. They have but one chance to live a life that is pleasing to God; that is in accordance with the Bible. We also must understand that within the time frame of their length of life, every accountable person has to make a choice. Whether they will serve God or not. Read the verse again Justin.”

Justin read the verse again, more slowly this time. “I think I am beginning to understand the point, now. Every accountable person has to decide if they want to go to Heaven or not, and whether they are willing to do what God has said you must do to get there. You have to decide because of the judgment of God.”

“That is right. Now how does this apply to what is bothering you?”

I waited as Justin contemplated my question. He looked down at the floor and his shoulders slumped. He said in almost a whisper, “Aunt Molly made her decision, didn’t she?”

“Yes, she did.”

“I never thought about the fact that she chose not to serve God. Even though she was a Christian, and had been faithful, she chose to return to the world: to live like the world. I always thought about that way of life,” Justin paused momentarily, “when I thought about those who had never become Christians, those who had never obeyed the Gospel.”

“The responsibility to live Biblically rests upon all people, even those who have become members of the Lord’s church.”

“Aunt Molly was personally responsible for living according to God’s Word, wasn’t she?”

“Yes Justin, she was.”

“We need to look a little deeper into your question now. Let’s look at Luke chapter eight.” Justin open there and I asked him to read verses five through eight:

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured

it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

After Justin read the passage, I added, “This is one of the parables that the Lord explained, so we need to read a few more verses, too. Please read verses eleven through fifteen.”

He continued his reading:

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:11-15).

“Your aunt was like the ones that grew among the thorns. She was fruitful for a time, but the world choked her faithfulness. She allowed the ungodly world around her to seduce her and it finally overcame her. Notice now a parallel passage found in Matthew 19:22. The Lord said that ‘the deceitfulness of riches,’ had choked the once faithful follower of His Word. Temptations are deceitful, they promise pleasure but bring only ruin. James said that temptations precede sin and sin precedes death (or spiritual separation from God)” (Jam. 1:14-15).

“Sometimes a way that is evil can even seem to be right, Solomon wrote, ‘There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death’ in Proverbs 16:25. Justin, even faithful brethren can fall away.”

“Yes, I remember that Paul said that he disciplined himself so he would not become a ‘castaway’” (1 Cor. 9:27).

“Discipline is necessary, daily, for the Christian to remain faithful. Justin, the world is full of evil things. They are the thorns of the Lord’s

parable of the soils. Paul lists the works of the flesh when he wrote to the Galatians, notice what he wrote:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

“Adultery, homosexuality, premarital sex, everything impure, wild parties, drinking, hatred, jealousy, envy, of course murder, and even drug-use are condemned. And what I just mentioned is only a partial list of what Paul included. Your aunt Molly had fallen prey to a number of these sins. Remember that James said that these horrible things have the ability to draw one away from God. They seem to be coated in sugar when in fact they are nothing but poison.”

“Justin, every one of your brothers and sisters in Christ suffer temptations. Paul wrote to the brethren in Corinth that though they faced temptations, just as did others, but there was always a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). God is still able to care for His children just as He always has. We are without excuse when we sin. We are without excuse if we depart from God.”

Justin looked intently at me and said, “Aunt Molly’s life was not worse than that of others. She had the same opportunities afforded to her for God’s guidance and care as He affords to all of His children. She could have chosen not to live like the world, but she loved it more than God.”

“You are right, Justin. Remember that God demands complete devotion and submission as Jesus said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment’” (Mat. 22:37-38).

“That is how you live Biblically, isn’t it?”

Smiling I said, “That is it exactly. Now let’s look at some specific things we must do to be living according to the Bible.”

“The first thing every accountable person must do is to obey the Gospel, that is to render obedience to the Gospel plan of salvation.”

Justin quickly held up his right hand, saying, “I know this one by heart.” Counting one through five with his hand, Justin gave verses to show what one must do to become a Christian: “A person must hear the Word of God—Romans 10:17, he must believe that same Word—Mark 16:15, he must repent of his sins—Luke 13:3, the believer must confess his faith that Jesus is the Son of God—Acts 8:37, and finally the one who has done all of these things must be baptized in water for the remission of his sins—Acts 2:38. Then the Lord adds you to His church—Acts 2:47.”

“Justin, you are right in every way. After doing the things you just said, one is in a saved condition. But how do you stay in that saved condition?”

“‘Be thou faithful unto death’; that is what the Lord commanded in Revelation 2:10.”

“Yes exactly,” I said. “Which is equal to...”

Justin proudly said, “Which is equal to Biblical living!”

“Once you become a Christian, by obeying the Gospel, you have to do certain things. John wrote, ‘God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:24). We must worship God according to His commands and with the right attitude.”

“I know the five acts of worship authorized by the Bible: prayers—Acts 2:42; preaching—2 Timothy 4:2 and Acts 2:42; a cappella singing—Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19; we are to partake of the Lord’s Supper—Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:20-34; and we are to give as we have been prospered—1 Corinthians 16:1-2,” Justin said without hesitation.

“Now what about the times between Sundays?” I asked.

“We should not miss mid-week services, the Hebrews writer said we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together in Hebrews 10:25.”

“You are right, Justin. Missing even one service when you truly could have been there could set in motion the ‘forsaking’ that the Hebrews writer mentions in Hebrews 10:25. Titus also tells us to be ready to every good work in Titus 3:1. The Hebrews writer says

something very similar in Hebrews 10:24: ‘And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.’ How can we do that if we do not assemble with the saints?”

“Do not forget that the Lord has given us a Great Commission, to preach the Word to all the world” (Mark 16:15).

“We are also commanded to study God’s Word in 2 Timothy 2:15. How can we preach the Gospel to the world if we do not know that Gospel?”

“Our neighbor is our concern, for the Bible commands that we do 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). Remember Justin that the greatest good that you can do for any man is to speak to him the Gospel and live righteously before all.”

“Solomon said that the whole duty of man was to, ‘fear God and keep His commandments’ (Ecc. 12:13). In fact, he said that such was the entire purpose of man’s existence. The Apostle Peter said that if we grow in the Christian virtues outlined in Second Peter 1:5-10, that we will never fall. Justin, a Christian must devote himself to God and to His Word. He must love God more than anything else and be willing to do whatever is required to be pleasing to God. Heaven can be ours, but only if we live according to the Bible!”

Justin breathed deeply, paused, then said, “Now, I understand.”

WORK CITED

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

Back To Biblical Music

Michael Hatcher

Harry had never been a religious person. He grew up without much religious training, and Sundays were more a day of rest, relaxation, and sports than anything else. He occasionally visited some *church* on certain special days. However, he was now grown with a wife and kids. Things were not going so well for him and his family; so he decided that it might be a good idea to get into *church*. There just happened to be a “church of Christ” close to where he lived; so he thought that he would take his family and stop there.

He noticed the times for worship services on their sign and when Sunday came around, he got his family together and they visited the nearby church of Christ. As they walked into the building, Harry noticed something that seemed strange to him. There was no choir loft and no musical instruments. He wondered in his mind if they were too poor to buy a piano, but they didn't look **that** poor. Harry and his family were warmly greeted by the members of the congregation and certainly made to feel welcome. If nothing else, Harry would say they are a friendly group. One silver-haired older man came up to greet them; so Harry got up his courage and asked him, “Why don't y'all have instruments?” The older gentleman answered, “Well son, you see, there's just not any Bible for it.” About that time, they started to make the announcements and dropped the question at that point, but the answer by the older gentleman continued to bother Harry. At the conclusion of the worship, Harry was impressed with the simplicity of it and the Bible-centered approach of the preaching. However, there was still that nagging question concerning the music and the answer by the older silver-haired gentleman.

Harry and his family went home and talked about the services they had attended. They appreciated the friendliness and helpfulness of the

folks, and they liked the worship. But they all were a little curious about not having any music or a choir. Harry mentioned the older silver-haired gentleman's reply as to why they did not use any music. While none of them knew much about the Bible, they thought they remembered hearing about David using instruments, and it seemed like the Psalms talked about using them. Additionally, Harry remembered those few times he did attend *church* and they always had music.

The next night they heard a knock on the door; so Harry went to see who was there. The people at the door introduced themselves as Tom and Mary and said they were members of the local church of Christ. They expressed appreciation for Harry and his family's attendance at worship services the day before. Then Tom asked Harry if he had any questions about the services. This gave Harry the opening he wanted, so he invited them in. They all sat down at the kitchen table and Harry, after telling them that they liked the service, asked them about not having any music at church, and he mentioned that one older man said that there was no Bible for it. Harry then said, "It seems like I remember David used instruments and that Psalms talks about them."

Tom put a friendly smile on his face and told Harry that many people ask questions along this line. Tom then started explaining that when the person told him there was no Bible for it, he simply meant that the Bible does not authorize us to use instrumental music in worship to God today. He then added that Harry was correct concerning David and the Psalms. Tom stated, "David did use instruments to worship and praise God, and Psalms often mentions the use of them for that purpose." Tom then began to explain that David lived under a different law from God—the Law of Moses while we live under the Law of Christ.

Tom then detailed this explanation by telling Harry that there are three dispensations of time. The first was the Patriarchal system where the fathers served as God's spokesman and as the priest for the family. Then God gave the Law of Moses to the Jewish world. Both of these systems pointed to the coming of the Christ and the New Testament law to which all men are now subject. Ephesians 2:14-15

and Colossians 2:14 show us that the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross; Hebrews 10:9 tells us that Christ took away the first so He could establish the second. Tom told Harry that David lived under a different system than we live under, and those things he did in worship to God is not what we do today. David was subject to the Law of Moses while we are subject to the Law of Christ. While we do learn from the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4), we do not follow it for what we do. So while David used instruments in his worship to God and Psalms speaks of their use, we are not given any authority by God today to use them.

Harry then asked: “Did God tell us **not** to use them today, and if God accepted instruments then, why would he not accept them today?” Tom told Harry that this is a matter of authority. We are only allowed to do what God authorizes us to do; God does not have to tell us not to do something. Tom begins explaining by using the illustration of Harry sending one of his children to the store to buy a gallon of 1% milk and gives him the money to purchase it. Tom then asks Harry, “Do you have to tell you son not to buy corn, potatoes, candy, or other items? And when you tell him to buy 1% milk, you do not need to tell him not to buy whole milk, buttermilk, 2% milk, or other types of milk products. You authorized him to get a certain product and that excludes everything else.”

Tom went on to tell Harry that God does the same thing—He tells us what we are to do, and everything else is excluded. Paul wrote: “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). So, everything we do must be authorized by God. Tom then added, “What if the next week you sent your son to the store and this time you tell him to buy whole milk, but he comes home with 1% milk. You then ask him why he did not get whole milk like you told him to. If he should tell you that last week you told him to buy 1% milk; so he did that this time also, you would not accept such an answer because this time you told him to buy whole milk.” God does the same regarding the music we use in worship to Him. Under the Old Testament He accepted the use of instruments; for this time period He said to sing.

Jesus shows us that authority comes from either God or man in Matthew 21:23-27. When the scribes and Pharisees condemned His apostles for transgressing the traditions of the elders, Jesus asked them why they transgressed the commandments of God by their traditions. He let them know that when they only had authority of man for their actions, then their worship was vain or worthless (Mat. 15:1-9).

Tom then reminded Harry that we are not to add to or take anything away from God's Word. He turned in his Bible to Revelation 22:18-19 and read:

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.

Tom then said to him, "Harry, if we add an instrument to what God says, then God will not accept our worship, and we sin in so doing."

"So Harry, what we need to do now is to get our Bible out and see what God told us to do today," says Tom. So Tom opened up his Bible and turned first to Ephesians 5:19:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Next Tom turned to Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Then they read together 1 Corinthians 14:15:

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

Tom also read James 5:13:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

"You see Harry," Tom said, "every time in the New Testament that God mentions the music we are to offer to Him in worship, God said to sing." Then Tom told Harry that the examples we see in the New

Testament also show that they sang. He said, "After Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the Bible says they sang a hymn then they went out to the Mount of Olives in Matthew 26:30. Later when Paul and Silas were in prison, they prayed and sang praises to God in Acts 16:25."

Harry was astonished at the things Tom was telling him. Harry then asked: "Why does everyone else use them then?" Tom had a perplexed look on his face when he responded, "I don't know. I think it boils down to a lack of respect for the Word of God. People like the instrument and it does not matter what God says; they are going to have it, no matter what." Harry responded that it seems like we should simply do what God says.

With this the discussion of musical instruments ended and Tom and his wife invited them to return to services again, they left, not wanting to overstay their welcome. The next Sunday, Harry went to the local Baptist Church. There was certainly excitement in the air with the band playing and then the chorus singing. During the sermon Harry listened closely and enjoyed the good speaker who was preaching. On their way home Harry observed to his wife that while the sermon was good, there did not seem to be the Bible emphasis of the church of Christ that they went to the previous week.

The following night someone from the Baptist Denomination visited Harry; so Harry decided to ask him about the band and choir. Harry explained he had recently visited with a member of the church of Christ and discussed the subject of music with him. This time the visitor began using all the points Harry had made the previous week. He first told Harry that David used instruments to praise God, and the Psalms tells us to praise God with them. While Harry did not remember all that had been said, he was still able to state that we do not live under the same system of worship David did; we are under the New Testament and not the Old. So the Baptist member told Harry that God did not say not to use them. Harry remembered what he had agreed to the week before and told him that we are not to add to or take away from God's Word. So the Baptist member was getting a little frustrated and told Harry: "Sing in the New Testament is from a word that actually means to sing with an instrument, and anyway

singing includes the instrument.” This is something Harry had not heard before and filed it away in his mind. They had a nice visit and then the visitor left.

It just so happened that the next night the preacher, Billy Bob, from the local church of Christ paid Harry and his family a visit. He mentioned that he knew Tom and Mary had visited with them the previous week and stated: “Tom said you had some questions about the use of instrumental music in worship.” He went on to say, “I am sure Tom was able to answer your questions, but I thought I would drop by and see if there was anything else you might like to ask.” Harry asked the preacher to come in and said: “It just so happens that there are a couple of more questions I would like to ask you.” So Harry asked the preacher in and they sat down at the kitchen table.

Harry then told Billy Bob that he was talking to someone from the Baptist Church and that they said that *sing* in the New Testament is from a word that means to sing with an instrument. Billy Bob then told Harry that *sing* comes from a Greek word, *psallo*. He said, “The ones who use this argument use it because they cannot find any authority for an instrument in the New Testament. They invented this to try to justify what they want to do.” Billy Bob went on to explain: “Words change meaning over time. For example, the word *gay* has changed meaning within our lifetime. It use to refer to someone who is happy, but now it is used for a person who is a homosexual.”

Harry quickly inserted, “Yeah, I can’t stand how they have done that to such a good word.”

Billy Bob agreed and then went on, saying: “*Psallo* is the same way; it changed meanings over the years. At one time it had reference to the plucking of the beard while at another time the plucking or twanging of a carpenter’s string. What we must do is find out what the word meant when the New Testament was written. When we study the Greek lexicons, which are simply dictionaries of the Greek language, we find that during the New Testament age *psallo* meant to sing. In fact, Thayer’s lexicon states ‘in the New Testament to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song’” (675).

Billy Bob paused for a second to let that sink in. Then he continued, “However, we realize the basic meaning of the word is to pluck or to twang. At one time it was applied to instruments and the plucking of the strings of an instrument. The thing is, God tells us what instrument is to be plucked in Ephesians 5:19 when He says, ‘Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.’ So the instrument that is to be used is the heart, not something that is mechanical.”

Harry, still wanting to defend instruments in worship, said, “But doesn’t the word *sing* include the instrument? I mean, when someone plays a piano and sings, we often simply say they sang.” Billy Bob pulled out a 4 by 6-inch card and wrote MUSIC on it as he said, “Let’s look at music and its different categories.” Then he drew two lines from the bottom of that and wrote VOCAL on one side and NON-VOCAL on the other. He explained, “There are two categories of music: vocal or non-vocal.” He then says, “Let’s look at the non-vocal side for a minute. There are again two categories of non-vocal music: mechanical and non-mechanical or natural. Mechanical music would include things like woodwinds, brass, percussion, stringed instruments, and such like, while non-mechanical would include clapping hands, hand boning, stomping feet, snapping your fingers, and things like these. None of these things are authorized for us today. Now consider the category of vocal music. Vocal music either communicates a message or it does not. Humming, whistling, or making sounds using our voice does not communicate a message, while the use of words, phrases, and sentences does. Singing is that type of vocal music that communicates a message. That is what God has authorized us to do in worship to Him today.”

Billy Bob then added, “We can see that God wants vocal music that communicates a message—singing—from the language of Ephesians 5:19 where Paul says, ‘Speaking to yourselves’ and in Colossians 3:16 when he adds, ‘teaching and admonishing one another.’ There are no other categories other than vocal music that communicates a message that accomplishes what Paul says here.” Harry looks at the chart [see

chart at end of the chapter] and then said, “Wow, I am just blown away by all this, but I see what you are saying.”

After a pause, Harry said, “But you use song books and didn’t I see your song leader use some sort of pitch pipe?” The preacher responded that they did use song books and that the song leader does use a pitch pipe. He then explained: “God authorized us to sing. When we use a song book, it simply aids us in doing what God said to do. All we do is sing. There is a melody. To get the correct pitch of the melody, some use a pitch pipe. However, after getting the correct pitch, the pitch pipe stops and all we do is sing. These are aids to our singing of praises to God. The instrument is an addition to what God has said.” Harry responded, “I can understand that and see the difference between something that aids us to do what God said and something that is an addition to what He said. I guess I really just like the sound of the instruments and want to be able to use them, but I guess I need to adjust my thinking to what God says instead.” Billy Bob responded, “Yes, Harry, that is what we all have to do in all things.”

Harry then said, “May I ask another question?” to which Billy Bob responded, “Certainly.” Harry then asked, “While we have been talking about instruments, and I can see why we should not use them, I also noticed that you don’t have a choir. Why?” Billy Bob responded, “Harry, that is another great question and one we have not discussed. Let me mention a couple of reasons. The act of worship is the pouring out of our praise and adoration to God. Just like an instrument of music cannot worship, no one can worship for me. Worship is something that I must do for myself. You cannot worship God for me, just like I cannot worship God for you. When a choir or chorus sings, the result is that they are trying to worship for you. You have stopped worshiping to be entertained by the choir. Jesus taught us that worship is to be directed to the Father in John 4:23-24. Yet, by its very nature a choir is entertaining those who are listening to it. The listeners have become the audience instead of the Father, and the choir is trying to worship for you. For you to be engaging in the worship, you would need to sing yourself, not listen to others sing.” Harry interrupted the preacher and asked, “But isn’t that what you do when you’re preaching?” Billy Bob

responded, “No, not at all. During the preaching aspect of our worship, I am simply leading the worshipers in a study of God’s Word. We are studying that Word together. I am not trying to perform for them.” He then laughed some and said, “If I was trying to perform, it would be a rather sad performance. I certainly cannot compete with some of the polished speakers some have; I cannot even think about simply standing in front of a group to entertain them.”

He then continued and said, “Another point I would make as to why we do not have choirs is because of what the Bible teaches. Notice the phrase in Ephesians 5:19: ‘speaking to yourselves’ and in Colossians 3:16: ‘one another.’ These show a reciprocal action. That simply means that we are doing it to each other but also shows that we are doing it at the same time. So I am singing to you while you are singing to me. With a choir or chorus, instead of a two-way situation, you only have a one-way situation. They are singing to you, but you are not singing to them. This does not do what God says in these verses, and there is simply no authority in worship for one group or individual singing to others.”

Harry then asked, “What if someone does not sing? Wouldn’t that ruin it for everyone?” Billy Bob replied, “First, everyone should sing; it is their Christian duty to do so. But sometimes an individual will not sing even though encouraged to do so. Those people will have to answer for their failure to obey God, but it would not affect the worship of others who are doing what God said—sing.” Harry responded that he saw the difference between the two and that he understood that all should be singing and doing so without an instrument. He then asked, “Why don’t others see this? It does not seem to be that difficult.” Billy Bob answered, “I am not sure why others don’t see it. It is my opinion that others often do not **want** to see it. They like to play and hear their instruments and be entertained by the chorus or choir because it generally does sound nice to the ear. So they are going to do what they want and they don’t really care about what God says on the matter. Then there are, no doubt, many others who simply have never been shown God’s Word about this matter. As they attend their denominational groups, their leaders simply are not going to teach

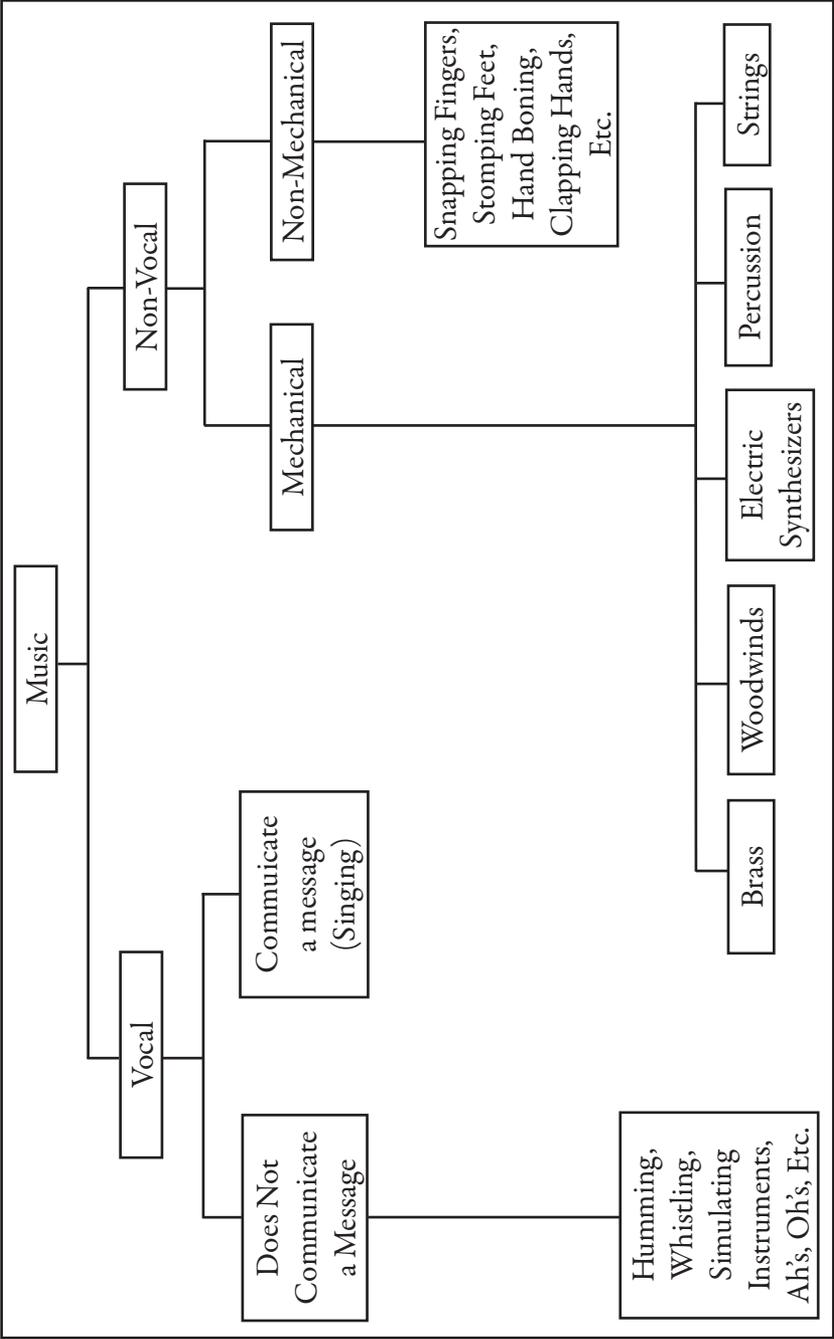
them the truth about the subject and they do not know enough to ask the right questions. They do not know the history of the early church or their own denominational background. Did you know that instruments were not used in the early church? And did you realize that the first introduction of the instrument into worship was in the seventh century by the Roman Catholics, but they did not come into use for over 1200 years? Then during the reformation movement all the reformers rejected its use. As a result, just about every religious group rejected their use at one time. But over the years as those groups became more secular, and their opposition to the instrument dropped also.”

Billy Bob realized it was getting late and did not want to wear out his welcome; so excused himself and invited Harry and his family to worship with them again. Harry thanked him for explaining why they did not use instruments and didn't have a choir and said that he and his family would see them next Sunday. Billy Bob, not wanting to miss the opportunity responded, “I am very glad that you plan on coming Sunday, and we would also love to have you come to all of our services.” With that the preacher made his way out and headed home, leaving Harry with a greater understanding of God's Will for us today.

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

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Back To Biblical Prayer

Lee Moses

*D*ear Jesus, I just want to give you all the glory and the praise...

The crowd that was gathered in the gargantuan assembly hall stood with their hands lifted in the air, rhythmically twitching from side to side. Intermittent shouts of “hallelujah” and “mm-hmm” rang out as the prayer continued.

...I want to pray for more favor. Give us Holy Spirit power. Give us an anointing...

As Hannah Scott brought her prayer to a close, she shot up her hand toward heaven and shouted, “Thank you, Jesus!”

The crowd erupted in shouts of “amen” and applause. Hannah felt a warm sense of satisfaction and gratification as she made her way backstage and up the stairs to her seat in the balcony.

Following the worship hour, Hannah made her way through the spacious Oak Meadows Church campus and into the atrium, where several hundred congregants were sitting down and visiting on numerous long, plush couches, or passing through to one of several adjoining areas. As Hannah navigated through the throngs, a young lady peering into the bookstore caught her attention. Hannah had never seen her before. Of course, in a church with a membership of over eight thousand, and their attendance spread over three separate worship periods, most of the members were pretty well strangers to her. But something in this young lady’s body language and astonished glances about the atrium and bookstore assured Hannah that this was a new visitor.

Hannah strolled up to her and greeted her warmly, “Hello! My name is Hannah. Are you new to Oak Meadows?”

The young lady smiled back, though it seemed to Hannah a nervous smile. “I’m Verity—Verity Hunter. Yes, this is the first time I’ve been to any church in a long, long time. And this one is sure different from what I remember.”

Hannah smiled and nodded understandingly. She had found Oak Meadows very different the first time she attended—and that was when she was a young girl. Much more had changed in the nineteen years since then. “What made you decide to come here today? Do you know some of our members?”

“No. Well...” She peered around the atrium at the mass of humanity, then grinned and added, “I might, if I look around enough. But I came here, first of all, because I know I need to assemble with the church. And I’m looking for the church I read about in the New Testament.”

Hannah had always sought to engage visitors to Oak Meadows. Pastor Dan and Pastor Tina had expressed their appreciation to Hannah many times for the favorable impression she made on visitors. She had asked countless visitors what brought them to Oak Meadows, and she had received all kinds of answers. But this was the first time anyone ever told her, “I’m looking for the church I read about in the New Testament.”

“So what sent you on your quest?” Hannah asked curiously.

“I’ve been reading my Bible—a lot. I never was much interested in it before. But one day I pulled it off the shelf when some things were going really badly in my life a couple of years ago. And then I read Ecclesiastes 12:13: ‘Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.’ I came to realize that God was missing from my life, and that was why it was so empty. I read the Bible all the way through last year. Since then, I’ve been focusing mostly on the New Testament, since that’s the covenant we’re under. And the New Testament teaches that there is one church, Christ’s body—that’s the church I’m looking for.”

Hannah was taken aback to hear so much doctrine spring forth from this shy young woman, a woman who had not “been to any

church in a long, long time.” She certainly had been reading the Bible “a lot.”

“So have you found it?” Hannah inquired. “Have you found the church of the New Testament?”

The young woman blushed, paused for a moment, and then shook her head. “No, I don’t think so.”

Hannah bristled with indignation. However, she tried to keep from showing it. “Why not?”

“Please don’t take offense.” Apparently, Verity had noticed. “I don’t mean anything personal. You have been friendly with me, and that means a lot. And I do not doubt that the members here are sincere. But several things that happened during the worship just wouldn’t happen in the church that I read about in the New Testament.”

“Like what?”

“Well, for example, the prayers. The first prayer was led by a woman, and it was addressed to Jesus, and....” The visitor trailed off. She began to look more closely at Hannah, and her eyes widened with recognition.

Hannah let out a small chuckle. This woman had not realized until now that Hannah had led the prayer with which she found such fault. Verity looked as if she would die of embarrassment. Hannah couldn’t help but like her. And though she knew they would disagree, Hannah was curious to hear more. “Would you like to eat lunch together?”

“Sure. Where would you like to go?”

“Just to the end of the atrium,” Hannah replied.

Verity shot her a quizzical look, but compliantly followed her the eighty feet from the bookstore entrance to a cavernous entryway with a large lighted sign over it reading: “Body and Soul Café.”

They entered the expansive café, and made their way up toward the counter. Hannah ordered a turkey sandwich and garden salad, while Verity opted for a calzone.

As Hannah led Verity to her regular table, several of her regular dining companions were seating themselves as well. Hannah introduced her friends Brian, Tammy, Beth, and Mike to Verity, and they began to eat and chat freely. Hannah glanced at Verity, and noticed

that she hesitated to eat. “Is something wrong with your calzone?” Hannah asked her.

“No, not that I can tell, but....” The guest looked around hesitantly at the others for a moment, and then shyly asked, “Shouldn’t we say a prayer before we eat?”

The others looked at each other with surprise. “Why?” Tammy asked, particularly startled at the suggestion. “We just finished a worship service. Haven’t we worshiped and prayed enough to cover us for the rest of the day, at least?”

“The Christian life is supposed to be a prayer-filled life. Paul wrote, ‘Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18. And we are specifically told concerning meals, ‘God hath created [foods] to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer’ by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:3-5.

“Now, it may be that you all have said prayers for your meals before you came in here.”

Tammy uncomfortably conceded, “No, I haven’t.” Beth likewise shook her head, and everyone else’s silence indicated the same.

Verity said, “I’m not trying to make you all uncomfortable. I’ll just say a silent prayer for myself.”

Hannah interjected, “No, I think a prayer would be good for all of us. Why don’t you lead it, Verity?”

Verity demurred, “I don’t think I should. It would be the same as your leading the prayer in worship. Paul said, ‘I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting’ in 1 Timothy 2:8. So a Christian man should lead the prayer.”

She looked doubtfully at Brian and Mike. The look on her face, and her earlier comment that she had not found the church of the New Testament here at Oak Meadows, told Hannah that Verity did not believe these men were Christians.

Nonetheless, Hannah quietly deferred to Brian: “Would you lead us, please?”

Brian turned three shades of red and mumbled: “I’d rather not.”

Hannah turned to Mike. “How about you?”

“Suuuuure,” Mike drew out sarcastically, “Let’s pray.” Everyone bowed their heads, and Mike said with a mocking tone, “Rub-a-dub-dub, thank God for the grub. Aaaaaay-men.”

Hannah lifted up her head, disgusted with Mike. Almost as irritating were the amused looks on Brian, Tammy, and Beth’s faces. Verity, on the other hand, looked more uneasy than ever, but she reluctantly reached for her calzone and began slowly to eat. Hannah sat stupefied at the atrocity that two men professing to be Christians would be incapable of leading a reverent prayer.

Just then, a thought struck Hannah—had Oak Meadows really cultivated a spirit of reverence in their prayers, or had they done just the opposite? Hannah reflected on the prayers she had led in worship, and realized that they may not have expressed the reverence due the Creator of the universe.

Memories then came to her of her childhood church. No, the worship had not been as progressive and exciting as that at Oak Meadows, but the men always led thoughtful prayers that expressed admiration for the sublimity of God and gratitude for all He had done. Even those who could not lead the most eloquent prayers always showed reverence. She had not heard a prayer like that since, and she realized that she bore a sizeable portion of the blame. When Verity had said she had not found the church of the New Testament, the first indicator that she mentioned was the prayer.

“Verity, what was it you said was unbiblical about the prayer during worship?” Hannah asked. “You mentioned the woman leading the prayer, and you also told me why you thought that was not biblical. But didn’t you say you didn’t like the prayer addressed to Jesus? Why not?”

“It’s not that I don’t like it personally,” Verity replied. “Whether or not I like it doesn’t matter—but the Bible doesn’t tell us to direct our prayers to Jesus. When Jesus gave the model prayer, He said, ‘After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven’ (Mat. 6:9). The Bible tells us to direct our prayers to the Father.”

“Why wouldn’t you pray to Jesus?” Beth asked, astonished. “Isn’t Jesus supposed to be our friend? How can you be a friend with someone you don’t even talk to?”

“Certainly you can appreciate that any friendship we might possibly have with Deity is going to be different from our human friendships. Jesus said, ‘Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you’ [John 15:14]. Jesus told His apostles that He would continue to be with them, and with all who keep His words, even after He ascended to the Father [14:23; cf. 1 John 2:3-5]. But regarding the time when He ascended to the Father, He said, ‘And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* you’ in John 16:23. Jesus told us to pray in His name, but He told us to ask the Father. If Jesus tells us not to pray to Him, but we do it anyway, we’re not very good friends to Him, are we?”

Hannah could feel her head spinning. Then she thought of something, and blurted out to Verity, “Why don’t you come with me to our Tuesday night women’s Bible study? We’ve been having a study led by Pastor Tina on ‘Spirit-Filled Prayer.’ I think it would help answer some of the questions you have regarding prayer.”

“Questions?” Brian asked incredulously. “It seems like she has more answers than any of us have.”

Hannah could not deny it, but she did not want to admit it. Hannah had no doubt that Verity had come to Oak Meadows honestly seeking truth. But the more this honest truth-seeker spoke, the more unsettled Hannah was becoming in her convictions.

“I’ll go,” Verity relented. “But just this one time.”

Hannah relaxed. Certainly, Pastor Tina would settle everything. Hannah changed the conversation topic by complimenting Tammy on her outfit, and they enjoyed the rest of their meal without incident.

When Tuesday night came, Pastor Tina was leading the Bible study group in a discussion of how culture affects worship style. “Sure, when you have a patriarchal culture as in the first century, you want to have men leading the worship, leading the prayers. It would have been a disgrace for a woman to lead a prayer. But in the twenty-first century,

when women are C.E.O.s and hold the highest public offices, no one is going to be scandalized if a woman leads a prayer.”

Hannah knew why Pastor Tina was taking this direction in the discussion. She had warned her about Verity and her views. Others were chiming in on the discussion, speaking about repressive cultures that didn't allow a woman to speak to a man and compelled women to cover their faces in public.

Pastor Tina looked at Verity and said, “It seems our visitor is keeping quiet. What do you think?”

Verity looked embarrassed, and Hannah thought it a little inappropriate of Pastor Tina to put her on the spot like that.

“I don't know that what I think really matters,” Verity responded. “What matters is what the Bible says. Colossians 3:17 says, ‘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.’ We need New Testament authority for whatever we do, and the New Testament only authorizes men to lead prayer in a mixed assembly.”

“You sound like someone from the church of Christ!” Pastor Tina retorted.

Hannah suppressed a chuckle at the suggestion. She knew all about the church of Christ. When she was a child, she had attended Second Street Church of Christ in Booneville. They had been unbelievably conservative in their doctrine. And dry in their worship. Of course, at the time, it was all she knew. Then her family moved to Capitol City.

She remembered how absolutely mortified she had been the first time she and her family attended Oak Meadows. There was a praise team composed of men and women at the front leading worship, and everything was geared for entertainment and high-energy worship. It was a complete departure from the dry—but reverent—worship to which she had been accustomed at Second Street. She even remembered being bothered at the time seeing a woman lead prayer. She had been shocked when her family actually returned to Oak Meadows, but they gradually grew comfortable with and appreciative of the more modern approach at Oak Meadows Church—or Oak Meadows **Church of Christ**, as it was still known at the time. Very few who

attended there now were aware that Oak Meadows had ever called itself a “Church of Christ.”

The questioning look on Verity’s face told Hannah that she had never even **heard** of the church of Christ.

Pastor Tina pressed Verity: “Where in the Bible does it say that only men should lead prayers?”

“First Timothy 2:8 says, ‘I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.’”

“Yes, but you are using the King James Version. It uses archaic language. Let me ask you this—Do you believe ‘On earth peace, good will toward men’ is limited to those who have a Y-chromosome?”

“No, of course not.”

“So why would you limit ‘men’ in your little passage to those who have a Y-chromosome?”

Hannah could see that Pastor Tina was getting awfully testy, but she had certainly caught Verity in her contradictory interpretation. Verity would back off now.

“Because the context demands it,” Verity replied.

“What do you mean?”

“Look at what Paul says after giving instruction for the men: ‘In like manner also’ [1 Tim. 2:9]; that is, just as men are to do something, women are as well. The instructions for women, including the instruction not to teach over the man, are specifically given to women. The instruction for men to lead prayer is specifically given to men.”

“So I guess you think you’re the perfect little Christian, since you know so much about the Bible.” Pastor Tina was clearly losing her patience.

“No—I don’t believe that I **am** a Christian—not yet. But I know God will reward me if I continue to seek Him diligently [Heb. 11:6]. Jesus once told someone, ‘Thou art not far from the kingdom of God’ [Mark 12:34]. I believe I am close to it as well, but I haven’t found it yet.”

Pastor Tina replied, “If you want to become a Christian, all you have to do is ask Jesus to come into your heart.”

Verity shook her head. “Can you show me anywhere in the Bible that depicts someone becoming a Christian solely by a prayer of any kind, much less by a prayer in which one asks Jesus to come into his heart?”

Pastor Tina spluttered and stuttered for a moment, and then said, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” [Rom. 10:13].

Verity said, “The apostle Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, teaches us how to call upon the name of the Lord.”

“That’s right,” Pastor Tina affirmed. “He asked Jesus, and Jesus saved him on the road to Damascus.”

“No, Saul was not saved on the road to Damascus. Jesus met Saul on the road to Damascus and told him, ‘Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do’ [Acts 9:6]. But Saul needed to learn what he had to do before he could do it. While Saul waited in Damascus to learn what he needed to do, he was praying [9:11]. But he had not yet done what was necessary to become a Christian because he had not yet learned what he needed to do. Jesus sent Ananias to tell Saul what he needed to do, and he told him, ‘arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord’ in Acts 22:16. Saul had already been praying, yet he still had to call upon the name of the Lord, and he still had to wash away his sins. Praying accomplished neither of these things—but being baptized did. The book of Acts never depicts someone becoming a Christian by means of a prayer. People become Christians by belief, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins.”

Hannah was simply amazed at what she heard. Verity did not consider herself a Christian, but it was plain to Hannah that she had a far better grasp of prayer and Christianity than did anyone at Oak Meadows.

“Well, if that’s how you feel, then Oak Meadows probably isn’t for you.” Pastor Tina hovered over Verity, her face flushed red.

“I think you’re right,” Verity agreed. “I’d better be going.” She quietly gathered up her Bible and purse and went out the classroom door.

There was absolute silence for a moment. Then Hannah quickly arose, and made toward the door.

“Are you going to try to talk some sense into your friend?” Pastor Tina asked.

Hannah stopped, and turned around. “No. But she has talked some sense into me. I’m leaving. And I’m leaving for good. I’m going to find the church I read about in the New Testament. And I think I know where to find it.”

WORK CITED:

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

Back To The Biblical View Of Communion

Ken Chumbley

It was the first day of class, and John was new to the state and town in which it is located. As he entered his English Literature class for the first time, he eyed the other students in the room. One girl caught his eye; she had blonde hair and a cheery smile on her face. He thought to himself, "That's a girl I would like to get to know." The next day in class he managed to find a seat next to her. He spoke briefly with her before class began, and the way she responded confirmed his initial impression. Later, he saw her in the cafeteria and was able to get a seat next to her while they ate lunch. As they visited, he found out that her name was Ruth Ann and she was a local girl who had stayed home with her parents to get her degree locally. He enjoyed visiting with her, but all too quickly it was time for them to return to their classes.

After that, John tried to get a seat next to her every day. Their conversations continued to grow and develop. Finally, during the second week of school, he managed to pluck up the courage to ask her for a date. Her response surprised him. Ruth Ann said that she was picky about dating. She wanted to date, but there was something that was extremely important in her life; thus she would only date boys who would show interest in Christianity. She would only date a boy who would be willing to attend church services with her before she would go out on a social date. John thought for a quick moment. He had never been much of a churchgoer, only going when he was young and when his parents made him. After that, he had found more important pursuits. However, he really liked Ruth Ann, and attending church would be a small price to pay to land a date with her. Thus he agreed that he would attend the church where she attended the next Sunday morning for the worship service.

Having been given the time of the service and directions to the place where the church met, he set out Sunday morning for worship. John had never heard of the church of Christ before, and he knew nothing about it or whether it was anything like the church he had attended as a youngster with his parents. He finally arrived at the building shortly before the start of the service. Ruth Ann was already in the auditorium as she had already taught her pre-school Bible Class. She loved teaching these little ones and had done so for some time, and even though she was now full-time at state, she continued to teach the class. As John entered the auditorium, he noted the table at the front below the pulpit that had inscribed on it the words: "This do in remembrance of me," and on the table two sets of round metal trays. He was curious about this, but quickly his mind turned to finding where Ruth Ann was seated. Finally he spotted her and made his way to the row where she was sitting near her parents. It was almost time for the service to begin, but she was able to quickly introduce them to each other.

As the service got underway, there were songs that were sung, prayer was offered, and a reading from the Scriptures, but those trays were still on the table. Then the preacher rose and preached his sermon. After another couple of songs, some men rose from their pews and moved towards the front and stood around the table. One man spoke some words with respect to the Christ's death on the cross and the fact that Christians partake on the Lord's Supper each Sunday. A prayer was offered "for the bread." Then the first set of trays was distributed among the men and these were then passed around the congregation. John noticed that these trays had what looked like big crackers in them and folks broke off a small piece and ate it. The men then returned to the front of the auditorium. After another prayer "for the fruit of the vine," the second set of trays were distributed among the men. The trays were then passed through the congregation, and folks drank from the small containers. This was all new to John, and he did not really understand the significance of it all.

At the end of the service, Ruth Ann asked him if he would like to come to her parents' house for lunch. Naturally John was happy to go.

He was ready for a good home-cooked meal after all of that cafeteria food! When he arrived at the house, he sat down in the family room with Ruth Ann's father while she helped her mother get things ready to eat. Then, it was time to eat. Ruth Ann's father offered a prayer of thanks for the food. John enjoyed the meal and thanked Ruth Ann's mother. After the meal was over and the table cleared, the parents had some things to take care of and left the young couple to visit in the family room.

Ruth Ann asked John what he had thought about the service. He said that it was different from any he had ever visited before and certainly different from where he had attended with his parents as a young child. As he thought back over the service, he summoned up the courage to ask Ruth Ann about those things that had intrigued him throughout the service. She immediately reached for her well-worn Bible and opened it. Before showing him some things that the Bible taught, she said that the church was following the teaching of the New Testament as it was the only source of religious authority. They did not follow the doctrines and commandments of men which cause division. She pointed out that the authority of Christ, as revealed in His Word was what they followed. She then showed John the words of Jesus: "All power [she said or authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Ruth Ann said, "If Jesus has all power or authority, can there be room for authority from any man or group of men in any council or synod." She paused to allow him to ponder the importance of this statement.

Having laid this groundwork, she said: "Let us look at what the Bible tells us about the Lord's Supper." First, she opened her Bible and showed him the words recorded in Matthew 26:26-30 where the institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded.

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. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

She also showed him both Mark's and Luke's record of its institution:

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives (Mark 14:22-26).

And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this pass-over with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you (Luke 22:15-20).

Ruth Ann said, "Here we have seen that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and made it clear that He wanted His disciples to partake of this as a means of remembering Him and His great sacrifice in His death upon the cross in order that men might, through obedience to His will, have the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven." She pointed out the phrase, *this do in remembrance of me*, in the passages and explained that it was inscribed on the table to remind Christians of what they were doing as they partook of the Lord's Supper. Then she made mention of the fact that there were two things that Jesus said were to be used in the partaking of the Lord's Supper: unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. She emphasized that these were the **only** things authorized by Jesus; thus, nothing else could be used because it would be unauthorized (no authority to use anything else).

John then asked about the trays and the cups. She responded that there needs to be a means of passing the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine around the congregation. Other methods could be

used, but this was convenient for the church, but it did not change what was done, for they were not additions to the Lord's Supper but just a means for passing the emblems—the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine—that Jesus had authorized for use. John was able to see this.

However, another question came to mind and he asked: "Jesus said, this was His body and His blood, referring to the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, does that mean that when people partake, they are eating of Jesus' body and drinking His blood?" Ruth Ann responded, "Early Christians were falsely accused of cannibalism. However, Jesus was not saying that we are to eat part of His physical body or drink some of His literal blood. The Gospel records that we looked at a few minutes ago make that clear. Note again what Matthew wrote: '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' (Matthew 26:26). He took bread and then said it was His body. How could the bread have literally changed into His body when He was still standing before them in His physical body?"

Again, note what He wrote: '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' (Matthew 26:27-29). They were to drink of the cup which He said was His blood. However, his blood was still flowing through His body as He was seated there with them. Also, notice that Jesus still refers to it as the 'fruit of the vine' after He had said it was His blood. Clearly, He was saying that as they partake of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to remember Him these two emblems **represent** His body and His blood to help remind them of His body that was broken and bruised on the cross and His blood that was shed in His death."

Ruth Ann then turned to another passage of Scripture and asked John to read it. That passage was 1 Corinthians 11:23-29:

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.

She then asked John: "When Paul was writing about the Lord's Supper to these Christians, did he in any way indicate that the bread literally became Christ's physical body and the cup literally become the blood of Christ? Does he say that the Corinthian Christians ate the body of Christ and drank his blood?"

John indicated that he didn't appear to do so. Ruth Ann then said, "Notice what Paul said about those who are partaking: '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.' Did not Paul indicate that, when they were eating and drinking, they were eating bread and drinking the cup, not eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ?" "Yes," John said, "I can see that the Bible shows that the bread and the cup do not get changed into the literal body and blood of Christ."

John then asked her: "How often do you have the Lord's Supper?" She said, "Christians partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday in remembrance of Jesus Christ." John replied, "Why every week? I know Jesus said, and Paul repeated that it was to be done in remembrance of Him, but that doesn't say it is to be done on a specific day, let alone every week. Why then does the church do it every Sunday?"

"That's a good question" she replied, "and since, as I have already said, we look to the authority of Christ who said, 'All power [or authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth' (Matthew 28:18), we need to look at the Bible and see what it teaches. Let me turn to the

book of Acts, a book that records some of the conversions of people to Christ and to the activities of the early church as it records its history. Take a look at this passage in Acts 20.”

She then had John read this passage:

And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto *him* the disciples, and embraced *them*, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, And *there* abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing *him* said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted. And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next *day* over against Chios; and the next *day* we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next *day* we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:1-16).

After he had finished reading the passage, Ruth Ann said, “I know that this is a long passage and not much of it refers to the Lord’s Supper, but it is necessary to look at the context around verse seven

that we might understand all that we are being taught in reference to the Lord's Supper."

She said, "Look at verse seven again. It states: 'And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.' When we look at the context, we see that Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem before the Jewish feast of Pentecost, according to verse 16. That's why he had decided not to go to Ephesus and why he called the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus where he speaks to them. Yet, earlier in verse 6, he and those traveling with him had stayed in Troas for seven days. Why would he want to stay seven days in Troas when he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost? Clearly, he wouldn't unless there was a specific reason to do that."

She continued: "That brings us to verse seven, 'And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight' where the Lord's Supper is mentioned with the disciples coming together to 'break bread.' That expression is used to indicate the Lord's Supper and the disciples came together to break bread." "But," said John, "why does the expression refer to the Lord's Supper? 'Break bread' could easily mean they had just come together to eat a meal, as the expression is often used." "Again," Ruth Ann responds "that is where it is necessary to look at the context and see what actually occurred."

"So, we have noted that Paul and his party had stayed seven days in Troas, even though he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost. Had 'break bread' simply meant sharing a meal together then why did he not arrange to have that meal earlier? Further, since 'break bread' has reference to remembering Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross, why did Paul, as an apostle, not have them meet together earlier to partake of the bread and fruit of the vine if, with heaven's authority, one can partake of the Lord's Supper on any day? Verse seven indicates that the church met together on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread, that is partaking of the

Lord's Supper. Paul and his party, therefore waited in Troas until the first day of the week, Sunday, so that he could 'break bread' with them. Thus, the example of Scripture is that the Lord's Supper is to be partaken on the first day of the week. Early Christian writings as well as scholars show this to be the practice of the early church."¹

"But," said John, "How can we know that it is Sunday when the Lord's Supper is to be observed?" Ruth Ann replied, "When we look at the Bible we see that the Sabbath Day was the seventh day of the week. In giving the Ten Commandments through Moses, note what is recorded in Exodus:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).

On what day do the Jews still observe the Sabbath?" John says, "Saturday, now I see, if Saturday is the seventh day then, obviously, Sunday is the first day of the week."

He continued, "But if the Lord's Supper is to be partaken of each Sunday, won't that diminish its value and importance in the minds of people?" Ruth Ann responded, "Well, if that be the case, then surely the same would hold true for meeting each Sunday, singing praises to God, praying to God, giving of our means, and the preaching of God's Word. Are these diminished in value and importance because they are done so regularly? The truth of the matter is that the Bible teaches that Christians are to partake of the Lord's Supper each week. Christ, who has all authority as we saw from Matthew 28:18, does not authorize us to partake of the Lord's Supper on any other time schedule or any other day. If we are to follow the teaching of God's Word, we will partake of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week—Sunday."

John suddenly realized how late in the afternoon it had gotten. He needed to get back to the dorm as he had things he had to do to be ready for classes Monday; so he excused himself. After saying goodbye

to Ruth Ann's parents, he said to her: "I'll see you tomorrow at school." She responded, "I'll look forward to it." As John drove home later that afternoon, he knew he would be seeing Ruth Ann again. He had initially been impressed with her looks, but now he saw her as an intelligent young woman who knew what she believed, could clearly articulate those beliefs, and was not ashamed to do so. He also knew that he would be attending the services of the church again, not simply to be able to continue his relationship with Ruth Ann, but to get to know more about the church of which she was a member that sought authority from the Bible for their faith and practice. He was intrigued and wanted to know more.

WORK CITED

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

ENDNOTE

¹Those writings to which Ruth Ann made reference would have included those to whom Wayne Jackson referred in an article titled, "Did the Early Church Observe the Lord's Supper on a Daily Basis?": "The testimony of the writings of those who lived shortly after the apostolic age bears unmistakable witness to the fact that the Lord's supper was observed each week on Sunday, and only upon that day. In the *Didache* (a document written about 120 A.D.), the statement is made that Christians 'come together each Lord's day of the Lord, break bread, and give thanks' (7:14). Justin Martyr (c. 152) also speaks of Christians meeting on Sunday and partaking of the communion (*Apology I*, 67)." Jackson also states: "In his book, *Early Christians Speak*, Everett Ferguson has observed that the literature of the post-apostolic age indicates that the Lord's supper was a constant feature of the Sunday service. He declares that there is no second-century evidence for the celebration of a daily communion (p. 96)" (Jackson, Wayne. Feb. 9, 2010. <<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/634-did-the-early-church-observe-the-lords-supper-on-a-daily-basis>>.).

Those writings also refer to those whom B. W. Johnson referred: "The language shows that it was the custom to meet on the first day of the week, and shows the leading object of that meeting. This was not a farewell meeting for Paul, for then the day of the week would not have been mentioned, but the regular weekly assemblage of the saints. They came together, primarily, **to break bread**, i. e., to observe the Lord's Supper. Dean Howson says: 'We have here an unmistakable allusion to the practice, which began evidently immediately after the resurrection of our Lord, of assembling on the first day of the week for religious purposes.' He also shows that the Lord arose on the first day of the week, showed himself to the apostles a second

time one week later on the first day of the week, that the church was founded and the Holy Spirit shed forth on Pentecost, which was on the first day of the week. On the same day the disciples at Troas meet to break bread, the Corinthians meet, take collections (1 Cor. 16:2) and eat the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20), and the Lord on Patmos reveals himself to John (Rev. 1:10). In addition to this, the early church writers from Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, to Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian, all with one consent, declare that the church observed the first day of the week. They are equally agreed that the Lord's Supper was observed weekly, on the first day of the week" (Johnson, B. W. *The Peoples' New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1972. 505.).

Another would be "Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan, written in the shadow of the apostolic age (112 A.D.), declared of the Christians that: 'It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing... After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food' [Gwatkin, Henry Melvill. *Selections from Early Writers*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell. p. 29.]. It is easy in Pliny's report to observe a reference to the Lord's supper; and the significance of 'on a fixed day' is therefore of the very greatest magnitude. The Christians, from earliest times, had the habit of meeting for the Lord's supper on 'a fixed day,' and Acts 20:7 identifies that day as 'the first day of the week,' Sunday" (Coffman, Burton W. *Commentary on the Acts*. Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1977. 385-86).

The scholars that she referenced would have included Augustus Neander (Lutheran): "As we have already remarked, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was still held to constitute an essential part of divine worship every Sunday, as appears from Justin Martyr (A.D. 150)..." (*History Of Christian Religion And Church, Vol. I*, Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, p. 332). Others in their commentaries have indicated the same including Thomas Scott (Presbyterian), A. C. Harvey (Episcopalian), P. Doddridge (Congregationalist).

Back To Biblical Giving

Wayne Blake

INTRODUCTION

I was recently invited to a Gospel Meeting by a co-worker of mine. I agreed to go, but I wasn't really enthusiastic about it. I've never been a religious person; I have never cared for organized religion for several reasons, but the thing that really gets under my skin is how they are always asking for money. Every time you walk through the door, they pass the plate for the "love offering." They promise that you will be blessed if you give, but I think they are just lining their pockets. You see these TV preachers wearing expensive suits, flying around in private planes and riding in cars that cost more than the houses of the poor folks that send him money! I even heard of a church that sent reminders to people to send in their tithes.

As I said, I was not looking forward to going, but my co-worker said that his church was different. He said he goes to the church of Christ and they don't do things like other churches do. I went to his meeting on a Tuesday night and heard a sermon. After it was over, I got my \$5 out to drop in the plate, but they didn't pass it. The sermon was interesting, so I decided to go again the next night. Again, they didn't pass the plate. I thought to myself, "I like this not having to give business. I need to check this church out more." I decided to go for Sunday morning services and I was in for a surprise. All week long during the meeting, they hadn't asked for a penny, but Sunday rolled around and there was the plate. I decided to ask the preacher what the deal was. I liked his preaching, but I didn't want to be nicked-and-dimed to death if I decided to go to church all the time. The preacher, Joe, was a nice guy and agreed to sit down with me and answer my questions. He even showed me in the Bible where he got his answers. We went back to his study and here's what I learned:

AS WE STUDIED

I first asked Joe: “How often do y’all take a collection? I noticed that all during your Gospel Meeting, y’all didn’t ask for money, but you passed the collection on Sunday.”

Joe responded: “We give our contributions on Sunday, as it was commanded in the Bible: He got out his Bible and turned to 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and read:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

When the church assembles on the first day of the week, it is for the purpose of worship. God has included as a part of our worship that a collection be taken. It is important to understand that this is a command. The Bible teaches that we are to give of our means each and every week, and we are to offer it in a specified way that is pleasing to God. Denominations are known for their special services that will solicit offerings on other days of the week. Some denominations pass the plate every time they meet, even nightly during their ‘revivals’. We do not do this because there is no authority to do our giving on any day other than the Lord’s Day.”

“That’s interesting” I said, and then asked, “Who is supposed to give?”

Joe answered by saying: “The command to give was given to the saints in 1 Corinthians 16:1. *Saints* are not holy icons, but Christians. So, the answer to that is **Christians** are to ‘lay by in store.’ Giving is an individual act of worship. For each family income there must be a gift. If there are a husband and wife, they must give as they have prospered. If the husband/father is the sole wage earner, he obviously will be the only source for a gift. If the mother/wife has a separate income, she must contribute from that as well. When Christian teens have a job, they must give from their incomes. If they receive an allowance, a portion of that belongs to God. If older folks are on social security, they are not exempt from this act of worship. ‘Each one’ means **every one** who has an income—rich or poor, young or old, male or female.

Because of the way in which so many church and preachers who seemed to be lining their pockets with the money, I asked, “What is the money used for?”

The preacher responded: “There are many things this money is used for: preachers’ salary, building upkeep, utilities, benevolence, as well as missionaries, and other authorized activities we are to be ready to support. Each week we are to set aside money to further the work of the local congregation. Bills normally come due by the first of the month. Like your own household, the physical plant where our congregation meets has monthly obligations. The electricity, water, and phone bills must be paid. Paper goods are purchased for fellowship meals and other activities. Personal comfort items such as paper towels, toilet paper, and soap for the rest rooms must be provided. Teaching materials must be purchased for our children to have Bible classes. Communion supplies also need to be provided. The local preacher usually gets paid weekly. There are other benevolent works that come at all times of the month and year. The emphasis Paul made was that the giving was to be done beforehand so that there is not a need to call a special contribution since the need was already known by the Corinthian brethren. Our giving is to be offered liberally. Paul said in Romans 12:8: ‘he that giveth, *let him do it with liberality*’ (ASV).

“We are to give in such a way that the treasury has the funds to do the work of the church properly. We have so many in our communities who have fallen on hard times and need money to help with their bills. We have missionaries and preachers that need funds to spread the Word away from home. If all of us gave as we could, then more works could be financially taken care of and prosper.”

This answer led me to ask Joe, “Then how much should one give, and what if a person is poor or can’t afford to contribute?”

Joe patiently replied: “The phrase ‘as he has prospered’ in 1 Corinthians 16:2 suggests the idea that we are to give by whatever degree we have been prospered by God. This is to be done week-by-week as we contribute a portion according to our ability. Of course, we cannot forsake our worldly duties (our jobs, our family, our debts), but we do make sure that those things do not interfere in our worship

and obedience to God. Some people have more, and with more we are expected to give more. Jesus said, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" as recorded in Luke 12:48. The amount of the gift is left to the individual, but God knows the heart and knows what we can and should give."

I then said, "I know some churches ask for pledges. Do you ask for them? Do I need to tell you how much I plan to give, or can I just give what is in my wallet?"

Joe then said, "In the Old Testament, there are two examples of great servants of God offering gifts to the Creator from their prosperity. Abraham gave to Melchizedek (a priest of God) ten percent of the 'chief spoils' he recently had taken from some pagan kings. We see this in Genesis 14:20 and in Hebrews 7:4. Later, Jacob pledged to give a tenth of his resources to Jehovah in Genesis 28:22. After that, the Mosaic Law formalized the 'tithe' (a tenth) as the required giving of Israel. We find that in Leviticus 27:30-32. In addition, they offered various sacrifices, and gave 'free-will' offerings. So actually, they gave much more than a tenth, but ten percent appears to have been the very minimum (Mal. 3:10).

"We are not governed by the Mosaic Law today, but there are some basic thoughts we do need to remember: The Bible tells us our giving is purposeful in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. God expects us to think about what we are going to give before we show up for worship. Waiting until the moment before the plate is passed to grab whatever happens to be in our wallet is not how God wants us to give. We are expected to pray about our decision and make sure we are giving as we have prospered. We should not be digging in our purses and wallets at the last minute due to a lack of planning. Our giving should be done of free will. We have a command to give, and it is to be done liberally and with an attitude of willingness."

However, I still had an aversion to giving money to all those money-grubbing (as I viewed them) preachers so I asked: "Do I have to give?"

Joe again went to the Bible as he said, "It is important to understand that 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is a command. Some overlook this

or even act as if the command to give is nothing more than a suggestion. The practice of giving is eternally important; as James said, 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all' in chapter 2 and verse 10. Our giving is to be one of cheerfulness. We are not to do so with an attitude of 'do I have to?' or we might as well give nothing. We are giving because we are commanded to and because we, out of love, are willing to give for the church to prosper and grow."

Feeling the force of what Joe was saying that giving is a command, I asked, "Will I be blessed if I give?"

Joe patiently explained: "The amount you give does not determine the size of your blessings. Remember back in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 that we give as we **have prospered**. Those that can afford to give more will not receive better blessings than those that cannot afford to give very much. If we stop to think about all that we have, we will soon realize everything we have comes from God. Paul reminds us that we 'brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out' as he writes in 1 Timothy 6:7. The person who has money to buy a nice home, cars, nice clothes, and enjoy recreational activities, or anything else the world has to offer needs to realize that with great wealth comes great responsibility. We are giving because we are commanded to and because we, out of love, are willing to give for the work of the church to prosper and grow. When we truly look at our blessings and then look at what we are willing to give to God, which is lacking? There is no doubt that God blesses us and gives us more than we could ever repay Him. We must remember God gave His Son, which is worth more than anything we could possibly give back. God challenged the Jews to '**put Him to the test**,' and see what He would do for them. No man can out-give God! Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 9:8-11:

And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for *your* food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

But we must work to give as we are instructed and as often as God commands. As those who want to please God, we learn to ‘seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you’ as Jesus said in Matthew 6:33. If we give in accordance with His will, we can be blessed with a home in Heaven.”

So I asked, “Is God pleased with anything I am willing to give, or is there some way to know what is pleasing to Him?”

To this Joe said, “A Christian can be displeasing to God in his giving if he does not truly examine his heart and give according to his blessings. God blesses us with money for clothing, cars, houses, and other things. When we give, we need to ask ourselves whether our gift to God reflects the blessings we have received. In the book of Malachi, God rebuked the people for not keeping His ordinances. The prophet gives the people a response from God in 3:8-12:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room* enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the LORD of hosts.

In this passage, we see that the people had robbed God by not giving Him what was expected. The same thing can happen today, also.

“The Bible tells us that God is not pleased with partial service. He commanded the Jews to ‘**bring the whole tithe**’—not just a part of it. In the Old Testament, Judah robbed God by withholding from God that which was due Him. They were guilty of the sin of defrauding God. In Mark 12:29-30, Jesus instructed God’s people to love Him with their whole mind, soul, heart, and strength. Then in Matthew 6:33 He taught that we are to put God first and everything else last.

God requires total commitment and will not be pleased if we do less than He requires of us.

“We can also rob God by failing to use our time properly and wisely to the glory of God as we see in Ephesians 5:15. The New Testament teaches us that we are render unto God things that are God’s as Jesus taught in Matthew 22:21. Jesus also teaches that we are stewards, and thus we responsible for proper use of that which He has committed to our care in Luke 16:1-3 and in Matthew 25:14-30. Then Paul said, ‘Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful’ in 1 Corinthians 4:2.

“Christians must remember to give correctly and with the proper attitude. In the Old Testament, Saul was a man whom God had anointed king over the people. He was commanded to perform as task by God. When Saul returned, he was confronted by Samuel the priest.

And Samuel said, When thou *wast* little in thine own sight, *wast* thou not *made* the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king.

“This is recorded for us in 1 Samuel 15:17-23. Saul had assumed he had done a good thing by bringing back the finer things from the battle. The problem was that God, through Samuel, had commanded Saul to utterly destroy **all** from the battle in verse 3. Samuel reminded

him that ‘to obey *is* better than sacrifice.’ Saul learned a lesson that we can learn, also. We must give to God, but we must do it His way or the sacrifice is for naught. To obey is better than even the simplest of sacrifices in the service offered to God. It’s not to say that sacrifice is not needed nor wanted, but it must be done correctly.”

CONCLUSION

I left that meeting with a new perspective on giving. What the preacher said made sense. We are expected to share what we have with others and give back to God. I’m all for helping others. I will take the Scriptures he gave me and give this more study. Joe said that if we give according to what the Bible says, that we will be blessed and pleasing to God. I will be going back to church for more information, but I will be sure to look for answers in the Scriptures on my own.

WORK CITED

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

Back To Biblical Preaching

Danny Douglas

The local church of Christ was going to be having a Gospel meeting. The members of the congregation had been encouraged to go out and invite their friends and neighbors to the effort. Eric and his wife, Eva, took this charge very seriously and went out inviting those they came into contact with. They invited a couple with whom they were friends, Bob and Sarah. Bob and Sarah did not really want to go, but the excitement and persistence of Eric and Eva intrigued them; so they agreed to go. As Bob and Sarah came in with Eric and Eva, they were introduced to other members of the congregation who gave them a warm welcome. As the service began, Bob and Sarah could notice the considerable difference to the service at the church of Christ from any place they had been before. Everyone actively participating in the singing, and the sincerely-led prayers were from the members of the congregation. They also noticed they did not “pass the plate” asking for money which surprised them. After the local preacher introduced the visiting preacher, he came to the podium and began his lesson.

Bob and Sarah open their Bibles as he came to the podium and began speaking. After some introductory remarks by the preacher, he encouraged others to follow along in their Bibles and make sure that everything he said came from the Word of God, and if what he said was not from God’s Word, then they should reject it, but if it was from the Scriptures, they needed to accept it. This challenge seemed odd for it seemed that other preachers they had heard simply wanted them to accept whatever they said.

“Open your Bibles,” the preacher said, “to the Book of Matthew, chapter fifteen and verse thirteen. Here, Jesus, in reference to the religion of the Pharisees of His day, said: ‘Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.’ What Jesus stated

here applies to every religious body of which we do not read in the Bible, and of which God is not the Author. Now,” the preacher said, “let us turn our attention to that which God did establish. In Matthew chapter sixteen, Jesus promised, in reference to the truth which Peter had just confessed (that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, in verse sixteen), that He Himself would establish His own church: ‘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’ (verse 18). This is the reason we call ourselves the church of Christ, because the church belongs to Jesus Christ. He purchased the church with His own blood, according to Acts 20:28, and there is salvation in no other name, but the name of Jesus Christ, according to Acts 4:12. The establishment of the Lord’s church would mean the founding of the kingdom of heaven, which is why Jesus refers to the kingdom of heaven in the next verse:

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. 16:19).

Next we will consider when the Lord’s promise was fulfilled.”

At this point Bob and Sarah are listening intently to find out when Jesus actually did establish His church and when the kingdom would come. They had been taught many times in their local denomination that the kingdom had not yet come.

The preacher directed his audience to the Book of Acts and pointed out that the things which took place in Acts 2 were the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to build His church, and that it would mean the establishment of the kingdom. He showed them that the establishment of the church was in connection with the kingdom of God and in connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon His apostles. Jesus had promised to His apostles that this shortly would take place, according to what He spoke after His resurrection:

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: 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: And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saieth he*, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:1-8).

He added further, “Jesus had predicted that the kingdom of God would come in the lifetime of some who heard Him preach: ‘And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power’ in Mark 9:1. The kingdom did come with power in their lifetime, just as Jesus had promised, when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, in Acts chapter two and verse four, on the first Pentecost day, following the Lord’s resurrection and ascension into heaven, which occurred some ten days earlier, according to Acts 1:9-11.”

Bob and Sarah looked at each other and were amazed at that which they were hearing, which was so different than the teaching that they had received for many years. They heard the preacher explain plainly how that the church of Christ and the kingdom of God refers to the same body. He said: “The church was established in Acts 2, and those who were obedient to the Gospel message were saved and added by the Lord to His church—which is His kingdom. Luke records:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they

that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls (Acts 2:38-41).

He emphasized the necessity of baptism for the very purpose of remission of sins, or salvation, because this is what the Lord commanded of the Jews in Acts 2:38, and this is what He taught in the great commission: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

He further explained that all who are baptized scripturally are baptized into Christ: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27; cf. Rom. 6:3). They are also baptized into His one body, the church: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). The preacher said, “This is in harmony with the last statement of Acts 2:47: ‘And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.’ Furthermore, Jesus taught that obedience to the Gospel in baptism results in one being ‘born again,’ and that in so doing, one enters into the kingdom of God, as Jesus said to Nicodemus:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).

Thus, the kingdom of God is the church.”

He expounded further on the church—how that Paul spoke of the Lord’s church as being His body in Colossians 1:18: “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.” The preacher continued: “The Colossians were in Christ according to chapter one and verse two, and they were also in the body of Christ, verse eighteen. In this context, Paul expresses thanks unto the Father, Who has given Christians an inheritance, having redeemed them by the blood of Christ, forgiven their sins, and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom

of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:12-14).

Thanks be to God, Who delivers man from the power of darkness and saves his precious soul!”

The preacher further stated: “Please notice in all of these passages that the Word of God speaks of the church in a singular manner. In other words, Jesus did not establish more than one church, but only one. He has only one body or church, of which he is the Head. The teaching today that many different religious bodies belong to Christ is a doctrine of men—one that cannot be found in the Bible. Now, let us consider various Scriptures which verify this point. As in Colossians, so also in the Book of Ephesians, we note that the church of Christ and the body of Christ are one and the same, designating that which is made of up Christ’s followers, of which He is the Head. Paul teaches what God has done through Christ, when he states: ‘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’ in Ephesians 1:22-23. Paul says here that ‘the church...is his body.’ We conclude, then, that the body of Christ is His church.”

By this time, Bob and Sarah’s attention is carefully riveted on the Bible. They appreciate the fact that this preacher is one who is allowing and encouraging them to turn from Bible passage to Bible passage to prove that what he is saying is true. They are also impressed with the harmony found throughout the Bible, and how everything fits perfectly together. For example, they notice that what Paul said is in perfect accord with what Jesus taught. They are beginning to nod their heads in agreement with the speaker, when they realize that what he is saying is true.

“Next,” the preacher said, “let us consider further what Paul, an apostle of Christ and an inspired man of God, teaches concerning the Lord’s body in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. He writes in verses 4-6:

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.

None of us would disagree with the fact that there is only one God and Father and only one Lord. Why then should we question the fact that there is only one body (or one church), one faith, or one baptism? Yet, many do question these. But there can't be more than one church, faith, or baptism any more than there is one God. It is impossible to have more than one God, and likewise, it is impossible to have more than one body, one faith, and one baptism, which are pleasing to God."

Bob and Sarah are taken back by these bold declarations, which are completely contrary to what they have believed for a long time. Nevertheless, they cannot find any biblical disagreement with what the preacher is teaching. He then said: "I challenge everyone here to go home and carefully investigate the things we have said tonight, in the light of the Scriptures, like the Bereans, who were 'more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so, according to Acts 17:11. If you find anything that I have said which is not in harmony with the Bible, please come back tomorrow night and let me know." They are impressed with such a challenge, and now realize that they must meet it with all of their efforts.

As the preacher closes his lesson, he states: "In order to be saved from sin and to become a Christian, one must hear and believe the Word of God, repent, and, based upon biblical faith, he must confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and then be baptized in His name for the remission of sins. The Book of Acts contains inspired examples of conversions to Christ, and what sinners must do to be saved. First of all, the Philippian jailor was commanded to believe: 'And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house' in Acts 16:31. However, he first needed to hear the Word of God, which is necessary to come to faith: 'So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,' as Paul writes in Romans 10:17. Next, let us notice concerning the Corinthians: 'and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized' in the latter part of Acts 18:8. Then, consider the Jews on Pentecost, and what they were told to do: 'Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye

shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost' in Acts 2:38. Now, consider the case of Philip teaching the Ethiopian eunuch as recorded in Acts 8:35-39:

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And 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. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

The preacher then explained how that everyone in Acts had to follow the same plan for salvation and that today God has the same plan for all men to follow. The preacher said: "You might be wondering why those in Acts 2 were not told to believe, like the jailor in Acts 16. Well, the answer is a very simple one. The jailor had not yet heard the Gospel in order to believe. He later did hear, believe, and obey the Gospel, as we read in verses thirty-two through thirty-four of Acts 16:

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

"Yet, those on Pentecost, in Acts 2, had already heard the message, and believed it, and this is why they were not commanded to believe. The fact that they believed already is evidenced by the fact that they asked: 'Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?' in the latter part of verse 37.

"We might illustrate it this way. If you are traveling from Macon, Georgia, to Nashville, Tennessee, and you stop and ask directions, the answer you receive will depend on where you are when you ask. If you are just getting started on your journey and ask for directions, you will be told to get on interstate 75, and travel north through Atlanta, and on toward Chattanooga. As you approach Chattanooga, you merge onto interstate 24 and travel toward Nashville, until you reach your

destination. If, however, when you stop for directions you have already passed through Atlanta, you will be told to stay on I-75 until you reach Chattanooga, and then get on I-24. In like manner, when one has already heard and believed the Gospel, he is ready to repent, confess Christ, and be baptized. Some today already know what to do to be saved. They believe the Gospel message, but they have not yet obeyed. If you need to come, do not wait, but arise and obey, as Ananias said to Saul who later becomes the apostle Paul in Acts 22:16: 'And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

As Bob and Sarah went home that night, they were disturbed, realizing that in the past they had been taught things that were not according to the Bible. On the other hand, they were happy that they had a better understanding of the Bible and that they had been motivated to study their Bibles and to seek God more fervently than ever before. They realized that the plain book, chapter, and verse preaching and rightly dividing of the Word of truth had opened their eyes. Although the preacher's plain Bible teaching had upset them to a certain degree, they recognized that their being taught the truth caused them to see their lost condition and to seek the Truth of God.

After three months of study with the local preacher along with Eric and Eva, who invited them to the Gospel Meeting, they are baptized into Christ. Their sins are now washed away by "him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5). They are now continuing in the light with God, and enjoy fellowship with Him and the continual cleansing of the "precious blood of Christ," as the Scriptures promise: "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). They are now rejoicing in the Lord, as members of His church, and glorifying God therein. "Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

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

Back To The Biblical Organization Of The Church

John West

Jim and Dan had been co-workers for several years. Both were religious men; however, neither had brought up religion at work. Jim was a member of the church of Christ in town while Dan was a member of a prominent denomination. One day, Jim brought a small pamphlet to work about the church of Christ and asked Dan to read it. Dan agreed and took it home. After several days, Jim asked Dan if he had read the pamphlet to which Dan answered, "I have, but I'm confused about what I read. I believe that I can go to heaven in my church, but I read in the pamphlet that there is only one church and it is the church of Christ."

Jim answered, "The Bible teaches there is only one church. If you read Ephesians 4:4, Dan, you will see that there is only one body." "But how do you know it is the church of Christ? I believe that all churches are of Christ, and it doesn't matter where you go as long as you are a believer" Dan remarked. Jim responded, "Dan that is a good question. I would like to study this further with you outside of work. When can we get together and study what the Bible teaches about this subject?" Dan thought for a minute and said, "Let me talk to my wife and figure out a night we can study this further."

Several weeks passed without a word from Dan, Jim approached him and asked, "Dan, have you and your wife decided when we can study the Bible together?" "She said she is satisfied where she is and does not want to study. I've been thinking more about it and can't get that pamphlet out of my head. I want to know what the Bible teaches about it." Jim said, "Well, Dan, how about visiting us next week at the church of Christ. We are having a Gospel meeting. You and your wife can visit during the week and you won't miss church where you go. What do you think?" "That sounds good Jim, I'll talk to my wife more" Dan responded. Dan

approached Jim that next day and told him that he and his wife would come on Monday night of the meeting. On Monday night, Dan and his wife came to the Gospel meeting as he had promised. The preacher's sermon that evening was about the organization of the church. After services, Dan and his wife were greeted by many of the members and remarked to each other how friendly the people were to them.

The next day, Jim asked Dan what they thought about the sermon. Dan said, "I've never heard it explained that way before, but now, I am still confused. Our pastor never preached that and has said it really does not matter that much because we all serve the same Lord. But after last night, my wife and I want to learn more. When can we get together and study?" Jim said with enthusiasm, "How about Friday night?" Since they both got off of work early on Friday, Dan thought that would be a good time. Jim invited them to come and eat dinner with his family before the study.

Friday night, Dan and his wife Jill arrived at Jim's house and were greeted by Sue, Jim's wife. "Come on in, dinner is almost ready." After a nice meal together and friendly conversation, Jim said, "Let's go into the den and study the questions that you have." As they sat down and opened their Bibles, Dan said, "The preacher explained the organization of the church, but we have always been taught differently. We have regional headquarters that give guidance to each church in its region. They answer to the state headquarters and the state answers to our national headquarters. Your preacher said there are no earthly headquarters in the church."

Jim responded, "Dan, you're exactly right. The Bible does not teach anything about earthly headquarters. There are thousands of churches around the world, each made up of individual members. There are no regional, state, or national headquarters. The church of Christ does not have earthly headquarters or an earthly head. The Bible teaches that Christ is the head of the church. Open your Bible to Colossians 1:18 and read what Paul wrote about Christ and His church: 'And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.' The Apostle Paul also stated to the church at Ephesus: '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' in chapter 1 and verses 22-23.

"Later in Ephesians 5:23, he wrote, 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.' Dan, how many heads are there in the church?" Dan answered, "Well, it says just one. But can't Christ be the head of the church and still have headquarters here?" Jim responded, "Dan, how can there be earthly headquarters while the head of the church is in heaven? You would not have the head of the organization at a different place than the headquarters." "That makes sense," Dan said. "You see, Dan, since Christ built His church (Mat. 16:18) and He is the head of it, He does not share that position with anyone. Therefore, we understand from the Bible that each congregation is autonomous, meaning that each one is self-governing."

Jim continued, "Since Christ is the head of the church, He is the head of each congregation. It also means that He is the head of each individual Christian within the local congregation. Paul wrote, 'But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God' in 1 Corinthians 11:3. As Christians, we are to submit ourselves to Christ as our head instead of some man." "That makes sense, I've never thought about it that way before" Dan responded.

After a brief pause, Jim said, "Dan and Jill, another part of the organization of the church involves the leaders of each congregation. Since each church is autonomous, or self-governing, there must be order and leadership within each congregation. The elders oversee a single congregation where they are members. They do not have authority over other churches in the region or state. That is why each one is autonomous and self-governing."

As Jim continued in the study, he said, "We know that Christ is the head of the church and man cannot take that authority. However, for things to be governed properly here on the earth, God chose elders to oversee the local congregation. It is from among the members that elders are chosen. These men are chosen to oversee the spiritual aspects of

the church, including the spiritual welfare of each member. Let's turn to Hebrews 13:17 and read what the members' responsibility to the elders is: 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.'

Dan stopped Jim and said, "We don't have elders where we go, we have deacons who are over the church."

Jim answered, "We'll talk about the deacons in a moment Dan, but notice the Bible states that the elders are the overseers of the church, not the deacons. The Apostle Paul met with the Ephesian elders and discussed their role in the church. In Acts 20:17, we read, 'And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.' As Paul continued talking to these men he stated in verse 28, '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.'

Jim continued, "Dan and Jill, the Apostle Paul taught in these two verses that the elders are the overseers of the church. The words: elders, pastors, bishops, shepherds, and presbyters all refer to the same group of men. The Greek word for *feed* is the word *poimen*; we get *pastor* from it, and it refers to the elders."

Jill interrupts, "But our pastor is the preacher, is that why you don't call your preacher 'the pastor'?" "That's exactly right" Jim responds. "Isn't that being nit-picky over the use of these words? What does it matter if we call the preacher, the pastor?" Jill quibbled. "It matters a great deal" Jim answered. "We must call Bible things by Bible names and use them properly. The Bible refers to the preacher as *a preacher* or *an evangelist* (2 Tim. 4:5), but never as the pastor. These are two different positions in the church" Jim stated.

"As we go back to the Bible, I want you to turn to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and notice that "elders" are called "bishops" in this passage. In Acts 20:28 the elders were called "overseers" which is the Greek word *episkopos* and is the same word for "bishops" in 1 Timothy 3. Jill, this is why it matters what the preacher is called. The pastor refers to the elders, not the preacher."

“I’ve never heard anyone teach that; I want to study about that further” Jill said.

“I would love to study further and clear this up. I don’t want you to be confused about what the Bible teaches. We will save that for our next study. Now, let’s turn our attention back to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and notice the qualifications of the elders. Paul recorded:

This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

“Not everyone can be an elder—he must meet all of the qualifications listed to serve in that position. Also, the Bible teaches that in a congregation there is a plurality of elders who are overseeing it. One man alone cannot oversee or control the affairs of a congregation. Paul called the elders (plural) in Acts 20 to meet with him. There is no instance anywhere in the Bible that a congregation had only one elder. That’s also why there can’t be one ‘pastor’ in the church and also another reason we would not call the preacher, ‘our pastor’” Jim stated.

Dan asked, “I understand about the church having more than one elder, but what if no one met those qualifications you just listed?” “That’s a good question, Dan. If there are no men qualified, then the men of the congregation must meet and conduct the business of the church until such time that qualified men can be appointed to the work,” Jim answered. “I understand that now” Dan responded. “It is important for us to know what the Bible teaches concerning these men so we follow the authority of Christ” Jim said.

“Another part of the organization of the church is deacons who serve under the elders. These men are special servants who work under the direction of the elders to fulfill different aspects of the work of the church.

Their qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Dan and Jill, turn in your Bibles to that passage and let's read it together.

Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. Even so *must their wives be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Jim continued, "As with the elders, these men must also be married and have children. However, the deacons are the servants in the church, not the overseers. Dan, you said that your church has deacons who oversee and rule the church." "That's right, Jim" Dan responded.

Jim continued and said, "Dan, if you read the New Testament, nowhere does it teach that the deacons are over the elders or the church. The Greek word for *deacon* means "servant," which differs from the position of elders. All Christians in the church are to be servants, however, only those men who meet the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3, can hold the position or office of the deacon. The first instance in the New Testament that teaches about these servants was under the direction of the Apostles as special servants in Acts 6. While these men are not listed specifically as deacons, they were given responsibility for a specific purpose—to make sure the Grecian widows had daily food and clothing. In no way did they make decisions for the church or rule over the church."

Dan responded, "I never thought it really mattered that much as long as there were people to oversee the affairs of the church." "Dan, as we have just read in the Bible, it does matter how the church is governed" Jim answered.

"Jim, I know of places where women are deacons, but you said earlier that men are to be the deacons" Dan said. Jim responded, "We read in 1 Timothy 3 that the deacon is to be 'the husband of one wife,' which would exclude women from serving." Dan said, "But, I was told that

in the Bible there were women who were deacons. I believe one lady named Phoebe was called a deacon.”

Jim answered, “Dan, you are referring to Romans 16:1 where Phoebe is called a ‘servant of the church.’ *Servant* is from the same Greek word as ‘deacon,’ but carries a different meaning here. You see, all Christians are servants of Jesus Christ, but not all Christians are deacons. This word is used throughout the New Testament to describe the servants of the Lord. One who is serving in the office of a deacon is a special servant and must meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Some have tried to teach that Phoebe was one of those special servants, or deacons, but there is nothing in the New Testament that authorizes a woman to serve in such a capacity. She was doing no more than any other Christian should have been doing as a servant. The context in the New Testament determines the appropriate usage of a word. The usage in Romans 16 does not teach that Phoebe was a deacon or a special servant.”

Jim was pleased with the interest being shown by Dan and Jill in the study. As he continued the study, he said, “Dan and Jill, the final part of the organization of the church are members, who are also called ‘saints,’ ‘Christians,’ and ‘disciples’ in the Bible (1 Cor. 1:2; Phi. 1:1). The members are under the oversight of the elders. In this group would also be the preacher or evangelist and also teachers. The preacher is just as subject to the elders as every member of the church. The preacher is not given any special authority over or equal to the elders.”

“But wait” Dan interrupted, “Our pastor, or preacher as you call him, said he also has authority over the church. I know in some churches, the pastor has a lot of authority and the members don’t question him.”

“That may be true” Jim responded, “But we must remember what the Bible teaches about those who have the authority. The authority lies within the eldership of the church, not the preacher. He has the authority to preach the pure Gospel of Christ, but he does not have the authority to make the decisions for the church. That is left to the elders.”

“You have answered a lot of questions that I have had for a long time. This is finally starting to make sense” Dan said.

After a few moments of silence, Jim spoke up and said, “Dan and Jill, we have studied about the Divine organization of the church that

we read about in the New Testament. We must all conform to what the New Testament teaches if we want to be right with God. We see that Christ is the head of His church. Each congregation has its own elders and deacons. The preachers, teachers, and members are under their authority.” Jim continued, “Although each church is self-governing, all who are following God’s Word are in fellowship with one another. They are not tied by man-made laws; so if one leaves the teaching of Christ and goes into error, it does not stop other churches from being faithful. As long as all are teaching the doctrine of Christ, they can work together and are still one body in Christ. That’s why I can travel to other parts of this country or even the world and find Christians meeting together and enjoy fellowship with them.”

Jim concluded the study by saying, “The reason we see religious division today is because man has left the teaching of the Bible concerning the organization of the church and many other doctrines. This has led to religious division that the Lord through the Apostle Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 1:10. We should all speak and teach the same thing, but, as you have seen tonight, most don’t even understand the true organization of the church which Jesus built. In the churches of Christ, we have determined to let the Bible be our guide in these and all other matters. We believe, according to the Bible that we should speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent (1 Pet. 4:11). There are other things we would like to study together with you, if you would consider coming back again.”

“It sounds good to me Jim” Dan said. “I would like to come back because I have other questions for you,” Jill remarked. “Great,” Jim said enthusiastically, “Would next Friday night be good for you?” “That sounds good to us” Dan responded. “We look forward to studying more next week. If you have any questions, please write them down, and we will discuss them next week. I’ll see you at work Monday, Dan.” “Ok, thanks for the dinner and for your willingness to study with us” Dan said. “Have a good night.”

WORK CITED

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

Back To The Biblical Work Of The Church

Dennis “Skip” Francis

Bob was brought up as a “person of faith.” His parents had insured that he was a religious person and knew who God and Jesus Christ were. Though they were not always faithful in their attendance, they made certain that Bob went to Sunday School, learned the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments, and attended Vacation Bible School. They did not attend every week themselves, though they were certain to attend during the times of the year known as “Easter” and “Christmas.” They did have periods when they were more faithful, sometimes because they needed answers to something going on in their lives, and other times when their conscience bothered them for not going.

Bob’s parents were not rigid in their own faith and had no problem if Bob wanted to attend church services at a different denomination than the one that they had made their own as long as it was a Protestant church that believed in Jesus. As a result, Bob would frequently accept the invitations of friends to “come to my church” on a Sunday, or for VBS, or on other occasions. Bob was fond of Vacation Bible School, especially when they had contests and giveaways.

Bob’s parents purchased a “family Bible” that sat on display in their living room: one with fancy gold trim, a wide red ribbon, and an unbroken or marred gilt edge on the pages. They firmly believed and attested to the fact that it was the Word of God, though they did not study the Bible for themselves. They believed that the minister at their denomination would give them enough of the Bible so there was no need to go to the time and trouble to read it. In fact, they thought that the Bible was more for the theologians than for the average church member.

As long as Bob grew up to believe in God and to be a good man was all that mattered to his folks. By most standards, they achieved their goal.

When Bob was grown, like so many do in this day and age, he left home and went into the military. In basic training he continued to be encouraged to attend “divine services” on Sunday mornings and, since his background was Protestant, he chose to go to “general Protestant” services held at the base chapel. Bob had still not decided which religion suited him best and was very confused over the various different belief systems which all claimed to believe in the same God and to follow the same book, though they all seemed to teach and practice different things.

For a time, Bob simply gave up; he really didn’t know what to believe. Even though he still had a basic belief in God, he was reluctant to put his faith in any given “organized religion.” This was an especially low period for Bob as, along with his faith, his morals began to slip. He began to participate in things that he knew were wrong but he didn’t have the spiritual foundation to prevent himself from doing as so many of his worldly friends were doing. During this time of his life, Bob also began to look into other forms of religion. During one stint overseas, he even considered Buddhism and other forms of Eastern mysticism. He quickly realized how little he really knew about God and the creation.

After a few years of sinful behavior and problems that he had difficulty coping with, Bob was invited to study the Bible and begin attending services at the local church of Christ by a friend of his from work by the name of Ken. To this point Bob’s life was not “working,” things had not gone well, and his emotional state was very low—so Bob thought he would at least give this a try. He still had grave questions about the confusion that he had seen in the area of religion and didn’t understand how the same God could have given so many different answers to the same questions.

Bob had had only one Bible study with Ken, and they had talked a lot about why they should only use the Bible as their rule of faith; then Bob went to his first worship service at the church of Christ. As

he and Ken were on the way to the church building, Bob wondered how much different it would be from what he had previously experienced. The title of the sermon that day was, "Justified by Works." Bob had a special interest in this subject because every church he had ever attended had taught justification by "faith **only**" (with special emphasis being placed on the *only* part). While listening to the sermon, he began to realize that it was different from most of the sermons he had heard when he was young. Instead of dealing in general terms and ideas, the preacher was quoting Bible verse after Bible verse. Rather than hear the words of Luther, Wesley, or a number of other philosophers and theologians, Bob was hearing the Bible. Still, the idea of works went so much against the grain of what he had been told over the years.

The main thrust of the sermon was taken from a passage in James that read: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jam. 2:24). This passage of Scripture was surprising to Bob as he had always been told that one was justified by faith **only**. Yet, this verse of the Bible seemed to contradict everything that Bob had been taught before. What made matters worse was a previous reading from the same chapter

What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? 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 (2:14-19).

Did the Bible actually equate the idea of faith only as equal with what the devils believe?

After the sermon was over, Bob decided to talk to the preacher and see what he could learn about this matter. He was, at best, thoroughly confused!

At the back of the church building stood the preacher shaking hands with those who had attended that day. Bob determined that he was going to confront this man with his confusion.

“Hello, brother Ken,” the preacher said to Bob’s friend. “And who is this that you have brought with you today?”

“This is Bob, a friend of mine from work,” answered Ken.

“Glad to have you with us, Bob. My name is Jerry. Is this your first time at one of our worship services?” the preacher asked.

“Good to meet you, Jerry. Yes it is, and I have some questions about your sermon today,” Bob responded.

“Well, Bob, the Bible teaches us to ‘always be ready to give an answer,’ as Peter wrote. “I am pleased to answer any question you may have,” Jerry said. “Can you stay for a few minutes after services, or can I invite you and Ken to lunch with my wife and me?”

With this query, Bob began his journey to a better understanding of the Word of God than he had ever had growing up. After lunch, the study began with the general idea of obedience, a concept that was foreign to Bob’s understanding of God and His will. The passage they went to was Hebrews 5:9: “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” “You mean to tell me,” Bob asked, “that God’s salvation is based on works? That is simply not what I was raised to believe, nor have I ever been taught any Bible passages that said this.” Jerry responded. “Well, Bob, I would not in any sense deny that salvation is based on faith, but you need to understand that God’s idea of faith is an obedient faith. As you just read for yourself, and will see many times, the Bible often contradicts current religious practice. In fact, there are many such passages in the Scriptures. God has always required obedience to His will. Haven’t you ever heard the story of Abraham and Isaac?”

“You mean the story where Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac to God?” asked Bob. “Yes, that’s the one” said Jerry. “What do you think God would have done had Abraham refused to obey Him?”

Bob thought about this for a minute and thought that he had Jerry on this one. "But that passage is in the Old Testament. God has freed us from all that!" Bob declared.

Jerry responded, "Though what you have said is true, it is wrong to believe that God has changed. In fact, He said that he has not changed. God still requires obedience and sent His Son to this earth in order to be an example for our own obedience. Let's look at what Paul said in Philippians 2:5-8:

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.

"Here, God's Word instructs us to follow the example of Jesus and be obedient. In fact, we are told in the Scriptures that faith without works is dead, being alone. Even though many suggest that one cannot be saved by works, did you know that faith itself is a work?"

"Where does the Bible say that?" Bob asked, obviously surprised. Jerry's response was: "Let's turn to John 6:29." They read the following: "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

"This is the first time I have ever heard belief described as a work," said Bob. "That's not all," Jerry interjected, "The Bible teaches us something else that may surprise you. Did you know that the things that most people have said are works are not really works at all? Let's take baptism, for instance. Is it a work?" Bob answered, "Well, I have always been told that it was. It is something that you have to do and is something that is outward rather than inward."

"Let's examine it," said Jerry. "Would you agree that one needs to believe in Jesus to be saved? How about confessing your belief to men? How about the need to repent? Must you do all these things in order to be saved?" "Of course," Bob responded, "But those are all inward things. They are not works."

“Really?” asked Jerry, “Then how is it that they are all active verbs? In fact, the only passive thing that one does in order to be saved is baptism. All the other things are things one does for himself. Baptism is done by someone else. Notice what the Bible says when Jesus gave the great commission: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mat. 28:19). The baptizing is done by those that teach. It is a passive act to the one being baptized.”

“I never thought about it like that,” Bob said. “I always heard that baptism was an outward sign of an inward grace.” Jerry replied, “Many people have been taught that, but I have asked those who teach such to show even one Bible passage that says anything like what you just stated, and they have been unable to give even one. The Bible does not teach that baptism is ‘an outward sign of any inward grace.’ Instead, as Peter says, in comparing our baptism to Noah’s ark, ‘the like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us,’ in 1 Peter 3:21. In the previous verse he even makes it clearer that it is water baptism he is talking about, saying, ‘wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.’ This should be clear but it has become clouded over many years by those who have departed from the truth of God’s Word into error.”

“How come I was never taught this?” Bob asked. “I don’t know,” Jerry responded, “but there are many who continue to believe and teach the ‘faith only’ concept and do it without Bible authority. In fact, the predominant instruction of God’s Word is that of obedient faith and **not** ‘faith only.’ The word *obey* shows up 24 times in the New Testament, *obedience* 12 times, *work* 64 times, *works* 108 times, and so forth. If you search the Scriptures with a good concordance or a computer search engine, you will only find the words “faith only” or “faith alone” **once**, and that passage negates the entire idea. It is that very passage that was the topic of my sermon today.”

“I guess I am starting to see what you are talking about, though it was never taught when I was growing up. I did see some things that may be examples of ‘works,’ though I never really thought of them that way,” Bob said. “What kind of works do you mean?” Jerry asked.

“Well,” Bob went on, “There were times one of the denominations I attended had bake sales or car washes in order to raise money for some cause or another. I guess you might consider those things ‘good works.’”

“This gets to the very heart of what we are talking about. Though men do things that seem to be right in their own eyes, everything that we do should be done in the name of the Lord—that is, with His authority according to Colossians 3:17. If we do not have a book, chapter, and verse of Scripture in favor of a practice, we should not do it. Though many in the religious world today have based their faith on the teachings of men, or creed books, or worldly designed statements of faith or confessions; we have, instead, based our faith on the Bible only. The things you have mentioned are things that as Solomon said, ‘seemeth right unto a man’ in Proverbs 14:12, but since they have no basis in the truth of God’s Word, their end is the way of destruction. Where do we get the notion that fund raising should be done with car washes or bake sales? The Bible teaches us to raise funds for the Lord’s work, but we are to do it with free will offerings, not sales as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.”

“I can understand that for most things, but how can the church build a hospital with only free will offerings?” Bob asked.

Jerry responded, “Where in the Bible is it the work of the church to build hospitals?”

“Well, I don’t know, but it seems like a good work to me. If that is not what the work is, then please teach me what the church is to do in the area of good works,” Bob said.

“The things you mentioned are things that are temporary problems and have temporary solutions. The church’s obligations of work are not in the temporary realm but rather the eternal.

“There are three that are mentioned in the Scriptures, but all of them have the same end result and goal in mind; that of expanding the kingdom of God through soul winning.

“Though all of the works of the church have temporary effects, they can all have permanent outcomes. The Bible teaches that the work of the church, primarily, is that of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is one of the first things the early church was told to do, given in the Great Commission by the Lord Jesus Himself, just prior to His ascension. In Mark 16:15 Jesus says to His apostles to ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ We can also see that this is the work of the church that is intended by God from the very beginnings of time itself. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:10: ‘To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.’

“In order to facilitate this work, the church must be made strong in God’s service. The Bible word for this is *edify*. It is how the church becomes prepared to do the work God has given them to do. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:12: ‘For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,’ and later tells us the results of this edification: ‘From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love’ in verse 16. The body, the church, becomes strong, every part does its share, and the body grows and becomes edified all the more.

“We can see that both edification and evangelism are mentioned, but so is benevolence, and with the same result. Notice that word *ministry* in the text? That word refers to the giving of aid or relief, thus, even the acts of benevolence done by the church to help and aid others has an end result of increase of the body and the winning of souls. All are eternal in nature.

“This is how the Bible differs from the notions of man in all things. God, His Son, and the church, are all to be eternally minded, and there is nothing more important than the winning and saving of souls. This is where the church must place its highest priority,” responded Jerry.

“What about **my** soul?” Bob inquired. “That is the most important question that anyone can ask, and I am glad that you asked it. Let’s consider God’s plan of salvation from the Bible as we reason together,” was Jerry’s response.

From this simple beginning—an accurate knowledge of what God had said regarding the work of the church, Bob began a life of labor in the kingdom of God.

WORK CITED

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

Other Bellview Lectureship Books

Preaching From The Minor Prophets
Preaching From The Major Prophets
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The Blight Of Liberalism
Great New Testament Questions
Great Old Testament Questions
Beatitudes
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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?

BACK TO
THE

BIBLE

Jesus asked, “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. 16:26). By this, Jesus was showing the importance of the soul. It is more valuable than all the world’s riches. Your soul is that valuable. God thought it was valuable enough that He would send His Son to this world to die an ignominious death on the cross. Jesus knew your individual soul was worth leaving heaven and freely giving Himself for you.

Through the grace of God, He gave us His Word to teach us what we must do to be in an acceptable relationship with Him and remain in fellowship. Paul tells us that the grace of God teaches us (Titus 2:11-12). It is our desire that this book will help you in understanding God’s will for you to the salvation of your most precious commodity, your soul, that you may spend eternity with Him.