

***How Can We
Understand The
Bible Alike?***

The 2006
POWER



Lectures

Hosted by the Southaven church of Christ
Southaven, Mississippi

B. J. Clarke
Lectureship Director

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Dedication

ONE OF THE GREATEST honors of my life is the invitation I received to come and be the pulpit preacher at the Southaven church of Christ. All of 29 years old, I arrived in Southaven, MS in January of 1991, both excited and scared. I knew that the three previous pulpit preachers at Southaven had been Alan Highers, Keith Mosher, Sr. and Garland Elkins. My respect for these men, their experience and their Bible knowledge, was (and is) immense. Furthermore, the membership at Southaven numbered twice as much as any church for which I had ever worked. So, quite frankly, I entered into the work with a measure of fear and trembling.

There were many individuals who helped to calm my fears and put me at ease in my new work. This year's lectureship book is dedicated to the person who helped me perhaps more than any other member. In truth, she has helped not only me, but the entire congregation. She has served as a deacon's wife, a Bible class teacher, a Ladies Bible class teacher, an active participant in the Faith-In-Action program, We Care program, and she has spoken to the ladies at the POWER lectureship.

Actually, this list does not begin to cover all of the things she has done to help the congregation, and it does not mention her greatest contribution of all. Hour after hour, for nearly two decades, she has worked behind the scenes to advance the work of the church. She has done her work energetically, conscientiously, professionally, tirelessly, and, through it all, she has done it cheerfully. There ought to be a picture of her in the dictionary right next to the word "secretary." She is the epitome of what a church secretary ought to be. She is informed, knowing just what needs to be done and how to get it done. She handles the phones pleasantly and effortlessly transitions from one line to another.

Behind the scenes she types the articles that several thousand people read each month in the POWER magazine.

If you've ever ordered a POWER lectureship book from her over the phone, then you know how eager she is to please and how efficient. We've never advertised same day shipping for orders placed by internet/telephone, but that is essentially what she has provided. I have watched her receive a book order just as she was preparing to leave for the day and stop everything just to satisfy a customer's request. She always goes the extra mile no matter what the task!

She was the first secretary I ever had, and I could not have had a better one to "break me in and show me the ropes." She has encouraged me and bolstered me in my work from the very first day we worked together. If you'll pardon me for saying something so personal, I will tell you that she has at times been like a mother to me. She has always been my sister in Christ, and I am proud to have worked beside her all these years.

She is more than my personal secretary; she is a splendid Christian woman, who has been a loyal wife, and devoted mother to all of her children. There has never been anyone that loved their job more than she has loved her job. That is why it was so agonizing for her to make the decision recently to retire at the conclusion of this year's lectureship. It is only fitting that she conclude her work at the end of lectureship week (her favorite work week of the year), and it is even more fitting that we dedicate this year's lectureship book to a true treasure, Geraldine Chaney!



Geraldine Chaney

Acknowledgments

THIS IS THE TWELFTH POWER lectureship that I have been privileged to direct, and with each passing year I recognize more and more the enormous debt of gratitude I owe to so many people.

The Southaven congregation is incredibly blessed to have two godly men, Con Lambert and Larry Everson, to serve as our elders. These men truly love the Lord and His Word. They unreservedly approved the theme for this year's lectureship because they love the Bible and they want men and women to understand its soul-saving message.

I wish to thank Geraldine Chaney for the efficient way that she handled the mountain of administrative work involved in commencing a lectureship. She sent out assignments, typed manuscripts and sent out letters, letters, and more letters. As noted in the dedication, she is a jewel.

I wish it were possible for the reader to truly appreciate the vast amount of work done by those who contributed chapters for this book. Hours of research, followed by hours of organizing and authoring the material, are represented in the pages that follow.

Also represented in the pages that follow is the volunteer spirit of so many good brethren at Southaven. First and foremost, I wish to thank my wonderful companion and helpmeet, Tish. She is the love of my life. Little did she know when she married me that I would ask her to journey into the world of desktop publishing, but she has done so most graciously and most professionally.

Finally, great gratitude is due to the following brethren who assisted me in proofreading the book: Kevin Cozort, Maggie Depoyster, Annette Kellett, Mina Lambert, Brian Martin, Janet Pounders, Stephanie Pounders, Bonnie Reid, Nicole Scroggins, Lynda Smith, Jennifer Thompson, Grace Williams, and Sheila Winstead. Thanks also to Holly and Michael Clarke for helping with some of the Scripture checking. I am truly blessed!

--B. J. Clarke

Foreword

GOD GAVE US ONLY one Bible and yet we find a multiplicity of denominational organizations, teaching diverse and opposing doctrines. It is only fair to ask how all of these different doctrines could have come from one Bible. Is God the source of this confusion, or does the fault lie with man?

Certainly, God is not the author of confusion. Why then do men not see the Bible alike? Can we all understand the Bible alike? I am aware that the previous question is technically redundant because if we truly “understand” something they will of necessity understand it alike. For instance, if two men truly understand the answer to the equation $2+2=?$, then they will come to the same conclusion. If one of them understands the answer to be “4” and the other understands the answer to be “5” then in reality only one of them “understands” the answer. If they both truly understand the answer they will understand it alike: $2+2=4$. Likewise, if two men truly understand the purpose of baptism as it is revealed in Scripture, then they will understand it alike because the Bible teaches one harmonious doctrine on this subject. Nevertheless, we have inserted the word “alike” in our title to draw attention to the need for unity in Biblical interpretation.

The aim of this volume is to first affirm that we can understand the Bible alike, and then proceed to demonstrate **how** we can do so. The first section of this book addresses the means and methods whereby we may understand the Bible alike. Tried and tested rules of interpretation are set forth, dealing with everything from the importance of context to how the Bible authorizes. The second part of the book asks and answers whether we can understand the Bible alike on a host of subjects. Part Three answers some crucial questions about understanding the Bible alike. The fourth segment of the book contains lectures, written by women, especially for women, designed to address whether we can understand the role of women alike. Finally, the book contains both a Subject Index and a Scripture Index to assist the reader. Our prayer is that this book will lead at least one soul to a home in heaven!

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CHAPTER 1

Can We Understand The Bible Alike?

Gary Colley

Commendation

IT IS A JOY ALWAYS to be associated with those of like precious faith. We consider this to be true of the elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, and members of the great Southaven church of Christ. These godly people seek always to walk in the old paths of the Bible. For fourteen years the POWER Lectures have been conducted with the intent of seeking the lost, edifying the brethren in the churches of Christ, and presenting the Truth to all. With our faithful brother B. J. Clarke as director, we believe the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth will be presented in each lecture. We thank God on our every remembrance of the faithful work of this congregation.

The great theme this year, "How Can We Understand The Bible Alike," is very needed in our world, and should truly be of help to many precious souls. We commend the lectureship book, tapes, and other conveyances of getting this material into the hands of honest seekers of Truth.

Introduction

The Bible is the greatest book the world has ever known. Most books come on the market, are well known for a short time, but can be absorbed and disposed of in less than a few months. However, the Bible has been the

best seller for centuries, has never been put aside for lack of interest, and has never been completely mastered. Continual study does not exhaust its contents. It is truly the most wonderful book in the world, and will continue to be, because it is from God. He made man, and knows all of his needs for all time.

We are living in an age of skepticism and religious division, a time when men are not studying the Bible as they once did, and consequently do not develop a saving faith that comes from hearing and obeying God's Word (Rom. 10:17). Though the Bible commands us to study (2 Tim. 2:15), many become so entangled in the things of the world that they think they do not have time to study the Bible (Luke 8:11-15; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

For this reason many are not living so as to please God, since without faith it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6). Every step from here to eternity must be a step of faith (2 Cor. 5:7). How sad is the fact that many will meet their maker without having made the proper preparation by obeying His Will (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Christianity is a religion of Biblical authority. Religious division, conflicts, and contradictions in our shamefully divided religious world, would all cease if all would study the Bible as they should. Only by following our Lord's teaching can we possibly please God, and one day go to our Father in Heaven eternally (John 14:6). Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, came into this world born of a virgin to become our Savior on the cross (John 3:16; Luke 19:10; Matt. 1:22; Heb. 2:9).

It was in His death that He took away the Old Law of Moses, and established His new Law in the Gospel to which all are subject today (Col. 2:14; Heb. 10:9-10; Matt. 26:28). Following His death, burial, and resurrection, He was given all authority for all time in Heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18-20).

Christianity is a taught religion, as is all religion (Heb. 8:10-11). We can not be taught wrong, and be right in our religion. The Bible therefore, must be our guide, director, and governor in all things religious if we would be assured of faithfulness (Jas. 1:25). No man can come to Christ for his salvation without being taught (John 6:44-45). However since so few are studying the Bible today we can understand why more are not responding to the Lord's invitation as they should (Matt. 11:28-30).

Why Are So Few Studying The Bible?

There are those who are utterly indifferent to the Bible and therefore do not study it. Really, these are those who do not have any interest in the Bible, and could care less whether it is true or not. They utterly reject its teaching and have no interest in investigating it in the least. Jesus came in contact with people of this kind during His preaching. He said:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:15).

He will not pardon and save those who are indifferent and refuse to study His Word.

Then some do not study the Bible because they do not realize its importance. They are slightly concerned with religious subjects, but they have never developed an interest or taste for that kind of food. They do not "hunger and thirst after righteousness" or the commandments of the Lord (Matt. 5:6). They see other things as more important than the principles taught in the Bible.

Others do not study the Bible for the simple reason that it condemns their spiritual condition. Instead of

attempting to change their condition they simply say, "I have my own theory about life, and I am satisfied." They do not wish to look into God's mirror for the soul (Jas. 1:25), because it reveals their hideous condition in the sight of God. They do not want to see themselves as God sees them. The writer of Proverbs states of some, "How have I hated instruction, And my heart despised reproof" (Prov. 5:12). When a faithful soul tries to teach this one, and show them their true spiritual condition they say, "Well that is just your interpretation."

But there are also those who do not study the Bible because they have been told that the Bible cannot be understood. In one form or another many preachers are proclaiming this error from their pulpits! Oh, how happy the Devil must be with his ministers who teach this! Sometimes this lie is told long enough and often enough that the unsuspecting will believe it. We submit without fear of successful contradiction, that no expression was ever so full of deception, nor farther from the truth than this statement! In this lecture we want to talk about understanding the Bible.

Can It Be Understood?

Without a doubt, and we readily admit, that there are passages that demand deep and persistent study, but we affirm that with proper study they may all be understood. The apostle Peter wrote concerning some of Paul's writings:

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

Peter did not say "they are impossible to understand," but rather "things hard to be understood." Again, we affirm

that all the Scriptures can be understood with the proper study. That any of the Scriptures cannot be understood did not begin to be taught by the Lord or His chosen apostles. Then how and when did this false teaching begin? It began as an invention of Rome! They say that, "The Scriptures are not intended for the common people, and that men must come to the church for an official interpretation." What a disservice to mankind!! They have made their members helpless subjects. They have said to the people that they cannot understand the Scriptures. This false theory was invented by the priests to exalt themselves and deprive people of their liberty. The Scriptures given by God make it evident that they were intended for all the people, and not for just a few presumptuous officials.

Please note some of the Scriptures pertaining to their being given to all the people:

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 (Col. 3:16).

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby (unto salvation, ASV) (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. 10:11).

I adjure you by the Lord, that this epistle be read
by all the holy brethren (1 Thess. 5:27).

These verses make it evident that the Scriptures were intended for all the people to read and study. The Bible is trustworthy, reliable, valid and credible, and is intended by God to be understood by all. If not, why not? Why would the Scriptures make all of these statements if they were not intended for the people in general??

Would anyone suppose that God commanded us to read, learn, and live by the Scriptures, all the while knowing that the common man could not understand them? If we “cannot understand the Scriptures,” then we must conclude that one of two things is true: (1) God could not give them in such a way that we can understand, or (2) God would not give the Scriptures so that man could understand.

If we choose number one, that God could not, we would impeach His power. But if we choose number two, that God would not, we would impeach his goodness! Surely no reasonable person would believe that God would have given a book of revelation to man, and command it to be read by all people, all the time knowing that the ones it is sent to could not understand it!! If our supposed difficulty, of our “not being able to understand,” is in some way true, it is not of God, but only due to our preconceived ideas!

But Can We Understand It Alike?

With the simple and true reasoning already discussed, someone is ready to grant that we can understand the Bible, but insists that “we can not all understand it alike.” This thought has been repeated so many times by so many people, that the lie is accepted by many. However, the former thoughts that have been

presented answer this quibble as before. This is the former idea in a modified form. It is the same contention that Rome has made regarding our inability to understand the Scriptures. Hence our former statements are appropriate again: If God did not give to man a revelation that we can understand alike, He either: (1) Could not or (2) Would not.

Either of these thoughts are a disrespect and reflection on God's character and on His wisdom. Surely God can give to man a message that all can understand, and if all understand, they understand it alike. If one of us understands one way, and another understands a different way, one of us, and perhaps both of us are wrong. We cannot both be right, since there is just one way to understand any one Scripture, and if we understand at all we must understand it alike. There are many ways to misunderstand a Scripture, but only one way to understand a Scripture.

So we are forced to the conclusion that if God did not give us a revelation that we can understand alike, it must be because He did not want us to understand alike. But it is clear from the Scriptures that God does want us to understand alike. The New Testament insists, and stresses, and pleads, for the unity of all believers upon our understanding of the Scriptures alike. The Lord of glory prayed to the Heavenly Father:

Neither pray I for these (the apostles, GC) alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same

thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Surely these verses and their instructions are so plain that we all can understand the Bible plea for unity. And further, that the plea is based upon God expecting us to read the Bible and understand it. And an understanding of it means that we understand it alike.

Would anyone concede to the thought that God would approve of this writer and any other, standing in the pulpit day after day, preaching a different plan of salvation each day? Oh no! We would accuse this one of being inconsistent and displeasing to God. But if this would not be acceptable, how could God approve of ten different men preaching ten different plans of salvation, from ten different pulpits??

Jesus, in His prayer (John 17:21), said this would cause the world to reject Him and His teaching if all were not in agreement! For this cause, it is a pitiful fact that division in the religious world is a very serious matter.

Are Our Differences Proof We Cannot See The Scriptures Alike?

Some insist that our religious differences are clear proof that we cannot see the Bible alike. But is this theory true or false? It cannot be both. Let us investigate by looking at some of our differences in the religious world. This thinking comes from the same disrespect for the Bible that says, "You can prove anything by the Bible."

Often people are attempting to justify conflicting religious views, and the existence of the many denominations in our world. Still we believe that this is a false and destructive teaching. The Bible is true, while man's theories are false. Paul wrote:

For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar...(Rom. 3:3-4).

Only one conclusion can be properly, logically, and correctly drawn from any given passage of Scripture. Anything contrary to the teaching of the Bible is necessarily false.

Nicodemus Came to Jesus By Night

This Bible reference, found in John 3:2, is clear, and agreed to by all. But then some want to discuss **why** Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. One says that, "He came by night because he feared the Jews, and came by night for protection." But another disagrees saying, "He came by night because he did not have time to come by day." How can we settle our differences?? The correct answer comes in taking just what the Bible says, "He came by night," and that should settle all disputes. We should be able to agree that the disagreement is not over what the Bible says, but over what it does not say!

Paul Had A Thorn In The Flesh

This is found in 2 Cor. 12:7-9, and has brought hours of discussion by some. The discussion has arisen over "What was Paul's thorn in the flesh?" Some have said it was weak eyes, others the gout, some that it was Paul's Jewish enemies, others that it was scars borne in his body, etc. But again we are divided, not over what the Bible says, but over what the Bible does not say! We can agree by taking just what Paul said, "there was given to me a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7).

Moses Saw A Burning Bush

The account of the sighting of the burning bush by Moses is recorded in Exodus 3. There quickly arises at times a disagreement about "What kind of bush did Moses see?" One may say it was a Cedar bush, while another

may say that he knows it was a Cypress bush. We really do not know, nor does anyone else, what kind of bush it was! The Bible does not say. But one may say, "Well, we just cannot agree, nor can we see the Bible alike!" Let it be seen that we are not divided on the fact stated in the Bible, "There was a burning bush." To this we all are agreed. Again, is not our difference over what the Bible does not say?

The World Is Divided Over Creeds

Yes, we are divided over humanly written creeds. But if we allow the Bible only to be our creed, would anyone reject this as our creed? Does anyone object to having the Bible as our creed? All would no doubt answer "no" to this question. Then we can be united. If we will just lay aside all humanly written creeds and unite on just what the Bible says, would not all division cease? According to the Bible we can all be united (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Religious World Is Divided Over Names

Literally hundreds of religious names are recorded today designating different religions and churches. If someone were to ask you what name you wore religiously, what would you answer? We should answer with the name "Christian." Surely no one would object, and we should all agree, to this name since the Bible says, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). The collective body of Christians is referred to by Paul as "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). The division is over names that are not found in the Bible. Can you find the name of the religious organization of which you are a member in the Bible? We can be united if we take just what the Bible says, and no more.

We Are Divided Over Baptism

Because of the desires of some to practice sprinkling, some pouring, and others immersion, there is a division

that causes men to say, “We cannot understand the Bible alike.” But sprinkling and pouring were not practiced by the Lord, or His apostles, or the early church in the New Testament. The Bible states that baptism is a burial (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Does anyone object to immersion? “Well, no,” one may answer, “but we prefer sprinkling and pouring.” Again the division is over what is not found in the Bible. Let us all determine to accept a “thus saith the Lord,” and build our hope of eternity thereon.

We Are Divided Over Music In Worship

Some say of our brethren in the churches of Christ, “You folks do not believe in having music in the church.” Well, let an explanation be given. There are two kinds of music in the world: vocal and instrumental. The truth of the matter is that we **do** believe in having music in the church, the kind of music for which we have the authority of the Bible, and that is only singing. Are we divided over singing? (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Oh no! Everyone agrees that singing is commanded and fine for worship to God (John 4:24). Playing on an instrument of music is not found to be practiced in the early church, nor is it commanded by the Lord or His apostles. Again, is not this division over what cannot be found taught in the Bible? Is it true that “We cannot see the Bible alike?”

We Are Divided Over What Must One Do To Be Saved

Some “would be” teachers and preachers say one must “pray through” or pray the little “sinners prayer” for salvation. Others want men to have an “experience,” while still others think salvation comes by “faith and trust only.” The Bible does not teach any of these false doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9). The Bible **does** teach that a lost sinner must develop faith by hearing the Gospel (John 3:16; John 8:24), repenting of one’s past sins (Acts 17:30-31),

confessing the name of Jesus with one's mouth (Matt. 10:32-33), and being buried in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Conclusion

We should all agree that the Bible is the only safe and correct rule of conduct in this life. It is that by which, and in which, all must walk who plan to go to Heaven (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6; Rev. 22:14, Rev. 22:18-19). The Bible says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, And light unto my pathway" (Psm. 119:105). May I make a plea for all to read and study the Bible? If we are not willing to follow the rule of faith found clearly given in the New Testament, do we really respect God, Christ, and Divine Authority (Matt. 28:18-20)? The more we read and study, the more we will find our understanding of it growing (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

May we also make an appeal for all to accept the finality and all-sufficiency of the Bible as our Divine rule of guidance? Let us be satisfied with the Bible, and it alone! Let us not digress into practices not mentioned therein, for these departures are the chief cause of misunderstanding and religious divisions (2 John 9-11; Gal. 1:8-9).

CHAPTER 2

By Approaching It With The Right Attitudes

B. J. Clarke

Introduction

IN 2 TIMOTHY 2:15, THE apostle Paul instructed Timothy “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (King James Version). The Greek word (which translates the words “rightly dividing”) is *orthotomeo*, which literally means “to cut straight” (*orthos*, “straight,” *temno*, “to cut”)...“the meaning passed from the idea of cutting or “dividing,” to the more general sense of “rightly dealing with a thing.”¹ **The Bible Knowledge Commentary** explains:

The Greek *orthotomounta*, “correctly handling,” found only here and in the Septuagint in Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5, means literally “to cut straight,” but just what image Paul had in mind here is uncertain. Stone masons, plowers, road builders, tentmakers, and (least likely of all) surgeons have all been suggested, but a firm conclusion remains elusive. What is clear is that the shame of God’s disapproval awaits those who mishandle His Word.²

The lexicographers Arndt and Gingrich suggest that the probable meaning here is to “guide the word of truth along a straight path (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk.”³ Whether the phrase means “plowing a

straight furrow, cutting a straight board, or sewing a straight seam,”⁴ “the good workman will properly handle (literally, “cut straight”) God’s Word, rather than twisting it as did the false teachers.”⁵

The state of mind or attitude with which we approach the Scriptures has everything to do with whether we “cut them straight.” As the title of this chapter indicates, our attitudes toward the Word of God may either be good or bad, right or wrong. Healthy attitudes toward the Bible are a prerequisite to understanding its teaching. The aim of this chapter is to identify the chief attitudes one must possess in order to understand the Bible.

It should be noted that this chapter is intended first and foremost for readers who already embrace completely the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. Yet, how sad it is that even among those who affirm strong convictions that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, there is a wide disparity of belief as to what it teaches on any number of subjects. For those of us who believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, what attitudes should we bring with us each time we approach its sacred pages? How should we approach the Holy Bible so that we might understand it alike?

We Should Approach It Reverently

In a very real sense, when we enter into a study of the Scriptures we are entering “Holy ground.” This is so because “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The expression “given by inspiration of God” translates the Greek word *theopneustos*, a compound of two Greek words: *theos* = God; and *pnein* = to breathe. B. B. Warfield explains:

What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of the Divine ‘inbreathing’ into its human authors, but

that it is breathed out by God, ‘God-breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God. In a word, what is declared by this fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them.⁶

The Divine nature of the Bible is well expressed in the following quotation:

The meaning of the word “breathed,” as here used, is brought out very forcibly by the comparison of two other words translated in the same way. The one is the Greek word *psuchein* = *to breathe gently*, while in 2 Tim. 3:16 the term denotes a forcible respiration. The other is the Hebrew word *ah-ayr’h* = *to breathe unconsciously*, while 2 Tim. 3:16 denotes a conscious breathing.

Inspiration, then, as defined by Paul in this passage, is the strong, conscious inbreathing of God into men, qualifying them to give utterance to truth. It is God speaking through men, and the Old Testament is therefore just as much the Word of God as though God spake every single word of it with His own lips. The Scriptures are the result of divine inbreathing, just as human speech is uttered by the breathing through a man’s mouth.⁷

The content of the very first chapter of the Bible reveals why we need to approach it so reverently. The chapter is saturated with the phrase “God said” (Gen. 1:3; Gen. 1:6; Gen. 1:9; Gen. 1:11; Gen. 1:14; Gen. 1:20; Gen. 1:22; Gen. 1:24; Gen. 1:26; Gen. 1:28-29). Furthermore, Moses recorded what “the Lord God said” (Gen. 6:3; Gen. 7:1; Gen. 9:1; Gen. 12:1; Gen. 26:2; Gen. 31:3; etc.), what “God spake” (Gen. 8:15; Gen. 46:2; etc.), and what “the Lord spake saying” (Exod. 6:10, etc.). Phrases such as this appear approximately 700 times in the first five books of the Old Testament alone. Similar phrases appear over 400 times in the Old Testament books of history. The very

familiar phrase “Thus saith the Lord” (and similar variations) occur 150 times in Isaiah alone, and can be found in abundance in all of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. All in all, it is claimed that such expressions as “The Lord said,” “The Lord spake,” and “The word of the Lord came,” are found 3,808 times in the Old Testament.

1. The Israelites revered the Word of God.

After the Israelites returned home from captivity, they eagerly assembled to hear the reading of the Word of God (Neh. 8:1-2). When Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people “all the people stood up” (Neh. 8:5). Furthermore, they “bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground” (Neh. 8:6).

2. Jesus revered the written Word. Read the Gospel accounts and you will see that the vast majority of the time Jesus sat down when He taught the people. However, when given the opportunity to read the Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus “stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16). After He finished reading, “he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and he sat down” (Luke 4:20). Although He was God in the flesh, Jesus still revered the Word because it ultimately came from His Father (John 12:49-50).

3. The Thessalonians revered the Word of God. Paul commended the Thessalonians: “because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). If the Thessalonians had concluded that the message Paul preached was of human origin they would have had no motivation to heed the message. However, because they recognized the message as Divine they took it seriously!

Antony of Egypt wrote: “Be astounded that God should have written to us.”⁸ Indeed, it is astounding! When

we recognize that the Bible is the product of holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21), then we will revere its message. If one man reveres the Bible as the Word of God and another man views it merely as a good book written by uninspired men, this sets the stage for them to come to different understandings concerning their obligations to its teaching. Indeed, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7).

We Should Approach It Regularly

1. The Psalmist did. The author of Psalm 119 declared, “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psm. 119:97). He could not sleep at night because of his fervent desire to meditate upon God’s Word (Psm. 119:148). The godly man delights in the Law of God so much that he meditates in it “day and night” (Psm. 1:2).

2. The Israelites of Nehemiah 8 did. As noted earlier, upon their return from captivity the Israelites gathered to hear the Word of God. Upon the first day of the seventh month, “Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding” (Neh. 8:2). Ezra read to the people “from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (Neh. 8:3). Although they had listened for hours to the Word of God being read, they were far from satisfied. They wanted more of the Word of God. The next day another assembly convened “even to understand the words of the law” (Neh. 8:13). In fact, “day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he [Ezra] read in the book of the law of God” (Neh. 8:18).

3. The Bereans did. Luke informs us that the Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica, at least in part, because they “searched the scriptures daily”

(Acts 17:11). When you consider the fact that, during this time, the Scriptures were not conveniently printed and packaged for the convenience of the reader, it is all the more commendable that the Bereans made the effort to so diligently search the Scriptures.

4. Much misunderstanding exists because people do not read the Scriptures regularly enough.

On five separate occasions Jesus suggested that the problem with certain people of His day was that they had not read the Scriptures. For example, when the Pharisees charged the disciples of Jesus with unlawful conduct upon the Sabbath day, Jesus said:

Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or **have ye not read in the law**, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? (Matt. 12:3-5—all emp. mine, BJC).

Actually, the query of the Pharisees had already been answered in Holy Scripture, and had they been more diligent in their daily study and meditation, they would have known the answer.

The Pharisees came to Jesus on another occasion and inquired whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause. Jesus answered and said, “**Have ye not read**, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” (Matt. 19:4-6). The answer to the Pharisees’ question had been in the Scriptures all along. They should have been able to read the inspired words of Genesis and deduce that what God has joined together, man should not put asunder.

After Jesus cast the moneychangers out of the temple, the blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple, and he healed them. Within the temple, children began to cry, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” The chief priests and scribes were greatly disturbed by this cry and asked Jesus if He was aware of what the children were saying. He replied, “Yea; **have ye never read**, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?” (Matt. 21:16). Perhaps if the chief priests and elders had given more time to the study and meditation of God’s Word, they would have realized the wisdom behind the cry of the children.

Later, Jesus asked this same group of priests and scribes what the lord of the vineyard would do to the husbandmen who slew his son. They correctly replied that the lord would destroy those wicked men and let the vineyard out to other husbandmen. Then, Jesus said, “**Did ye never read in the scriptures**, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Matt. 21:42). The Pharisees did not miss the intended application. They knew that the Lord was criticizing their conduct. They should have been familiar enough with the Scriptures to “put two and two together” and identify Jesus as the Messiah.

Furthermore, the Sadducees presented a scenario to Jesus, which they considered to be an insurmountable argument against the resurrection: If a woman had been married to seven different men on earth, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? It is easy to envision the Sadducees presenting this hypothetical situation to Jesus and then glancing smugly at one another, as if to say, “Let’s see him wiggle his way out of this one.” However, Jesus wasn’t the least bit stumped. Without a trace of hesitation, He declared:

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, **have ye not read** that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine (Matt. 22:29-33).

According to Jesus, the problem with the Sadducees was their ignorance of the Scriptures. The answer to their question was as close as the nearest copy of the Old Testament Scriptures. They could have (and should have) known the truth about the resurrection if they had properly meditated upon God's Word.

In each of the foregoing passages, Jesus made His point by asking, "**Have you not read?**" The ignorance of the Jewish religious leaders in these passages is glaring, especially in view of the fact that the synagogue and school were inseparable—the center of education for the Jewish boy was the Bible. Yet, Jesus observed that either the people had not read the Scriptures, or they had read them so carelessly that they failed to apprehend the truth. Jesus noticed that the people of His day had a tendency to give an ear instead of an eye. But then hearing has always been easier than reading and hearsay has always been more exciting than cold print. The problem is that we tend to listen more to what men have to say than to what God has said. Jesus saw this as something to be guarded against. For instance, in the sermon on the Mount, Jesus identified at least six prominent misconceptions held by His listeners (Matt. 5:21; Matt. 5:27; Matt. 5:31; Matt. 5:33; Matt. 5:38; Matt. 5:43). And why did the people believe these misconceptions to be true? It was because they had blindly trusted in what they heard someone else say. That is what happens when you substitute hearing for reading.

Simply put, when we substitute hearing for reading we allow men to do the talking and not God. And what is the end result? We end up with the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9). Multitudes of people would leave denominationalism if we could just get them to read their Bibles. Most people today who have rejected Christianity have never read the New Testament all the way through. Often, even those who claim to be Christians have never given serious consideration to what the Bible actually teaches. Too many of us only have a second-hand knowledge of God, or Jesus Christ, of personal responsibility, and of salvation.

Never have Bibles been so readily available, and never has the dearth of Bible knowledge in society been so appalling. If we wish to understand the Bible then we are going to have to “give attendance to reading” (1 Tim. 4:13). An unknown author wrote: “A bit of the Book in the morning, to order my onward way. A bit of the Book in the evening, to hallow the end of the day.”

The psalmist declared, “I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments” (Psm. 119:131). The Hebrew word translated “panted” in this passage conveys the idea of inhaling eagerly. What a vivid picture! Does this word picture accurately describe your yearning for the Word of God? Do you regard a daily study of God’s Word to be as vital to your spiritual existence as oxygen is to your physical survival?

When it comes to reading the Bible, are you like William McPherson? Who is William McPherson? After a tragic explosion, Mr. McPherson found himself with no hands and no eyes. In his despair, he turned to the Word of God. However, he could not read Braille with artificial hands. He attempted to read the Braille with his lips, but the dynamite had exploded in his face and he had no feeling left in his lips. One day he tried to read the dots with his

tongue and discovered that he could distinguish the Moon system of dashes. Unfortunately, his tongue became sore and bled constantly. Sometimes, he would stay up the entire night just to learn a single letter of the alphabet. Eventually, he mastered the entire alphabet and read the entire Bible with his tongue four times before his death. Surely, those of us who do not face the same physical challenges can find time to read the Word of God more regularly!

We Should Approach It Reflectively

As important as it is to read the Scriptures, there is more to it than going through the motions of reading words on a page. Merely reading a passage does not guarantee an understanding of the passage. It is better to meditate and reflect upon a text than it is to race through it just so we can say that we read a whole chapter. Furthermore, we should not read the Scriptures solely for the purpose of preparing to debate those who may be in error. Robert Boyle (1627-1691) wrote: "I use the Scripture, not as an arsenal, to be resorted to only for arms and weapons. . . but as a matchless temple, where I delight to be to contemplate the beauty, the symmetry and the magnificence of the structure." Meditating upon the Scriptures should motivate us to evaluate the course of our lives. John A. Hutton wisely observed: "The New Testament holds up a strong light by which a man can read even the small print of his soul." In fact, there are some sterling examples in both Testaments of individuals who saw the importance of approaching the written Word reflectively.

1. Joshua reflected upon the Word. When God commissioned Joshua to succeed Moses as the leader of the children of Israel, He said:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but **thou shalt meditate therein** day and night, that thou mayest observe to do

according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Josh. 1:8).

The word “meditate” in this passage should not be confused with the “transcendental meditation” of the New Age religions of our day, where people are encouraged to look within themselves for the answers to life’s problems.

On the contrary, the “meditation” required of us by God enjoins us to look within the pages of the Holy Scriptures for the secret to success. Hence, God told Joshua that his success would be dependent upon his acquaintance with, and obedience to, the Scriptures contained in the Law of Moses. A striking similarity exists between Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-3, in that both passages place daily meditation upon the Law of God (the Word of God) as a prerequisite to godly success and righteous prosperity.

Joshua reflected upon the Word and led others to do the same. He made sure to acquaint the children of Israel with the entirety of God’s revelation. In the presence of all the children of Israel, he copied the Law of Moses upon some stones and:

afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them (Josh. 8:34-35).

Please notice how even the “little ones” of the congregation of Israel were introduced to “**all** the words of the law.” What about us? Have we personally read all the words of the Law of Christ, the Law under which we live? Moreover, can it be said that we have introduced our “little ones” to all the words of the Law of Christ?

Furthermore, have we introduced them to the “things that were written aforetime” (Rom. 15:4), the Old Testament Scriptures, as well? Although we are not under the Old Testament today (Col. 2:14; Heb. 8:6-13), the things written within that covenant were written for our learning and for our admonition (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6; 1 Cor. 10:11).

2. The Israelites of Nehemiah’s day reflected upon the meaning of the Word. They were attentive to the reading of God’s Word but they went beyond mere hearing. Those who read the Word “read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Neh. 8:8). That the Israelites reflected seriously upon what they heard is evidenced by the fact that “all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (Neh. 8:9).

3. The Bereans reflected upon the Word. We have already emphasized the daily diligence of the Bereans to search the Scriptures. It is important to note that the text does not declare that the Bereans merely read the Scriptures. Rather, they “searched” the Scriptures. The Greek word translated “searched” is very vivid. It is the word *anakrino*, which means “to sift up and down, make careful and exact research as in legal processes as in Acts 4:9; Acts 12:19, etc.) the Scriptures for themselves.⁹ They reflected upon what the apostles were saying and then reflected upon the teaching of the Scriptures to see if what they were saying was so. If men and women of today would do the same thing—reflect upon what they hear preached, and then reflect upon the teaching of the Scriptures to see if the two harmonize, then the religious world would be united, rather than divided.

4. Paul exhorted Timothy to reflect upon the Word. Paul informed Timothy that, in order to be found approved before God, he would need to “study” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). Daniel B. Wallace notes that:

The King James Version should not be condemned here, for the word “study” in 1611 English meant very much what our idiomatic “pour yourself into this task” suggests. Only in later English usage did “study” take on a strictly cognitive sense.¹⁰

Concerning this word “study,” Kenneth Wuest observes: “The word today refers to the effort to learn by reading or thinking. It speaks of school, teacher, books, recitations, the application of the mind to the acquisition of knowledge. The Greek word has no connotation of this kind.”

Moulton and Milligan in their **Vocabulary of the Greek Testament**, that final court of appeal as to how first-century people used their Greek, give examples of its usage, the italics indicating the usage of the word being ours:

I wish to know that you are *hurrying on* the making of it; I am *anxious* that you should receive the letter; *make haste* therefore and put our little slave Artemidorus under pledge; that he may meet him and *do his best* until it is effected.” The word means, “make haste, be eager, give diligence, make an effort, do your best,” and has reference to all areas of Christian life and service.¹¹

The conclusions of Wallace and Wuest are in harmony with other lexicographers. Regarding the Greek word (*spoudazo*), Vine’s observes that it signifies “to hasten to do a thing, to exert oneself, endeavor, give diligence.”¹² It is interesting to note that the same word translated “study” in 2 Timothy 2:15 is also employed by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:9 and 2 Timothy 4:21, wherein it is translated “Do thy diligence.” German linguistic scholar Gerhard Kittel defines *spoudason* as “to get intensely involved” or “that which is worth striving for.” He explains:

The word was used in ancient military literature to compliment a soldier who followed his orders

out of more than a sense of duty or obligation, but because the warrior was convinced that the fight was worth the sacrifice. He not only followed his orders but he believed in them. Of the infantryman who gave his all in the line of fire, it was said he had *spoudason*. He was intensely in pursuit of his objective.¹³

We could almost translate it, “Make this your highest priority,” or “Pour yourself into this task.”¹⁴

While it is true that the word “study” does not, in the original language, convey the notion of poring over books, it is nevertheless true, as we observed in our first point, that the Christian must pour himself into poring over the inspired Book. Proverbs 23:12 declares: “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.” Indeed, “The believer who desires to grow in his faith must then, be in intense pursuit of the Word of God.”¹⁵ In order to be approved by God, Timothy was told that he would need to possess an attitude of zealous earnestness.

Timothy would need to be, as Paul put it, “a workman.” This same word is translated “labourer(s)” in a number of New Testament texts (Matt. 9:37-38; Matt. 20:1-2; Matt. 20:8). The word is also employed by Luke to describe the “workmen” in Acts 19 whose craftsmanship at making silver shrines provided their living. In extra-Biblical Greek literature the word is most often used of an agricultural laborer, a grape-picker. It was also applied to those who engaged in fishing, building, or the production of some artifact.

Although we do not know which occupation Paul had in mind when he used this figure, we do know that the basic meaning of the word is one who works for hire. It depicts one who works under the direction of another and is subject to the employer’s inspection of his work. Thus, the emphasis in this paragraph is that the workman needs

to be diligent in His labors so that he will not be ashamed when his work is inspected. The diligent workman does not need to be ashamed because he knows he has put in an honest day's work. Also, the workman with the right attitude is unashamed because he knows that God approves of his work, regardless of what anyone else thinks of it.¹⁶

In order to be approved of by God, we must be willing to toil and labor; we must not be shoddy workmen, but workers who craft our lives with care so that we may present God with the very best we have to offer. Many who own a Bible never read it, and of those who do read it, a small percentage actually take the time to reflect upon the meaning of what they have read. Perhaps you can identify with the sentiments expressed by Sir Thomas Fuller (1608-1661):

I discover an arrant laziness in my soul. For when I am to read a chapter in the Bible, before I begin I look where it ends. And if it ends not on the same side, I cannot keep my hands from turning over the leaf, to measure the length on the other side; if it swells to many verses, I begin to grudge. Surely my heart is not rightly affected. Were I truly hungry after heavenly food, I would not complain of meat. Scourge, Lord, this laziness of my soul; make the reading of your Word, not a penance, but a pleasure to me; so I may esteem that chapter in your Word the best which is the longest.

To study the Bible reflectively takes time. Martin Luther claimed: "I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf." Regrettably, based upon some of his erroneous views, Luther must have forgotten to shake some limbs, branches and twigs, and there are some leaves he must not have looked under at all. Nevertheless, his planned approach

to Bible study, if followed, is commendable—it requires us to reflect carefully upon each passage that we read.

Paul commanded the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) and explained how to do so in his correspondence to the Colossians: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16). The only way that we can carry out these commands is to read the Bible regularly and reflectively. When a farmer sows sparingly, he reaps sparingly. Likewise, when a Bible student studies sparingly, his harvest of knowledge is sparse, as well.

It is impossible to honor Peter’s admonition to “give an answer to every man to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15) if you do not possess a thorough familiarity with the Word of God. Of course, a thorough familiarity with God’s Word does not come by osmosis. It is reported that a member of the church came up to an exceedingly knowledgeable preacher and said, “I’d give half of my life to know the Bible as well as you do,” to which the preacher replied, “That is just about what it would cost you.”

Having said this, we hasten to point out that no one’s life is long enough for them to say that they have plumbed the depths of Bible teaching and have nothing left to learn. The Bible is so remarkable in its depth of teaching that there is always something for everyone to learn, whether new convert or long time member of the church. One aged preacher said that despite his decades of study, every time he went to read the Bible, he felt like a man walking to the ocean with a teaspoon to dip it dry.

Indeed, a real knowledge of the Scriptures involves blood, sweat, tears, and toil. A laziness to study begets ignorance and we must not be satisfied in our ignorance. Repeatedly, Paul emphasized to the readers of his epistles that he did not want them to remain in ignorance (1 Cor. 10:1; 1 Cor. 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:13; Rom. 11:25). Ignorance

does not lead to bliss when God's Word is involved. Rather, a lack of knowledge leads to destruction and rejection (Hos. 4:6). Therefore, we must take the time to regularly and reflectively read the Word of God.

We Should Approach It Receptively

It is not enough to read the Word of God—we must approach it with a receptive mind. Yet, Norman Vincent Peale diagnosed the problem with the majority of mankind: “The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.” As we reflect upon the Word of God we must remember that it is profitable not only for instruction, but also correction (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It does no good to read the Bible if we are not willing to accept what it teaches. We must be so receptive to the Word of God that we are willing to embrace its message, even if that message is critical of our belief system or behavior. Fortunately, the Bible provides us with some sterling examples of receptive hearts.

1. Samuel was receptive. When Samuel was a child, living under the care of Eli, the Lord called out to him one evening. Samuel mistakenly concluded that Eli had called for him and he ran unto Eli and said, “Here am I; for thou calledst me” (1 Sam. 3:5). Eli assured Samuel that he had not called for him and instructed him to go lie down. Samuel lay down again and the Lord called again. Samuel again went to Eli and Eli again explained that he had not called for him. After this happened the third time, “Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child” (1 Sam. 3:8). So Eli told Samuel, “Go lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9). Samuel went and lay down as Eli had told him to do, and indeed, the Lord called out “Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, **Speak; for thy servant heareth**” (1 Sam. 3:10).

The Lord does not speak directly to mankind today, but speaks to us through His Word. Nevertheless, as we approach the written Word, we should possess the same receptive attitude as Samuel did toward the Lord's spoken Word. As the Lord speaks to us through the avenue of His written Word, our attitude should be **“Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”**

2. Cornelius was receptive. An angel of the Lord appeared to Cornelius while he was praying and instructed him to send for Simon Peter to come and preach to him what he ought to do (Acts 10:1-8). Cornelius dispatched two of his household servants and a soldier to Joppa to retrieve Peter and bring him back to Caesarea (Acts 10:9-23). Cornelius waited anxiously for Peter to arrive, and when he did arrive Cornelius said, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear **all things** that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33).

Please observe that Cornelius did not say, “We are here to listen to your message, but be forewarned that we already know what we believe and we are satisfied with our religion, so don't bother trying to change us.” Quintilian said of some in his time that they might have become excellent scholars had they not been so persuaded of their scholarship already. Cornelius was not like that. On the contrary, he approached the message of God Word with a reverent, humble and receptive heart. He recognized, “we are all here before God” and thus he sincerely wanted to hear what the will of God was for his life. Someone has written, “Don't bother to give God instructions; just report for duty.” That is what Cornelius did!

3. The Bereans were receptive. Perhaps the Bereans are most famous for their diligence to search the Scriptures daily. However, Luke first commends them because “they received the word with all readiness of mind” (Acts 17:11). Before coming to Berea Paul preached in Thessalonica:

But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people (Acts 17:5).

The hostility against Paul and Silas became so great that they had to escape by night into Berea. Although some in Thessalonica had received the Word (1 Thess. 2:13), they were the exception rather than the rule. However, Paul and Silas found a different mindset in Berea. The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they received the Word with all readiness of mind (Acts 17:11).

Sadly, many are not so receptive to the Word of God. Some of the people in Isaiah's day said to the prophets, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:" (Isa. 30:10). Jesus described some whose hearts were the very antithesis of the Bereans:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:15).

Stephen indicted his hearers, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts 7:51). Unlike the Bereans, some "receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10). Peter described scoffers who were anything but open-minded—they were "willingly ignorant" (2 Pet. 3:5).

The Book of Proverbs contains much encouragement to be receptive to God's instruction. One such passage exhorts:

My son, **if thou wilt receive my words**, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou

incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:1-5).

The noble Bereans certainly possessed the attitudes described in the passage above.

We Should Approach It Responsively

Real exhilaration does not come merely from an examination of the Divine text. True joy comes only when we make application of that which we have read. Revelation 1:3 says, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein.” Jesus said, “blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it” (Luke 11:28). Our responsibility is not merely to possess a copy of the Bible, nor is it our duty merely to read the words that are found in the Bible. Rather, our responsibility is to read and heed the Word of God.

1. The Israelites of Exodus 24 were responsive to the Word of God. “Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exod. 24:3). Moses then “took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exod. 24:8). The Israelites understood at the time that it was not enough for them to hear the words that Moses read—they needed to respond to these words with obedience.

2. The Israelites of Nehemiah 8 were responsive to the Word of God. On the second day that the Israelites assembled to hear the Word of God “they found written in

the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month” (Neh. 8:14). As they continued to listen to the reading they learned that:

they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written (Neh. 8:15).

How did the Israelites respond to the Word of God they had heard?

So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness (Neh. 8:16-17).

The Israelites didn’t just listen to the Word of God—they immediately responded by doing exactly what the written Word required of them. They did not argue that the words they were hearing from Leviticus 23:39-44 were hundreds of years old and, therefore, not culturally relevant to them. Another commendable aspect of their response is that they **immediately** did what the written Word said to do even though none of their parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. had ever done so! If men and women of today would demonstrate the same responsiveness to the Word of God, family loyalties to manmade denominations and the doctrines and commandments of men would be replaced by an unwavering commitment follow the Word of God!

3. Those converted in the Book of Acts were responsive to the Word of God. Multitudes heard the Word preached on the Day of Pentecost, but not everyone responded favorably to the message. However, about 3000 “gladly received” the Word and were baptized (Acts 2:41). A multitude of Samaritans, and one Ethiopian man in the wilderness, responded obediently to the Word of God (Acts 8:12; Acts 8:26-40). Saul of Tarsus responded favorably to the message of Ananias by arising from his prayer to be baptized to wash away his sins in the blood of Christ (Acts 9; Acts 22; Acts 26). Cornelius responded to Peter’s sermon by being baptized (Acts 10:48).

It is not enough to be hearers of the Word. We must do what it says (Jas. 1:22). Many in the NT did not respond to the Word! Felix heard the Word and even trembled—yet he refused to respond in obedience (Acts 24:24-25). Festus heard the Word and mocked Paul for preaching it. Agrippa heard the same message but was only “almost persuaded” (Acts 26:24-28).

Someone has noted: “Men will wrangle for religion; write for it; fight for it; die for it; anything but live for it.” What the world needs now is more men and women who will approach the Word of God reverently, regularly, receptively, and responsively.

We Should Approach It Retentively

It is not enough to be initially responsive to the Word of God. We must also approach it retentively. The Psalmist possessed such an attitude when he said:

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.
With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let
me not wander from thy commandments. **Thy
word have I hid in mine heart, that I might
not sin against thee** (Psm. 119:9-11).

Simply put, we must retain our allegiance to the Word of God. The Parable of the Sower depicts some who initially received the Word but who did not retain their commitment to it (Luke 8:13-14).

To illustrate the need of retaining our commitment to the teaching of the Word of God consider the episodes wherein someone has no difficulty accepting the Word of God on marriage, divorce and remarriage—until their own son or daughter becomes embroiled in an unlawful relationship, at which time a commitment to the Word of God is replaced by a commitment to loving son or daughter more than Jesus!

When we say that we must approach the Bible retentively we are saying that, once we have understood and accepted the truth of God’s Word, we must retain our commitment to embracing it no matter what it may cost us to do so. We must not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men” (Eph. 4:14).

Finally, when we say that we must approach the Bible retentively we mean to say that we must retain a commitment to approach it reverently, reflectively, receptively and responsively. We must not commence our study of the Word of God with these attitudes only to dispense of them later.

Conclusion

The importance of handling aright the Word is so that we might be “approved unto God.” The Greek word translated “approved” (*dokimos*) has a rich meaning. **The Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon** explains:

In the ancient world there was no banking system as we know it today, and no paper money. All money was made from metal, heated until liquid, poured into moulds and allowed to cool.

When the coins were cooled, it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely. In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity, who would accept no counterfeit money. They were men of honour who put only genuine full weighted money into circulation. Such men were called “dokimos” or “approved”.¹⁷

One of the best ways to understand the meaning of *dokimos* is to look at its antonym, which Paul employs in 1 Corinthians 9:27: “But I keep under my body, and bring it unto subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” The word translated “castaway” is from the Greek *adokimos* and is translated by the ASV as “rejected.” In the banking world, your loan is either approved or rejected.

On the Day of Judgment, the stakes are much higher than a bank loan, but it still all boils down to one of two results—you and I will either be approved or rejected by God. May we never forget that our attitudes toward the Bible will very much determine whether we hear the words “Depart from me” (Matt. 25:41) or the words, “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

Endnotes

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2 J. F. Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, & Dallas Theological Seminary, “2 Timothy 2:15,” **The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures**, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

3 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 584.

4 **The Bible Exposition Commentary**, (SP Publications, Inc., Copyright (c) 1989, All rights reserved).

5 “2 Timothy 2:15,” **New Geneva Study Bible**, electronic ed, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995).

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7 William Evans and S. Maxwell Coder, **The Great Doctrines of the Bible**, Electronic version, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998, c1974), . pp. 194-210.

8 Unless otherwise indicated all quotations in this chapter are taken from the **Parsons Bible Software** program Bible Illustrator.

9 A. T. Robertson, “Acts 17:11,” **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, (Vol. V c1932, Vol. VI c1933, 1997 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems).

10 **Conservative Theological Journal Volume 1**, (Tyndale Theological Seminary, 1997; 2002) p. 109..

11 **Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 117**, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1960;2002), pp. 45-46.

12 Vine, p. 169.

13 Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, 10 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 7:559, p. 560.

14 **Conservative Theological Journal Volume 1** Tyndale Theological Seminary, 1997;2002), p. 109).

15 Ibid, p. 147.

16 Ibid, p. 112.

17 James Strong, “Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order,” **The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible**, (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship).

CHAPTER 3

By Studying An Accurate Translation

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

YEAR AFTER YEAR IT continues to be a deep delight and high honor to appear upon this good, grand and great lectureship. This year, 2006, is no exception. B. J. is a master in crafting lectureships designed to magnify the Godhead and lift all of us to higher and holier peaks of piety. My thanks to him, Wayne, Larry, Con and all Southaven members for this treasured invitation to speak and pen a chapter for the book. Special thanks to Tommy and Peggy Shull for opening their home to Irene and me each year. Their hospitality abounds in wonderful fashion.

Vital to correctness in understanding the Bible is the ardent acceptance of a correct, reverent and dignified translation. Translations are necessary for most do not speak Hebrew and Aramaic, languages in which the Old Testament was written or koine Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written.

Beginning Scriptures

Thirty-five centuries ago the Sage of Sinai wrote:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord

your God which I command you...What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it (Deut. 4:2; Deut. 12:32).¹

In about the middle of the Bible, Inspiration stated, “Every word of God is pure...Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Prov. 30:5-6). Purity attaches to the Word of God—not the words of fallible men. It is a literary crime of egregious proportions for men to add to the perfected, all-sufficient Word of God. His Word needs no adjustments from erring humanity. Human additions tamper with that perfected product. God has magnified His Word even above His name as per Psalm 138:2. He will not take lightly those who add to or take from His wonderful and worthy Words.

In bold and brilliant fashion Israel’s Sweet Singer wrote, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psm. 119:89). Foolish men come along and seek to unsettle that settled, fixed, unchangeable and inviolate Word of Jehovah God. Men should tremble who even contemplate such. In Mark 7:7, Mark 7:9, and Mark 7:13 we hear our Lord declare with force and finality:

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men...Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition...Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

The Lord’s Pharisaic enemies majored in tampering with what Moses and Hebrew prophets had written. They should have been afraid to do so but no such fear characterized them in the least. What amazing stupidity this was on their part.

In 2 Corinthians 2:17, and 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul wrote:

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ...But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Note two points pertinent to our study. (1) Paul and his fellow helpers did not corrupt the Word of God. It was not up **for sale** to the highest bidder. Paul knew from Solomon the Sage in Proverbs 23:23 that we are to buy the truth and sell it not. (2) Paul and those with him did not handle it deceitfully. They handled it rightly and reverently (2 Tim. 2:15). New version translators have committed both evils. They have sold it out to what will sell; they have handled it deceitfully. They have added; they have subtracted; they have substituted; they have altered; they have changed. For a surety Proverbs 23:23 has not been a translational guideline with many of the translators of modern versions.

In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul stated in forceful fashion:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

For a surety Galatians 1:6-9 has not been a priority passage with modern Bible translators.

We are admonished in 2 Timothy 2:15 to divide rightly or handle correctly the Word of truth. This they have not done!

Revelation 22:18-19 places a weighty woe upon those who add to or take from the Word of the Lord. John wrote tersely:

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.

Not surprisingly, **The Reader's Digest Bible** left out these two verses even as they diminished God's Word by some 300,000 words.

Do all the foregoing apply to Bible translators? Most assuredly!

Prayerful Wisdom From A Godly Elder

Several years ago I was in the capital city of a northern state to preach in a Gospel meeting. Before I arose to speak that Sunday morning, one of the elders led the prayer. He was a practicing attorney in that city and had argued cases before the U. S. Supreme Court in Washington, D. C. He ranked high in judicial circles and was well respected. In the prayer that morning he prayed with fervency in his petitions, "Lord, may we never tamper with thy Word." This should be the prayerful sentiment of all of us in attitude, word and action.

The new Bibles have tampered greatly and grievously with the Word of the Lord. Payday is coming for such literary crimes against high and holy Heaven and their Book Divine.

Translational Accuracy And Biblical Understanding

Like the proverbial horse and carriage and glove and hand they go together. Not many religionists can read the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament or the koine Greek of the New Testament. Hence, there is an imperative need for translations in the native tongues of people who read and relish the Bible. This was one of the motivations for the Septuagint Version in third century B. C. More and more Greek was being spoken and less and less Hebrew appeared on the lips of Jewish people. So the Greek Septuagint Version became a literary reality. It was the version read by first century people. The eunuch was reading from it in Acts 8:26ff. Philip began at that Scripture and called what the eunuch was reading Scripture, and indeed it was.

There are three imperatives for a good translation. (1) It must be accurate. (2) It must be reverent and dignified. (3) It must be readable and understandable. We are dealing with God's Word—not a morning edition of a newspaper or a comic section such as *Blondie*, *Dennis* or *Family Circus*. Some have been heard to say that they would like to have a version that reads like the local paper. There is nothing in our home more worthless than a day old newspaper. It is read and discarded within a matter of a few hours or days at the most.

Genesis 1-3 are great places with which to begin. If Genesis 1:1, with its ten Words in the KJV, are incorrectly handled, then we cannot understand that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Genesis 1:1 in **The Living Bible Paraphrased** by Kenneth Taylor is a poor substitute for the elegance of Genesis 1:1 in the stately and well beloved KJV. Unless we have accuracy in Genesis 1:1-31 we will be minus proper understanding. In **The Reader's Digest Bible** we cannot tell when Genesis 1

ends and Genesis 2 begins for they have eliminated chapter and verse indicators. In Genesis 1, we have light, atmosphere, botany, sun, moon, stars galore, fowls, fish, land animals and man as the climax of all earthly creation. Unless we have accuracy of translation, we will not have the necessary details of how man was made, woman was made and the marital tie binding them together. We will not have God's great ideal for marriage—one man for one woman for life. We will not understand the origin of sin within humanity, the penalties imposed and the first ray of Messianic sunshine to shine in Genesis 3:15. When Prefaces treat the early chapters as fanciful stories or hand-me-down traditions, there cannot be reverential understanding. When the Mosaic authorship for Genesis is denied; and/or editor's various sources, or editors are accepted, there cannot be proper understanding. When Genesis 1-11 are treated by modern translators as myths, there cannot be proper understanding by the unsuspecting readers.

Unless we have accuracy of translation we will have no understanding of Enoch, the longevity of certain patriarchs, Noah and the ark, the life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the purity of a transplanted Hebrew youth, Joseph, into the Land of the Nile. We do not have all of Genesis in **The Reader's Digest Bible**. They began their destructive work of deletion early in the Bible's first book.

Look at how Kenneth Taylor misleads his readers in Genesis 6:1ff. He makes impossible a correct understanding of a crystal clear passage in a reliable Bible like the KJV. He has sexual unions between evil spirits and earthly women. The progeny produced resulted in giants! He tampered with Scripture in inexcusable fashion.

I do not have **any** confidence in so-called translators who deny the Mosaic authorship of Genesis of the Pentateuch or consider the first eleven chapters of Genesis to be filled with myths, legends, etc.

Unless we have translational accuracy we will have little or no understanding of the Pentateuch, the twelve historical books, the wisdom literature in Hebrew poetry or the seventeen prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi. Minus translational accuracy, how can we understand Christ in prophecy? The way the modernistic RSV, one of its own translators by the name of Harry M. Orlinsky called the RSV the Bible of the **liberal** Protestant community, mistranslated Isaiah 7:14 not only precludes a proper understanding of that precious, Messianic prophecy but makes impossible its connection with Matthew 1:22-23. Suppose we had nothing but the RSV on Isaiah 7:14; there is no way we could understand the virgin conception and virgin birth of the Christ. “Young women,” the RSV preference here, have given birth to countless billions of children since Eve was pregnant with Cain. The RSV muddied the prophetically accurate waters of an amazing and brilliant prophecy about Jesus becoming Incarnate.

The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, put out by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, rewrites Micah 5:2 to fit its fatal teaching that Christ is a created being and not eternal as Micah affirms He was/is.

Before leaving the Old Testament one more observation is in order. Translational inaccuracies keep us from understanding that the Abrahamic promises center in “seed” with no ‘s,’ in a descendant and not descendants as per Galatians 3:16. The RSV is totally misleading here in its rendering of Genesis 22:18.

How can there be an understanding of Christ’s intentions for the Law of Moses when one has versions en masse saying Christ would **not** abolish or annul Mosaic law and yet Paul has Him doing that very thing in Ephesians 2:15?

How can there be an understanding of Matthew 19:9 when perverted Bibles revise and rewrite that passage? Fornication needs to be retained and not changed to “marital unfaithfulness.” There is more than one way, sexually, that a mate can be unfaithful to a spouse—abuse, neglect, failure to provide the essentials, etc.

How can there be an understanding of man’s basic nature when the NIV injects “sinful nature” renderings into Romans 7, Romans 8 and Galatians 5?

How can there be an understanding of Mark 16:9-20 when it is omitted entirely or relegated to footnote status?

How well could the readers of the RSV in 1946 understand one of the qualifications of an elder when this perversion had “married only once?” This would keep an elder who lost his first wife and married a fine Christian woman for a second marriage from serving ever again in the eldership. What ineptness!

How can there be an understanding of the place of works in the redemptive process when perverted version after perverted version will have salvation by “faith only” or “faith alone?” How well do you suppose Luther’s German readers understood Romans 3 when the Protestant reformer finished his perversion of Romans 3:27-28?

How well will the understanding of English readers be on Acts 20:7 when more than one translation changes the first day of the week to Saturday or the seventh day?

Real Scriptural understanding cannot be severed from translational accuracy.

Word Understanding Is Essential

The Bible is a **Word** translation. It is not God’s **thoughts** couched in **words** of man’s choice, a favorite and fatal theory of Bible inspiration. Thought inspiration is **not** Biblical inspiration by any stretch of the imagination. David in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament combined insights to this eloquent effect:

The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his **word** was in my tongue...Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Cor. 2:13, Emphasis added).

Is every Word in the Bible important? Moses thought so and wrote, "...that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by **every word** that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3, Emphasis mine, RRT). Jesus thought so and stated, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by **every word** that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4, Emphasis mine, RRT). Word in Deuteronomy 8:3 is italicized meaning it is supplied by translators. However, it is not italicized in Matthew 4:4.

So precise and definite is Sacred Scripture that cases can be presented where an argument depends on verb tense or the singularity of noun usage. In His confrontational/verbal battle with the skeptical Sadducees on Tuesday of the Final Week, He based a strong logical argument for life beyond death on verb usage. At the burning bush the Lord did not say "I **was** the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," but "**I am**" the God of these three worthy patriarchs. These three still lived in the sphere of departed spirits—Abraham's bosom as per Luke 16:19-31 (Matt. 22:13; Exod. 3:6). In Mark 12:27 we have the present **is**—not **was**—employed. Verb tenses were/are all important.

What about precise and definite noun usage? Galatians 3:16 is a clear case in point, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Here, a potent Pauline argument centers on whether a term is plural or singular. It is precisely singular here in the Galatian passage.

Sometimes an argument may depend on the definite article in usage. Should it be “**the** baptism of repentance” as in the KJV and ASV or “**a** baptism of repentance” as in the NASB (emphasis added, RRT)? **The** and **a** do not have the same significance grammatically! **The New American Standard Bible** translators apparently did not know this. In his informative and scholarly work, **Christian Baptism**, Alexander Campbell made a very effective argument on the usage of the definite article on Mark 1:4. **The Living Oracles**, published by Campbell during the 1820’s, has “the immersion.” That “**the**” is important. Jude spoke of “the faith” or “the Gospel system” in Jude 3.

The KJV has nearly 775,000 Words from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. How important are these Words? Enough so that Israel was warned about adding to or diminishing in Deuteronomy 4:2; Deuteronomy 12:32 and Proverbs 30:5-6. Enough so that adding and subtracting are strictly forbidden in Revelation 22:18-19—verses axed by **The Reader’s Digest Bible**. Even if John has the book of Revelation only in mind with these two verses, the adding and subtracting principle applies forcefully and fully to the other twenty-six books of the New Testament. **If not, why not?**

Word importance was not all that important to the RSV people in 1946. They left out more Words in Mark 16 than they put in—twelve verses omitted and eight retained. This amounted to more than 160 Words left out of just one chapter—the shortest chapter in Mark’s Gospel record. Subsequent versions have done immeasurable damage to Mark 16:9-20 by casting doubts on whether the verses actually belong and were written by John Mark.

Word importance meant little or nothing to **The Reader’s Digest** people. They omitted about one-half of the Old Testament and about one-fourth of the New

Testament. This amounts to about 300,000 Words of the Bible or roughly forty percent. Yet one of the main translators of this pernicious product said they had not tampered with the doctrine of the Bible. It is all doctrinal. Doctrine is teaching, and the whole Bible teaches. If not, which part fails to instruct in one way or another?

Some people have been known to say, “I like the new Bibles because they contain more truth than the older ones do.” That statement is made out of sheer ignorance! The truth of the matter is that they get shorter and shorter all the time. This means they contain less and less truth.

Version Mistranslations And Biblical Misunderstanding

Unfortunately, they go hand-in-hand. The way Kenneth Taylor, my, but what he has done to the **Taylor** name, mishandles Genesis 6:1ff leads the highly unsuspecting to conclude that in ancient times evil beings from the spirit world consorted sexually with human women with giants as the progeny. Sons of God took daughters of men we are told by Moses here. The former were righteous men; the latter were wicked women. The former possibly were sons of Seth and the latter possibly the daughters of Cain. Genesis 6 cannot be understood in the perverted Bible, **The Living Bible Paraphrased**.

There cannot be a reverential understanding of 1 Samuel 20:30 if one goes by the crude, vulgar and coarse rendering of LBP. Even denominational people have protested against such and found fault with their book stores peddling such. Yet Billy Graham helped to popularize it when it came out during the 1970's. He and his crusade people bought them en masse. They became a part of the problem of Biblical perversions—not a part of the answer to such.

There can be no understanding of Psalm 51:5 by the renderings found in LBP and the NIV which have David

conceived and born in sin. In Psalm 51, David is confessing sins of which he was guilty as a **man**, perhaps fifty years of age at the time. He was not an adulterer or a murderer at conception or birth! In no sense of the term is he discussing his status at the moment of conception or at birth. David the man sinned and not David in his mother's womb. Yet Taylor's perverted product and the infamous NIV show an unrelenting bias in favor of Adamic or original sin which is Calvinism in full, iniquitous bloom. For Psalm 51:5, Taylor's perversion reads, "But I was born a sinner, yes, from the moment my mother conceived me." The NIV, the darling among the liberals, has, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Yet in Psalm 139:13-14 the NIV has David to say:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

In this latter passage is David expressing thanks that the Lord had fearfully and wonderfully made him a sinner at conception and birth? How utterly inept can translators be?

In Ephesians 2:3 Taylor perverts this passage to read or misread:

All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with evil natures, and were under God's anger just like everyone else.

John Calvin could not have expressed it any better for his error-filled philosophy. But the NIV is not a whit better teaching in both Romans 7 and Romans 8 and Galatians 5 about our evil or sinful nature. Be it kept in mind that

we get our nature from God, and it is not evil or sinful when He bestows it. “By nature” in a reliable Bible refers to a lifestyle caused by long, continued practice which has become habitual. Taylor was a thorough-going Calvinist when he put out his product. So were many of the NIV translators when they came to the significant *sarx* and rendered it sinful nature instead of as flesh. Calvinistic translations make nearly impossible right understanding of Sacred Scripture.

The New World Translation Of The Holy Scriptures, by Jehovah’s Witnesses, does irreparable damage to Christ’s Deity in Psalm 45:6-7 and Hebrews 1:8-9 by making Him a creature, a created being—not God, not the Second Person of the Godhead, not an eternal being. In John 1:1-3 they have Him a little god—not God in the upper case. Yet they have Him as “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father” in Isaiah 9:6. How can He be “Eternal Father” and “Mighty God” and be a created being? Such ineptness as translators!

The way the RSV mistranslates Isaiah 7:14 makes impossible intelligently understanding it in light of Matthew 1:22-23. “Young woman” is not an accurate translation of the Hebrew term, *ha almah* or **the** virgin. Young women have given birth to countless billions of children from Eve to the present. Only **one** virgin has done so and that was Mary of Nazareth. Isaiah 7:14 is not a dual prophecy; it is a straight-line prophecy with one virgin, one virgin conceived and one virgin born Son and a one time occurrence—Mary and Jesus—not one in Isaiah’s era and another in Mary’s day.

If one has chosen Phillips’ work on the New Testament, how can he approach Bible Study in a reverent and understandable way with Phillips’ low view of how the Bible came about to be? Phillips was not convinced at all that Biblical scribes knew they were writing Scripture.

He did not think Paul was concerned about consistency between what he wrote in earlier life—1 and 2 Thessalonians—and what he wrote in later life—1, 2 Timothy and Titus. He did not believe Paul was that concerned with accuracy—dotting i’s and crossing t’s as we might express it in our English language. Phillips was proficient in “begging the question” or assuming something to be true without proving it. I think I know why he offered nothing but his own senseless allegations relative to these matters. He could not prove such! Biblical understanding is not derived from low views held and propagated by translational misfits and those who slavishly follow them.

In the NIV there is a “flat contradiction” between what they have in Matthew 5:17, and what they injected into Ephesians 2:15. Biblical understanding does not derive from perversions that deliberately place contradictions into the Sacred Text.

The NIV has an untenable rendering in Acts 2:31 as they inject “grave” instead of “Hades” as in the ASV. The spirit of Jesus that Friday afternoon did not go into the grave but into Abraham’s bosom or a place of paradise. Were I a Jehovah’s Witness, I would prefer the NIV on this passage even over **The New World Translation Of Holy Scriptures**.

In Ephesians 5:19 we have “make music” in the NIV, “play music” in **Beck’s Bible**, and “instruments along with voices” in the **Amplified New Testament**. All three favor mechanical music in Christian worship. In this contested passage the instrument is provided; it is the heart—not an organ, piano or ten piece band!

Inaccurate Translations And How To Be Saved

Can a messed-up, mixed-up and unreliable translation keep one from understanding Heaven’s redeeming plan of pardon? Most assuredly!

The Reader's Digest Bible teaches people it is all right to leave out large portions of the Bible. Suppose a person wants to be saved in Calvinistic style or minus any and all conditions of conversion or stipulations of salvation. Let him come to the hearing passages and out they go. Let him come to faith passages and cut them out. Let him come to penitent passages and purge them. Let him come to confession passages and remove them. Baptism is so hated and rejected in the religious realm that it will be no big deal just to cut all them out of the Bible. How can there be Biblical reverence and Scriptural understanding with such defiant attitudes and rebellious actions prevailing? There cannot be!

Suppose one is struggling with the essentiality of baptism and is pointed to Mark 16:16 by the soul winner working with him. He has an old RSV handed down from his parents. This is his study Bible. He turns to this passage only to find its total omission. There is nothing in the text about the final twelve verses, only some added footnotes. How is he going to react? Perhaps he will say, "how do we know all other New Testament references to baptism ought to be **left in** when Mark 16:16 has been **removed**?" Attitudes like this are not conducive to Scriptural reverence and Scriptural understanding.

Jesus Christ must have His rightful place in the scheme of human redemption. He is Lord, Head, Builder, Foundation and Saviour. Yet the Catholic world is flooded with Petrine concepts of his primacy and being head of the church. How can they understand Matthew 16:18 when text and accompanying footnotes have Peter as the rock upon which the church is built? The way they handle Matthew 16:18 keeps them from understanding 1 Corinthians 3:11 where Christ is foundation and no man can lay any other save the Lord Jesus Christ. On this passage **The New English Bible** has out-poped the Pope

and out-Romed Rome in its perversion. The Catholic world does not get anywhere close to the New Testament plan of pardon for people this side of Calvary.

The Protestant world has been sold such a bill of goods on “faith only” that most people do not question faith and only being linked. Martin Luther connected “faith” and “alone” in his German translation of Romans 3:28 (in reality a mistranslation). This kept him from appreciating and understanding James in the epistle section and especially James 2:14-26. Kenneth Taylor injected faith only in Romans 1:16-17. He has salvation **by faith** accomplished from start to finish. He linked “faith only” to Abraham in Romans 4:12. Abraham was **never** a faith only servant of Jehovah God. This is putting the creed of “faith only” into what they call the Bible.

The NIV injects faith only into Romans 1:16-17 as that perverted product has “salvation by faith from first to last.”

So does Bratcher in his so-called **Good News For Modern Man**. He must have forgotten his faith only passages when he arrived at James 2:24 for he contradicts his own former affirmations. The creedal concept of faith only has galloped, not crept, into modern Bibles with a rapidity that is amazing indeed.

Most versions, with which I am familiar, will omit Acts 8:37 with the good confession made by the inquiring eunuch. My Bible, the KJV, does not do this for which I am profoundly grateful.

The NIV is no friend or supporter of the Gospel plan of salvation. It has people included in Christ at the point of hearing (Eph. 1:13). People are not included in Christ at the point of hearing. That voids the rest of pardon’s plan.

Note how the NIV renders Romans 10:10, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Note

the verb tenses—**are** justified and **are** saved. Here are some problems created by this perverted volume. If one is included **in** Christ at hearing, then he would have to get **out** of Christ prior to belief in order that he might be justified at the point of belief. Then before the state of confession is reached he would have to get **out** of Christ again in order that he might be saved when he confesses. But the NIV has people baptized **into** Christ in Galatians 3:27. Therefore such people would have to get **out** of Christ again prior to baptism in order to enter Him at that moment. Such is utterly ridiculous and yet the NIV has really caught on with multitudes of our people. The **why** escapes me entirely.

Wisdom From Brother Guy N. Woods

Shortly after the NIV came out during the 1970's I had a conversation with brother Woods in Memphis, Tennessee. I asked him what he thought about the New Bible, the NIV, that had just come out. He responded, "Brother Taylor, as little as I think of the RSV, I would prefer it over the NIV. The NIV is shot through with error." Wisdom had spoken! An accurate assessment had been offered!

Conclusion

Unreliable Bibles result in mass misunderstandings of God's Word. This is why I stay with the KJV and the ASV of 1901. There is absolutely **nothing** I need to hear, believe, and obey in order to become saved and remain saved but what I can find in the KJV of my childhood and now the Bible of my adulthood. It was my mother's Bible and dad's Bible but it is mine also. I love it dearly.

Endnote

1 All Scriptures are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER 4

By Learning How The Bible Authorizes

Dave Leonard

Introduction

AUTHORITY IN RELIGION MAY seem to some to be so complicated as to be beyond their comprehension. But, authority is really a quite simple matter. Adults and children alike understand and practice the principles of authority every day. If you went to the butcher and asked for a pound of beef, you would be quite upset if the butcher decided to give you half a pound, and even more so if he charged you for two pounds. A sign on a restroom door which reads “Men” or “Women,” leaves no question as to who is authorized to enter the room. When children meet in a yard or a park to play baseball, they must follow the standard of baseball rules and regulations; otherwise, they are playing another game. We depend upon standards of authority for practically everything we do.

Authority is needed in the home, school, business, and the nation. If we are going to have any kind of order in our lives, we must have some standard of authority to follow. The same is true in regard to religion.

What causes us to practice what we do in spiritual matters? What guides or directs us in the choices we make regarding religion? How do we determine what is right or wrong? This study is of utmost importance. In reality, understanding and obeying Biblical authority is at the

heart of every religious matter. In order to establish the right or wrong of anything, we must first establish what constitutes authority in religion.

“Authority” (Greek: *exousia*) is defined as “the power of authority; right to exercise power (Rom. 13:1; Acts 1:7; Matt. 8:9); having the ability or strength to do something (Mark 2:5-12); permission or right to do something (1 Cor. 9:4-12; Heb. 13:10).”^{1, 2} Divine authority, then, would be described as God’s superiority, based on His Deity and Sovereignty, which gives Him the right to command and make final judgments.

We learn that one of the most confusing and backward times in Israel’s history was a time when God’s people had no respect for His standard of authority. In Judges 21:25, the Scripture says, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). This is the reason for many of the divisions in the religious world today. Multitudes of religious groups are simply doing what is right in their own eyes. We live in a world where many people, like the ancient Jews, are content to establish their own righteousness. Listen to the apostle Paul from Romans 10:1-3:

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

This is extremely unfortunate because the Bible says that in true Christianity, everyone should “speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor. 1:10), and that all should “walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (Phil. 3:16). In Matthew 7:21-23,

Jesus says that many religious people would be rejected at the judgment because of iniquity or lawlessness. In 2 John 9-11, the apostle says:

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

Without a standard, there can be no right or wrong, no harmony or unity, all would be confusion and chaos. Where do we get our authority or permission to do what we do in religion? There are two, and **only two**, sources of authority in religion, human or Divine:

And when He was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him as He was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell Me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And He said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things (Matt. 21:23-27).

The purpose of this lecture is to discuss these crucial matters by looking at several points of study: (1) Reasons for Religious Authority, (2) Revelation of Religious Authority, (3) Regularity of Religious Authority, (4) Recognition of Religious Authority, (5) Range of Religious Authority and (6) Reactions toward Religious Authority.

Reasons For Religious Authority

Direction

Man has proven, from the beginning of time, that he needs the instructions of God to direct his life. When man hearkens to any other source, the inevitable end is sin (1 John 3:4). The first three chapters of Genesis record the beginning of God's relationship with man: Creation - Prohibition - Transgression. The digression of man from sinlessness into shame is seen as we move past their innocent nakedness (Gen. 2:25) to the temptation, deception, transgression and guilt that marks their souls (Gen. 3:1-21). The result of ignoring God's authority always brings the same result: sin.

In Jeremiah 44:15-23 we read of the rebellion of Judah against the "word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord" (Jer. 44:16). Refusing to hearken unto Jeremiah, they chose their own sources of authority. Jeremiah records their many attempts to replace God as their authoritative guide. They turned to their own wants or desires, to their fathers, to their rulers, to what is popular and to what is prosperous (Jer. 44:17). The women even turned to their husbands as their authority (Jer. 44:19). But, none of these things are the true standard of authority in religion (Jer. 44:20-22). They were suffering because they had "not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies" (Jer. 44:23).

Jeremiah wrote of man's need of God's instructions: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). The words of Isaiah explain further why man is in need of Divine guidance:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither
are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as

the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

The wise man advised against man following his own path: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12; Prov. 16:25). Man must have the direction of his Creator in order to be knowledgeable and obedient to Him.

Division

Shortly after the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, we read of the shedding of the blood of animals (Gen. 3:21). In almost the next breath we are reading of their sons, Cain and Abel, as they offer sacrifices to God (Gen. 4:1-5). In the sacrifices of blood under the Old Testament, we see a type of Jesus, Who died for our sins (Heb. 9:12-10:18). There had to be a payment of blood for the sins of man because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) and “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

Man was separated from God by his transgressions. Isaiah rebuked Israel for their sins and declared their position before God:

Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

In similar fashion, Peter refers to the barrier that sin puts between God and the sinner: “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12; cf. John 9:31). Man needs God’s words because of the separation of sin.

Damnation

Separation from God, our Creator and Sustainer, is a terrible thought. But, the real tragedy of the situation of sin is the damnation of a soul. The Bible is replete with expressions of condemnation of sin, all with one theme, the spiritual death of the sinner (Gen. 2:16-17; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 1:32; Rom. 6:23). Transgression of God's Word brings only the wrath of God in judgment (Col. 3:5-6).

We see many Biblical pictures of the judgment of God carried out physically upon sinners. One of the most notable of these accounts is the flood (Gen. 6-8), of which the purpose was to:

destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them (Gen. 6:7).

The reason for the Lord's change of mind was, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Verse six shows us the grief of the Lord over the sins of man; yet, His grief would not keep Him from executing judgment for those sins.

Consider also the account of God's judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). In each of these instances, God's judgment was carried out physically, giving us evidence of the "severity of God" toward sin (Rom. 11:22).

While physical judgment brings fear upon men, it is not on the same plane with the spiritual, eternal judgment which God has promised to execute upon all sin (Rom. 1:18-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-6; et al). The Bible informs that no one will escape the judgment of God (2 Cor. 5:10; John 5:28-29; Rom. 14:12). As we stand before God, all sinners will receive their "just recompense of reward" (Heb. 2:1-4).

Man needs the revelation of God because of the condemnation of sin.

Deliverance

Misdirection, transgression, separation and condemnation are words describing the severing of our relationship with God. Because of the seriousness of being cut off from God and all spiritual blessings and ultimately being condemned, we must seek deliverance from our sins and their consequences. Once man transgresses, there is nothing he can devise or do to justify himself before God (Rom. 5:6). God loves man and has instructed him in the way of deliverance through His grace (Tit. 2:11-12). We depend upon God to offer reconciliation for our broken relationship, which He has done through the blood of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Heb. 2:17). Because of our separation from God we must be “bought back” or redeemed from our sins, again, through the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14). Without God’s Word, no one would understand sin and its consequences or the forgiveness from sin that is offered through the blood of Jesus (1 John 2:1-2). Man is in need of God’s inspired revelation and the deliverance from sin which it supplies (Rom. 1:16-17; John 6:66-68).

Revelation Of Religious Authority

Inspiration Of God

In the powerful statement of Hebrews 1, Scripture declares that God has spoken to man:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb. 1:1-4).

In this and every passage dealing with inspiration, it is easily seen that God used language, words, to reveal His authority to men. God used words in the Old Testament:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God **spake** as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21, emphasis mine DL).

Consider also 2 Samuel 23:1-2; Isaiah 1:1-2; Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 1:3; Ezekiel 2:7; Ezekiel 3:26-27, et al. The New Testament also reveals that God used **words** to communicate to man:

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to **speak** with other tongues...every man heard them speak in his own language...But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his **voice**, and **said** unto them...Now when they **heard** this...And with many other **words** did he testify and exhort...Then they that gladly **received his word** were baptized...And they continued stedfastly in the **apostles' doctrine** and fellowship..." (Acts 2:4, Acts 2:6, Acts 2:14, Acts 2:37, Acts 2:40, Acts 2:41, Acts 2:42, emphasis mine DL).

Take time also to read Matthew 10:19-20; Luke 6:46; Luke 24:47-49; John 5:46-47; John 6:45; John 6:66-69; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:13, et al.

It is necessary that we know that God has inspired His mind to man, and that He has used words to convey His thoughts. Communication from one spirit to another always requires words. This is true between men and certainly between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. Paul wrote:

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:10-13).

The Holy Spirit revealed the mind of God in “words” (1 Cor. 2:13). This is **verbal** inspiration. The very words that inspired men spoke or wrote came from God.

“How much of the Bible is ‘God breathed?’ Note that **all** Scripture is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16). The idea that every word of the Bible was authorized by God is called **plenary** inspiration. The Bible is thus said to possess plenary, verbal inspiration. A working definition of inspiration is thus arrived at as God’s influence on the mind of man to enable him to speak or write God’s Word.”³ Thus, we can logically conclude that every word of Scripture is given by and carries the authority of God.

Inspiration from God is evident in the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. Consider the words of 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.

“Given by inspiration of God” literally means “God-breathed.” One can see the mind of God clearly in the “profitable” nature of **all** Scripture. When taken as a whole, Scripture meets all the spiritual needs of man. Peter wrote that Divine power had revealed “all things that pertain unto life and godliness...” (2 Pet. 1:3). Jude concurred as he penned, “...ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Divine revelation is complete. Since there is no need for more, there will be no more. The Word which God has inspired to men is all-sufficient and authoritative.

Authority Of God

In order to see that the Bible is the true standard of authority, there are a number of things we must see and understand. Among these is the delegation of Divine authority.

Authority inherently resides in God. From its beginning, the Bible reveals the authority of God: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). He is the “...living God, which made the heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15). He is “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth...” (Acts 17:24). God is the Creator and Sustainer of man and the universe in which he dwells, and, as such, He stipulates conditions with which sinners must comply in order to be saved and to remain saved (Deut. 11:26-28). God has no obligation to ask anyone concerning man’s whims or fancies or to gain man’s approval for whatever decisions He has made in regard to man’s responsibility (Rom. 9:8-18). However, God has not kept His authority solely to himself but has delegated it. That is, He has given the right to command obedience to others. We can follow that delegation from God all the way to the Bible.

Divine authority has been delegated to Jesus, the only begotten Son. It passes first from God, the Father, to God, the Son. Jesus Himself says, "...the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (John 14:24). In the giving of the great commission, Jesus said to His apostles, "All power (*exousia*, authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). The first chapter of the Gospel of John introduces the Word, Who, in the beginning was "...with God, and the Word was God." John 1:14 explains that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." Jesus is unveiled as the "only begotten Son" of God (John 3:16), and to the hatred of the Jews, He claimed to be "equal with God" (John 5:17-18). His Divine authority is revealed through His life (1 Pet. 2:22), miracles (John 3:2; John 11:47-54) and doctrines (Matt. 7:28-29). It is Jesus, the Christ, that men are to hear (Matt. 17:5; Deut. 18:18; Acts 1:5-8; Acts 3:22; Heb. 1:1-2; Heb. 12:25).

In turn, Christ has delegated authority to His apostles. In this process, miraculous inspiration made sure that there would be no mistakes in the revelation and recording of God's words. We read the words of our Lord in John 17:18: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." This means that the apostles had delegated authority on earth to "bind" and "loose" what had been bound or loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18), i.e., they had the authority to command those who heard them:

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 3:1-2).

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things

write we unto you, that your joy may be full (1 John 1:3-4).

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37; cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-13 above).

None of this meant that they could originate doctrine or devise commandments to speak to men (Gal. 1:6-9). They were authorized by the Lord to inform the world of what had been bound and loosed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To aid them in this work, Jesus said the Father would send the Holy Spirit to the apostles in His name, which means by His authority (John 14:26). The Lord went on to say, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This was for the express purpose of guiding the apostles into all truth (cf. John 16:13-14). In Matthew 10:40, Jesus said, "He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." This confirms that the apostles were the official representatives (ambassadors) of Christ on earth (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Eph. 6:20). Therefore, the very words they spoke were authoritative:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

Through the apostles and prophets the Scriptures are authoritative because they are God's words. The Holy Spirit so guided the writing of the Bible that the very **words** of the Bible are just as much the Words of God as if we were to hear God Himself speak from heaven in an audible voice. Today, no one can be saved who does not comply with the conditions authorized in

the Bible (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 6:3-5; John 3:3-5). All who practice what is not authorized by the Bible sin in so doing (Lev. 10:1-2; 2 John 9-11; 1 Cor. 4:6).

Jesus clearly considered written Scripture to be Divinely inspired and authoritative. He attributed David's words in Psalm 110:1 to the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36). He handled Daniel's prophecy as an inspired prediction which would come true (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15). He declared the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, as He spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:21). He attributed His selection of Judas as the fulfillment of Psalm 41:9 (John 13:18). He was so sure of the Old Testament's inspiration that even at His death He quoted Psalm 22:1 (Matt. 27:46). Clearly, Jesus recognized Scripture as originating in heaven in the mind of God.

When one considers the inspiration of the written Word and the delegation of authority from God, it is no wonder that Peter pens these words:

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:11).

If God is to be glorified, it will be when men speak and act according to His Word. If the religion we practice is going to be from heaven and not men, then it is going to have to come from the Bible. Consequently, what the Bible reveals is very important to all men everywhere (Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 1:16-17). The Bible can be held as a standard for our obedience and judgment only if it bears the authority of God (John 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). Writings that come from the mind of men do not have Divine authority supporting them. Scripture is of the mind of God and, therefore, carries the weight of Divine authorization.

Regularity Of Religious Authority

Has there ever been a time when men were without the instructive authority of God? How has God revealed His authority in the past? Did God authorize during the time of the patriarchs? Did he reveal His authority to Moses and those who lived under the Old Law? How have men been able to determine God's mind and authority in any age?

From Hebrews 1:1-2 we understand that God has always spoken to man. He used different methods at different times, but He has always revealed His authoritative Word. Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), we know that to act by faith is to act according to God's instructions:

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 (Heb. 11:6).

In any age, in order to be pleasing to God, man was responsible to obey the very words that were spoken by God. There had to be revelation, reception and response.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is a treasure of information. Many refer to this chapter as the "Faith Hall of Fame," but there is so much more to this passage than simply revealing that men acted by faith. It is a treatise to the authority and revelation of God's inspired Word to men of all ages. From this passage we learn that God provided His instructions to men during...

The Patriarchal Age

We read the names of several notable people of patriarchy: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. In each case the Scriptures note that they acted "by faith." How were they able to perform

anything by faith? The Word of God was revealed, received and men responded (Rom. 10:17). There is no other way!

Consider the case of Noah as an example. From a study of two passages of Scripture, one can gain a complete view of what transpired during this time. Genesis 6 reveals God's wrath and grief caused by the sins of man and His purpose in bringing the flood (Gen. 6:5-7). Genesis 6:8 declares the grace of God that would save Noah and his family from His destructive judgment. God did not deliver Noah by "grace alone," but gave commandment (law) concerning the building, preparing and entering the ark (Gen. 6:14-21). In Genesis 6:22, when compared with Hebrews 11:7, we read of Noah's obedience of faith to God's instructions. Grace, law, faith and obedience were combined to the salvation of Noah. There was revelation from God, reception by Noah and response of faith.

The Mosaic Age

Likewise, we read of men and women who lived during the time that the Law was delivered by Moses to the children of Israel: Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. They, like those mentioned above, acting by faith, performed the commandments of the Lord:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about

in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise (Heb. 11:33-39).

How was this possible? God's Word was revealed, received, and men responded in obedience of faith.

The Christian Age

Hebrews 11 is a brief march through the Old Testament. God uses the faithful obedience of prominent characters to lead us through the most significant spiritually historical points of the Old Testament. We are shown the authority of the Word of God and its effect upon man as we begin with the creation (Heb. 11:3); travel alongside the first family (Heb. 11:4); go beyond death with a true man of God (Heb. 11:5); experience the near eradication of the human race (Heb. 11:7); hear the promise of a Savior proclaimed (Heb. 11:8-19); watch the descendents develop toward Egypt (Heb. 11:20-22); trace the movement of the seed from bondage to the border of the land of promise (Heb. 11:23-29); follow the conquering of the land (Heb. 11:30-31); witness the development of the seed line from a nation into a kingdom (Heb. 11:32, David); and know that the promise continued to be proclaimed (Heb. 11:32-39, Samuel and the prophets).

What would be the point of all of this history and all of these lives of faith if the chapter ended here? Heb. 11:13 and Heb. 11:39 reveal that under both Old Testament periods, Patriarchal and Mosaic, people lived and died by faith, but did not yet receive the benefits of God's promise. But, as we progress from Heb. 11:40 into chapter twelve, the point of the entire letter is seen, God has delivered what once was a promise and, therefore, we have

something better. God has spoken to man in all ages and we, like the Old Testament examples, are responsible for receiving God's revelation of the New Testament and responding in obedience that comes from faith:

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 11:40-12:2).

Recognition Of Religious Authority

The Necessity Of Understanding God's Word

Since God commands for all men to submit to Him in obedience to His Word, and our very judgment rests in the words that were spoken, there is a great need for all to understand what His words require of us. The Bible is inspired, authoritative, reasonable and understandable. Since we **can** read and understand (Eph. 3:1-11), then we **must** (John 8:31-32; John 17:17; Heb. 5:9, et al).

But what do the Scriptures say to me? Is every word of the Bible authoritative in nature? Am I responsible for following everything that is written? What if it was said by sinful men or even the devil? How can we expect to agree on our understanding of the Bible? Has God given His authority to us so that we can all understand alike and be unified in our beliefs and practices (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16; et al)? Which words are authoritative in commanding or guiding my thoughts and actions? This leads to the question at hand—how does God authorize? Has God given us a method whereby we can determine what He has authorized?

Direct Statements

The Bible authorizes by the giving of **direct statements**. In the past, much has been discussed concerning the **commands** of the Bible. Some direct statements are commands, but there are several kinds of direct statements in the Bible from which we receive direction and authority. The grammar of the Greek New Testament has four moods for direct statements: indicative, imperative, subjunctive and optative. Considering the nature of all four moods, direct statements can be declarative (Mark 16:16), interrogative (Rom. 6:1), hortatory (Heb. 6:1), conditional (Col. 3:1), mandatory (Acts 2:38), prohibitory (Jas 1:18) or wishful (Rom. 9:1-3).

In Acts 17:30, there is instruction concerning the necessity of repentance. In Acts 2:38, Bible authority teaches that repentance and baptism are both necessary in order for one to obtain the remission of sins. In Hebrews 10:25, we are taught that we ought not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. In Colossians 3:9, we are taught that it is wrong to lie. In each of these cases, the direct statement is used to deliver God's authority. But, direct statements are not the only phrases that carry Divine authority.

Approved Examples

In addition to authorizing by direct statements, the Bible also instructs us as to what is acceptable or authorized by using **examples**. The phrase "approved examples" is used because there are examples in the Bible of sinful people and evil activities. The word "example," by definition, means: "A person, action or thing taken as a model to be copied or avoided by others; an exercise or description that illustrates a principle, method or problem; a pattern or model." This is mentioned to point out that an **approved** example is **intended** to be followed, to be

imitated. The very fact that an example is given confirms the authority of the speaker and the authoritative nature of the message. An example is **binding**. So, when does the Bible account of an action constitute an example?

At this point I should explain the sense in which I am using the word “binding” in relationship to examples. I have in mind the thought that (1) some things are *binding* (and are thus examples) in the sense that they *must* be done (these are *demanded*; there is nothing optional - these facts being made clear by due consideration of the totality of the Bible teaching on the subject at hand), and (2) some things are *binding* (and are thus examples) in the sense that they *may* be done (these are authorized; they may be done, but they may be left undone).

For instance, I am *commanded* to observe the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 11:24-25. I am instructed (by precept and by example) to observe it on the first day of every week, Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2. There is no option here. I am authorized (by example) to observe the Supper in an “upper chamber” with “many lights.” This is *binding* only in the sense that I am *allowed* or *permitted* to do it. It is optional. I learn from other passages that the *place* is not the important thing, and I, therefore, conclude that the “upper chamber” is an optional matter.

Further, I am *commanded* to give - *as I have been prospered*. This is a *must* matter. I must not fall short of giving as I have been prospered. But, in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, I am taught by example that I *may* exceed giving as I have been prospered. The Macedonian brethren gave “beyond their power.” Did Paul refer to these brethren as an *example* for the brethren at Corinth? Is this an *example* for me? Is this account of this action binding on me? If so, *in what sense* is it binding? Does it teach that I *must* upon every Lord’s day give beyond my power? Or, does it teach that I *may* give beyond my power? How does the *example* “fit in” with the *command*?...

...Whether an “example” is binding in the sense that it *must* be done, or in the sense that it *may* be done has to be determined by due consideration of the totality of the Bible teaching on the point at hand.⁴

In regard to the Lord’s Supper, must we observe it in an “upper room” with “many lights?” How do we know that the first day of the week is binding, but the upper room is not? Upon consideration of several passages, there is no evidence that the Lord’s Supper was **always** observed in an “upper chamber” and where there were “many lights.” These are incidentals, not essentials. However, we are taught in several passages the significance of the first day of the week. We are **commanded** to observe the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:24-25). We are shown that the Lord’s supper **was** observed on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). We are **not shown** that it was ever observed on **any other day** of the week, therefore, there is no authority by example of such a practice.

Implications

Everything the Bible teaches it teaches either explicitly or **implicitly**. And, that which it teaches implicitly is just as true, just as binding, and just as authoritative, as is that which it teaches explicitly. Many scoff at the principles of implication. “Necessary inference” is often discussed. Actually, “inference” is a sub-topic of implication. Inference is correct reasoning, but God has **already authorized** by implication whether I infer correctly or not.

An inference is a conclusion which results from what has been implied by the facts of the circumstance; an irresistible, indisputable conclusion that **must** be drawn. To speak of “necessary inference” is unnecessary. If it is an **inference**, it is **necessary**. Any conclusion drawn from

the facts of the circumstance that is not **necessary** is an **assumption**.

When a teaching or action is mandatory based on the Biblical information at hand, without being specifically stated, then that teaching or action is a matter of implication. Let's note a few examples. (1) Compare Mark 16:16 and your baptism. Where do you find your name in the text? Is it the case that you and I are authorized, and therefore commanded, by God to be baptized in order to be saved? How can we know this without applying the principles of implication? (2) Did Paul repent prior to his baptism? The Scriptures are clear that repentance precedes baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). But, where is the explicit statement which states that Paul repented? The fact is, God uses implications often in authorization. (3) There is a sacred command to partake of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28). The Sunday assembly was for the purpose of observing the communion (Acts 20:7). The Lord's day meeting was a weekly affair (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). The inference from the facts of the circumstance is, the early church observed the Lord's Supper every first day of the week.

Expediency

In order to carry out the Christian's obligations from examples, implications, and direct statements there is the area of expediency. Expediency is involved in the fulfillment of every action authorized by God. When God specifies how an obligation is to be carried out, the how is just as binding as the obligation itself. But, if no specification is Divinely given as to how the obligation is to be done, then the manner and method of fulfillment are left up to human judgment, to the realm of expediency. We are commanded to go and preach the Gospel of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-49), but there

is no instruction as to how we must go. We could walk, ride, drive, sail or fly. Any of these would be expediting the command to go and preach the Gospel and, thus, are authorized by God.

Where there is no Biblical example, implication, or direct statement, there is no expediency. One must have a Bible obligation, if one is expediting. Arbitrarily calling something an expedient does not make it so; it must be expediting the fulfillment of an authorized obligation. For example, the church is commanded to assemble on the first day of the week, but where or at what time shall the saints meet?

In expediency, as in every facet of Biblical interpretation and application, we must remain faithful to what is written. We must not attempt to add to God's authorization in the name of expediency. An addition is not authorized by God. An expedient, a true aid, is authorized by the Scriptures and is not an addition. To make this distinction clear, compare the use of a song book with instrumental music in singing. A song book is simply an aid to singing. When we employ a song book, we are still just singing. Instrumental music and singing are two different ways of making music; they are coordinates. Either one can be done without the other. Neither is an aid to the other, but an addition. Expediency must follow and stay within the realm of written authorization of the Scriptures.

Range Of Religious Authority

It is absolutely necessary that one comes to an understanding of the principle of generic and specific authority. The importance of this understanding is illustrated in the fact that both liberal digressions and radical extremes have developed out of a failure to respect

this concept. Changes in worship, such as the addition of the musical instrument to singing, reflect disregard for the **specific** authority of the Bible. However, it is ignorance of the nature of generic authority that has resulted in the several “anti” factions that have divided the Lord’s church.

Understanding the principle of **specific** and generic authority is as simple as understanding the giving of details. Consider the authorization involved in the writing of medicinal prescriptions. A doctor may authorize a **specific** drug for an illness; in which case, the pharmacist **must** dispense the named medicine. Or, a doctor could authorize a **generic** drug, for which the pharmacist could dispense any of several brands of the authorized medication. The authority is bound in the details given by the doctor.

Generic Authority

Generic authority allows choices within the general area indicated. In the giving of the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-49), the Lord gave authority specifically and generically. His command was to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Specifics are given as to the message, “the gospel,” and the audience, “all the world.” But the **manner** or **method** of going is not specified. I must go, but I can go in any way that is right within itself.

‘Go’ is generic as regards various modes of travel - walking, riding, flying, etc. Any of these would be acceptable. Also acceptable would be any incidentals or expedients which would be used in obeying the command - shoes, horse, car, etc. Generic authority allows anything within the genus, and all otherwise lawful expedients pertaining to it.⁵

An understanding and respect for God’s generic authority is necessary.

Specific Authority

Specific instructions authorize only the doing of the thing specified, thereby showing a lack of authority for things of the same class (coordinates), which are not specified. Noah was instructed to build an ark of gopher wood (Gen. 6:14). A lamb was specified for use in the passover (Exod. 12). Unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are specified in the observance of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28). Believers are specified as the subjects for baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 16:15-16). In each of these Biblical cases, specific instructions authorized only what was specified. There was no authority for anything else!

If the New Testament had given a generic instruction to produce music in worship, any kind of music would be authorized. But, specific authority is involved in the New Testament instruction of **singing**. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he explains how they were to be "filled with the Spirit" by "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). To the Colossians he clarified how they were to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" by "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Make note of the specifics of these passages regarding singing: (1) It must involve speaking, teaching, admonishing - enlisting the human voice in articulation of **words**. (2) It must be **reciprocal** action, "to yourselves" and "one another." (3) The singing must be **Scriptural** - "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (4) The **heart** must be involved with the **voice** - "singing and making melody in your heart" and "singing with grace in your hearts." (5) It must be **sacrificial** - "to the Lord."

The specification of singing parallels the specification of gopher wood for the ark, a lamb for the passover, unleavened bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper, and believers as subjects for baptism—all things required by specific authority. Every Scripture of the New Testament that discusses singing, authorizes only the action of singing (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; Jas. 5:13). There is no mention of mechanical instruments of music. The specification given by inspiration is to sing. Therefore, there is no authority for any other kind of music in worship to God. We must have an understanding and respect for God's specific authority.

Reactions Toward Religious Authority

Men may respond to the authority of God's Word in different ways. In the parable of the sower, our Lord taught His disciples this very principle (Matt. 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). God's authority requires obedience of faith, whether initially to enter into Christ and His church, or continually in faithful living of the Christian life. When men are faced with obeying God, they will either **respect** or **reject** what God has authorized.

Respecting Biblical Authority

Respect for God's authority in the Scriptures is easily seen and understood. When men love and respect the Lord, they will obey His words: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Again:

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:2-3).

The parable of the sower illustrates the marked difference of one who respects the authority of God:

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 8:15).

Rejecting Biblical Authority

Rejecting God's authority is as simple as refusing to hear or obey His words:

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:46-49).

Through the apostle Paul, the Lord declared His judgment upon all who reject His authority:

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

Our Lord understood the hearts of men that reject His authority. In the parable of the sower, He acknowledged that there are many reasons that men turn away from the Scriptures (Luke 8:11-14). Some never receive the Word at all. Others receive it, but then cast it away because of temptations, problems, and cares and

riches and pleasures of this life. No matter the reason for rejection, the result is always the same:

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

Conclusion

Our only hope of receiving the benefits of God's grace is to respect His authority in obedience of faith (Heb. 5:8-9; Tit. 2:11-14). May God help each of us to recognize the importance of Bible authority, to understand the basic principle of Colossians 3:17: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Paul's charge, that in Christian work and worship we must do only that which is authorized by the Word of God, must be the practice and plea of all who desire a home in heaven.

Let us determine to follow the instruction of Peter:

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever (1 Pet. 4:11).

Let us think, speak and live according to the authority of God's Word so as to glorify God in all that we do.

Endnotes

1 W. E. Vine, "Authority," **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 81.

2 Joseph Henry Thayer, "exousia," **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 225.

3 Keith A. Mosher, Sr., "Lesson One: Inspiration - A Definition," **The Book God "Breathed,"** p. 12.

4 Roy C. Deaver, "XV: Authority Is Established By Example," **Ascertaining Bible Authority,** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1987), pp. 53-54.

5 David Pharr, "Generic and Specific Authority," **The Spiritual Sword, Vol. 21, Number 3,** (Memphis, TN: Getwell church of Christ, 1990), pp. 27-28.

CHAPTER 5

By Carefully Considering The Context

Billy Bland

Introduction

HOW BLESSED WE ARE that God has communicated with us! He has revealed His will to us in the words of the Bible. David wrote; “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). Likewise Paul stated:

For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:11-13 ASV).

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles and other inspired men into “all truth” (cf. John 16:13). Hence, we have the completed revelation from God in the pages of the Holy Bible. What a blessing it is to be able to open up the pages of God’s Word and learn what He says on any given subject! “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psm. 119:97). While it is a blessed privilege to read and study God’s Word, great care should be given

when so doing. Man must be careful not to “read into” (eisegete) God’s Word his own preconceived ideas. Man’s responsibility is to “read out” (exegete) of the passage what God has placed into the sacred text. Man is to draw out of the passage only the conclusions warranted by the evidence.

God expects man to reason properly with the Word of God. His responsibility is to rightly divide, or handle aright, the Word of truth (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Jesus expected people to know and properly apply the Old Testament Scriptures. When the Pharisees came to Jesus, tempting Him with their question regarding divorce, the Bible states:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:4-6).

Jesus asked “have ye not read,” which implies they should have had proper knowledge of God’s will in this matter, as He had discussed this matter previously, and they had access to God’s Word. They should have reasoned properly from God’s Word and known the answer to their question. Jesus often asked the question “have ye not read” implying that people should read and properly interpret the Word of God (cf. Matt. 12:3; Matt. 12:5; Matt. 19:4; Matt. 22:31; Mark 12:10, Luke 6:3). Likewise, in the New Testament, Paul would reason with people out of the Scriptures:

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where

was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ (Acts 17:1-3).

Know The Context

When studying the Word of God, one can come to a knowledge of God's will if he will carefully consider the context. Perhaps the reader has heard the old illustration of one who decided that he wanted to start reading the Bible. Having no concept of how to study the Bible, he decided that he would just open his Bible to a passage and whatever it stated, that is what he would do. He opened the Bible and read the section where Judas hanged himself. Turning to another passage he read "do thou likewise." Finally, he read "that thou doest, do quickly." Thinking that he was obeying the Word of God, he went out and hanged himself. In the fictitious illustration above, each passage was in the Word of God. However, by not carefully considering the context, a person committed suicide! He drew wrong conclusions by not considering the context. Likewise, it is possible for people today to draw something "from the Bible" that God never intended!!

People sometimes ignore the context in order to "prove" a pre-conceived doctrine. This person believes something and then seeks for a passage to confirm his established belief. Another fictitious account is that a preacher was tired of a woman wearing her hair tied in a knot on the top of her head. So he preached against such by preaching on the topic "Top Knot Come Down." He (mis)used for his proof text Matthew 24:17 which states; "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house" (Matt. 24:17).

While the above illustrations are humorous, they reveal a problem that some have in interpreting the Word of God. They do not consider the context. Many false doctrines are perpetrated upon an unsuspecting public by people who do not properly consider the context of a passage. They quote the Word of God, but make the wrong application. Even the devil quoted the Word of God to Jesus in tempting Him. The Bible records:

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone (Matt. 4:5-6).

Satan is quoting from Psalm 91:11-12, but he is taking it out of its context and misapplying it. “Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matt. 4:7). Satan doesn’t mind misapplying Scriptures, and even lying, to lead souls away from God. Jesus, however, would not allow Satan to get away with misapplying the Word of God and cause Him to sin against the Father. If you have ever had someone quote you out of context and have you say something you did not say, you most likely did not appreciate it. Likewise, God does not want us to quote Him out of context. It is not true that “one can prove anything from the Bible.” Surely, one should have more respect for the Word of God than to believe such a thing about God and His Word. It is true, however, that one can mishandle the Word of God and cause people to believe something God did not teach. When people do this, they bring condemnation upon themselves and those they lead astray (Gal. 1:6-9).

J. Roberston McQuilkin observed: “The most common failure in interpretation is to violate this most single and

basic principle: the context must control.”¹ Words within the context must be considered. It is not enough to know the meaning of a word, though that is essential, but it also essential to **understand how** the word is used in the context. Words can (and often do), have more than one meaning. For example does the word “train” mean “a series of railroad cars,” or a “long veil,” or to “get into physical shape by proper diet and exercise?”² All of the definitions are true, but how the author used the word “train” in the context will determine its meaning. Darrell Conley observed:

Not only must we look to the context for the meaning of the words, it is important to realize that the way they are used is what gives them their meaning. Words do not derive their meanings from the dictionary or lexicon. On the contrary, the lexicographers have deduced their meanings from the way the best native speakers and writers have used these words. Usage determines meaning. Usage is context. Be sure that usage of words or phrases found elsewhere (than your explicit statement) actually have the same meaning. Context is the key to the proper interpretation of not only words, but of statements, of paragraphs, or sections, of the various books of the Bible, and of the Bible itself. Never neglect the context.³

It is a grievous mistake to remove a text from its context and misapply it. Such is a mishandling and a wresting of the Scriptures to one’s own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

The Immediate Context

When studying the context, study the immediate verses before and after the particular verse you are studying. For example, by studying the immediate context of Acts 2:1-4, one will learn who it was on the day of Pentecost who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Keep in mind that chapter divisions were placed into the Bible by man to give references so passages could be easily located. If one reads Acts 2:1-4, he learns:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

But who are the “they” in the passage? The antecedent to the plural pronoun “they” is the “apostles” in Acts 1:26. The context reveals that the disciples were choosing an apostle to take the place of Judas. The text states: “And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:26). Then it continues by saying, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). The “they” refers to the “apostles” in the immediate context.

Also, the immediate context reveals that the multitude were not the ones who received the Holy Spirit, because they had not yet come together (Acts 2:6). Further, the immediate text reveals that when the charge was given that “these men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13), Peter stood up with the eleven (not the multitude nor the one hundred and twenty), to answer the false charge. Also, Acts 2:7 states that those who were doing the speaking were Galileans (not the multitude from other parts of the world).

The immediate text likewise reveals that the “tongues” in which the apostles spoke were “languages.” Acts 2:4 states that they spoke “with other tongues” while Acts 2:6 reveals “that every man heard them speak in his

own language.” Consequently, the speaking in tongues was not speaking in unintelligible sounds, but in languages that people understood!

The Remote Context

Someone has observed that sometimes the more precious ore or metal is found deeper in the soil. Consequently, if one wants the more precious metal, he needs to dig a little deeper! It involves more work, but the dividends are certainly enriching! The remote context has to do with more than just the immediate context. It has to do with the overall purpose of the book where the passage is found, as well as other passages dealing with the same subject in other books written by both the same, as well as other authors.

The remote context of Acts 2 would include such passages as Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:46-49; John 14:26; John 16:13; Acts 1:1-2:47; Acts 10:1-11:30 (especially Acts 11:14). The passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all lead up to Acts 2. Especially does one learn in Luke 24:46-49 that the apostles were commanded to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued (or clothed) with power from on high. Acts 1 finds them waiting in Jerusalem and then Acts 2 finds the baptism of the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles and the Word of God being proclaimed by them. Acts 11:15 informs us that the Holy Spirit fell upon the household of Cornelius like it did on the apostles “at the beginning.” Acts 11:15 marks Pentecost as the beginning!

This is a Divine commentary informing us of the beginning of the Christian dispensation. The church of Christ had its beginning on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47). Acts 11:15 also shows that the Holy Spirit was evidently not poured out on others like it was on Pentecost until Cornelius, as Peter used it as the example of when such a

thing had previously occurred. He did not say that the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his household, like it was on the Samaritans! He had to go back all the way to Pentecost to find another example of such a pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

The remote context of a passage may also include parallel passages on the same subject. For example, consider Ephesians 5:18-20. Here the Word of God states:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? The immediate context reveals that being filled with the Spirit is in contrast to “and be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.” From the immediate context one learns that the stimulant, or the stirring up for our worship to God, is not wine, but being filled with the Spirit. Also, from the immediate context, one learns that being filled with the Spirit is a command and therefore something for man to do. In other words, it is not something that is going to be done to man by God. It is something man himself is responsible to do.

The **remote** parallel passage to this is Colossians 3:16-17, which states:

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. 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. 3:16-17).

In these parallel passages where one states the command “Be filled with the Spirit,” the other states, “Let the Word

of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” Consequently, one learns that the way he obeys the command to “be filled with the Spirit,” is by letting the Word of Christ dwell in him richly with all wisdom.

Another example of studying the Word of God by the immediate and the remote context would be doing a word study on the subject of “water baptism.” By doing this, one would induce all the passages that deal with the topic of water baptism. This, in Hermeneutics, is noted as the “Inductive Method” which simply means that one induces all the evidence and then draws (deducts) conclusions warranted by the evidence. One must be careful not to draw hasty conclusions prior to inducing all the relevant evidence.

If one will study the context, both the immediate and the remote, he should come to a correct understanding of the Word of God. Of course, it will be helpful to have a good dictionary and concordance to aid him in defining words and finding all the remote contexts.

Knowing The Genre Of Literature Will Aid One’s Interpretation Of Scripture

Knowing what type of literature is being used will aid one in understanding the Word of God. The Bible contains various types or kinds of literature. Is the book of the Bible one is studying one that deals primarily with history? Perhaps it is largely poetic in its style. Does it contain apocalyptical literature? Knowing this will help one as he studies the Bible.

As one studies the book of Psalms, he will soon find out that he is dealing with much figurative language. Figurative language often adds height and strength to language. One may read of one desiring God as the hart panteth after the waters (Psm. 41:1). David may declare that he is a worm and not a man (Psm. 22:6). All of these are understood to be figurative. Common sense dictates

that David is not a literal worm and he didn't mean that by his statement.

Another type of language that is sometimes used in the Bible, that we do not use that often, is apocalyptic language. Apocalyptic language is a type of figurative language that often employs signs and symbols. It is often used in times of distress and trouble. Such language can be found in Daniel, Matthew, Mark, Luke and especially Revelation.

History usually is more straightforward in stating facts. The Books of Genesis and Acts are examples of this type of language. Some things may be stated as a matter of fact, and it may not record (immediately) whether God approved of such action or not. It is a matter of fact and is usually stated without much (if any) figurative expression. If one will consider the type of language that is being used in the context of his study, it will aid him in coming to a better understanding of the Word of God.

Denominational “Proof Texts” Which Are Not Proof Texts

Peter informs us that there are those who wrest the Scriptures. Peter admonishes:

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace,

and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen (2 Pet. 3:14-18).

Peter writes that the unlearned and unstable “wrest” the Scriptures. Some would use the precious Word of God for their own unholy purposes. As earlier stated, even the devil quotes Scripture, but he misapplies that which he quotes (cf. Matt. 4:6). There are many false teachers who are ready to misapply the Word of God for various reasons. Jesus warned:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:15-21).

Paul cautioned the elders of Ephesus that after his departing grievous wolves would enter in among them not sparing the flock and even from among their own selves would men arise to draw away the disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30). He then gave the following warning and admonition:

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:31-32).

It is recognized that not everyone who believes or teaches error is doing so intentionally. However, when an honest person learns the truth, he will change (as did Paul), or he will cease to be honest. The one who teaches or practices error must realize that such will condemn his soul. Consequently, each of us should give the greatest effort to make our calling and election sure (cf. 2 Pet. 1:10).

One good rule to remember when studying the Bible is that difficult passages are to be interpreted in light of plain passages. In other words, what the Bible plainly teaches and is easily understood, should not be rejected by more difficult passages (or those not so easily understood). Also one should not so array a Scripture as to cause it to contradict another passage in the Word of God. Frank Young, former instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching, would tell his students, “one does not have to harmonize one passage to another passage because they are not out of harmony.” The Word of God does not contradict itself.

“Proof Text” - John 3:16

John 3:16 is a beautiful passage which gives us much hope and assurance. It states: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Faithful Gospel preachers use this passage often in informing souls of the great love of God! However, the passage, as wonderful as it is, has been greatly abused. In order to “get around the Bible teaching on baptism for the remission of sins,” people will misuse John 3:16. If one reads to someone Acts 2:38, a likely response will be, “but what about John 3:16?” Does John 3:16 teach “faith only” salvation? No, it absolutely does not! If it did, it would rule out grace, repentance and baptism. If it is “faith only” then it is faith and nothing else. This would mean that

one is not saved by grace. I don't know any "faith only" advocates who are willing to accept such a conclusion. Likewise, John 3:16 does not specifically mention repentance, yet all know that one must repent, because Jesus has taught, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:3). By the way, Luke 13:3 does not teach "repent only" salvation, just as John 3:16 does not teach "faith only" salvation. What some fail to realize is that "believe" and "faith" can be used in an inclusive sense as well as in an exclusive sense. What is meant by this is that sometimes "believing" in Christ carries the concept of obeying Christ.

A Biblical illustration of this is seen in the case of Moses, who was told to speak to the rock in order to bring forth water out of the rock for the people (Num. 20:8). Instead, Moses smote the rock twice (Num. 20:11). The text then states:

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron,
Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in
the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye
shall not bring this congregation into the land
which I have given them (Num. 20:12).

Moses' disobedience to God was stated as "ye believed me not." It is obvious that the word "believe" at times has an inclusive meaning of "obey." In other words, if one believes God he obeys God. If he doesn't obey God he doesn't believe God. Now note the Bible teaching on water baptism.

The Bible clearly teaches that the purpose of water baptism is "for the remission of sins." Jesus stated: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). This passage is easy to understand. Some do not want to accept its meaning, but it is plain. The remote contexts also agree. 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” (Acts 2:38). Saul was admonished: “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The Epistles are in complete agreement. To the Romans, Paul wrote:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

Likewise, Peter by inspiration penned these words: “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21). If one induces all the passages on the topic of water baptism, he learns that the purpose (design) of water baptism is: “shall be saved,” “for the remission of sins,” “wash away thy sins,” “baptized into Christ,” “baptized into his death,” and “baptism does also now save us.”

If the Bible plainly teaches that water baptism is for the remission of sins (and it does Acts 2:38), then John 3:16 (nor any other passages such as Acts 16:31, or Romans 10:10), does not teach that water baptism is not for the remission of sins. One must not allow a so called “proof text” to become a “pre-text.”

“Proof Text” – Revelation 20:1-4

It is thought by some that Revelation 20:1-4 teaches a doctrine known as “Dispensational Premillennialism.” This is the doctrine that divides the history of the world into seven dispensations, the seventh dispensation being the literal one thousand year reign of Christ in the literal city of Jerusalem. It is thought by many that Revelation 20 teaches this doctrine. The passage reads as follows:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-4).

Many things essential to Premillennial doctrine are not mentioned in this passage. The Second Coming of Christ is not mentioned in this passage. Christ sitting on David's throne is not mentioned. Reigning in Jerusalem is not mentioned. No one living today is mentioned. In fact, no one in his physical body is mentioned. John saw "souls" or disembodied spirits. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

One should keep in mind that Revelation was written in about AD 96 and is highly symbolic. John says that God "signified" the message (Rev. 1:1). He used signs and symbols. In other words, God used figurative language in much of the Book. Back in Revelation 6:9-11, John saw "souls" crying out, "how long". Now, in Revelation 20, he sees "souls" reigning with Christ.

The Bible clearly teaches that the kingdom of Christ is now in existence. The brethren in Colosse were in the kingdom. Paul wrote; "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). "Hath translated" is past tense. They were already in the kingdom of His dear Son. Likewise, the Hebrews writer stated:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28).

They had received the kingdom. Even the Book of Revelation, the Book that Premillennialists misuse to teach a future kingdom, teaches that the kingdom was already established and that John was in it. John wrote: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9).

Conclusion

How refreshing it is to simply go to God’s Word and learn the Will of God. How blessed we are to have the “precious Book Divine.” If one will carefully consider the context, he will come to a greater understanding of God’s Word. May we say with the Psalmist: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psm. 119:97).

Endnotes

1 Darrell Conley, **Rightly Dividing The Word, Vol. 1**, Shenandoah Church of Christ, (Pensacola, FL: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1990), p. 359.

2 Ibid, pp. 359-360.

3 Ibid, p. 361.

CHAPTER 6

By Understanding The Five W's Of Each Passage

Clarence Sparks

Introduction

THE THEME OF THIS Bible lectureship is appropriately expressed in the question, “How can we understand the Bible alike?” The question implies that many persons who are acquainted with the Bible do not understand it alike. Not understanding it alike implies that some people are misunderstanding it. The question also implies that all responsible people are capable of understanding it alike. It further implies that correctly understanding it alike can provide special eternal benefits for all interested persons.

This subject is unlike other more temporal subjects on which people very often, “Agree to disagree,” because it produces eternal consequences. This being true, it is of major importance to discover how people can correctly understand the Bible alike. These considerations bring attention to another important question, “Why do we need to understand the Bible alike?” **First**, if all people who propose to believe the Bible would be in agreement by correctly understanding it alike, the Bible would have a much greater appeal to all who are aware of it. Consequently, instead of the non-concerned response, “You

can prove anything by the Bible,” the response would be a concerned, “What does the Bible say?” **Second**, if all people who propose to be Bible believers would be in agreement of correctly understanding the Bible alike they would be a much greater comfort and encouragement to each other. **Third**, if all people who are aware of the Bible would be in agreement of correctly understanding it alike, the force against evil would be compounded and much more effective.

Throughout the Bible there are references to the need for correct understanding thereof. David said, “O Lord; give me **understanding** according to your word” (Psm. 119:169). Solomon advised, “With all thy getting get **understanding**” (Prov. 4:7) and “Apply thine heart to **understanding**” (Prov. 2:2). Jesus said in explanation of the parable of the sower, “He who received the seed on good ground is he who hears the word and **understands** it, who indeed bears fruit and produces some a hundred fold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matt 13:23). Luke writes of Jesus’ actions in the last hours of His presence with the apostles, briefly before He ascended: “And He opened their **understanding**, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Paul expressed his concern for Timothy by saying, “Consider what I say and may the Lord give you **understanding** in all things” (2 Tim. 2:7). John said, “We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an **understanding** that we may know Him who is true...” (1 John 5:20).

These passages along with a host of others confirm the fact that any person attempting to serve God must accurately understand God’s Word and Will. Correctly understanding the Bible is an absolutely essential requisite of acceptable service to God. It is very unlikely, if not entirely impossible, for a person to render acceptable service to God while not correctly understanding His Word and Will.

Careful, thorough, unbiased, non-prejudiced study, motivated by sincere conscientious respect and compelling desire for truth, will produce its special rewards. A correct comprehension of all factors pertaining to any given subject is essential for knowing the complete truth of the matter under consideration. Upon acquisition, correct compilation and acceptance of complete truth on any subject, mortal beings are then in position to agree on the understanding obtained therefrom. Correct understanding should be the objective of all persons who read, study, interpret, accept and apply the message of God's Word.

Paul's admonition to, "Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV), when accepted and conscientiously applied, increases understanding of God's Word. The system of study described as the 5-W method of interpretation, when correctly utilized, provides information that contributes to expanded and improved understanding of God's Word.

Essential factors of information represented by the 5-W's are: (1) **Who:** Who wrote the passage under consideration? (2) **When:** When did the author write the passage? (3) **Where:** Where was the author when he wrote the text? (4) **Whom:** To whom did the author write the passage? (5) **Why:** Why did the author write the passage?

In addition there are several other providential elements related to the 5-W's which are contributory to the presence of the sacred text. These include the prevalent languages, with the peculiar idioms, in accepted public use at time of writing, namely Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, plus the human capability and talent for activity of writing, tools and materials for writing, circumstances conducive to writing, means of transporting the written Word to its destiny, and protective preservation of the text. It is very likely that an attempted interpretation of any Scripture

that does not include the 5-W procedure will not provide a fully correct understanding of the Scripture in question. The 5-W's are basic fundamental factors that are indispensable to correct interpretation. To overlook or ignore one or more of the factors will disparage the conclusions obtained. Without the full truth of these factors any interpretation will to some degree be incomplete.

First Thessalonians, possibly the earliest of Paul's epistles is an appropriate text for consideration (as is the entire Bible) for study by the 5-W method. There is sufficient evidence of its authenticity from early church writers. The accepted historical circumstances of its origin coincide with its content. It is included in the earliest lists of New Testament Scriptures:

There can be little doubt of the genuineness of the letter. Ignatius (*Ephesians 10*) and Hermas (*Shepard of Hermas, Visions 3, 9, 10*) both contain passages that may have been taken from it and it is listed in the canon of Marcion (A.D. 140). Irenaeus c. 180 quoted it by name (*Against Heresies 5, 6, 1*); Tertullian attributed it to "the apostle" (*On the resurrection of the Flesh 24*); and his contemporary, Clement of Alexandria, ascribed it directly to Paul (*Instructor 1, 5*). As noted the autobiographical illusions in I Thessalonians correspond well with the data of Paul given in Acts.²

The interpreter must have access to all correct information pertaining to the Scripture under study in order to produce truthfully accurate conclusions that will provide interested persons with a clearly complete understanding of the Word and Will of God. Information acquired by means of the 5-W's contributes substantially to correct interpretation. Beginning with this information the interpreter understands religious, social, political, economic, education, geographical and other conditions

attending the historical circumstances of the setting of the Divine revelation of truth. However, Divine truth and principle extend beyond historical time frames. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22 reveals timeless truths and principles as an applicable portion of the Christian standard for personal conduct, both public and private, at all times and in all places.

Who: Who Wrote It?

Who wrote it? The first step of the 5-W procedure is author identification. Those mortal beings chosen by God to record His Word did not by their own personal volition formulate His Will. It is an obvious fact from appraisal of all aspects of Divine inspiration that each writer chosen by God to record a portion of His Word and Will was empowered and guided the Holy Spirit in use of linguistic style and verbal composition including the exact words necessary for recording His Will. They were selected by Him to set His Word and Will in handwritten script, such as could be read, understood and circulated by first century Christians and succeeding generations. In their inspired Word of recording His Word they revealed the provisions and terms of His Will. In so doing, they recorded the facts of God's designed and ordained plan for man's spiritual well being and benefits in life and eternity.

The original autographs of God's Word and Will are at this time thought to no longer exist. However, respected archaeologists, notable historians, linguistic specialists and other credible scholars, have, by determined research and providential discovery of the most ancient papyrus and vellum scrolls, plus tablets of clay and stone along with other authentic artifacts from Bible lands, been able to replicate the original text of God's Word and Will. Consequently, respected scribes, copyists and printers have through the centuries been able to produce replicated

copies of God's Word and Will. This work enables those who desire to become his loyal servants/subjects, and realize the rewards gained thereby, to do so by faithful obedience to His Word in compliance with His Will.

The Bible, God's Word, is composed of mostly separately written units by a series of no less than 40 writers doing their work over a period of approximately 1600 years³, and it exhibits ample evidence of Divine inspiration. The continuity of its subject matter and consistent continuation of its basic theme by such a large number of writers, without editorial guidelines and controls for such an extended period of time, plus its historical accuracy along with other evidence, substantiates its claim of inspiration as stated within its text.

Within a limited time following the events of Acts 2, men who were inspired by God began to record the Word and Will of God in written form. The final portion of the New Testament, Revelation, the Apocalypse of John, according to some scholars, was written soon after the reign of Nero, about 68 A.D.⁴ Others suggest a later date of 81-96 A.D.⁵ The earlier date is preferred by some on the basis of abundant evidence proving persecution of Christians by Nero.

Be that as it may, the fact is that a major proportion of persons who own a Bible or have access to one are as the treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia in Acts 8. He had been to Jerusalem to worship and as he was returning and sitting in his chariot, Philip heard him read the prophet Isaiah and asked him "Understandest thou what readest?" He said, "How can I except someone guides me?" The treasurer's question directs attention to his need for correct instructive interpretation which in most normal circumstances produces correct understanding.

The treasurer's dilemma reflects some of the basic needs of many people who own or have access to a copy of

God's Word. Among these is the need to know from what source, by what authority and for what purpose did the New Testament come into existence? John, in the first chapter of his Gospel, with a minimum of words, provides insight and answers to these questions:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was god. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.' And of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The 5-W factors are easily determined by reading the English text of Paul's second missionary journey described by Luke (Acts 15:36-18:23) and his first epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1-5:28). In this context the Who, When, Where, Whom and Why are readily

identified. In the text of the epistle, Paul introduces himself as the writer in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 1 Thessalonians 2:18. All of the credible evidence indicates that Paul is the writer. The most respected scholars of New Testament studies agree that Paul is the author.

Authorship and inspiration of the text are inseparably related. Inspiration is a vital feature of writer identification. The text under consideration must exhibit evidence of inspiration in order to be identified as a portion of God's Word. Several passages within the overall text of sacred Scripture refer to and define inspiration of God's Word as fact.⁵ Among the Bible passages that are indicative of and instructive on this important subject are:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:26).

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them unto us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the spirit of God. Now we have received not, the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things

that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned...For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2: 9-16).

Additional passages that give information on, and definition of, the subject of inspiration are: 1 Corinthians 11:23; 2 Corinthians 12:1-9; Ephesians 3:1-7; Acts 10:1-20; John 16:13-14; and Acts 1:20-21.

In view of sufficient reliable evidence for Paul's authorship of 1 Thessalonians a few historic facts about him are in order. Paul was born probably about 10 A.D. in Tarsus of Cilicia⁶ (Acts 9:11). His apparent birth name was Saul, but he was later called Paul (Acts 13:9). He inherited from his father citizenship of both Tarsus and Rome. He was of the stock of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews and in regard to the Law a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) Paul was brought to Jerusalem at an early age to be educated at the feet of Gamaliel where he was taught according to the perfect manner of the Law (Acts 22:3). Paul had at least one sister whose son, his nephew, on one occasion saved his life (Acts 23:16-30). He consented to the martyrdom of Stephen and guarded the clothes of those who killed him (Acts 22:20). A short time after the death of Stephen he was converted to Christianity in the city of Damascus (Acts 9:1-20). Paul said of himself:

I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Tim. 1:13-15).

From the time of his conversion to Christ in Damascus, which some say occurred no more than two years after the crucifixion of Christ, until the end of His life in Rome, as opportunity afforded and God directed, he conducted determined, relentless campaigns for Christ, establishing many churches, often endangering his life for Christ, across Asia from Antioch, into Europe, back to Jerusalem and then to Rome (Acts 13:1-28:31).

When Was It Written?

When was it written? This is the next factor to be determined in the 5-W process. Before attempting to establish the calendar year and period of time when the first epistle to the Thessalonians was written it will be beneficial to consider the extent of circumstances and events before and after the historic date of writing. The portion of time in world history beginning with the birth of Christ in 4 or 5 B.C., including His ascension in 30 or 33 A.D. (Acts 1:1-11), plus a short time following when on the Day of Pentecost the church was officially established (Acts 2), and concluding with the writing of Revelation by John (probably about 68 A.D.), is the most important time period in world history. No other time frame of any extent in the history of world religion can be favorably compared to any degree with this period. In the outset of this period that which is described in John 1:1-14 was fulfilled. The first one third of this period is apparently the time referred to by Paul in Galatians 4:4-5 and Ephesians 1:7-11:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made

known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which he purposed in Himself, that in the **dispensation of the fullness of times** He might gather together in one all thing in Christ, both which are in heaven and are on earth in Him. In Him also we have gained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:7-11).

It is also the time of fulfillment of prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ. Jesus said of this time, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14). The succeeding 55-60 years of this period brought the spread of that which has changed the world in bringing salvation from sin by the Gospel of Christ to mankind. It was during this time that the text of the New Testament was written by those men inspired by God for the purpose of revealing His complete Word and Will to mankind.

It was during this time that Rome, the most expansive political and military empire in history, attained its zenith. During this time, civilized nations of the West and a major portion of the East were under Roman rule or subservient to it. During the first century A.D., Rome with an army of legionnaires numbered at no less than 25 legions, and an auxiliary army of comparable strength stationed at strategic locations throughout the empire, ruled the entire Mediterranean and European world while extending its influence over adjacent kingdoms.

Roman roads, built by imperial engineers, connected the provinces of the empire and extended avenues of trade and travel to distant lands beyond. These roads, portions of which had survived for more than 2000 years, enabled travelers to move expeditiously about the empire. It was within the domain of the most powerful empire in the world

that the kingdom of Christ was established (Acts 2). Travel by land routes and sea lanes was practically undisturbed. Barriers were down.

Gates to the world were open and the fullness of time had come (Eph. 4:9-11). Jesus said, "...look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35-38) and "... the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few..." (Matt. 9:37-38). By the year 49 A.D., Paul, a devout Jew of the sect of the Pharisees, a leader in the persecution of Christians, had been converted and was on his second far reaching missionary journey preaching Christ crucified. Apparently, that which occurred on Paul's second missionary journey (49-52 A.D.) in relation to the places and people involved was in keeping with God's Will and Plan (Acts 16:1-18:10) and as such beneficial to all people from that day forward.

With this accepted fact it is important to realize that personal developments involving Paul on his second missionary journey beginning at Thessalonica in late 49 A.D. resulted in his writing the first epistle to the Thessalonians in the early portion of 50 A.D. During the time of writing, Paul was residing with Aquila and Priscilla in the city of Corinth of Achaia, engaged in the physical labor of tent making as a means of financial support while preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ to the Corinthians. While thus engaged, Timothy brought him word from Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:6-7) to which he responded by writing 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1).

Where Was It Written?

Where was it written? The question gives special recognition to the importance of the factor of location of the author at time of writing. The location is a designated geographical site where the author had stopped

temporarily or was living when he wrote the Scripture under study. In the case of 1 Thessalonians there is unanimous agreement by most scholars of textual history and geography that Paul was residing in the city of Corinth of Achaia, approximately 400 miles from Thessalonica where in 50 A.D. he wrote the first Thessalonian epistle.⁷ Location, as is each of the 5-W factors, is important, because of specific conditions and circumstances, including the special needs of those to whom written that are currently known to the writer and his ability to constructively respond from his state of affairs at the time and location of writing.

It is determined by a constructive analysis of Luke's account of the early portion of Paul's second missionary journey, beginning in 49 A.D. at Antioch (Acts 15:36-40) that upon arrival in Thessalonica with the company of Silas and Timothy, Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue for three Sabbaths (Acts 17:1-4). This effort persuaded some of them, and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4). In response to Paul's success in teaching the Gospel, those Jews who were not persuaded became envious, took some evil men, gathered a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring Paul and his companions out to the people. As a result of this riotous episode, the brethren sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. However, upon Paul's successful entry to the synagogue at Berea the Jews from Thessalonica came and repeated the turmoil they had created in Thessalonica. Immediately, the brethren conducted Paul away and brought him to Athens (Acts 17:15).

After measured success in Athens with his sermon on the Unknown God, Paul traveled on to Corinth. While Paul was in residence with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth,

Timothy came to him with encouraging news from Thessalonica. Paul responded to Timothy's report by writing his first epistle to the Thessalonians. Before consideration of his report, and in order to appreciate what he said therein, it is necessary to consider some special aspects of his environment in the city where he was living at the time of writing.

When Paul arrived in the city of Corinth, it must have been with some extent of satisfaction that he had by the grace of God confronted the philosophers of Athens with a degree of success (Acts 17:22-34). The geographical location of Corinth gave it a massive market outreach by way of the harbors under its control on the Aegean and Adriatic Seas.⁸ By means of this advantage Corinthian merchants and tradesmen had access to all the shoreline cities of both seas and the over land trade routes servicing each location. Consequently, Corinth attracted a large community of merchants, both Jews and Greeks who bought and sold goods from many directions. As a result, a significant portion of its population was connected with or affected by the transit sea faring trade.

Corinth also exerted a degree of political influence because it was the seat of the Roman Proconsul of Achaia. By the time Paul arrived in 50 A.D. the city had developed a national reputation as a center of luxury, indulgence and vice. He found a city, of a large population of people with mixed backgrounds including a sizeable component of Jews large enough to support a synagogue. Apparently, many of the Jews had been attracted to the business opportunities of the city.

Paul arrived with no financial means of providing for his needs. Fortunately, he soon discovered a Jew by the name of Aquila and his wife whose name was Priscilla. Since they were of the same craft he abode with them and worked, for by occupation they were tent makers (Acts 18:2-3). Thus Paul

arrived on the scene in Corinth of Achaia. Paul's arrival in Corinth brought the message of the Gospel of Christ to the ears, minds and hearts of many who were receptive to it. Among those believing was Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and all his household (Acts 18:8).

One reason for the significant Jewish population in the city was because the emperor Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome (Acts 18:2). Obviously, another reason why many of the Jews and others had come to Corinth was the business opportunities available in the city.

In the beginning of Paul's stay of one and a half years in Corinth he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, bringing Timothy's report from Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:6), Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. When Paul gave that testimony the Jews opposed him and blasphemed. In the face of their opposition Paul shook his garments and said to them "your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized.

At this time the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision at night and said to him, "Do not be afraid but speak and do not keep silent...I have many people in this city" (Acts 18: 9-10). When Gallio became proconsul of Achaia in the latter part of 50 A.D., the Jews rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, charging that he persuaded men to worship God contrary to the law. Gallio would not hear their case and dismissed them. The Greeks, who were obviously strong loyal supporters of Paul, in response to the action taken by the proconsul, took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat.

Gallio took no notice of these things (Acts 18:1-17). Paul was in Corinth for one and a half years and this event leaves no doubt about how effective he was with the Greeks.

To Whom Was It Written?

Whom: To whom was the first epistle to the Thessalonians written? The fourth W of the 5-W method of interpretation addresses the question of, to whom was the written message of the text directed? The correct answer to this question is an essential aid to clarification and understanding of the Scripture under study. The text very clearly states in the salutation that the epistle is addressed to, "The church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1). The majority of textual scholars from the earliest dates are unanimous in agreement that the epistle was written to the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1). This being true, a brief review of events associated with the beginning of the Thessalonian church is in order.

Paul, Silas and Timothy arrived in Thessalonica in 49 A.D. after the episode in Philippi. Upon their arrival, Paul went to the Synagogue and reasoned with them for three Sabbaths (Acts 17:1-2). His efforts were met with initial success as, "Some of them were persuaded and a great multitude of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women joined Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:4). However circumstances changed when the Jews that were not persuaded gathered a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason where they thought Paul, Silas and Timothy were staying (Acts 17:5-10). With this fearful development Paul and Silas were sent away by night. From this point Paul was more or less on the run until he came to Athens (Acts 17:16).

With the memory of the beginning of the church in Thessalonica fresh on his mind, and being concerned about the young church's well being, Paul sent Timothy to

discover its state of affairs. Paul described his concern for them by saying:

We thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and send Timothy our brother and minister of God and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith (1 Thess. 3:1-2).

There is no doubt that the portion of New Testament text entitled 1 Thessalonians was written to the young church in Thessalonica which was established by Paul, Silas and Timothy in early 49 A.D.

Why Was It Written?

Why was it written? is the concluding W of the 5-W interpretation process. This question brings into focus all the questions and evidences regarding the church in Thessalonica from the time of its beginning until the writing of the first epistle to the Thessalonians. A review of the message of the letter to the church explains why it was written.

The first epistle to the Thessalonian church is one of the earliest of Paul's writings to be included in the New Testament. Upon receiving Timothy's report on the church in Thessalonica, Paul responded by writing his first letter to the church (1 Thess. 1:1) with the concluding instructions, "I charge you by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren" (1 Thess. 5:27). A reading of the epistle reveals the sense of delighted excitement and concern Paul experienced upon receiving Timothy's report. The general theme of the letter reveals among other things: a response of complimentary appreciation for their faithfulness (1 Thess. 1:1-10; 1 Thess. 2:13-16; 1 Thess. 3:1-13); encouragement for their continued growth and development (1 Thess. 4:1-12); instruction about the Second Coming of Christ and those

who have expired (1 Thess. 4:13-18); clarification on the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1-11); encouragement for Christian conduct (1 Thess. 5:12-22); and the conclusion (1 Thess. 5:23-28). The expected result of the letter to the church in Thessalonica would be an enhancement of their appreciation for the Apostle Paul, an increase in devotion of the brethren to the cause of the Lord, an acceleration and strengthening of their maturity in Christ, and a clarification of their hope for eternal reward in heaven.

The more often the letter is read, the more informative and instructive it becomes. It is weighted with information, instruction and advice, the principle of which should be accepted, applied and amplified by God's people in every place. Compliance with its teaching will make the world of today a much better place.

The 5-Ws established by this brief review of First Thessalonians are:

1. Who?.....The apostle Paul
2. When?.....50 A.D.
3. Where?.....Corinth
4. Whom?.....The church in Thessalonica
5. Why?Provide respect.
 - Why?.....Give needed instruction/admonishment.
 - Why?.....Clarify matter of Christ's Second Coming.
 - Why?.....Give assurance of resurrection of deceased Christians.
 - Why?.....Ask for prayers and pronounce blessing.

An unprejudiced student with this information in hand, plus additional information on the covenant period, priesthood, required sacrifice and testament regulations (Heb. 9:14-18), motivated by respect and love of truth is able to understand that portion of God's Word and Will as revealed in 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians

**Numerical Divisions Of Verses
According To Subject**
89 Verses Total

Appreciation And Encouragement
1:1-10; 2:13-16; 3:1-13
27 Verses

Review Of Paul's Actions For Them
2:1-12; 2:17-20
16 Verses

Instruction
4:1-12; 4:13-18; 5:1-4
22 Verses

**Exhortation To Growth.
Development And Maturity**
5:5-24
20 Verses

Conclusion
5:25-28
4 Verses
Pray For Us
Read The Epistle
The Grace Of Our Lord Be With You

Conclusion

There are numerous passages of sacred Scripture that can be easily misunderstood if the 5-W procedure is not properly utilized in their interpretation. A few of these are:

1. **The Sabbath law** (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). The information acquired, confirmed and established by the (1) Who, (2) When, (3) Where, (4) to Whom and (5) Why, provides correct understanding of its origin, application and termination. Any student of the Scriptures using the 5-W method honestly, truthfully and without prejudice will conclude that persons living in the year 2006 A.D. are not bound by or subject to the Sabbath law of the Old Testament period.

2. **Speaking in Tongues** (1 Cor. 12:10). Again, evidence produced by the 5-W procedure indicates that persons living today, 2006, are not granted the privilege of miraculously speaking in tongues

3. **Impossibility of Apostasy** (1 John 3:6; 1 John 3:9, 1 John 5:18). Again the 5-W procedure with a major emphasis on numbers 4 and 5 provides assistance in solving the problem.

4. **Saved by faith only** (John 3:16; Luke 23:43; Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16-17; 1 Cor. 13:2; Jas. 2:17). Again the 5-Ws will establish the correct perspective for an understanding of the passages and proposition under consideration.

Every human being should strive to know, by the assistance of God's providence, as much as is humanly possible, the truth of God's Word and Will. Very often, failure to understand correctly the Word and Will of God is often because of the interpreter's motive. Full, complete, and correct use of the 5-W method, plus other vital information effecting interpretation of a specific Scripture and its context, will produce correct understanding of the subject under study. A full, complete and correct use of the 5-W procedure in interpretation of a specific Scripture, its content and context will contribute substantially to a correct understanding of the text and subject under question.

A definitive study of the 5-Ws of any single or multiple Scripture inevitably results in some duplication

of findings. Duplication in that case should be considered as indication of consistent truth. An effort to avoid any and all duplication while attempting to develop the complete picture could result in loss of some valuable information considered to be irrelevant. However, an attempt to develop a complete study of each of the 5-Ws independently, in deference to the other 4-Ws could result in a failure to see the full picture with all components in proper balance. The result could be a short fall of comprehension in regard to the complete scene involved. It appears that any procedure used to gain a collective understanding of all 5-Ws will necessitate a slight degree of duplication, but in so doing the whole picture is there, shadows and all. The result thus achieved by the honestly diligent student may be surprising, but at least the student can say “Hallelujah, I see the whole complete.”

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

2 Merrill C. Tenny, **The New International Dictionary of the Bible**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), p. 1008.

3 Jay Lockhart, **Inspiration**, (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate, June 2006), p. 13.

4 Dub McClish, **Why I Should Believe The Bible, Power Lectures**, (Southaven, MS: church of Christ, 2005), p. 15.

5 Robert B. Sloan, **Holman Bible Dictionary, The Book of Revelation**, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), p. 1183.

6 Phillip W. Comfort, **Tyndale Bible Dictionary**, (Wheaton, IL: 20901), p. 996.

7 Thomas L. Brisco, **Holman Bible Atlas**, (Nashville, TN, Broadman & Holman, 1998), p. 248.

8 Comfort, p. 1252.

9 J.W. McGarvey, **Commentary On Acts Of Apostles**, 10th Edition, (Bowling Green, KY, Guardian of Truth Foundation).

CHAPTER 7

By Distinguishing Between The Permanent And The Temporary

Glenn Colley

Introduction

RATHER THAN TAKING A broad approach to this topic, I have decided to narrow down to one specific example, which I consider to be relevant and practical. The advocates of Sabbath observance publicize their beliefs and weave them with condemnation of all of us who believe the Bible teaches us to observe the first day of the week as our day of Christian worship to God. So, let's spend this short time distinguishing between the permanent and temporary as we consider the truth about the Sabbath day and how we can answer the popular objections.

Recently a good friend, a member of the body of Christ, said, "There are 55 references in the New Testament to the Sabbath, and only eight to the first day of the week. Are we right to not practice the Sabbath today?" (45 of those actually are mentioned in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John before the cross while the Old Law, including Sabbath worship was in effect). And he was troubled. Someone from the faith called, "Seventh Day Adventists" had knocked at his door, and their arguments puzzled him. Although there are various religious groups which hold to the idea of Sabbath keeping in Christianity,

probably the most well known are the followers of a woman named Ellen G. White. You know them as the Seventh-Day Adventists, and they consider her an inspired prophetess.

In Seventh-Day Adventist circles, a vision that Ellen G. White had in 1847 is important to their exaltation of the Sabbath command:

We felt an unusual spirit of prayer. And as we prayed the Holy Ghost fell upon us. We were very happy. Soon I was lost to earthly things and was wrapped in a vision of God's glory. I saw an angel flying swiftly to me. **He quickly carried me from the earth to the Holy City. In the city I saw a temple**, which I entered. I passed through a door before I came to the first veil. This veil was raised, and I passed into the holy place. Here I saw the altar of incense, the candlestick with seven lamps, and the table on which was the shewbread. After viewing the glory of the holy, Jesus raised the second veil and I passed into the holy of holies. In the holiest I saw an ark; on the top and sides of it was purest gold. On each end of the ark was a lovely cherub, with its wings spread out over it. Their faces were turned toward each other, and they looked downward. Between the angels was a golden censer. Above the ark, where the angels stood, was an exceeding bright glory, that appeared like a throne where God dwelt. Jesus stood by the ark, and as the saints' prayers came up to Him, the incense in the censer would smoke, and He would offer up their prayers with the smoke of the incense to His Father. In the ark was the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of stone which folded together like a book. Jesus opened them, and I saw the ten commandments written on them with the finger of God. On one table were four, and on the other six. The four on the first table shone brighter than the other six. But the fourth, the Sabbath commandment, shone above them all; **for the Sabbath was set apart to be kept in honor of God's holy name. The holy Sabbath looked glorious — a halo of glory**

was all around it. I saw that the Sabbath commandment was not nailed to the cross. If it was, the other nine commandments were; and we are at liberty to break them all, as well as to break the fourth. I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for He never changes. But the Pope had changed it from the seventh to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws ...I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, **the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers;** and that the Sabbath is the great question to unite the hearts of God's dear, waiting saints (**Early Writings**, 1963, pp. 32-33) (Emphasis mine, GC).

The summary meaning of this Ellen G. White vision is stated as follows in **Early Writings**, pp. XXI, XXII:

In this revelation, Mrs. White was carried down to the close of time and **saw the Sabbath as the great testing truth on which men decide whether to serve God or to serve an apostate power** (Emphasis mine, GC).

The Bible And The Sabbath Day

In the first three chapters of Genesis we read the Biblical and only factual description of the six days of creation. We observe that God rested on seventh day. This fact has been often over stated by those who wish to bind Sabbath worship on Christians today. Although Jehovah rested on the seventh day and He blessed/hallowed it, Moses does not say that He made it a day of **observance** from the beginning. Some assert the idea that the Sabbath was initiated at creation, at the beginning, but the Divine record doesn't say that.

It is true that the Sabbath had been hallowed by the time that the writer of Genesis penned the Decalogue, but the wording doesn't make it an observance until Exodus 20. I wish to show that it was not hallowed as a day of worship until it was given as part of the Law.

Consider the testimony of Nehemiah on the Sabbath-observance origin:

Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: **And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath**, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant (Neh. 9:13-14; Emphasis mine, GC).

Use this text to ask and answer relevant questions: **What** did He do? He “Made known the Sabbath to them.” **When** did He do this? When God came “down also on Mount Sinai and spake with them from heaven.” It was not until they were in the region of Sinai that they knew anything about hallowing and observing the Seventh day. Therefore, this idea that it started back at creation, existed from the beginning of time, and is still binding today, is simply not what the Bible says about the Sabbath.

Those who have studied this matter of Christian Sabbath worship will be familiar with a large number of Bible passages that turn the light on this truth: Sabbath observance is not part of the Christian system, and the true day of corporate worship for our age is the first day of the week. Get your Bible and let’s settle this matter with five blockbuster Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments.

Exodus 20

Let’s begin at the heart of the matter, Exodus 20, and the giving of the ten commandments. “And God spake all these words, saying, I **am** the Lord thy God, **which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt**, out of the house of bondage” (Exod. 20:1-2; Emphasis mine, GC).

In reading the Law of God, the ten commandments, these introductory verses are often overlooked. Look

closely. To whom were the 10 commandments, including the fourth one regarding the Sabbath, given? Observe that the Law of Moses was only meant to be bound on a very limited people. It was given specifically to those **whom God brought out of Egypt**. We shouldn't overlook that. Who was that?

Let's trace the history of generations from Adam to the giving of the Law of Moses and demonstrate the limited scope of that Law.

Adam was the first man. Read Genesis 5 and see that there are ten generations from Adam down to Noah. They are Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah.

Then come down to Genesis 10-11 and see that there are ten more generations down to Abraham. But wait—Noah had **three** sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth. But we don't trace the lineage through all three of these. We only do that through one of the sons of Noah, the one named Shem. Here they are: Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and Abraham.

Abraham produces a son by the name of Isaac. Isaac then has Jacob. Jacob's name is changed to Israel. One of the sons of Jacob is Joseph who was sold by his brothers into slavery and was taken down to Egypt where he eventually was elevated by God to a great ruler. When famine struck his large extended family, Joseph brought them all to Egypt and placed them in the safety of the land of Goshen.

Some time after Joseph was dead there arose a king in Egypt who knew not Joseph, and he made slaves of them. In Exodus 7-12, we read a description of ten awful plagues God rained down on Pharaoh and his people. The tenth one moved Pharaoh to release the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites. **They** are the ones that come out of Egypt. That is significant! Look closely. The sons of Japheth

are not in Egypt. The sons of Ham are not over there either. Only the descendents of Noah, through one of his sons, Shem, become eventually known as the children of Israel, slaves delivered from Egypt by God's hand. Why is that important? Because most of the people who read this chapter are descendants of Japheth or Ham. There may be a Shemite or as called today a Semite who studies this book, (as we hope all people will) but it will probably be rare. Most of us are not, and have never been in that lineage!

In a recent sermon preached in Henderson, Tennessee on the subject of the Sabbath, Alan Highers said this:

Most of the dark skinned peoples we know today descended from Ham whose descendants settled in what we know as Africa. Most of the Gentile or European people descended through Japheth whose sons (7 of them) were spoken of as the isles of the Gentiles (Gen. 10). But the people called Semitic people today, including the Jews, all came through one son: Shem.

Who was in Egypt and who came out of Egypt by God's mighty hand? Only the descendants of Shem. There were no descendants of Japheth there, and no descendants of Ham. Do you see the point? The Gentiles were not given the Law of Moses, it was only the Semitic people who were in Egypt. Those are the people to whom the Ten Commandments were given. It says, "I am the Lord thy God, which have **brought thee out of the land of Egypt**, out of the house of bondage. **Thou** shalt have no other gods before me" (Emphasis mine, GC).

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Now, to the second blockbuster passage for our lesson, Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here is the prophecy of Jeremiah regarding the new covenant:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers **in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt**; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this **shall be** the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Emphasis mine, GC).

Make some observations with me. The Lord says “I’ll make a new covenant.” (We don’t have to wonder long about what covenant that is referencing, because Hebrews 8:8-13 quotes this and applies it to the New Testament).

Now here is a specific detail we want to see: God says that when He makes that new covenant it won’t be like the one He made with their fathers when He took them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt.

I know one thing—the new covenant, (which is the New Testament law) is meant to be **different** from the one given by God to Moses when He brought the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. If we could find out what the covenant is that God made with the fathers when He took them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt we’d know this new covenant will be different from that!

Get a good concordance and find every time this phrase is in the Bible: “Out of the land of Egypt. It is in the KJV 81 times. One of those references is 1 Kings 8: 21, “And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein **is** the covenant of the Lord, which he made with our fathers, **when he**

brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Emphasis mine, GC). The ark of the covenant was the central piece of furniture in the Tabernacle and Temple and was kept in the most holy place. The Ark was a cabinet. What was in there? The name itself tells you, the “Ark of the Covenant,” and furthermore 1 Kings 8:21 says, “Wherein is the covenant of the Lord which He made with our fathers when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.”

Hold that thought, and compare this with Jeremiah 31:31:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to **the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (Emphasis mine, GC).

What was that covenant? It was what was inside the Ark. What covenant was inside the Ark? Go back in 1 Kings 8:9: “There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.”

There you have it. In Jeremiah 31, God says He will make a new covenant, and it won’t be like the one He made with the fathers when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. Furthermore, 1 Kings 8 says that covenant that God gave Israel at that time was the one that was in the Ark of the Covenant, and that was the two tables of stone, the ten commandments. I might add, the ten commandments, which include the fourth command regarding observance of the Sabbath day.

Romans 7:1-7

Now to the third blockbuster passage, Romans 7:1-7:

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion

over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, **ye also are become dead to the law** by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, **even** to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now **we are delivered from the law**, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not *in* the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except **the law had said, Thou shalt not covet** (Emphasis mine, GC).

This passage makes a good point about God's law on marriage, a law for all times. Yet, the issue of marriage and remarriage isn't the point of the apostle. He is speaking to the matter of our being released from the Old Law—and a careful reading shows that he means to include the Ten Commandments in that release.

There is a cutting-off point in marriage, a point at which a husband and wife are truly no longer married. It occurs at the death of one or the other spouse. Paul uses this well-known fact to drive home the facts about Christianity's cutting-off from the Law of Moses. That Old Law wasn't sin of course; after all it was from God Himself. And furthermore, Paul observes that the Old Law has been beneficial in his own life. In this observation we find our blockbuster point hidden. "...I had not known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet'." Get it: the law to

which we are no longer “married” or attached at all, included “Thou shalt not covet.” Now where is that found the Old Testament? In the Ten Commandments, which include “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”

Colossians 2:14

Now to our fourth blockbuster passage, Colossians 2:14: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross...” What do we know about the ordinances (or laws) Paul says have been “blotted out”? Well, they were against us, contrary to us, and therefore they were taken out of the way when Jesus was crucified.

But please observe: **that which was blotted out includes** the ten commandments. “Blotting out the **hand writing**... (Emphasis mine, GC)” What was ever given by hand? The Ten Commandments, engraved in stone by the finger of God (Exod. 31:18).

But we aren’t finished with this passage yet. Drop down to Colossians 2:16, and a further explanation of what Paul has in mind: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the **sabbath days** (Emphasis mine, GC).” That’s been taken out of the way. Nailed to the cross. He includes the Sabbath days. The word “therefore” is significant. It means, “Since the Old Law was nailed to the cross, don’t let anyone judge you in reference to these things under the OT Law.”

We are simply not under the Ten Commandments today, and thus not commanded to observe the Sabbath as were the Israelites.

2 Corinthians 3:6-11

Now to our fifth and final blockbuster passage, 2 Corinthians 3:6-7 and 2 Corinthians 3:11:

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for

the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written **and** engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which **glory** was to be done away: For if that which is done away **was** glorious, much more that which remaineth **is** glorious (Emphasis mine, GC).

According to the inspired apostle, that Old Law was the ministration of death and has been done away. While Christ is promised in the Old Testament, He didn't come until the time was right. That Law had a purpose, to prepare us for, and make us hungry for, the Christ with His New Testament (Gal. 3:19-29). That Old Law was just that, a law. A law, by its typical nature, does not provide for forgiveness, but merely condemns those who violate its contents. We needed more. We needed the grace which could only come from the Lamb of God. So, according to Galatians 3:11, one law is done away and one remaineth. One is no longer with us; it is something that no longer continues with us. The Law written and engraven in stones is the one done away, the ten commandments, the fourth of which regards the Sabbath.

Those today holding to the Sabbath as a perpetual law required of Gentile as well as Jew, have misapplied the Scriptures. The Law binding those Sabbath practices was temporary and never intended to be permanent. Christians recognize the first day of the week as the day of acceptable worship to God, and their reasons are valid. Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week, (Matt. 28:1-2); the church had its beginning on the first day of the week, (Acts 2:1); the church of Christ met for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7); early Christians ate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week and contributed monies to the Lord's work on the same day too (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Today, and so long as Christians seek the true way, we shall do the same.

CHAPTER 8

By Understanding The Differences Between The Covenants

David B. Jones

Commendation

WE ARE ONCE AGAIN honored to be asked to speak on the POWER Lectureship. We have always appreciated this good church since we first came to know her and her good members back in the late 1970's. We continue to be thankful for all the good which has been done to help us over all these years. God has blessed her with two godly elders and we are grateful for Con and Larry and their families. Their work is exemplary of what godly elders ought to and should do. Southaven is blessed with two sound Gospel preachers. B. J. and Tish Clarke, along with their children, have been our good friends for almost sixteen years and we are still thankful to labor in the same county with them for the Lord. Wayne Jones is a young man who has shown himself well in his writing, work and his proclamation of the King's message. We are proud of Shana Kaye and our grandchildren whom they rear in a godly home. We are also so thankful for all the members and the support and strength we draw and have drawn from them over the past years.

Introduction

We live in an age of religious confusion which can be traced to several roots. For various and sundry reasons

religious people have absorbed the traditions of their fathers. In some cases traditions are followed out of respect for parents and grandparents. However, Jesus said: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37).¹ People ought to have more respect for Jesus and His Word than for the word of parents or grandparents. Others follow traditions due to laziness and neglect of study. They are like rivers which flow the courses of least resistance. These individuals tread paths which have been laid by forefathers without giving much, if any, heed to where the road leads. After a few generations the majority of these have no idea how they accessed the road they walk much less the destination of the road.

The confusion can also be linked to people following their own feelings as opposed to a “thus saith the Lord.” The age of humanism is permeating and perverting the entirety of society. Humanism promotes self as “god,” and demotes God. What people feel becomes the standard by which they live. Respect for the Bible is ridiculed and rejected by the “intellects” of this type society. The Bible is viewed as nothing more than an ancient book like any other ancient book.

The present day confusion can also be attributed to ignorance of God’s Word. Our society majors in secular education and stands ignorant of God’s Word. The majority of young people are taught financial terminology and given physical training in contrast to knowing what God has decreed on living and dying. One generation arises and passes, followed by succeeding generations which become more and more steeped in ignorance. Hosea said in the long ago: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast

forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hos. 4:6). Many things in religion are sought to be justified based on an uneducated misconception of the Bible. This attitude portrayed in society has also crept in and now rushes headlong into the Lord’s church.

One of the major problems in misapplication of Scripture is due to an erroneous view of the differences in the covenants. Many individuals will run to the Old Testament for authorization of religious principles today. Countless are those who try to walk with a foot on both sides of the covenants when it comes to absolute religious authority. When one tradition or innovation is used, often they run to whichever covenant can be twisted so as to justify the action.

The true Bible student, who will be included in all those who see the Bible alike, is the one who will know how to rightly divide the Bible. Paul wrote to Timothy and said: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The ASV’s rendering of the last part of that verse is “handling aright the word of truth.” Thus, Paul encouraged and exhorted his young preacher friend to use the Scriptures correctly as he studied for himself and taught others. We can all see the Bible alike if we know the differences in the covenants. We will notice the difference in the covenants with several applications.

The Definition Of The Word “Covenants”

As we begin our study of the differences between the covenants we first need to understand the meaning of the word “covenant.” The ISBE defines it as such:

As already noted, the idea of covenants between God and men doubtless arose from the idea of covenants between men. Hence, the general

thought is similar. It cannot in this case, however, be an agreement between contracting parties who stand on an equality, but God, the superior, always takes the initiative. To some extent, however, varying in different cases, is regarded as a mutual agreement; God with His commands makes certain promises, and men agree to keep the commands, or, at any rate, the promises are conditioned on human obedience. In general, the covenant of God with men is a Divine ordinance, with signs and pledges on God's part, and with promises for human obedience and penalties for disobedience, which ordinance is accepted by men.²

A covenant as it refers to God and man is an agreement of sorts. God promises man if he (man) will keep His (God's) commands then God will bless man with certain rewards. If man decides to break God's covenant or agreement, then man reaps the consequences of God's wrath. Strong's defines the Hebrew word used most frequently and translated "covenant" as follows: "*ber-eeth*' – From H1262 (in the sense of *cutting* (like H1254)); a *compact* (because made by passing between *pieces* of flesh): - confederacy, [con-]feder[-ate], covenant, league."³ This is illustrated in the Bible as God made a covenant with Abraham:

And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not (Gen. 15:9-10). . . And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: (Gen. 15:17-18).

God made a pact or an agreement with Abraham when the animals were parted and God passed between them.

God also made a covenant with His children when He led them out of Egypt. God promised them:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exod. 19:5-6).

God promised them His blessings if they kept that covenant that He made with them. However, that generation did not keep the covenant so God punished them with forty years of wandering. When Moses had the next generation ready to go over Jordan into Canaan, God spoke through His servant Moses and said:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deut. 4:1-2).

Thus, God had reminded them of the covenant and commandments He expected them to keep. In the course of time, God had to send His people into captivity to purge the idolatry from them. In the days of Jeremiah the prophet God prophesied about a new covenant He would make with His people:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which

my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

God makes reference to His first covenant but promises a new covenant with His people. This new covenant would be the New Testament under which we live today. We will speak of this new covenant later and also look back at Jeremiah's writings as to the dynamics of the Old and New Covenants.

Thus, a covenant is a pact, agreement, or a league made between two parties. If both parties are men then they would be equal in their agreement. Both parties would be obligated to that upon which they agreed. But in the case of God and man there is a superior party and inferior party. God makes certain promises and man has the obligation to keep those commands if he desires God's blessings, knowing that God's wrath awaits the disobedient. God has the right to decree such a covenant seeing He created and sustains mankind.

The Design Of The Covenants

We begin by asking ourselves the question: "Why did God make a first covenant?" Just why did God design a covenant to be made with His people? To begin to see the design of the covenant we must go back to the garden of Eden. God created man and placed him in a paradise to work the land (Gen. 2:15). Man had right to every tree

which God had made except for the fruit which came from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, being deceived by the serpent. She gave the fruit to Adam who was with her and he ate also (Gen. 3:1-6). Since God had promised them death if they ate, God was faithful to His Word. He expelled them from the garden and physical death was introduced to mankind on that day.

However, God also made a promise on that day and allowed a propitiation to be used. God promised that one day a Deliverer would be sent: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The Bible also records: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). Since we are introduced in Genesis 4 to blood sacrifices, it is very conceivable to believe that God allowed those animals from whom came the clothes for Adam and Eve, to serve as blood sacrifices on that day in their stead. Further, God made the declaration in the Law of Moses that only blood can atone for sin: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).

As God through His power and sovereignty worked out His plan to bring the Deliverer into the world, He delivered His children from Egyptian bondage and brought them to Mount Sinai. There He gave them the Law of Moses and made the covenant with them to which we alluded earlier. What was the design of this covenant? Why did God make this covenant?

We have already noted that God promised them blessings **if** they kept this covenant. However, they did not keep it correctly and God punished them in accordance.

But there was a deeper design to this covenant than simply blessings if they were obedient. Paul writes and tells us why God made this first covenant with His people: “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). Why did God make this first covenant with Israel? Paul says because of transgressions and it was to be in force **till** the seed should come. He has already told them that **the** seed was Christ (Gal. 3:16). So we can know that this first covenant was made because of man’s sins and it was to last till Christ came. In so giving them this Law God designed it to prepare them for the Christ—the Deliverer of Genesis 3:15. His design is seen in several ways...

Shadow And Substance

The writer of Hebrews explicitly says that the Old Law was but a shadow of the real substance to come:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

When we see a shadow we can see the outline of the approaching figure. We can tell somewhat the size and shape of the figure upon whom the light is shining. But we can not see the exact details of that figure. The first covenant was but a shadow of the substance that was to come in the second covenant. The Jews could grasp some

of God's plan for the future but they were not able to know all the exact details of what God had in mind for His children under the second covenant. Paul quotes from the first covenant and makes application of this very fact: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). This is a quote from Isaiah 64:4 and Paul applies it to the second covenant or church age under which we live. There was no way for the Jews to know the intricate details of the second covenant but they did have a shadow of them or a glimpse into them. What did they see when they saw the shadow?

They saw in the animal sacrifices a shadow of the true sacrifice—Jesus—who was yet to come. They saw this in the Passover Lamb that was sacrificed before the Jews left Egypt. Notice the commands which Moses gave them:

Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it (Exod. 12:5-7).

This lamb was to not have a blemish on it; it was to be killed in the evening; and its blood was to be applied to their houses. The observance of the Passover was to be a law for them and their descendants (Exod. 12:14). Thus, every time they observed this feast God was casting a shadow over them of something to come. Paul explains exactly what that was: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:" (1 Cor. 5:7). No doubt, the Corinthians would have known the reference

to which Paul alluded. So the first covenant served them as a shadow of the true substance to come. This lesson would have been especially important to them because they needed to purge out the sin in the congregation and Paul used the shadow of the Passover to show them the true substance of what they needed to do.

Also, the Old Law was a shadow of the priesthood which was to come. We read in the book of Leviticus about the ordaining of the priests. We read of the qualifications of the priests in the Law and of all the details of their service and of their attire. We are told that all sacrifices must go through them and that no sacrifice outside the authorized priesthood will be accepted. We even read of the exactness of their service as we read of the tragedy of Nadab and Abihu:

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD (Lev. 10:1-2).

Therefore, the shadow explained that when the substance was given that the matters of worship would be essentially important. Peter reveals that all who have obeyed the Truth through the Spirit would be the true priests of God today and would offer spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5).

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

Just as the shadow had depicted in the past covenant, today in the new covenant only the true priests of God can offer sacrifices and have them accepted through Christ.

We can know when those outside the accepted and authorized priesthood attempt to offer sacrifices to God today that He will not have respect unto them nor unto their sacrifices.

The shadow also pictured the fact that God expected His children to be sanctified and separate from the world around them. Moses wrote:

Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth (Deut. 14:1-2).

The children of Israel were prohibited from cutting themselves because that was the way that the heathen mourned and tried to beseech the mercies of their idolatrous gods. The true God of heaven demanded that His children call upon Him in the authorized fashion and not to be like the heathen of the world. Paul makes this abundantly clear when he writes to the Romans:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Paul commanded that we be not conformed to this world. That is, that we take not upon ourselves the image of this world. We are to be different and distinct from the darkness of this world. Paul also wrote:

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye

therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light (Eph. 5:6-8).

Just as light repels darkness, we as the children of God must repel the darkness of this world.

Prophecies And The True Prophet

The first covenant was also designed by God so that many prophecies could be made and thus His children would be watching for these and would know the Deliverer of Genesis 3:15 when He appeared. Beginning with that prophecy God made hundreds of prophecies concerning the coming of the Christ. Some scholars have estimated as many as three hundred thirty-three were made in the Old Testament and fulfilled perfectly in Christ. Some prophecies concerned those living in the times of the prophets and were fulfilled within the lives of the people on earth. Others were not fulfilled until the coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. For example, Jeremiah prophesied of the seventy years of captivity in Babylon: “And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jer. 25:11). The Jews went into Babylonian captivity starting in about 606 B. C. and came out in 536 B. C. This was exactly seventy years. However, most prophecies concerned the coming of the kingdom and of the Christ. Nathan said to David:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy

shall not depart away from him, as I took *[it]* from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

This prophecy was directly fulfilled in Christ as Peter explained in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff). Isaiah also spoke of the establishment of the house of the Lord [750 B. C.] (Isa. 2:2-3). We know the house of the Lord is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). Joel spoke of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Jew and Gentile [830 B. C.] (Joel 2:28-32). This too was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14ff).

Numerous are the prophecies of the True Prophet (Christ). Peter makes reference to the Christ by quoting from Deuteronomy 18:15ff and applying it to Him:

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people (Acts 3:22-23).

A prophet was one who spoke for God and Jesus brought down the Word of God to all the earth (John 16:13-15; Heb. 1:1-3). Isaiah spoke of His crucifixion some seven hundred years before Christ was ever born on earth as a man (Isa. 53). The details are so vivid that one might think Isaiah was sitting at the foot of the cross and writing a detailed account as an eyewitness. Yet, God was showing them in the shadow a picture of the real thing which was to come. Zechariah spoke of Jesus being a priest and king on His throne (Zech. 6:11-13). On and on the verses are to show repeatedly that the prophecies were made in the shadow and the True Prophet fulfilled them when he came, died and was resurrected.

The Promise Of Redemption And The Provided Redemption

The first covenant was not designed to eternally redeem man's sins. God made this crystal clear in many instances. In Leviticus 16, we read of the Day of Atonement. On the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 16:29) the high priest was to gather the Israelites and cast lots between two goats. On the one which the lot fell the hands of the high priest were to be laid and the goat led out and released outside the camp. This was symbolic of the fact that one day a sacrifice would come and take the sins of the people away and they were to be redeemed outside the walls of the city. We read that this was fulfilled in Christ: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12-13). The other goat was slain and his blood taken into the most holy place by the high priest. This was for himself and the sins of the people. This was done every year to remind them that the true sacrifice had not yet come. But the Hebrews writer tells us that Christ offered Himself once for the eternal redemption of the people:

Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the

time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:6-12).

So the shadow portrayed a promise of eternal redemption but the true substance brought about eternal redemption for the sins of mankind.

The Dynamics Of The Covenants

The dynamics of the two covenants also speaks as to their differences. Under the first covenant one was born physically into the covenant and then taught Who God was and what God had done for them. A male child was circumcised the eighth day as a sign or token of the covenant:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised (Lev. 12:1-3).

This physical birth made them a member of the covenant and then they were taught about God and about His great works. The design and dynamics of this were so put into place by God to make them aware of their need and dependency on God. Also, God was providing and preserving a physical line through which He could bring the Christ into the world. We have already noted that David was told that through his house would come the Christ (2 Sam. 7:12-16). By having a physical birth as the means into the covenant, God provided the fleshly side He needed to have a mediator for mankind.

However, the time would come when this covenant would not suffice for God's eternal plan to redeem man. As we have already quoted, Jeremiah spoke of a day when God would make a new covenant with the house of Israel. We will notice in detail one of those verses:

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:34).

Notice that God said that the day would come when those in the covenant would **not** have to teach or be taught Who God was. Under the first covenant, as soon as a Jewish baby was born he or she was automatically a part of the covenant. But this is **not** the dynamics of the second covenant. Under the New Testament one must be born again, but this is a spiritual birth and not a physical birth (John 3:3-5).

Those who are in the New Covenant will be those who are old enough and mature enough to make the decision to be baptized for the remission of sins. These will be old enough to understand Who Jesus is and have faith in Him. These will be old enough to have repented of sins and confessed the sweet name of Jesus. These will not have to be taught Who God is because they can **not** be added to the covenant unless they do! And when they obey the Gospel they are born into God's family and they are added by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

The Duration Of The Covenants

The duration of the first covenant was **never** meant to be everlasting. As we have already noted Paul said it was to last till the seed should come (Gal. 3:19). Jeremiah's

prophecy also states that a new covenant would be established. The Hebrews writer quotes from Jeremiah and makes direct application to those after the cross:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest (Heb. 8:6-11).

Notice that the second covenant is established upon better promises. If there is **no** second covenant why would the writer use this analogy? Why does God say that an occasion for the second would be sought if the first is still in authority today?

Christ Himself said that the first covenant's duration was not eternal: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17). He said of Himself that one of His works on earth was to "fill full" the Old Testament. Paul confirms Christ's role when he wrote:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For

he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh (Eph. 2:13-17).

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it (Col. 2:14-15).

Christ came and fulfilled all the prophecies about Himself and His church. He took the Old Law out of the way and nailed it to His cross. Since the time His New Law was sent from heaven on the Day of Pentecost all men were made accountable to it. This is why He would say to His apostles shortly before His ascension:

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

Because all the world resided under His authority and the authority of His new will, He sent His apostles into all the world to teach all men to obey the Gospel in order to be saved.

However, it is simply amazing that most people in the religious world will **not** even listen to simple, straightforward and strong statements about the duration of the covenants. Paul wrote plainly:

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:22-25).

Paul said emphatically that we are **no longer** under the schoolmaster or Law of Moses!! That is about as plain as God could have stated it.

Conclusion

People do not understand the Bible alike for various reasons but ignorance of how to divide it is high on the list. The honest Bible student only has to barely study to know that there is a difference in the covenants. There was a difference in design, in the dynamics of the covenants and in the duration of them. If people would only read and study God's Word, taking it for what it says and teaches, many more in the world could be united in Christ. Jesus said: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Endnotes

1 All quotations were taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

2 **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** (e-Sword Version 6.5.0, Copyright 2000-2002-Rick Meyers, All Rights Reserved worldwide), <http://www.e-sword.net> .

3 **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance**, (James Strong, S.T.D., L.L.d., Craig Rairdon and Parsons Technology, Inc., Hiawatha, Iowa, 1990 via e-Sword Version 6.5.0, Copyright 2000-2002- Rick Meyers, All Rights Reserved worldwide), <http://www.e-sword.net>.

CHAPTER 9

By Distinguishing Between Literal And Figurative Language

Don Walker

Preface

I ALWAYS CONSIDER IT a great privilege to participate in the Annual POWER Lectures. We appreciate the brethren here with her elders and deacons and are always impressed with the quality of the production, both in book form and in the lectureship itself. We also count it a great honor to call B. J. Clarke a brother, fellow worker and friend. It is our sincere hope and conviction that this effort will be rewarded by our God being glorified. I thank each one involved for the blessing of being able to provide this chapter and to participate by the presentation of this chapter in the lectureship.

We are also impressed with the series of lessons that have gone before. Particularly we are thrilled with the series of lessons which began with “Why Should I Believe the Bible?” and continue with this year’s theme. Certainly a study of God’s Word is of value and to study about the Bible is also of great benefit.

George Washington once said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” It is sad indeed that so few in this world recognize the breathtaking gift that is God’s revelation, the Bible. The

righteous man's delight is in the Law of the Lord (Psm. 1:2). It seems significant that the longest chapter in the Bible is a marvelous tribute to the value of God's Word. In Psalm 119, we find a number of passages that proclaim how the righteous will look upon God's Word.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word (Psm. 119:15-16).

O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day (Psm. 119:97).

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psm. 119:103-105).

In the great Psalm of revelation, Psalm 19, the inspired writer proclaims the value of God's written revelation. Notice these glorious truths.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them *there is* great reward (Psm. 19:7-11).

The wise man encouraged his son to turn his attention to the wisdom and knowledge of God.

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine

heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:1-5).

Young Timothy stood where he stood because of the exposure he had to the Word of God. Paul wrote:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Right thinking men will give much attention to the Book of books. It speaks of eternal matters that concern man and his Creator. It proclaims Divine truths of eternal consequence. God gave Scriptures to make Himself known to His creation. Paul's prayer was that the Colossians would be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). Paul stated that his desire was:

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Phil. 3:10-11).

What a magnificent goal it is to set out to know our most Holy and Hallowed God. It is for this purpose, to know God, that His Word was given in the first place. Understanding this point will help us to see the value of the set theme for this book and the lectures which did

accompany it. “How can we understand the Bible alike?” It is a most relevant question. Can we understand the Bible? If yes, then can we understand it alike? The very thought of “understanding” demands that we understand it alike. If there is a disagreement, then somewhere there is misunderstanding. It may be with one or it may be with all parties involved. But it is a reasonable conclusion to recognize that when there is a difference in our understanding of God’s Word, it is because someone misunderstands. So if we can understand the Bible, then we can understand it alike.

Even though there may be some portions of God’s Word that are difficult to understand (2 Pet. 3:16), we must conclude that God’s Word can be understood. Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Paul also wrote, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4). Not only can it be understood, it can and must be understood alike. Again, Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Again, to the Philippians, Paul wrote, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2).

Yet, the reality of the matter remains. Not all people understand the Bible and certainly, not all “understand it alike.” What is the answer? How can we understand the Bible alike? With the remainder of our space we will suggest and develop one area that undoubtedly will assist us in our understanding of the Bible. We can understand the Bible alike “By Distinguishing Between Literal and Figurative Language!”

Introduction

From the very beginning of time man has had the ability to communicate. Language has been a part of man's existence always. Adam was able to communicate with God and the serpent was able to communicate with Eve. Eve and Adam were able to communicate with each other. The power of language is seen when we consider Genesis 11:1, which reads: "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech." Again, the context continues:

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city (Gen. 11:6-8).

When they spoke the same language "nothing would be restrained from them." Yet after the Lord confounded their language, they scattered abroad and "left off to build the city." There is power in language and in the understanding of language.

"Language" is a general term which includes many elements. "Grammar" is the necessary structure of language—the sounds, words, syntax, and semantics. "Rhetoric is what we do with the language, the choices we make with words, phrase structure and placement, and the tricks we use to make the language more noticeable and memorable."¹ In the traditional sense, words in literal expression "denote what they mean according to common or dictionary usage."² On the other hand, "figurative expressions connote additional layers of meaning."³ E. W. Bullinger wrote:

All language is governed by law; but, in order to increase the power of a word, or the force of an expression, these laws are designedly departed from, and words and sentences are thrown into, and used in, new forms, or *figures*.⁴

As Wayne Jackson observed:

How dreary human communication would be were it not for the figures of speech that adorn language. In fact, it scarcely would be possible to convey ideas meaningfully if figurative speech were not a part of our vocabulary.⁵

As true and valid as this thought is, we also recognize that there are challenges that are associated with language concerning its literal and figurative uses. Sometimes these challenges are genuine challenges, and other times, those who are perhaps less than honest take advantage of others by attributing literalness to figurative language and vice versa.

Concerning “literal language,” Lockhart wrote, “When a word is used in its primitive or most usual sense, it is said to be literal.”⁶ On the other hand, when a word that has been appropriated by usage to one thing and is transferred to another, it is said to be used figuratively:

A figure, therefore, is a departure or deflection from the primitive or usual meaning of a word, or the usual manner of expressing ideas.⁷

A figure of speech occurs when a word, phrase, or sentence is employed in a sense other than the **usual** or **literal** sense it has normally.⁸

Every language known to man is adorned with figurative language. This then is true of the Greek language in which the New Testament was first delivered. In fact, the Greeks were “so sophisticated in the art of symbolic language that they gave names to more than 200

forms.”⁹ Wayne Jackson gives four reasons why figurative language developed and accelerated through the ages:

First, all languages are growing entities. There is not always a word to express a specific idea. Thomas Horne explained, ‘Figurative language has its rise in the first ages of mankind: the scarcity of words occasioned them to be used for various purposes: and thus figurative terms, which constitute the beauty of language, arose from its poverty; and it is still the same in all uncivilized nations.’¹⁰

Secondly, the human mind has been so designed as to appreciate comparisons. Thus the use of analogies accommodates the very way we think.

Thirdly, in terms of Biblical studies, it must be recognized that many of the great spiritual truths of Scripture (e.g., thoughts relating to God, salvation, etc.) involve abstract concepts that require more concrete expressions in order to relate the meanings.

Finally, it should be remembered that most of our knowledge is acquired by means of sense perception, i.e., by what we see, hear, feel, touch, or taste. Frequently, we think in pictures. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that graphic images of human languages should be borrowed from the world about us so as to facilitate our communication with one another.¹¹

Yet, as we have stated, the use of literal and figurative language serves to challenge our minds at times and the misuse of language by false teachers can serve to deceive.

So then, whether we consider the lucidity and precision of literal language, or the deep shades and multiple levels of figurative language we must recognize the challenges men face in understanding Jehovah’s proclamation to men.

Examples Of The Challenges

Men have struggled with the use of figurative language throughout the years. In John 2, Jesus said:

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up....Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body (John 2:19-21).

Jesus was using figurative language, but they understood in a literal sense. Nicodemus in John 3, the woman at the well in John 4, as well as the disciples of Jesus in the same chapter, would be other examples where Jesus would speak figuratively to illustrate spiritual truths and yet was understood literally because those He spoke with were thinking of the physical man.

The struggle with the use of figurative and literal language was not isolated to the first century. Mickelsen and Mickelsen tell us that “Allegorizing was prominent in Greek thought at least 500 years before the time of Christ.” They also wrote, “Allegorizing was common in the church from the time of Origen (A.D. 200) until nearly the time of Luther (A.D. 1500).¹² During this time there were a multiplicity of fanciful thoughts and teachings abounding. Origen studied Genesis 24:15-21 about Rebekah’s drawing water for Abraham’s servant and allegorized it to mean: “We must come to the well of Scripture to meet Christ.”¹³ Origen interpreted the story of the triumphal entry of Christ thus:

The ass represents the letter of the Old Testament; The colt or foal of the ass speaks of the New Testament; The two apostles who obtained the animals and brought them to Jesus are the moral and spiritual senses.”¹⁴

One preacher in the fifth century looked at the slaughter by Herod of the children two years and younger, with the three year olds presumably escaping, as teaching that those who hold the “Trinitarian faith will be saved, where as Binitarians and Unitarians will undoubtedly perish.”¹⁵ Augustine saw the death and resurrection of

Christ when he read of the Psalmist lying down, sleeping and arising in Psalm 3:5. Bernard Ramm summed it up this way:

A study of the commentaries or use of Scripture among the early Church fathers reveals a fantastic use of the imagination in finding New Testament truth or Spiritual truth or Theological truth in the Old Testament by use of Allegorical interpretations.¹⁶

These abuses mention only one style of figurative language. When you broaden the search, it should be evident that examples of abuse could be piled high in all areas of figurative language. With such confusion present we don't want to conclude that it is impossible to decipher between the literal and the figurative. In fact, we must realize the import of rightly dividing in this most wonderful and important area.

Before we turn our attention to passages of Scripture which illustrate the import of our subject we will present some rules for distinguishing between literal and figurative languages.

Rules For Interpretation

In contemplating various considerations that must be employed we would first say that a simple application of common sense will assist us greatly. Another important consideration, as is true with any legitimate hermeneutic, would be the fact that we must recognize context. Even in general conversation, this is true. For example, if a young man says, "When she entered the room my heart did leap," we know he is not saying his heart did literally leap, so we conclude it is figurative language. But what did he mean? Was she a wicked, scary woman and it "did leap" with fear, or was it a woman who brought good news? It may have been the young man's true love and it was this

great love that caused the heart to leap. Context means everything. This is especially true concerning the study of our Bibles.

E. W. Bullinger wrote these salient words, emphasizing other important principles in understanding:

It may be asked, "How are we to know, then, when words are to be taken in their simple, original form (i.e., literally), and when they are to be taken in some other and peculiar form (i.e., as a Figure)?" The answer is that, whenever and wherever it is possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood literally, but when a statement appears to be contrary to our experience, or to known fact, or revealed truth; or seems to be at variance with the general teaching of the Scriptures, then we may reasonably expect that some figure is employed. And as it is employed only to call our attention to some specially designed emphasis, we are at once bound to diligently examine the figure for the purpose of discovering and learning the truth that is thus emphasized.¹⁷

Now let's break these particular points down and develop them more fully.

First, **whenever and wherever it is possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood literally.** This, we are told, was Origen's problem. That is, he went in to the study of a context expecting to find the "deeper meaning" of the symbolism or figure. We must do just the opposite. We must first assume the literal, unless there are other factors which necessitate a different approach. Therefore, our next points must reflect this understanding.

Secondly, **Scripture must be recognized literally unless the sense implies an impossibility.** Brother Jackson uses John's declaration in his Gospel account as an example. He writes:

John closes his Gospel account with the declaration that should all the deeds of Jesus

during His earthly ministry, be fully recorded, not even the world itself could hold the books that might catalog them (John 21:25). This language is acknowledged as “hyperbole.” A “hyperbole” is a tool used in a figurative sense for the purpose of emphasis. John’s point was there was much more that Jesus did while on this earth than what we have recorded in John’s account or even in Scripture for that matter.¹⁸

Thirdly, Scripture must be recognized literally unless the sense implies an absurdity.

The Scriptures use the term ‘face’ dozens of times in a figurative sense, e.g., face of the deep (Gen. 1:2), face of the earth (Gen. 1:29), face of the ground (Gen. 2:6), etc. Obviously, to press the word ‘face,’ in a literal sense, would imply and absurdity with reference to the sea, the earth, etc. Clearly, then, these uses are figurative.¹⁹

Several of Jesus’ “I am” statements in the book of John would imply an absurdity if taken literally. “I am the bread that gives life” (John 6:48), “I am the light for the world” (John 8:12), “I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7), etc., all serve as prime examples of showing that we must assume figurative language because to take the passages literally would be to imply an absurdity.

Fourth, Scripture must be taken literally unless the sense implies a contradiction.

In the book of Revelation, the final abode of the redeemed is depicted as a ‘holy city’ (Rev. 21:2). One of the features of that city was its wall, that rested on ‘twelve foundations’ upon which were written the names of the ‘twelve apostles’ (Rev. 21:14). The numeral ‘twelve,’ as used here, cannot be literal, for there were thirteen apostles (the original twelve, minus Judas, plus Matthias, plus Paul). The number ‘twelve’ came to be used as a symbol of the apostolic group, even when the number ‘twelve’ was not precise. After Judas died, yet before Matthias was chosen, Jesus

(following his resurrection) appeared to ‘the twelve’ (1 Cor. 15:5). ‘Twelve,’ therefore, in Revelation 21:14 is employed symbolically for the apostolic company, without literal, mathematical precision.²⁰

There is a multiplicity of absurdities accepted by religionists because they have taken figurative language and applied it in a literal sense. Catholicism, Premillennialism, and Max Kingism, are but a few of the movements that have butchered Scripture, accepted an absurdity and built whole systems of religion upon foolishness.

Another point that must be recognized is, **Scripture must be taken literally unless the sense puts the passage at variance with the general teaching of the Scriptures.** It is amazing how so many false doctrines are formulated from passages that are obviously figurative, but are forced into a literal sense. And then, when the conclusions are drawn that contradict clear Bible passages, the clear teaching of Scripture is ignored and the fanciful and bombastic false teaching is grasped. Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return and establish His Kingdom and reign for 1000 years. However, there are a host of passages that clearly teach that the kingdom is the church and that it came into existence in the first century. Let us notice some of those passages now.

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath **translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son** (Col. 1:13).

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and **in the kingdom** and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9).

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will **build my church**; and

the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

Rather than the church being a “Plan B” as Premillennialism teaches, the Bible clearly teaches that the church is God’s eternal purpose.

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9-11).

As students of the Bible we must allow the clear passages to shed light upon the more difficult or figurative texts. We dare not ignore the teaching of the whole New Testament simply because we can form a false teaching by literalizing a figurative text. This brings us to another very important consideration. The **nature** of a biblical book may provide a clue, suggesting that the student is to watch for an abundance of **figures of speech**. Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah are Old Testament Books which contain apocalyptic literature. The Book affected most with apocalyptic literature is the Book of Revelation. John wrote, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and **signified** it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev. 1:1). Of this word Wayne Jackson writes:

The verb “signified” derives from *semaino*, which in early Greek meant “to show by a sign, indicate,

make known, point out” (Liddell-Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, Oxford: Clarendon, 1869, p. 1448). Vincent cites John’s use of the term in his Gospel (John 12:33) where Jesus, in symbolic fashion, identified the method of his death by means of the expression “lifted up,” which hinted of the crucifixion (cf. also John 21:19). He further notes that the term “signified” is “appropriate to the symbolic character” of the revelation.²¹

In studying Revelation, we must take great care that we do not overlook the symbolic language and draw faulty conclusions from this most colorful section of Scripture.

In all honesty, these rules all would fall under the use of “common sense” when we study Scripture. Now let us turn our attention to some examples where the failure to distinguish between literal and figurative language has caused men to miss God’s intended message and even at times caused men to draw a completely different conclusion.

Examples Of Language Abuses

In Revelation 7, and Revelation 14, John speaks of 144,000. The Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that that is a literal number and represents those that will be in heaven at the end of time. The rest of the good will dwell upon God’s glorified earth. In their words we read this:

The total number of those making up the “body” of Christ, the spirit-begotten congregation, is stated to be 144,000 persons. These, when resurrected to the heavens, are to reign with Christ as kings and priests (Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-5; 20:4,6).... They are the nucleus around which a much larger number of honest-hearted persons have gathered. These latter ones are called by Jesus the “other sheep” (John 10:16). The Bible also designates them as a “great crowd,” having the hope of everlasting life on earth as subjects of the Kingdom (Rev. 7:9-17).

The remaining ones of Christ's spirit-anointed body members on earth constitute the "faithful and discreet slave" of today, and it is this class as foretold at Matthew 24:47, that the Lord Jesus has appointed "over all his belongings" here on earth (*Organization*, pp.9-10).

One thing that is of great interest in this matter is the selectiveness employed concerning what is literal and what is figurative. Jehovah's Witnesses say the 144,000 is a literal number, but other elements in this context must be figurative. In Revelation 7:4-8, the numbers are derived from the twelve tribes of Judah. Revelation 14:4 describes them as "they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." However, these are not accepted as literal by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet again, in chapter 7, John wrote:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10).

In actuality, the number is a figurative number which represents all of the redeemed—not only 144,000, but all that are faithful to the Lamb and to the One that sits on the throne. The numbers 12 and 1000, (144,000 is a derivative of both of these numbers), are numbers that represent completeness or totality.

Another doctrine accepted and espoused is the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. The Catholic Church teaches that when Jesus established the Lord's Supper the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine changed literally to the body and blood of Christ. Therefore during "the Eucharist" the two elements change to the literal body and blood of Christ. Let's notice Jesus' statement.

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 (Matt. 26:26-28).

The conclusion that the Catholic Church promotes is not substantiated by Scripture in any other section, and it does imply a serious absurdity. As is true in John 6, the statement made by Christ is figurative. The unleavened bread **represents** the body of Christ and the fruit of the vine **represents** his blood.

Conclusion

Bible study is a noble activity to say the least. However, with an attempt to understand Scripture comes challenges of which we must be aware. Yet, we can not allow the challenges to quench our desire to know God and His Word, nor can we allow them to extinguish our desire or activity to know the Word. A knowledge of God's Word is essential to the salvation of our souls. We can and must understand God's Word. With that understood, we must also realize that we can and must understand the Bible alike. There is no other way to "understand."

One point that will help us to understand the Bible alike is to distinguish between literal and figurative language. May we all apply the principles mentioned herein and determine that we will study more and more and apply the life giving message to our lives that we might ever walk nearer to our Lord.

Endnotes

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19 Ibid.

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CHAPTER 10

By Allowing The Bible To Interpret The Bible

Brian Kenyon

Introduction

HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND the Bible alike? is a question at the very heart of salvation. If God's Word must be obeyed in order to be saved (and it must, Heb. 5:9), then it is imperative that we understand the Bible. If God's Word teaches a unified message of salvation applicable to all humanity (and it does, Eph. 4:1-6), then it is imperative that we understand the Bible alike. Allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible is one of the key elements—if not the key element—in understanding the Bible alike. In this study we will define what “the Bible is its own best interpreter” means, give examples of how one passage in the Bible is often the key to interpreting accurately other passages in the Bible, show how certain misunderstandings of the Bible exist because people have not allowed the Bible to interpret the Bible, and explain the practicality and importance of sound Biblical exegesis, the most needed and effective way of allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible.

The Bible Is Its Own Best Interpreter

Those of us who have been members of the church of Christ for any length of time have probably heard often that “the Bible is its own best interpreter,” but have we ever really considered the significance of that statement?

What exactly does it mean? The answers to these questions become clear when we understand **why** the Bible is its own best interpreter.

Although the scope of this lesson does not include proving the existence of God and the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible, these two facts are fundamental to this study and, for that matter, any Biblical study. For the sake of this lesson we will accept as true, without taking the time to rationally prove it, that God does exist and that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. With those facts established, we can know that whatever the Bible teaches as being true and applicable is true and applicable to all people.

The Bible Itself Is Both Divine Testimony And Divine Interpretation

The main reason why the Bible is its own best interpreter is because it contains the only written revelation from the mind of God. The apostle Peter declared that the Bible itself is both Divine testimony and Divine interpretation:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:19-21; all Bible quotations are taken from the KJV unless otherwise noted).

To appreciate the meaning of these two verses, an examination of the context is necessary.

Peter wrote against the background of false teachers who were trying to lead the church into error, particularly by questioning the accuracy of the Old Testament prophets as well as the New Testament writers (2 Pet. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 2:10; 2 Pet. 2:13-14; 2 Pet. 2:19; 2 Pet. 3:4; 2 Pet. 3:5-7, 2 Pet. 3:16). In meeting

their attack, the apostle made clear that Christianity was based on reliable, irrefutable sources. Peter initially declared that Christianity was based upon the knowledge of the apostles:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

These verses give three reasons why the apostles' knowledge was (and is) irrefutable.

First, the apostles' knowledge did not come from religious fiction. The word translated "fables" refers to stories, legends, or myths. These "fables" were said to be "cunningly devised," which means that they were invented or devised artificially. In other words, the apostles did not receive their information from cleverly invented stories. Elsewhere, Paul warned the young evangelists not to get entrapped in these "fables" (cf. 1 Tim. 4:7; Tit. 1:14). Peter's declaration that the apostles' teaching did not come from fictional stories is in stark contrast to any other religion, including the so called "Christian" denominations. The founders and so-called "prophets" and/or "apostles" of these religions were not inspired by the only true God, but were the products and promoters of "cunningly devised fables"!

Second, the apostles' knowledge was gained from being eyewitnesses. An "eyewitness" is one who sees with his own eyes. The Greek word was used in non-biblical literature to refer to those "who, after their initiation, were permitted to look into the mysteries of a cult."¹ This passage, of course, does not depend on this meaning

because the apostles were actual observers of Christ's majesty. 2 Peter 1:16 contains the only occurrence of this Greek noun, but the verb is found twice, where it is translated "shall behold [observe, NKJ]" (1 Pet. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:2). The apostles not only saw, but they also were permitted to behold and look into the glory of Christ (cf. 1 John 1:1-3). The eyewitness testimony of the apostles is also in stark contrast to any other religion, so called "Christian" denominations included. The founders and leaders of these religions were never eyewitnesses of any Divine being! They may have had dreams and "revelations," but rest assured, they were not from God (cf. Deut. 13:1-3; Jer. 23:26-32)!

Third, the apostles' knowledge involved the witness by some of them of the Son of God receiving "honor and glory" at the Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:17-18 cf. Matt. 17:1-8). Peter, James, and John witnessed the sights of the transfiguration and the sound of the Father's voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Pet. 1:17). Regardless of the claims of the false teachers against whom Peter wrote, we can trust the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. In the Old Testament, two or three witnesses were all that was needed to confirm something (Deut. 17:6). The eyewitnesses of Jesus were numerous (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5-8). Even those who were against Him acknowledged His Deity (Matt. 27:54)!

Not only were the apostles themselves an irrefutable source of Christianity, Peter points out another irrefutable source that is extremely applicable to our lesson; namely, prophecy. He declared:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Pet. 1:19).

The expression “more sure word of prophecy,” translated by the NKJ as “the prophetic word confirmed,” in the immediate context of Second Peter 1 refers to the Old Testament prophecies of Christ confirmed by the Transfiguration witnessed by Peter, James, and John. As the next verses will indicate, the confirmed “word of prophecy” extends to all the writings of inspired men in both the Old and New Testaments. From Moses to Malachi to John writing from the island of Patmos, all the prophets spoke with one voice (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-11). One of the most powerful evidences for the truth of New Testament Christianity is the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible (cf. Acts 3:24; Rom. 15:12). No other religious document—not even the Koran or the Book of Mormon—contain fulfilled prophecies, except those prophecies they copied from the Bible!

We know assuredly that all the prophecies recorded in Scripture are true because they did not originate with men. Peter writes, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20). The term “private interpretation” has been misunderstood by many. Some falsely conclude that it means no one is capable of interpreting the Scriptures; thus, Holy Spirit illumination is needed. Others falsely surmise that it condemns the individual from reaching his or her own conclusions about Scripture; thus, the Roman Catholic Church (or some other group of men) is the only entity that can rightly interpret the Scriptures.² However, a closer examination of the text indicates that “private interpretation” is not referring to the readers of prophecy but to the writers of prophecy. The prophetic writings were not the result of the prophets’ own interpretation, but were the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

The word “is” (2 Pet. 1:20) is translated from a word (*ginomai*) that means to become, to come into being. The

word in this context has to do with origin. The word translated “private” (from *idios*) literally means “one’s own.” The question is whether it refers to the “prophet’s own interpretation” or to “the reader’s own interpretation.” With the use of “is” (*ginomai*), Peter points to the meaning of the “prophet’s own interpretation.” Thus, “no prophecy of the scripture” originated from the prophet’s own “private interpretation.” In fact, there were times when the prophets themselves did not even know the meaning of what they prophesied (1 Pet. 1:12).

The word translated “interpretation” (from *epilusis*) means “releasing, solving, explaining, interpreting.”³ The Greek word occurs only here in the New Testament, but is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) to refer to Joseph’s interpreting of dreams (Gen. 40:8; Gen. 41:8; Gen. 41:12). These incidents in Joseph’s life give insight to the Biblical meaning of this word translated “interpretation.” Did Joseph interpret the dreams of the chief butler and chief baker, and later the dream of Pharaoh, by his own wisdom and insight? Or did Joseph’s interpretation come from God? Obviously, God was the source of his interpretations. When Pharaoh confronted Joseph about his alleged ability to interpret dreams, Joseph declared, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Gen. 41:16).

Thus, Peter is saying that no prophecy of the Scripture came into existence as a result of the prophet’s own explanation. Scriptural prophecy never had its origin with the will of men. Only false prophets are said to have originated their own message (Jer. 23:16; Ezek. 13:3).

True prophecy originated with Deity. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). There is a strong contrast between the two parts of this verse to emphasize the point. The English

conjunction “but” is translated from a strong adversative (*alla*) in the original language. In strong contrast to “the will of men,” prophecy came about “by the Holy Ghost”! The word “moved” was a “maritime metaphor” used of a ship carried along by the wind (same Greek word is found in Acts 27:15; Acts 27:17).⁴ The prophets, as it were, “raised their sails” in obedience and receptivity, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill them and carry them along in the direction He wanted.⁵

In these few verses, Peter has shown that all Scripture is from the mind of God, not the fallible minds of humanity (2 Pet. 1:20-21 cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). As such, all Scripture is both Divine testimony from “holy men of God” and Divine interpretation from “the Holy Ghost.” Our responsibility, therefore, is to ascertain its meaning and application to us. Furthermore, our salvation is absolutely dependant upon properly understanding the Bible, and the only way to assure that is to allow the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Allowing Biblical Contexts To Interpret Bible Passages

One passage in the Bible is often the key to understanding other passages in the Bible. A common reason why people do not understand the Bible alike is because they ignore the immediate and/or remote context of the Bible. The immediate context refers to the verses immediately before and after a given verse in the Bible. Most false doctrines can be refuted from the immediate context of the verse that supposedly supports them. Two memorable examples come to mind. First, a Mormon once said that the account in Ezekiel 37:15-17 of two “sticks” becoming one was a prophecy that the Bible would become one with the Book of Mormon. He reasoned that because the Hebrew word translated “stick” was very similar in

sound to a Chinese word that meant “scroll,” Ezekiel was referring to two “scrolls becoming one scroll.” One does not have to research the Hebrew and Chinese languages to see if “stick” and “scroll” rhyme in those languages to decide whether the Mormon’s point was accurate. All one needs to do is read the context of Ezekiel 37:15-28. When the people were to ask the prophet the meaning of the two sticks, he was to tell them:

Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph... with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick...Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen...and will gather them...and bring them into their own land (Ezek. 37:19-22).

Ezekiel explicitly interpreted the two sticks becoming one as a prophecy of God’s people returning from captivity and becoming one nation in order to bring forth the Messiah!

A second example of allowing the immediate context to interpret a passage involves a discussion with an anti-Biblical expediency brother. After several e-mail exchanges on the “saints only” doctrine of benevolence, he insisted that even Jesus did not help everyone who asked Him. This brother cited Matthew 15:21-26. In this context, a woman of Canaan asked for the Lord’s help because her daughter was “grievously vexed with a devil [demon, NKJ]” (Matt. 15:22). At first, Jesus did not respond to her request, and when confronted by His disciples, He responded, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:23-24). She then came and “worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me,” but Jesus told her, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs” (Matt. 15:25-26). Why did the anti-Biblical expediency brother stop with verse 26? After more dialogue between Jesus and the woman, which showed her great persistence of faith, the immediate context goes on to say, “And her

daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matt. 15:27-28). Needless to say, the brother had no more interest in discussing the subject after this was pointed out!

Sometimes, however, an examination of the immediate context will not be sufficient in allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible. An examination and proper understanding of the remote context will also be necessary. The remote context refers to the total teaching of the Bible. A classic example of the importance of taking into consideration the total teaching of the Bible is found in interpreting the figurative language used in the Book of Revelation. While there is a chapter in this lectureship book on distinguishing literal versus figurative language, let it be said here that the Book of Revelation has more quotes and/or allusions to the Old Testament than any other New Testament book. Therefore, to better understand and interpret many of the figures used in Revelation, one must first have a good understanding of their Old Testament usage and background. Usually, however, it seems that the Book of Revelation is what many people want to first study. When people fail to take that remote context in mind, they will come up with far out interpretations such as the “battle of Armageddon” (Rev. 16:16) referring to a literal conflict between two world powers over oil, or “Gog and Magog” (Rev. 20:8) referring to “the AntiChrist” and his forces. Neither of these ideas is found in the remote, Old Testament context of “Armageddon,” which literally means “the hill of Megiddo” (2 Kings 23:29-30), or “Gog and Magog” (Ezek. 38-39).

Doctrinally, the result of failing to understand the remote context is exemplified by the situation of Apollos and the Ephesians (Acts 18:24-19:7). The parallels are not exact to our day in every detail because Apollos did not have access to the completed revelation of God, for it was not yet finished (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13). However, the principle of needing

to understand the remote context is the same. Apollos was “eloquent” and “mighty in the scriptures” (Acts 18:24). Even though he taught “diligently the things of the Lord,” his understanding was limited to “knowing only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25). He had no knowledge of the remote context of baptism. He apparently knew nothing of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). Thankfully, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).

Yes, John’s baptism was given by God (Matt. 21:25), endorsed by Christ (Mark 1:15), based upon repentance (Matt. 3:1-6), and “for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3), but there was a very important difference that could only be known by an understanding of the remote context. Paul revealed the difference when he taught the people correctly, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

Simply put, John’s baptism looked forward to what Christ’s death at Calvary would accomplish, but Great Commission baptism looks backward to the actual accomplishments of Christ’s death. Under John’s baptism, it would have been impossible to “confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and...believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead” (Rom. 10:9). Exactly why Apollos was not informed about Great Commission baptism before Aquila and Priscilla taught him is not stated, nor is it necessary to know. The point is that we must understand the remote context of any Bible subject in order to let the Bible interpret the Bible. The consequences of not doing so are disastrous. If those twelve men who were baptized in John’s baptism had not been taught and baptized correctly (Acts 19:5-7), they would have been eternally lost!

The importance of studying the context cannot be overemphasized. If we are to allow the Bible to interpret the Bible, we must allow the immediate and remote context to speak!

Misunderstandings Based On Failing To Let The Bible Interpret The Bible

Denominationalism is the result of not allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible. While it is true that some denominations exist because its members are not at all interested in following what the Bible teaches, most denominations at least claim to follow the Bible. However, if everyone truly followed the Bible, denominationalism would not exist. Jesus prayed for unity among God's people. He prayed for the apostles, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Then He prayed for us:

Neither pray I for these [the apostles] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

The unity that we are to have with one another is exemplified by the perfect unity that exists between the Father and the Son. The only way that we, fallible human kind, can be one with God and one another is to base our unity on the Word of God. Paul exhorted the Corinthians, and us, to "all speak the same thing" and to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). That which we are to "all speak" and to "be perfectly joined together" is summarized as, "one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6). The

Word of God is the only thing that can unify all people religiously!

The doctrines that make denominationalism different from the truth and from one another are not those doctrines that are the result of the Bible interpreting the Bible (such as meeting on the first day of the week), but those doctrines that are derived from not allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible (such as mechanical instruments of music in worship, infant baptism, etc). The distinct doctrines that denominations hold that are not found in the Bible are what give them their existence. In other words, it would be impossible for the Roman Catholic Church to exist if it were not for the pope and Roman Catholic traditions. It would be impossible for the Mormon Church to exist if it were not for the writings of Joseph Smith.

While there are many doctrines in denominationalism that are the result of not allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible, only a few examples will be given to show the point. First, any interpretation of the normal use of the word “baptism” that includes any method other than a complete burial in water is the result of not allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible. The transliteration “baptism” for the Greek word *baptisma* is quite unfortunate. As the story has been told, the translators of the KJV did not want to translate *baptisma* as “immersion” because not all on the translation committee belonged to denominations that practiced immersion. Some sprinkled water on the baptismal subject, while others practiced pouring. Instead of offending anyone, the translators decided to spell out the Greek word in English letters. With the tremendous influence of the KJV translation through the years, “baptism” has been accepted as meaning whatever each particular group decides it means. However, if the Bible is allowed to interpret the Bible, the meaning of “baptism” is clear—it is a burial (immersion) in water!

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

Second, any interpretation of the normal use of the word “church” that includes denominationalism is the result of not allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible. To the vast majority in so called “Christendom,” the term church refers to any group that claims to be following Christ regardless of its beliefs and/or practices. Their idea is that “We’re all going to heaven; we’re just taking different roads.” However, if the Bible is allowed to interpret the Bible, the meaning of the word “church” is clear—it is the one and only body of Christ! Paul said that Christ was the “head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18 cf. Eph. 5:23). Elsewhere, Paul considered his sufferings for the Gospel way behind the sufferings of Christ. Therefore, he was even more motivated to suffer “the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). The church of the New Testament is the “body of Christ.” When the Bible is allowed to interpret the Bible, there is only one way to become a member of the New Testament church—obey the Gospel, which for the sinner outside of Christ culminates in being baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 12:13 cf. Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27). Then and only then does one become a child of God, forgiven of all past sins (Acts 2:38). Baptism, of course, is not the end of conversion. It is actually the beginning, the new birth (John 3:3-5). Those baptized into Christ must live faithfully (2 Cor. 5:17-18; 1 Thess. 2:12; Rev. 2:10).

Other examples could be given of doctrines that are the result of failing to allow the Bible to interpret the Bible, but these are sufficient to illustrate the point. One practical point should be learned from this. What we mean by

Biblical terms, whose meanings have been ascertained by allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible, may not necessarily be what others with whom we study have in mind. One key element of denominational indoctrination is to take Bible terms, redefine them, and then reinsert the denomination's definition into the Biblical text so that whenever the term is read or discussed, the denominationalists think only of their definition. Therefore, when we study with others we must make sure we are using the same language (i.e., meaning).

The Bible Interprets the Bible Explicitly

The Bible is indeed its own best interpreter. In connection with this fact, however, questions arise. How does the Bible interpret the Bible? How do we allow the Bible to interpret the Bible? The answers to these questions are crucial in allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible.

The most obvious way that the Bible interprets the Bible is by explicit (word for word) statements indicating an interpretation. First, all explicitly stated fulfilled prophecies are instances of the Bible interpreting the Bible. Whenever the Bible explicitly describes a fulfilled prophecy, whether an Old Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (Dan. 9:11-13), or a New Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (Matt. 3:3; Acts 2:16; et al.), or a New Testament fulfillment of a New Testament prophecy (Acts 11:28), we must accept the Bible's interpretation of itself. Some New Testament declarations of fulfilled Old Testament prophecy are unexpected in that the Old Testament passage by itself does not seem prophetic at all, especially in the way the New Testament uses it. For example, the context of Hosea 11:1 refers to the eventual return of God's people from captivity, yet Matthew 2:15 applies it to the small child

Jesus coming out of Egypt with his parents after the death of Herod. Whether we expect it or not, however, we must allow the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Second, an explicit Bible statement may explain another Bible statement. An Old Testament passage may explicitly interpret another Old Testament passage, such as when Ezekiel said the vision he saw was “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek. 1:28), not some UFO as many think. A New Testament passage may explicitly interpret an Old Testament passage, such as when Matthew interpreted the meaning of Isaiah’s “Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14; Isa. 8:8), as being “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). A New Testament passage may explicitly interpret another New Testament passage, such as when John explicitly interpreted Jesus’ statement, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). John interpreted it by saying, “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

The Importance of Exegesis

Explicit statements are not the only way the Bible interprets the Bible. There is a sense in which every verse in the Bible interprets itself by its vocabulary, structure, syntax, and context. The way we allow the Bible to interpret the Bible in this sense is through exegesis. The word “exegesis” is from a Greek word (*exegeomai*) that means “to lead out of.” When applied to the study of the Biblical text, it simply refers to the “reading out” of the meaning.⁶ Exegesis is the key to allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible!

There are basically two ways to study the Bible: topically or exegetically. For example, when applied to

baptism, a topical study will look from Genesis to Revelation at the occurrences of the word baptism, arrange them in a logical fashion and draw points from that arrangement. An exegetical study will take a baptism passage such as Romans 6:1-7 (or how ever many verses the expositor wishes), draw out the meaning put in the text by the Holy Spirit, and let the text itself formulate the points. Although there is value in both approaches, the exegetical method gets one closer to the mind of God because it draws out the meaning that God intended for us to learn from a given passage when it was first written.

This is not to say that exegesis will answer all the questions we may have, nor does it settle all matters of judgment. Some things just simply are not revealed (Deut. 29:29). Proper exegesis, however, does address matters of judgment in that it will distinguish what matters are matters of judgment and what matters are matters of doctrine. Think of all the unnecessary division that would not exist if brethren allowed the Bible to interpret the Bible as to what are matters of judgment and what are matters of doctrine!

Exegesis also allows for fewer misapplications from Scripture because it draws out the meaning from the text itself and examines it contextually. An example of a topical lesson misapplied is when a Bible class teacher read, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34), and then taught a lesson on how we should have respect for one another as God does. Everything he said was true, but it was not what Acts 10:34 teaches. A serious credibility issue is what is at stake. If that same Bible class teacher would have exegeted Acts 10:34, he would have discovered that it teaches that God shows no partiality.

Exegesis comes to mind upon reading what the wise man said of wisdom, "If thou seekest her as silver, and

searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:4-5). Exegesis digs into the text to discover the treasures therein. It is not enough just to quote the Bible as if that alone proved a point. The devil could quote Scripture (Matt. 4:6), but he misapplied it because he did not honor the immediate and remote context of Psalm 91:11-12. Too many people, preachers included, approach the Bible with preconceived ideas and force those ideas on the text rather than allowing the text to teach what the Spirit intended. Would it not be better to allow the text to speak for itself? Is not that what is involved in “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)?

Hindrances to Proper Exegesis

There are two main hindrances to proper exegesis. First, some are just too lazy to properly examine a text. Studying the Bible is hard work. It takes time and discipline to go through a passage verse by verse, word by word, studying as much background information related to that passage as possible. It also takes time to study a passage exegetically (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13). There will be weeks that preachers will not be able to study as much as they would like. Funerals, illnesses, and tragedies in families will happen, and sometimes all at once. These situations are legitimate reasons for not having time to study the Bible as intensely as one might like. However, some are just not interested in studying, no matter what may happen during the week. They are not willing to put forth the effort it takes to truly learn the mind of God revealed in Scripture. As a result they are spiritually malnourished and pitifully weak (cf. Prov. 6:9-11).

Second, human tradition hinders proper exegesis. In one section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old

time....But I say unto you” (Matt. 5:21-22; Matt. 5:27-28; Matt. 5:31-32; Matt. 5:33-34; Matt. 5:38-39; and Matt. 5:43-44). In this section Jesus was not correcting Moses, nor was He adding to what Moses had said. Rather, the Lord was revealing the truth that God through Moses taught all along. The problem was that centuries of Jewish tradition had blinded the masses to the truths that Moses taught in the Law. Yes, each section in Matthew 5:21-48 begins with a quotation from the Old Testament, or at least a statement derived from it. Of course, “hate thine enemy” (Matt. 5:43) was nowhere found in Scripture. However, what the scribes and Pharisees taught from those statements was human tradition, not what God through Moses taught. Likewise today, many approach Scripture through the glasses of human tradition. They will not let the Bible interpret the Bible. Rather, they “allow” human tradition to determine the meaning of Scripture.

Guidelines to Proper Exegesis

Remembering that exegesis is bringing out of the text the meaning and application that is already in the text, the following guidelines are given. These are not meant to be an exhaustive list coming from an expert scholar, but are simply practical suggestions that have helped this writer to better allow the Bible to interpret the Bible and thus learn better the mind of God revealed in Scripture.

First, choose a block of Scripture. Many factors may be involved in choosing the text. We may have been given an assignment for a summer series, Gospel meeting, or VBS. Of course, the best text to choose is one about which we are very interested and want to know more.

Second, become as familiar as possible with this text on our own. Those who have had training in the original languages would do well to translate the passage, which

is in itself a tremendous learning experience. Those not trained in the original languages can also become familiar with the text by reading it over and over again, perhaps even memorizing it. Look for patterns in the text such as recurring phrases, series of infinitives, or key words. Define key words in the text by using a Bible dictionary, word study, or lexicon. Always remember, though, that context is the overriding factor in determining the meaning of a word. Bible dictionaries and lexicons can be wrong.⁷

Third, make an outline of the text according to the understanding gained from familiarizing ourselves with the text. Many times we will discover that the text has naturally outlined itself.

Fourth, consult commentaries, lectureship books, and journal articles. Good sources will give valuable information on people, places, and things. Learning the historical background of a passage will also add insight into the meaning of the text. When we study a text with an opened mind and determination to let it speak for itself, we might be surprised to find that some of the scholarly commentators reached the same conclusions that we did!

Concerning commentaries, there are two common misconceptions that can potentially keep us from the best understanding. Some think that the older a source the better it is. This is not always so. Adam Clarke, for example, may have been the premiere commentator in the early 1800s, but much has come to light over the last couple hundred years that helps us to better allow the Bible to interpret the Bible. The meaning of the Biblical text has not changed, but our understanding of it has. Case in point, Thayer's **Greek-English Lexicon**, originally published in the late 1800s, says that *agape* love was "a purely bibl[ical] and eccl[esiastical] word."⁸ However, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker's **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian**

Literature, originally published in the mid 1900s, says that for *agape*:

[A]n unquestioned example fr[om] a pagan source was lacking for a long time...and then goes on to show that the word was used, though rarely, by non-Christian sources.⁹

Another common misconception is that only brotherhood sources should be used in studying a passage. If we limit our sources to only brotherhood material, we will be deficient in some areas. This is not to say that brotherhood materials are not valuable. They are! However, there are not enough good brotherhood sources to fill the need. While it is true that denominational writers often contain false doctrine, it is equally true that we cannot assume that because a source is from a member of the church of Christ, it is free from error. We must learn the Word of God and be able to separate truth from error.

Finally, after consulting commentaries, lectureship books, and journal articles, we may need to revise our outline and/or reword some of our points. If the exegesis will be used for a sermon, this would be the time to write the introduction and conclusion. This would also be the time to formulate the main points, as some preachers like, so that they all begin with the same letter or perhaps even rhyme.

One does not have to be a preacher or Bible class teacher to exegete a passage. All will benefit tremendously from doing exegetical studies. In the judgment of this writer, there is nothing more—dare he say—fun and exciting in Bible study than to dive into a passage of Scripture, study each verse word for word, examining the immediate and remote contexts, and to later ascend with newly learned treasures of truth from the mind of God! Yes, it takes time and hard work, but the rewards are much more valuable than all of this world's treasures!

Conclusion

The question, “How can we understand the Bible alike?” is easy to answer. When we allow the Bible to interpret the Bible! Our very salvation, the salvation of others, and the unity of the Lord’s church depends upon allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible. The Bible was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21); it is all sufficient and inerrant (2 Tim. 3:16-17); and it is perfectly capable of interpreting itself. Are we really interested in salvation, unity in the brotherhood, and learning the mind of God? If so, then let everyone of us allow the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Endnotes

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3 Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, **The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament**, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) p. 584.

4 Michael Green, **Second Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary**, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 18, Leon Morris, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987) p. 102.

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6 John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, **Biblical Exegesis: A Beginners Handbook**, rev. ed. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987) p. 5.

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8 Joseph Henry Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (1885; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) p. 4.

9 Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature**, 2nd edition revised by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) p. 5.

CHAPTER 11

By Binding And Loosing Only Where God Has

David Sain

Introduction

I *OFTEN READ, HEAR* and observe things in the church that cause me to believe that there is a need to study this matter. Frequently, I hear us discussing “issues” among us, and some of the comments prompt me to conclude that many of our “issues” would be less of an “issue” if we would address what we have the right to teach and to do through the proper application of the fundamental principles of how the Bible authorizes, specifically and generically. Therefore, I am thankful for this opportunity to address the important topic.

We shall begin our study of this important subject by focusing upon the word **authority**.

Authority is the great regulator of life. Without authority society would be in a chaotic state, and anarchy would reign. There is therefore, of necessity, a standard of authority in every area of life. In society, on both the local and national level, we have those who are given authority to establish and enforce laws, in order to maintain order.

In the home, parents have Divinely-appointed authority (Eph. 6:1). In schools, principals and teachers are the authorities (although our permissive society has stripped them of most authoritative power). In sports, the duly appointed officials are supposed to exercise authority

and make sure the contest is conducted according to the rules. On every job, there is a person who has authority to govern and supervise. Even if a man is self-employed, he has, in a sense, authority—over himself.

In all areas of life, authority is simply a matter of common sense that is necessary for a civil society. However, beyond the scope of human authority, there is the ultimate authority—the Lord God Almighty, the One with Whom we all have to do (Heb. 4:13).

When men ignore or defy human authority, problems erupt, as we observe all too often. And, when men ignore or defy Divine authority, problems, of much greater consequence, likewise occur.

Respecting and submitting to Divine authority is a serious matter. The Holy Scriptures provide numerous examples of the consequences of not doing so.

To illustrate, recall what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they ignored the Lord's instructions and offered unauthorized fire:

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD (Lev. 10:1-2, KJV).

Another well-known Old Testament story also illustrates the consequences of disregarding the Lord's authority. King Saul and his army of men took it upon themselves to alter the instructions of God regarding the spoils of war, and Saul, as the appointed leader, was held accountable by the Lord (1 Sam. 15). Note how the Lord, through Samuel, characterized what he did:

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? (1 Sam. 15:19).

Clearly, the above Scriptures lead to the compelling conclusion that disregarding the Lord's instructions and doing that for which we have no Divine authority is a serious matter. These, and numerous other Scriptures, emphasize that respecting Divine authority and heeding the Lord's instructions should be a top priority, for without Divine authority, there is no Divine approval, and we are unacceptable to him.

How We Determine What is Authorized

Now, having established the importance of having Divine authority for all that we teach and do religiously, we turn our attention to how we determine what **is** authorized and what is **not** authorized.

For valid reasons, we have long understood that Divine authority is imparted in three ways:

- (1) By a direct statement or command,
- (2) By inference,
- (3) By an example that illustrates obedience to a

Divine command.

In this brief treatment of this extremely important question, we shall focus upon the first of the above list, namely, authorization by direct statement or command.

Direct Statement or Command

There are three types of a direct statement or command. Below is a list of these three types, with each one illustrated by a Scripture regarding baptism.

1. **Imperative statement.** This is a statement that directly requires or orders a particular action. For example, Peter (by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) commanded, "...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" (Acts 2:38). Obviously,

such a statement provides Divine authority for us to teach that the purpose of baptism is “for the remission of sins.”

2. Declarative statement. This is a statement that declares a certain action to be right. For example, Jesus declared, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). This declaration by the Lord clearly teaches that baptism is a prerequisite to salvation. And thus, this Scripture, which harmonizes perfectly with the imperative of Acts 2:38, authorizes us to believe and teach that baptism is essential to salvation.

3. Interrogative statement. This is a statement that authorizes in the form of a rhetorical question. For example, the apostle Paul asked, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3).

In the form of a question, Paul reminded the Roman saints of what happened when they were baptized, and the rhetorical question teaches vital truth about baptism. And from this Divinely inspired Scripture, we have authority to teach that baptism is the act that puts one into Christ, and, in context, that baptism is a likeness of the death (and burial and resurrection) of Christ (Rom. 6:1-7).

Specific and Generic Authority

What do we mean by **specific** and **generic authority**? Although the answer to that question could be quite lengthy and detailed, I shall answer it briefly, in what I hope is a helpful and useful manner.

The Bible teaches in two basic ways—**specifically** and **generically**. **Specific teaching** is teaching in which something is commanded or declared explicitly. It is what the Bible **specifically** says.

Generic teaching is teaching in which something is not specifically commanded or declared, but is

understood (with logical reasoning) from what is specifically stated. In other words, **generic teaching** is that which is **implied** from explicit statements. And, if one is to study the Bible effectively and beneficially, and correctly interpret the Scriptures, one must keep this in mind when reading and studying the Word of God.

Applying Specific and Generic Authority

When a direct statement or command is given in the Divinely inspired Scriptures, in any of the forms previously mentioned, we have Divine authority.

If God, in His Word, specifies **how**, or **when**, or **where**, or **why** to do the command, then we have specific authority for that **how**, **when**, **where**, or **why**. If He does not specify **how**, **when**, **where**, or **why** to do the command, we still have authority, but it is **generic** authority.

And it should be noted that when God commands us to do something, a part of the command might be specific in nature while another part of the command may be generic in nature.

An Old Testament Example

When God instructed Noah to build the ark, He was both specific and generic in the commands (Genesis 6). He did not generically tell Noah to construct it out of **wood**. Instead, he specified **gopher wood**, a particular type of wood. From this we have correctly concluded and taught that when God specified **gopher** wood that only the type of wood that was specified was authorized, and all other types of wood were unauthorized. (Incidentally, this story and the conclusions stated above are also applicable to the question of, Does silence of the Scriptures **forbid**, or does silence of the Scriptures **permit**?)

While the command to build the ark out of gopher wood was specific, it also involved generic authority. God

did not specify anything about the procurement of the wood, or the length of each piece of wood. Those matters, not being specified, were left to Noah's judgment.

New Testament Examples

When Jesus gave the great commission, He was both specific and generic. He commanded the apostles to "go," but did not specify **how** to go, leaving man to choose the most expedient means of going. However, He did specify **what** is to be preached. He commanded that the Gospel be preached (Mark 16:15). Therefore, man may walk or ride to preach the Gospel, with the Lord's authority, but when he "gets there," he is required by the Lord to "preach the gospel."

Then, after commanding the preaching of the Gospel, Jesus said that the one who believes (the Gospel) and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16). Now, in the context of our immediate study, a correct interpretation of this declarative statement is that baptism is required for salvation. And that conclusion is substantiated by the fact that the Bible, in Acts 2:38, specifies that the **why** of baptism is "for the remission of sins."

However, it should also be noted that, while the Bible teaches that baptism is in water (John 3:23; Acts 8:36-39), the **place** where one is to be baptized is not specified, in the great commission, or in any other Scripture. The place (whether it be a river, swimming pool, or baptistry) is left to man's better judgment and is a matter of expediency.

Another example of specific and generic authority is found in what Paul wrote to Christians regarding music in Christian worship.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

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 (Col. 3:16).

The command to sing, in both of these Scriptures, explicitly authorizes vocal music, which is a particular kind of music, and that specific command authorizes vocal music, and, at the same time, the words of these Scriptures provide no authority for any other kind of music such as instrumental music. (Compare the specific command to build the ark out of gopher wood, a particular kind of wood, which excluded using any other kind of wood.)

To sum up this example, there are two basic kinds of music—vocal and instrumental. Had the Lord commanded, “make music,” that would have been a **generic** commandment, and it would have left man free to choose either vocal music or instrumental music, or he could choose both, and do so with the Lord’s authority and approval. However, the Lord **specified** “singing,” which is a particular kind of music. Therefore, vocal music (“singing”) is Divinely authorized for Christian worship, but there is no authority for instrumental music in Christian worship.

Guidelines for Determining Specific and Generic Authority That Will Help Us Understand the Bible Alike

The following general guidelines, when applied objectively, will serve to help one to know if we have authority for teaching or practicing some particular thing.

1. In all matters, the first thing to consider is: Does the New Testament authorize the matter being considered? If a careful, objective study of the scriptures reveals that the thing under consideration is authorized, there is a right way to do it. If it is not authorized, there is no right way to do it.

2. If the thing being considered is authorized, the right way to do it is either revealed in the New Testament,

and must be done that way only, or it is left to man's judgment and may be done as one thinks best.

3. When God gives a general commandment, everything in that general area is included and permitted, unless it is expressly excluded. For example, the manner in which one is to "go" preach the Gospel is left to man's judgment, since the Lord did not specify the manner of going. That would mean that **walking** is permissible as a manner of going, unless **walking** is expressly forbidden in the Scriptures.

4. When God gives a specific command, everything of the same kind, that is not included in that specific command, is excluded and forbidden, and is not authorized unless commanded or authorized elsewhere. To illustrate, the specific command to Noah to use gopher wood in building the ark excluded authority for using pine wood, unless pine wood had also been specified as a wood to be used.

To further illustrate, as pointed out earlier, singing is the type of music that is specified for Christian worship (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16). That authorizes vocal music in our worship, but instrumental music is excluded and forbidden, unless instrumental music is commanded or authorized elsewhere (which is not the case).

5. When a command is given, but God does not specify, for example, the **where** to do the command, any place would be permissible and authorized. To illustrate, the command to be baptized can be fulfilled anywhere that there is sufficient water to immerse one. As I previously stated, the place (whether it be a river, swimming pool, or baptistry) is left to man's better judgment and is a matter of expediency.

To further illustrate, the command to assemble (Heb. 10:25), could be fulfilled indoors or outdoors, on personal property or on property collectively owned by the church.

6. Generally speaking, if we are commanded to do something, but not **how**, any method is all right and

permissible as long as it does not violate any other command or Biblical injunction. For example, the command to “go” (Mark 16:15) authorizes going by airplane, but it would be wrong to steal the money for the ticket (Rom. 13:9).

7. It is wrong to “loose” what God has “bound.” In other words, we have no authority not to require that which the Lord has required. For example, I have no authority to teach that baptism is not required for salvation, because the Lord has clearly and unmistakably taught that baptism is required for salvation (Mark 16:16).

8. It is wrong to “bind” what God has “loosed.” In other words, we have no authority to require that which God has not required. To illustrate, consider baptism (which I have used as a frequent topic for illustration throughout this study). Since the Bible does not specify the **place** for baptism, I have no authority to teach that baptism must be done in a **particular** place. Likewise, since the Bible does not specify particular **words** to be spoken when one is being baptized, it would be wrong to require that **certain** words be spoken.

Conclusion

Hopefully, and prayerfully, this brief treatment of this matter has helped to clarify how the Bible authorizes. If one does not understand these fundamental matters, he will be unable to know whether the things he believes, teaches, and does are authorized and acceptable unto God.

Before we teach or do anything, we must first make sure that we have authority from God to teach or do that very thing.

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).

CHAPTER 12

By Rejecting Liberal Approaches To Hermeneutics

Keith Mosher, Sr.

Introduction

THE APOSTLE OF CHRIST, Paul, penned his first ever inspired letter to a congregation of Christians who resided in the city of Thessalonica in ancient Macedonia (1 Thess. 1:1).¹ As the apostle began to close the missive, he was inspired to encourage that church (and thus all Christians for all time) not to avoid **all** teaching just because some of the instruction they had heard was in error:

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.
Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.
Abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess.
5:19-22).

In the first century some Christians were given the miraculous gift of prophesying (Acts 8:12-18). Such a gift, as well as the other **eight** gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10), was intended to teach and confirm the preaching of the Gospel of Christ (Heb. 2:1-4). Evidently, the Thessalonian brethren had heard so much error that they would not even listen to the truth. Therefore, Paul admonishes them not to “quench the Spirit” by hating all teaching (1 Thess. 5:19-20). Rather they were to test all teachers by the

standard of God's truth which they had received from Paul (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Thess. 5:21). When they had "proven" the teaching, they were to "hold fast that which is good" and when error "appeared" (*eidōs*, came on the scene, K.M.) they were to abstain from it (1 Thess. 5:21-22).

By rejecting all modern, liberal approaches to the interpretation of God's Word, Christians today can understand the Bible alike; still proving "all things, and holding fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). However, one should not become so hateful of error that one loses perspective and so misses truth itself. In order to reject "liberal" hermeneutics one must know what such approaches are and what truth is (John 17:17). For example, one has written that "There is only one Lord—Jesus Christ. Through him, God created us and all creatures."² The foregoing is **truth**, but that author also denies many Bible doctrines, for he has also written: "We must discover in whatever social relationships prevail what God's will is for us and do what is good in his sight."³ God's will cannot be found in relationships, but is uncovered in Scripture (John 8:31-32).

This essay will involve, then, a **brief** excursion into the liberal approach to the science of interpreting Scripture and the underlying theology that informs such. Perhaps the uninitiated in this area of religious philosophy will find in this manuscript some clues as to why people believe as they do.

Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is the "science of interpretation."⁴ Since God uses words to communicate to man (1 Cor. 2:13), "there would be no reason in giving revelation which would need inspiration to interpret."⁵ Dungan adds the following succinct deduction:

If the inspiration had to be given (to everyone in order to understand the Bible, K.M.), there is

no need of the word itself. The inspiration would make known all the truth as well without the word as with it. Indeed, it would be better to have the inspiration alone than to have a faulty word revelation, which might mislead those who have not the needed inspiration. While the word would be of no practical value whatever, it might do a great deal of harm. Better that God had never given it, since its only power is to deceive. But when He made choice between direct revelation to everyone, and the selection of a few who should be the teachers of many, He chose the latter. Hence to those whom He has chosen as His revelators, must we look for the knowledge of His divine will.⁶

Dungan then adds the following to his fine comments above:

It does not change the question to claim that a few men are now chosen to interpret that word. We must have some means of knowing that they are favored above the common people in thus being divinely endowed. And since those who have equal claims to a special call to this work differ widely respecting very important matters, we are incredulous respecting these exalted assumptions. The truth is, their claims are not sustained. Besides, there is no reason that God should give special inspiration to interpreters now. He has no other truth to reveal, nor can He make it any plainer than He did when He gave us the Bible.⁷

Some, who have tried to take away the Bible from the “common man” (cf. Mark 12:37) use 2 Pet. 1:20-21 as a proof text. For the passage reads:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

However, Peter was not insisting that one cannot interpret the Bible for oneself, but was indicating that the Holy

Scriptures did not **originate** in man's mind. Therefore, all have the ability, right, privilege, duty, and need to use sound hermeneutical principles⁸ in understanding the Bible alike (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; Eph. 3:4). Liberal principles, however, cloud the issue when interpreting Scripture for:

...Which set of theologians shall we follow? Should we follow Schleiermacher as he attempts to restruct modernism and orthodoxy into a theology for the intellectuals of his day and end up being the father of liberalism? Shall we follow Karl Barth as he counter attacks the liberalism of his time and end up with neo-orthodoxy? Shall we follow Bultmann or Tillich as they retool theology for this generation and retranslate Christianity out of existence? Shall we follow Altizer, Hamilton, and Cox as they explain that "God is dead" in our world as it is and that we now have only Jesus to follow? Shall we follow this "new breed" of scholars who were schooled at the feet of Neo-Orthodox theologians, and are still riding that horse, now knowing that it is dead?⁹

It is also the case that a "new hermeneutic" has emerged among certain preaching members (apostate) of churches of Christ which teachers have been drinking too long from the wells of liberal theologians. Miller warned that the new hermeneutic among modern Christians has its roots:

...deep within the soil of denominational theology, specifically "Neo-Orthodox theology. Outside the context of churches of Christ, the term "New Hermeneutic" refers to an approach to biblical interpretation formulated by Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Eberling. Fuchs and Eberling were extending the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer while building upon the ideas of Rudolph Bultmann. Bultmann's hermeneutical theories emerged out of the existentialism of Martin Heidegger and Soren Kierkegaard, the phenomenology of Wilhelm Delthey, and the epistemology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹⁰

The discerning reader of the above lengthy quotes, from brethren Henley (deceased, K.M.) and Miller, will note that they have **both** named two men whose theological ideas now permeate liberal thinking—Schleiermacher, and Bultmann (add Karl Barth here). For this study three other liberal theologians will be mentioned—Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Reinhold Niebuhr (American neo-orthodoxy).¹¹

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is the “father of modern hermeneutics.”¹² Schleiermacher’s efforts appear to be attempts to reconstruct “the author’s original message,” that is to find the “intended meaning.”¹³ Schleiermacher, who was a “German pietist and Lutheran preacher,” tried to “wed idealism (which teaches that reality is determined by the rational process) and romanticism, which led Schleiermacher to say that religious faith is grounded in the feeling of absolute dependence upon God.”¹⁴

Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic had “two major factors—the grammatical and the psychological, which corresponded to the two spheres of knowledge—the external linguistic codes and the internal consciousness.”¹⁵ If Schleiermacher intended not to be understood in any complete sense, he seems greatly to have succeeded. What is clear is that his method is subjective pietism, which sees authority in the Biblical text only as far as one can “align himself with the mind of the author.”¹⁶ In other words the Bible student is left psychoanalyzing the writer rather than using sound, hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text.

Schleiermacher’s disciple might well be pictured as reading a text written by Paul, for example, and asking, “I wonder how Paul felt when he wrote this?” “Was he having a good day or bad day, and what did he really mean

or intend to mean?” Paul, however, insisted that he wrote to be understood (Eph. 3:4).

Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic is removed from classical interpretation which is genre based (i.e. what does the text say?) and has been redefined by Wilhelm Delthey (1833-1922).¹⁷ Delthey called his approach the “rediscovery of the I and Thou” and meant that one discovered self in reading Holy Writ and that “readers are in a position to understand the meanings of texts better than the authors themselves.”¹⁸ In other words, Bible students can find deeper meanings different from those even intended by the writers. God’s Word, however, is **pure** and **tested** and one who adds to it can be found to be a liar (Prov. 30:5-6).¹⁹ Henley wrote:

Most church members, and some theologians, would have trouble understanding Friedrich Schleiermacher’s **The Christian Faith**... Must we wade through this theological morass to be able to understand and appreciate the truths of God’s Word? The jargon of the theologian is that of the philosopher and has little meaning to the layman.²⁰

An added thought concerning this Schleiermachian romanticism is that the new “scholars,” some even professing association with churches of Christ, “would have us believe that the present Greek text is suspect; that it will never be possible to construct a ‘true’ text; and that all propositions will have to forever be tentative.”²¹ Paul wrote of those who are “Ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). And certainly it is a very good thing that Schleiermacher’s subjectivism has not infected more.

Rudolf Bultmann

This contemporary with Karl Barth adopted a great deal from Barth, but Barth’s “faith-only” thesis was, to Bultmann, too much work toward salvation. Bultmann

(who died in 1961), is of such importance to modern seminarians that one has written of him that:

He is like a paradigm for much of modern theology. To understand him is to understand much that the theological winds have carried to us from the direction of Germany.²²

As a “paradigm” Bultmann should have realized more history than he actually did, for he used a Mandalan work to interpret the Gospel According to John, not realizing that those Gnostic writings were not contemporary with John.²³ However, such mistakes aside, Bultmann’s ideas infect all of modernism.

For example, Bultmann saw a dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments and, like Marcion in the second century, Bultmann viewed the Mosaic law as a **failure** to justify that led to the Christian economy.²⁴ In fact, God **never** designed the Old Law as the source of justification, but as the instrument that pointed to Christ (Gal. 3:23-29).

Bultmann’s interpretive method is often called the “History of Religions” approach to Scripture.²⁵ Bultmann believed that the message of Jesus was a “presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself.”²⁶ There is **no** historical Jesus in the New Testament according to Bultmann so that Biblical theology only has meaning, as:

timeless general truths,... only as an expression of an understanding of human existence which for the man of today also is a possibility for his understanding of himself.²⁷

Perhaps Bultmann’s views are best described when one realizes that this German theologian believed there was an “actual” resurrection of the Christ, but that then His

followers had to concoct stories about Jesus whom they were amazed to see actually escaped the tomb.

Eventually, Bultmann's disciples acquired the view that:

...any consideration of the Bible as the Word of God is idolatry, since a human book (the Bible) is as the definitive portrait of God. Instead, the Bible addresses our concerns and provides answers that are relevant to our needs, and its authority is functional rather than absolute and dogmatic.²⁸

So in fact, disciples of Bultmann hold the view that the Bible is relevant to one's needs, but does **not** present ultimate truth. One wonders why Bultmann never grasped the significance of John 17:17: "Sanctify them through the truth, thy word is truth." Of course Bultmann thought that such statements were not really uttered by Jesus. To Bultmann, the Bible is myth.

Paul Tillich

Tillich (1886) was a philosopher whose ideas lie somewhere between Schleiermacher's and Bultmann's.²⁹ Tillich is known as a "mystic-liberal."³⁰ In Europe, Tillich's liberal views appeared to many as being in opposition to Bultmann's, but in America Tillich was thought of as a "spokesman for neo-orthodoxy."³¹ Tillich, himself, claimed that he "stood on the boundary between liberalism and neo-orthodoxy."³²

To Tillich, "faith is the state of being ultimately concerned."³³ And, when confronted with the thought as to whether truth and faith were related, Tillich responded with, "Reason is the pre-condition of faith; faith is the act in which reason reaches ecstatically beyond itself."³⁴ Tillich added:

...it is the unavoidable duty of every theologian to relate the biblical message to his contemporary situation...therefore, if man is to understand the revelation of Christ, there must be a preparation

which enables him to comprehend revelation, that is, there must be a correlation between the thought and problems of man and the answers given by religious faith. In other words Christian theology must learn to speak the language of the culture in which it finds itself.³⁵

Professor Tillich, if asked what law governs man in religion, would have to respond with “theonomy.”³⁶ Theonomy asserts that:

The superior law, rooted in God, is at the same time the innermost law of man himself. One does not receive this law from external agencies but finds it within his own heart.³⁷

The professor thus denies that the Bible is authoritative, for such outside authority destroys man (in Tillich’s view). Too, Jeremiah’s statement that the “way of man is not in himself” is foreign to Tillich’s system. For Tillich:

A man is religious at the point where he is ultimately concerned, and he is ultimately concerned when he experiences the unconditional. The experience of the unconditional is the experience of that which has absolute authority **for one** (Emphasis mine, K.M.), of that before which he bows in humility and awe.³⁸

Tillich seems to have committed the same sin as Adam and Eve by wanting to be his own God (Gen. 3:5).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

It is interesting that Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s major impact on theology today comes not from his writings but from his life. Bonhoeffer died in 1945, for he had been arrested by the Nazis in 1943 and hanged by them on April 9, 1945 at Flossenbürg just before American troops could rescue him.³⁹ Letters from the prison to his friend Bethge have been published under the title, **Prisoner for God**.⁴⁰

One of the significant challenges to Protestantism was Bonhoeffer's charge of "cheap grace." To Bonhoeffer, "cheap grace promises that, if we believe certain doctrines, our sins will be forgiven without effort on our part."⁴¹ (Bonhoeffer's **The Cost of Discipleship** sets forth his ideas on grace).

Further, because Bonhoeffer (from a Nazi prison, remember) came to believe that "the world had come of age" and grown "beyond religion," theologians must teach a "religionless Christianity."⁴² Schleiermacher, Bultmann, and Tillich all held that all men are religious, but to Bonhoeffer "men are no longer religious so that any attempt to approach them through their religion is doomed to fail."⁴³ From Bonhoeffer, then, comes the "social gospel" for the task of the Christian is "not to lead a pious life, but to be a witness to Christ in the world through life and action."⁴⁴ Note the following:

Religion has disappeared, believes Bonhoeffer, because man has "come of age." Modern man explains all questions and solves all problems without reference to God. It seems, says Bonhoeffer, that God is teaching man that he can live without God. God has allowed himself to be edged out of the world and onto a cross because it is not by his omnipotence that God saves the world but through his weakness in Christ.⁴⁵

Bonhoeffer also believed that science was edging God out of this world, and since the Old and New Testaments (to Bonhoeffer) held no interest to individuals, man cannot turn to God as some "cosmic bellhop" to solve man's problems.⁴⁶ Bultmann, who would treat the Bible as myth, tried to update Bonhoeffer and failed; for to Bultmann the Bible is legend, but to Bonhoeffer the Bible was irrelevant for Christ came into the world and, therefore, the church has a civil duty to **prevent** the unfortunate from being hurt.⁴⁷ Hordern adds:

A few years ago a popular religious leader was quoted in the newspaper as saying that too many Americans were taking sleeping pills instead of turning to God. Bonhoeffer would not have been too concerned about this. What he would have criticized is that too many religious leaders are offering God as a substitute for sleeping pills.⁴⁸

It seems that Bonhoeffer was a Deist whose views were deeply affected by his imprisonment. He could not even begin to find the God described in Holy Writ.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Last, but not least, of the five theologians chosen for this study is Reinhold Niebuhr, the American neo-orthodoxist. Hordern notes that Niebuhr was:

...a professor of Christian ethics at Union Theological Seminary, New York, from 1928 to 1960. He was primarily interested in applying Christianity to political and social affairs. No other theologian has made such a deep impression on the social sciences....For at least two decades his thought was the most important influence in American seminaries. He, more than any other individual, is responsible for bringing neo-orthodox tendencies to America.⁴⁹

Niebuhr's theology grew out of his efforts to apply "Christianity" (i.e. Protestantism) to the "Social, economic, and political spheres."⁵⁰ As with Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr's real world differed from the liberal idealism he had learned in seminary. Note the following concerning Niebuhr's thinking on the relationship of man to God:

The relation of man to God, the finite to the infinite, cannot, says Niebuhr, be expressed in merely rational or logical terms. It can only be expressed in myths such as the Genesis story of the creation and the fall. In religion, he believes we are dealing with the mystery and depth of life which elude our efforts to catch them in neat

rational descriptions. Niebuhr compares theology to a painter who, working upon a flat surface, tries to create the illusion of another dimension, depth. This is a deception, but a deception that describes a truth about reality. Similarly, the theologian must describe God and his ways in the thought forms of our space-time world. But God transcends the world so that none of the things we say can be adequate.⁵¹

To Niebuhr, then, the Bible is inadequate to describe God and is mere deceptive myth. Niebuhr meant by **myth** that, although it deceives, it does point to a truth that is not adequately expressed in any other form. Niebuhr's "reality" in essence was "unreal." Faith, then, to Niebuhr, is **not** rational (cf. Heb. 11:1) and the Bible's mythological message points to truth, but is not itself truth.

Conclusion

The Bible **is** truth (John 17:17). However, even in Paul's day some Christians refused to listen to any prophesy (revelation) because of the cacophony of errors surrounding it (1 Thess. 5:18-19). Paul insisted that those Christians could "prove all things" and could separate the good from the evil (1 Thess. 5:20-22).

In the last one-hundred years a myriad of scholars have espoused non-supernatural, liberal, mythical views of Scripture. Schleiermacher "romanticized" the Bible and Christianity so that individual experience, in his view, superseded Bible authority so that the Bible student is always seeking some "intended meaning" in the text. Schleiermacher's views must be rejected or else clear Bible statements must be repulsed (cf. Eph. 3:4; 1 Cor. 2:9-13).

Bultmann's "conservatism" refuted Schleiermacher's liberalism, but Bultmann was not a Bible conservative. In fact, his theory that the "real" Jesus has to be discovered **behind** what the text says is called "demythology." Bultmann's use of second-century **Gnostic** writings (cf.

the “Da Vinci Code” today) led him to his dim view of Scripture and has influenced countless millions to think that the Bible is merely a human product.

Tillich’s mystical theology and Bonhoeffer’s “social gospel” have infected the majority of western theological thought to such an extent that the Bible has been relegated, by the many, to an outdated, somewhat useful religious book about less than modern people with legendary views of some “God.” That “God” has been “edged out” and is no longer relevant to modern man for that “God” died on a cross.

Of the five theologians briefly reviewed here, Reinhold Niebuhr has been most influential on American theologians. To Niebuhr, the Bible is “deceptive myth” but since it is written in human language Holy Writ is inadequate to describe God. Niebuhr’s views must be rejected logically for he uses human language (inadequate he says) to speak about God. Biblically, the writers insisted that they spoke for God. “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37).

Endnotes

1 **The Holy Bible, King James Version** (World Publishers, n.d.). All of the Scripture references in this essay are to this version.

2 Karl Barth, **Fragments Grave and Gray**, trans. Eric Mosbacher (London: Wm. Collins Sons and Co., 1971), p. 54.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

4 D. R. Dungan, **Hermeneutics: A Text-Book** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, reprint, n.d.), p. 1.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

8 See **Rightly Dividing the Word** volumes one and two (fourth and fifth Shenandoah lectures, ed. Terry M. Hightower, 1990-91) for an in-depth study of Bible interpretation.

9 Ralph Henley, “Scholarship Movement,” **Rightly Dividing the Word**, vol. 1, ed. Terry M. Hightower (Shenandoah, TX: Firm Foundation, 1991), p. 105.

10 Dave Miller, "The 'New Hermeneutic:' A Review and Responses," **Rightly Dividing the Word**, vol. 2, ed. Terry M. Hightower (Shenandoah, TX: Firm Foundation, 1991), p. 353. Miller adds a lengthy endnote describing his sources for his statements, p. 367.

11 This study does not lend itself to biographies of these theologians. Interested students may want to find these histories in S. P. Schilling, **Contemporary Continental Theologians**, (Abingdon Press, 1966), Schilling lists other books that are available.

12 Grant R. Osborne, **The Hermeneutical Spiral** (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1991), p. 368.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 369.

19 Schleiermacher, in attempting to wed reason (Kantian theology) and subjective hermeneutics actually erected an epistemological base for hermeneutics, characterized by a diachronic interest in history, (Osborne, p. 433). In other words, Schleiermacher was insisting that words do **not** mean what they say!

20 Henley, "The Scholarship Movement," p. 106.

21 Ibid.

22 Robert Campbell Roberts, **Rudolph Bultmann's Theology: A Critical Interpretation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 10.

23 Osborne, **The Hermeneutical Spiral**, p. 151.

24 Ibid., p. 277.

25 Ibid., p. 279.

26 Rudolf Bultmann, **Theology of the New Testament**, vol. 1, trans. K. Geobel (New York: Scribners, 1951), p.1.

27 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 251.

28 Osborne, **The Hermeneutical Spiral**, p. 289.

29 Similar to Schleiermacher's influence around 1900, Bultmann's historic-critical approach to Biblical interpretation affected theology from 1930-1960. Bultmann's critical methods, however, have not so much been displaced as they have produced offshoots. In seminaries, today, the reader controls the Bible rather than orienting himself to the text. Post-modernism, rather post-Bultmannianism, denies the validity of seeking reality "behind" Biblical statements, but offers only more subjectivism since the "sense of scripture" to the post-modernist is **not** connected to the

reality of the words themselves. That is, Bible writers could “tell stories,” even false ones and still teach truth. It is also the case that some, even contemporary with Bultmann, argue that there was no **pure** form of Christianity in the beginning that can properly be called orthodox, and that Paul’s “version” of Christianity **replaced** the early form (Osborne), p. 426. It is strange to imagine that not until the twentieth century did anyone ever think that Paul started Christianity!

30 William E. Hordern, **A Layman’s Guide to Protestant Theology** (New York: McMillan, 1978), p. 170. Tillich, a German, came to America in 1933 and taught at Union Theological in New York and then at Harvard. He died in 1965 (Ibid.).

31 Ibid., p. 171.

32 Ibid.

33 Paul Tillich, **Dynamics of Faith** (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 1.

34 Ibid., p. 76.

35 Hordern, **A Layman’s Guide**, p. 172.

36 Ibid., p. 174.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid. 179.

39 Ibid., p. 210.

40 Ibid., p. 211.

41 Ibid., p. 214.

42 Ibid., p. 215.

43 Ibid., p. 216.

44 Ibid., p. 217.

45 Ibid., p. 218.

46 Ibid., p. 220.

47 Ibid., p. 226.

48 Ibid., pp. 227-28.

49 Ibid., p. 150.

50 Ibid., p. 150: Niebuhr’s politics were socialistic and he ran for public office on the Socialistic ticket in New York State. He was one of the founders of “Americas for Democratic Action,” an anti-communist group. Niebuhr also devoted much of his time to Zionist causes.

51 Horden, **A Layman’s Guide**, p. 151.

CHAPTER 13

By Rejecting The Traditions Of Men

J. Todd Clippard

Introduction

WE LIVE IN A world of religious division. David Barrett, an Anglican who has spent more than forty years in religious population research and publishing, has identified more than 33,800 distinct “Christian” religions in the world.¹ **Mead’s Handbook of Denominations in the United States** lists 232 distinct denominational bodies, including some of the better-known community mega-churches like Willow Creek and Saddleback.² With new “non-denominational” independent bodies springing up almost daily, the actual number is certainly much higher than that. Getting closer to home, there are at least twenty distinct divisions within our own brotherhood,³ and I fear more are on the way.⁴

Religious division is so entrenched in the American mind that it is now celebrated. It is strange to see so many ecumenical efforts (Promise Keepers, etc.) when denominational bodies, until just a few decades ago, often debated one another in an attempt to proselytize members from other bodies.⁵ Post-modernism and religious pluralism have caused a great reduction in the number of religious debates. The “I’m Ok—you’re Ok” attitude of most

religionists now hinders even a private discussion of the Biblical differences between the Lord's church and denominational bodies.

Definition Of Terms

“Understand”

“How Can We Understand the Bible Alike?” is the question of this lectureship. This theme is one of vital importance because it affects our society and our brotherhood. My topic is “By Rejecting the Traditions of Men.”

As we begin, a defining of terms is certainly in order. Within the theme of this lectureship is the word “understand.” There are two primary Greek words that are so translated in the King James Version.⁶ One is *noeo* (**Strong's** #3539), which means to “ponder, think upon, perceive, or understand.” The other is *sunemi* (**Strong's** #4920), which means to “bring into union with, comprehend.” Matthew records Jesus as using the latter word five times in His giving and explanation of the parable of the soils in Matthew 13. Specifically, it means to receive Divine instruction by joining it to one's mind. Practically, it means to make Divine instruction a permanent part of one's thinking. Implied in this joining of doctrine and mind is a proper understanding of Divine intent.

When God speaks, His words have an intended and comprehensible message. Therefore, only when one properly comprehends God's message can he be said to “understand.” In reality, it is not possible for people to “understand” the Bible differently. If two people arrive at differing conclusions as to the meaning of a Bible text, both cannot be right. One may be right and the other wrong, or vice versa. Or both may be wrong, but **both cannot be right.**

“Traditions”

The Greek word primarily translated “tradition(s)” is *paradosis* (**Strong’s** #3862), and refers to any teaching or instruction handed down by word of mouth or in written form. The word appears thirteen times in the New Testament and is used both positively and negatively. In the King James Version it is translated “tradition(s)” in every occurrence, with one exception in 1 Corinthians 11:2 where it appears as “ordinances.”

Negatively, the word is found three times in Matthew 15:1-9 regarding the traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, condemning them as having “made void the word of God” through their traditions (Matt. 15:6, ASV). In Matthew 15:9, these traditions are called the doctrines and commandments of men. In fact, the Pharisees themselves referred to them as “the traditions of the elders” in Matthew 15:2.

Positively, the word appears three times with each appearance found in the Pauline epistles. In these senses Paul identifies the traditions as authoritative and binding upon men. These “traditions” will be discussed later in this study.

“Of Men”

The phrase “of men” as it appears in the Bible is of considerable import, especially when appearing with or contrasted with the phrase “of God.” For example, in Genesis 6, the “sons of God” chose wives for themselves out from among the “daughters of men.” It is clear from the resultant apostasy that those “sons of God” were men who loved God and kept His Word, while the “daughters of men” were those women of the world who cared nothing for the ways of God. Peter makes this same distinction in 1 Peter 4:1-2:

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to **the lusts of men**, but to **the will of God** (Emp. mine throughout, JTC).

This distinction is critical when discussing the traditions of men versus the traditions of God. Again, Jesus equated the traditions of the Pharisees with the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:6; Matt. 15:9). Earlier in this exchange, the Pharisees themselves identified their traditions as belonging to “the elders” (Matt. 15:2). Jesus immediately placed their traditions in contraposition to the Word of God saying, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3). Jesus’ words are even stronger in Mark’s Gospel account. Labeling His accusers as hypocrites, Jesus issued this scathing rebuke in Mark 7:8-9:

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

Thus, any reception of man-made traditions which are held as authoritative and binding upon men are nothing less than an outright rejection of the commandment of God.

The apostle Paul warned against the dangers of those who would make spoil of us “through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men . . . and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). Though Paul said he had always lived before God with a good conscience (Acts 23:1), he still identified his religion as “the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14) and not the tradition or Word of God. Rather, Paul contrasted those traditions with the message he preached to the Galatians by identifying the Gospel he preached as “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12).

Though the phrase “traditions of men” is not specified in the text, Paul identifies this very thing in Romans 10:1-3 when he wrote of his Hebrew brethren:

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and **seeking to establish their own righteousness**, have not submitted to the righteousness of God (NKJV).

The apostle Peter identified the traditions of the fathers as leading to a “vain manner of life,” incapable of bringing man back into a state of redemption to God (1 Pet. 1:18, ASV). Tragically, many fail to understand how embracing the traditions of men is a rejection of the righteousness offered by God. Untold millions of “believers” have exchanged God’s offer of righteousness for a man-made righteousness which is ineffectual to save (cf. Matt. 7:21-23).

The difficulties of embracing the traditions of men are many and grievous. Ultimately, those in Bible times who received as doctrine the traditions of men elevated their tradition to a position superseding the Scriptures (Matt. 15:1-9). Those who teach and practice the traditions of men today differ in no real way from the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. Though they pay lip service to the Bible, in truth their tradition trumps the inspired Word of God. Additionally, those who teach and practice the traditions of men often find themselves in contradiction to the practices of their forefathers, and can even be required to cease what they were formerly encouraged or commanded to practice!

Modern-Day Traditions Of Men

Mormonism

There is perhaps no better example of the quandary created by following the traditions of men than examining

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormons. In the sixth paragraph of the “Introduction” to **The Book of Mormon**, Joseph Smith boldly declares:

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.⁷

However, the cover of **The Book of Mormon** unwittingly **condemns the work as a tradition of man. The subtitle of The Book of Mormon is “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”** This claim stands in opposition to the inspired apostle in Galatians 1:8-9:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

With its manifold contradictions with the Biblical record, it is only fitting that Mormonism’s creed book contradict the Bible beginning at the front cover!

Mormonism’s “most correct of any book on earth” has undergone numerous revisions since it was first published in 1830, including major changes in the first revision in 1920. Regarding these first revisions, Walter Martin said “no less than one hundred verses were changed without consulting the missing golden plates.”⁸

There are two other holy books among Mormonism: **Doctrine and Covenants** and **Pearl of Great Price.**⁹ Also, the Mormon Church teaches that he who holds the church office of president is “a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church.”¹⁰ The Mormon Church’s

Council of Twelve Apostles are also held to be “prophets, seers, and revelators.”¹¹ Through their continuing revelation, we will see how the Mormon holy books themselves are subject not only to revision, but to **complete reversals in official church doctrine.**

1. Polygamy. A foundational principle of Mormonism was its practice of polygamy. Interestingly, the practice of polygamy is condemned as an abomination in **The Book of Mormon.**¹² But the practice is enjoined by the first edition of **Doctrine and Covenants.**¹³ However, it is (again) **forbidden** in the present edition!¹⁴ So we find polygamy condemned, then enjoined, and later condemned again.

An appropriate question to ask is, “Why did the Mormon Church reverse its official position on polygamy?” The answer may be summed up in one word—**money.** In the late 1800’s Mormon leaders in Utah Territory were pressing for statehood, but the Mormon practice of polygamy was repulsive to most of America and her elected officials. This repugnance was so strong the federal government outlawed polygamy with the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act in 1862. Additionally, the Edmunds-Tucker Act (1887) permitted the federal government to seize, not only the assets of the Mormon Church, but of all Mormons.

Amazingly (said with tongue in cheek), in 1890 then Mormon President Wilford Woodruff had a “vision” that the church needed to abandon and **completely reverse** its teaching on polygamy. This official change took place in Wilford’s declaration called the **1890 Manifesto.** The manifesto satisfied the government; the church’s assets were not seized, and statehood was granted to Utah in 1896. Thus, the Mormon church has by “inspiration” condemned polygamy, by “inspiration” later embraced polygamy, and now by “inspiration” has condemned polygamy (again). Incidentally, it is commonly known that

thousands of Mormons reject this manifesto and continue to practice polygamy today.

2. Racial Discrimination. Another vital area wherein Mormonism's traditions of man have radically changed is in the realm of race (skin color). From its beginning, the Mormon Church openly discriminated against blacks, believing that dark skin was the curse and mark of Cain. Listen to this statement from Brigham Young on February 5, 1852:

What is that mark? you will see it on the countenance of every African you ever did see upon the face of the earth, or ever will see.... I tell you, this people that are commonly called negroes are the children of old Cain.¹⁵

On October 9, 1859, he stated:

Cain slew his brother. Cain might have been killed, and that would have put a termination to that line of human beings. This was not to be, and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the flat nose and black skin. Trace mankind down to after the flood, and then another curse is pronounced upon the same race—that they should be the 'servant of servants;' and they will be, until that curse is removed; and the Abolitionists cannot help it, nor in the least alter that decree.¹⁶

Speaking of blacks in 1852, Brigham Young is recorded as saying:

[A]ny man having one drop of the seed of [Cain] ... in him cannot hold the priesthood **and if no other Prophet ever spake it before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ...**¹⁷

Note how Young boldly invoked his authority as a "Prophet" and claimed the authority of Christ in his pronouncement. This claim and its subsequent reversal should be enough to shame any right-thinking Mormon into abandoning their ridiculous lot.

The Mormon church's official position of discrimination against blacks remained **unchanged until 1978**, when then "Apostle" Bruce R. McConkie stated:

Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world (**All Are Alike Unto God**, pp. 1-2).¹⁸

Astonishing! One "inspired" man now says to "forget everything" he has said, or what any past Mormon President has said, or what anyone else has said who has spoken "contrary to the **present revelation.**" Thus McConkie reversed a "prophet" who invoked the authority of Jesus Christ. McConkie has concluded that by "inspiration" he and other "inspired" men have contradicted what is now inspired! And again, Mormons are now commanded to practice what at one time was expressly forbidden!

Consider also the necessary conclusions of Young and McConkie's statements. Their statements deny the omniscience of God! Was God's knowledge incomplete in 1852 and 1859 when he "inspired" Young to make his statements? Did God not know any better? Could God not see far enough into the future to know such a statement would be an embarrassment to His people? Since when does God need to correct or reverse Himself (Mal. 3:6)? Try to imagine the apostle John making such a statement: "Forget what I have said earlier, or anything spoken by Paul, Peter, or any other apostle. We all spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that has now come into the world." Such is utter foolishness.

These two examples show beyond any doubt whatsoever that God is not the "inspiration" behind these or any other Mormon pronouncements. The genuinely

inspired apostle Paul declared that “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33), yet confusion surely reigns among the Mormon Church on these and many other doctrines.

Catholicism

In his well-known work, **The Faith of Our Fathers**, James Cardinal Gibbons affirmed:

The church has authority from God to teach regarding faith and morals, and in her teaching she is preserved from error by the special guidance of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹

In this statement, Gibbons was only condensing the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority. Indeed, the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time.

This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.²⁰

The Catholic “holy book” continues:

As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.²¹

The doctrine of continuing revelation and Catholicism's rejection of the Bible as God's final revelation and authority to man is further stated in **The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XV:**

Must it be admitted that Christ instituted His Church as the official and authentic organ to transmit and explain in virtue of Divine authority the Revelation made to men? The Protestant principle is: The Bible and nothing but the Bible; the Bible, according to them, is the sole theological source; there are no revealed truths save the truths contained in the Bible; according to them the Bible is the sole rule of faith: by it and by it alone should all dogmatic questions be solved; it is the only binding authority. **Catholics, on the other hand, hold that there may be, that there is in fact, and that there must of necessity be certain revealed truths apart from those contained in the Bible.**²²

Thus, Catholicism completely ignores the Divine testimony of Peter, her "first pope" (a little sarcasm there) when he wrote by inspiration that God "has given to us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3, NKJV). Also ignored is Jude's affirmation that the faith "was **once for all** delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, NKJV). Finally, no credence is given to the very words of Jesus Himself when He promised His apostles that they would be guided "into **all truth**" (John 16:13).

Finally in this regard, the Catholic Catechism instructs those who interpret the Scriptures to do so "within the living Tradition of the whole Church."²³ Thus, we are told the Catholic Church alone has the authority to interpret, translate, and teach the Scriptures. Furthermore, the Scriptures must be interpreted in light of the Tradition. Despite whatever arguments are made to the contrary, such a view relegates the Scriptures to a position subservient to man-made traditions.

1. Catholicism and Astronomy. For hundreds of years the Catholic hierarchy held as incontrovertible truth the notion that our galaxy is geocentric (Earth centered) and not heliocentric (Sun centered). Copernicus was among the first prominent Catholics to propose a heliocentric system in his 1543 work, **On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres**. Though his book was dedicated to Pope Paul III (Copernicus was a Catholic canon and friend of the Pope), his work fell under immediate condemnation by the church, in particular by a Dominican named Giovanni Tolosani. Tolosani claimed Copernicus' work denied the absolute authority of Scripture.²⁴ Copernicus' book was censored and later placed on the Catholic Church's **Index Librorum Prohibitorum** (List of Forbidden Books).

Nearly a century later, Galileo published his heliocentric work, **Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems** (1632). Like Copernicus before him, Galileo was censored and his book placed on the **Index**. Of course, we all now know that both Copernicus and Galileo were correct, and the Catholic hierarchy was wrong. Though there be many apologists who attempt to defend Catholicism in this case, the best excuse they can muster (that I have found) is: "We weren't the only ones who opposed a heliocentric system at the time."²⁵ Other Catholic apologists engage in *ad hominem* arguments against Galileo as "unconverted," a plagiarist, a philanderer and deadbeat dad.²⁶ Any of these personal attacks may be true. In fact, they are all probably true, but this does not change the fact that he was **right**.

2. Catholicism and Evolution. Following the publication of Darwin's **Origin of the Species** (1859), Pope Pius IX invoked papal infallibility during the First Vatican Council (Vatican I) of 1869-70. In Vatican I he declared:

... all faithful Christians are forbidden to defend as the legitimate conclusions of science those opinions which are known to be contrary to the doctrine of faith, particularly if they have been condemned by the Church; . . .²⁷

Though neither **Origin of the Species** nor Darwin's theory of evolution are specifically identified, the timing and language of the edict certainly lends itself to a condemnation of the same. Pius IX's statement remained unchanged and virtually unchallenged among Catholicism for eighty years.

The best-known change from Catholicism's traditional opposition of evolution came in 1996 when Pope John Paul II shocked many around the globe (and delighted infidels everywhere)²⁸ when he endorsed the idea of theistic evolution as not necessarily incompatible with the Bible record of human origin.²⁹ Though the statement created a firestorm, what John Paul said was not radically different than what was said by his predecessor Pius XII nearly fifty years earlier. In an encyclical titled **Humani Generis**, Pius said:

The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, insofar as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter.³⁰

Pius prefaced his remarks earlier in that same address when he said:

Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such Letters the Popes do not exercise the supreme power of their Teaching Authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority, of which

it is true to say: “He who heareth you, heareth me”; and generally what is expounded and inculcated in Encyclical Letters already for other reasons appertains to Catholic doctrine. But if the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the Pontiffs, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians.³¹

The essence of Pius’ statement is: “What I say at this time is not bound upon the Catholic Church as a final authority. But, if I, or some other Pope, decides to speak definitively on the subject, then it is no longer a matter of conjecture and therefore not open to discussion.” So, what **God** said about man’s origin in Genesis 1 and what **Jesus** said in Matthew 19:4 are **not** the final authority!

Note also the difference between Pius’ “ordinary teaching authority” and “Teaching Authority.” To Pius there is teaching, and then there is **teaching**. Obviously, he had long forgotten Peter’s admonition in 1 Peter 4:11, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” Also ignored is Paul’s admonition to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (Tit. 2:1, NKJV).

In his 1996 address, John Paul cited Pius’ statement that the physical evolution of man from lower life forms (“pre-existent and living matter”) is not incompatible with Scripture. John Paul concurred, restating Pius’ position that the evolution of man from lower life forms was a tenable position so long as man was not reduced to a totally material being. That is, man may have descended from apes so long as one recognizes the Divine creation of man’s soul.

In July 2004, Cardinal Ratzinger, (now Pope Benedict XVI), endorsed a statement from the International Theological Commission which includes a paragraph stating the “widely accepted scientific account” that:

- 1) the universe erupted 15 billion years ago in an explosion called 'the Big Bang,' and has been expanding and cooling ever since;
- 2) Later there gradually emerged the conditions necessary for the formation of atoms, still later the condensation of galaxies and stars, and about 10 billion years later the formation of planets. In our own solar system and on earth (formed about 4.5 billion years ago), the conditions have been favorable to the emergence of life;
- 3) there is general agreement . . . that the first organism dwelt on this planet about 3.5 - 4 billion years ago;
- 4) Since it has been demonstrated that all living organisms on earth are genetically related, it is virtually certain that all living organisms have descended from this first organism; and
- 5) physical anthropology and molecular biology combine to make a convincing case for the origin of the human species in Africa about 150,000 years ago in a humanoid population of common genetic lineage.³²

So the Catholic Church has moved 180 degrees from its original position on the origin of man to a full endorsement of evolutionary (and atheistic) theory. This “about face” has caused much consternation and confusion among the Catholic people and is the source of considerable dissent among their hierarchy.³³ But again, such will always be the case when men embrace as truth the traditions of men.

“Traditions” And The Apostle Paul

As earlier noted, Paul three times used in a positive or authoritative sense the term “traditions.” But to what traditions did he refer? Were these also traditions of men? I believe the answer can be found within the reading of each occurrence. Note the three texts with added emphases:

Now I praise you that ye remember me in all things, and hold fast the traditions, **even as I delivered them to you** (1 Cor 11:2 ASV);

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, **whether by word, or our epistle** (2 Thess 2:15);

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition **which he received of us** (2 Thess 3:6).

In each case Paul identified himself as the deliverer or messenger of the traditions. However, he never identified himself as the **source** of these authoritative messages. There are two churches represented in the three texts: the Corinthian and Thessalonian. So we ask, “Did Paul say something elsewhere in these two epistles to identify God as the source of his message?” Indeed he did.

To the Corinthians he presented his teaching as one possessing “the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 7:40). Later, in his discourse concerning spiritual gifts he wrote:

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord** (1 Cor 14:37, NKJV).

In his earlier epistle to the Thessalonian church, Paul wrote:

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake (1 Thess. 1:5, NKJV);

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 4:1-2, NKJV).

Paul left no doubt in the minds of those brethren as to the source and authority behind these traditions. When Paul’s declarations concerning the source of his message

(“traditions”) are considered in contrast to his warnings against the philosophies of men (Col. 2:8), not to mention his renunciation of “the traditions of his fathers” (Gal. 1:14), there is no way to assert or conclude that Paul endorsed and bound the traditions of men upon the church.

The Bible condemns the traditions of man as:

1. Transgressing the commandment of God (Matt. 15:3);
2. Making the commandment of God of no effect (Matt. 15:6);
3. Making vain our worship (Matt. 15:9);
4. Rejecting the commandment of God (Mark 7:8-9);
5. Opening one to spoil (Col. 2:8);
6. Ineffectual to save (1 Pet. 1:18).

As such, the binding of man-made traditions should be avoided at all cost.

Conclusion And Exhortation To Follow Jesus' Example

So how can we understand the Bible alike? In part by rejecting the traditions of men. But there is more. It is not sufficient simply to reject one thing without embracing another. Like the man purged from an unclean spirit, we must fill our minds with good things, lest something worse befall us in the end (Matt. 12:43-45). Therefore, let us understand the Bible using the attitude and example of Jesus.

In Matthew 4:1-10, Jesus exemplifies four wonderful attitudes that will serve us well in our quest to understand the Bible alike and teach others to do the same. This text is commonly called “The Temptation Of Jesus.” To each temptation by the Devil, Jesus responded with “it is written.” Each response was taken from the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 8:3; Deut. 6:16; Deut. 6:13). These rebuttals reveal to us Jesus' attitude toward the Scriptures.

The Scriptures Are Concrete

Jesus' use of the phrase "it is written" (Matt. 4:4; Matt. 4:7; Matt. 4:10) reveals His belief in the Scriptures as God's continuing and unalterable authority. The verb is given in the perfect tense and indicative mood. Jesus straightforwardly affirmed the Scriptures were still as authoritative as the day they were written and were in no way diminished by time (cf. Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34).

The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, continues unabated (Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:23-25). Its teaching and power are not subject to change with time or societal influence. In the mold of the Mormons and Catholics (among many others), many religionists believe the Bible must be interpreted in light of present circumstances. But the Bible was given to change the world and not the other way around.

The Scriptures Are Canonical

Jesus believed the Scriptures were authoritative because of their source—they came forth "out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 15:4). This alone makes the Scriptures authoritative. They did not come from the mind or imaginations of man, but from the mind of Him who created and upholds all things by the Word of His power (Heb. 11:3; Heb. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:7). Therefore, when we approach the Scriptures in our daily readings, meditations, and studies, we must do so with the understanding of the absolute Authority who begat them. Furthermore, we must instill in our hearers that same reverence and devotion to the Word.

The Scriptures Are Consistent

When the Devil tried to twist the Scriptures to suit his own hellish purposes, Jesus rebuffed him with the certainty that the Scriptures **cannot** be contradictory to one another. "It is written again" was the response of our Lord (Matt. 4:7). The word so translated "again" is the Greek *palin*

(**Strong's** 3825) and is here used as a means of contrast—not as an example of one Scripture contradicting another, but in the sense that one Scripture cannot be used in such a way as to contradict another. To his credit, the Devil accurately quoted the text (Psm. 91:11-12), but he **misapplied** it.

In similar fashion, false teachers around the world misuse the Bible to promote salvation by grace only (Eph. 2:5; Eph. 2:8); premillennialism (Matt. 24; Rev. 20); denominationalism (John 15:5); proxy baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29); and a host of other heresies. We must be careful to embrace and promote a hermeneutic that respects the integrity and consistency of God's Word: "the entirety of Your word is truth" (Psm. 119:160, NKJV, cf. John 17:17).

The Scriptures Are Comprehensible

In rebutting the Devil's final temptation, Jesus said "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). However, when one looks back to the original text, the word "only" is not present. Therefore, Jesus used a principle of interpretation known as inference to determine the meaning and intent of God's Word. Furthermore, the Devil accepted the use of inference as perfectly acceptable as is evidenced by his silence in the face of Jesus' response.

This was not the last time Jesus would use inference in His teaching. In His confrontation with the Sadducees in Matthew 22, Jesus quoted Exodus 3:6 saying, "I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Again, a reference back to the original text reveals the absence of the word "am." Though "am" is in the text of the KJV and NKJV, it appears in ***italics*** denoting it as a word not present in the original manuscripts but supplied by the translators for clarity.

How unfortunate that so many of our brethren must take a back seat to the Devil in matters of interpreting the Bible! For years, many have sought to introduce mechanical instruments into the worship of the church. Dissatisfied with “thus saith the Lord,” and leaving the safe harbor of sound hermeneutics, they parrot their denominational counterparts, crying, “But the Bible doesn’t say ‘thou shalt not use the instrument!’” Tragically, even the Devil knows better than to make such a convoluted argument.

Let each of us resolve to reject the empty clouds of man’s tradition (Jude 12) and pursue the way of righteousness wherein is life (Prov. 12:28). As we approach the Scriptures, may our attitude always be, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

Endnotes

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2 Frank S. Mead, “Alphabetical Table of Contents for Religious Groups,”**Handbook of Denominations in the United States**, 12th edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 1.

3 Mac Lynn, **Churches of Christ in the United States**, (Nashville: 21st Century Christian, 2006). This edition contains nine distinct divisions, mostly variations of non-institutionalism. However, examination of previous editions reveal additional non-institutional divisions, (e.g., no church building), bringing their number of schisms to more than a dozen. Other distinct divisions include congregations that are premillennial, adhere to the AD 70 (Max King) doctrine, baptize in the name of Jesus only, baptize in the name of the Holy Spirit, charismatic, and those that possessed a progressive spirit” (i.e., liberal, ecumenical, associated with the change movement).

4 With many congregations forsaking God’s law on marriage, divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:9), declaring instrumental music in worship a non-fellowship (and thus a non-salvation) issue, or in open fellowship with denominational bodies, can additional formal divisions be far behind?

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22 Jean Bainvel, "Tradition and Living Magisterium," **The Catholic Encyclopedia**, Volume XV, 15006b, transcribed by Tomas Hansil, (Robert Appleton Company, 1912), online edition copyright 2003.

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CHAPTER 14

By Understanding The Rules For Interpreting Difficult Passages

Scott Ferguson

Introduction

I*N OUR WORLD TODAY*, there are many who do not cherish the book we call the Bible. However, to us as Christians, it is the greatest book ever written. We, as members of the body of Christ, understand that God's Word is the power to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18). The Bible is the only book that can make men united. Paul wrote, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:16). Paul makes it clear that all can understand the Bible alike.

Further, he wrote to the church at Corinth:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Not only can we understand the Bible alike, it is imperative that we do so. In order to please God, we must understand and know the truth. Yet, there are passages in the Bible that are difficult to understand and interpret. These verses present the challenge to give diligent study as a student of the Bible.

As we begin, notice the words of Peter in 2 Peter 3:14-16:

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Peter alludes to the fact that Paul was inspired of God and further he states that in Paul's epistles, "there are some things hard to be understood." Although there are difficult passages, Peter emphasizes that we must beware of those who seek to make these verses mean something never intended by the writer. However, the fact remains, there are some passages difficult to interpret, which presents a challenge to the student of God's Word. What then does this mean? Are there passages in the Bible so difficult that it is impossible to interpret? If not, are there guidelines that we may follow in order to come away with a clear meaning of these passages? It is needful that we examine the fact that the truth can be known. It is also important that we notice why some verses are difficult, as well as rules that may be followed for interpreting these passages. Finally, we will consider some examples of false doctrines established upon misinterpretations of Scripture.

We Can Know The Truth

There are many who approach the Bible as a book of mysteries and thus will never have a clear understanding of what it teaches. When we consider the Bible, we must

understand that it is truth. Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Jesus affirmed the fact that the Word of God is from God and is truth. Paul would later write:

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

Every word of the Bible is inspired of God. Now, notice the words of Christ:

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

If all of God’s Word is truth, and we can know the truth, then we can know the Word of God. The truth is clear; we can know God’s Word.

Notice the example of Timothy. Paul affirmed that Timothy had known the will of God from his childhood.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Timothy knew the Old Testament Scriptures from his childhood. I am convinced that even though the Old Testament may seem difficult, we may know and understand its teaching. Further, Paul wrote:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (Eph. 3:3-5).

Paul was able to understand the mystery of Christ, which was also to be understood by the church. He told the brethren, “when ye read, ye may understand...” This is further affirmed in Ephesians 3:8-9:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Paul would later write, “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren” (1 Thess. 5:27). The epistles were written to reveal God’s will to the church. God has given us His revelation in words whereby we may read and understand. No matter how difficult a passage may seem, we can ascertain the truth.

Why Are Some Passages Difficult To Interpret?

There is no doubt that some passages are hard to understand. Peter affirmed that in our text of 2 Peter 3:16. However, the question that we should consider is why? First, we must consider what the Hebrews writer refers to as the “strong meat” of the Word.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is

unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The fact that there are difficult passages may not necessarily be a reflection upon our intelligence, or the lack of it. There are teachings of the Bible that we would consider more in-depth. Certain texts and verses simply call for more attention, study, and reflection. For example, we may consider the things which are meta-physical. The Bible reveals to us the things, which are spiritual and cannot be examined by our five senses. We may find it difficult to understand certain verses that deal with the triune nature of God, the end of time, the resurrection of the dead, the destruction of the world and the city of heaven. It may seem that these verses are difficult, but, with a little time and diligent study, they may be understood.

On the other hand, some passages are difficult to interpret because many are untaught, unlearned and unstable. One of the greatest dangers in our world is ignorance of the will of God. In the long ago, Hosea said:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

Unfortunately, there are many who simply do not study God's Word and thus draw conclusions that are unwarranted by the text. It is our solemn responsibility to apply ourselves in the study of God's Word. Paul wrote, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). We are to study and rightly divide or handle aright God's truth. If we would follow Paul's admonition, there would be no verse that we could not

understand. Just as the Hebrews writer stated, there are those who ought to be teachers, but they have need that one teach them again. There are some students of the Bible who are still thumbing through Genesis when they ought to be plowing through Revelation. If one is not willing to increase his knowledge there remains the possibility of misinterpreting a text. Peter admonished, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever” (2 Pet. 3:18). This admonition calls for me to do what is necessary that I may grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Further, Christ spoke of those who will not hear the Word of the Lord. They do not accept the truth; because of their biased mind and, thus, find many passages hard to understand. Jesus said:

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:14-15).

Jesus spoke of those who were rebellious and would close their minds to the truth. In this case, individuals were blinded from the truth taught in the Bible because of their own prejudice. It is sad indeed, when men refuse to examine God’s Word to fully understand His will for man. These are several reasons why certain passages seem difficult to interpret.

Rules For Interpreting Difficult Passages

It would prove to be beneficial for any Bible student to have rules or guidelines in understanding difficult

passages in the Bible. The rules, which are written in this chapter, are in no way original with me. However, based upon my study of the Scriptures, these are rules, which I have implemented and which have been helpful to me. Let's examine some rules for interpreting difficult passages of the Bible.

First, **approach the Bible as the absolute standard of objective truth.** One can arrive at the truth only when he approaches the Bible objectively as opposed to subjectively. When one objectively studies the Bible, it will be understood that the truth is absolute. Truth is not subjective or relative. The truth is not dependent upon the reasoning or interpretation of the individual. To claim that it would be acceptable to approach the study of the Bible subjectively would result in the belief that any interpretation of a verse would be correct. The objective truth of the Bible establishes authority, while subjectivity results in relativism, which rejects the idea of an absolute standard of authority. Peter wrote:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:3).

God's revelation to man is considered by James as the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25). God's Word is a specific body of truth referred to as "the faith" (Jude 3). It is needful for any Bible student to recognize that all authority inherently resides in God. John wrote:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).

Christ stated that all power had been given unto Him (Matt. 28:18). Further, it is evidenced that the Bible is the absolute standard of authority because it is the standard by which all men will be judged. Jesus said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). By understanding the fact that God’s Word is the truth, and objective, we can know that just any interpretation will not suffice. Thus, we will see the need to study in order to attain God’s truth in that verse. If we understand that the Bible is the objective standard of truth, then we can understand difficult verses.

Second, it is needful for us to bear in mind that to understand a difficult verse, **we must study the context**. One of the most destructive approaches to the Bible is lifting verses out of context. If we would seek to interpret a passage correctly, we must consider the context in which it is written. This may call for the student to observe a few verses before and after. It may even call for us to examine the chapters before and after to arrive at a clear meaning of the text and the difficult verse. Studying a verse in context will reveal to whom the writer is speaking. It will also aid in determining the subject under consideration. Along with the idea of studying the context is the fact that other texts may aid in our study of the verse. The statement has often been uttered but is true: “The Bible is its own best commentary.”

Third, **take into consideration that a verse may contain figurative language**. Many verses that seem difficult to individuals are those which contain apocalyptic language. For example, the book of Revelation is highly figurative. John wrote:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which

must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John (Rev. 1:1).

One may think that a book such as Revelation is difficult to interpret but it is not. Many times the writer defines for us the meaning of the figures used. A good example of this is in Revelation 1 where John writes of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks. If one were to neglect to study the context, he would find that it would be difficult to interpret exactly what John is saying. Further, without studying the context, especially in the use of figurative language, one could draw conclusions not warranted by the text and find himself in error. Notice how John reveals the meaning of the things signified.

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks, which thou sawest are the seven churches (Rev. 1:20).

It is clear to see that, based upon studying the verses following, the figures are made clear and even defined.

Fourth, it is always important to **keep in mind the setting in which the verse is written**. We must examine to see to whom the text was written. It does make a difference to know who is being addressed and especially why they are being addressed. For example: in First Corinthians, Paul was writing to the church of Christ at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). Further, if you examine the entire letter, it is seen that Paul addressed many of the problems that existed among the brethren. Further, it is essential to understand the times in which the text was written. When studying the book of Revelation, it is most helpful to understand that the church was under great persecution. Christians just like you and I were put to

death because of their faith. The Roman Empire was a superpower at that time. Understanding the history, to whom the book was written, and why it was written, will be beneficial in interpreting difficult passages of the Bible.

Fifth, **conducting a word study will aid in interpreting a difficult passage.** There are many words whose meaning has changed over the centuries. Further, there are certain words in the Bible which are descriptive of different things. To give an example, the word “wine” in the Bible is a reference to many things. In some verses it is used as an intoxicating beverage, such as in Proverbs 23:31: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.” However, it can also refer to the juice that exists in the grape, such as in Isaiah 16:10:

And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease.

I would encourage every student of God’s Word to use a concordance such as **Strong’s** and study the origin of words in order to get a clear meaning. One preacher rightly said, “As we study, let’s put on our first century glasses.” We must consider what these words meant when they were written. Again, studying such words, as mentioned above, would call for an intense look at the context.

Sixth, it would be wise to **consider the grammatical make-up of the verse.** I have found that some of the easiest verses to understand were perverted because the grammar was misapplied and misconstrued. Take for instance Acts 2:38: “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.” The word “for” is the Greek word, “*eis*,” meaning “unto.” However, many denominational preachers have perverted this verse by stating that the word means “because.” Thus, they state that we are baptized because our sins are already remitted rather than to obtain remission. Further, in Mark 16:16, they state that faith and baptism are not equal. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The word “and” is a coordinating conjunction which connects two things of equal value. Christ makes it clear that both faith and baptism are essential to receive salvation from sin. Therefore, it can prove to be helpful if one is familiar with grammar.

These are just a few rules that I believe will be helpful in studying the Word of God in general as well as interpreting difficult passages of the Bible.

False Doctrines Built On Misinterpretations Of Scripture

One of the greatest mistakes one could make is to misinterpret the Bible and draw souls away from the truth. I wish it were not so; however, this is done on a large scale in our world today. The time was foretold that false teachers would arise and draw away disciples after them. Paul wrote:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

The wresting of Scripture has been an age-old problem. In fact, that is exactly the problem Peter

addressed in our text of 2 Peter 3:16. Peter spoke of those who would wrest the Scriptures, which in essence means “to torture.” The problem of twisting the meaning of verses to prove preconceived ideas is rampant and ungodly in our world. Denominations and man-made religions are the direct result of such heresy. Jesus addressed the culprits of twisting Scripture when He said, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Paul wrote to Timothy of the coming apostasy in 1 Timothy 4:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

Direct results of drawing conclusions not warranted by the text are the traditions and commandments of men. Jesus spoke to such a people when He said:

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 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 (Matt. 15:7-9).

These false doctrines based on a misinterpretation of Scripture produce nothing but vain actions and empty talk. Take for example the false doctrine of faith alone. Although the verses abused to teach this false doctrine are simple, they are truly perverted. Many use Romans 5:1 to advance their false teachings. Paul wrote, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Based upon this verse alone one would seek to believe that justification is received by faith alone. However, we who follow and teach the Bible do not reject that we are justified by faith. The Bible is clear that we are justified by an obedient faith. James wrote, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24). To state that one is justified by faith alone is to say that one is justified by a dead faith. James further wrote, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jas. 2:26). Yet, keep in mind, this false doctrine is based off of a “skip and hop” approach to the Bible. One would have to skip and hop around the Bible to get this false doctrine.

Let’s notice a false doctrine based on a misinterpretation of a difficult verse of the Bible. Take for example the deadly and destructive false doctrine of Calvinism. This system of perverted faith teaches that all men have inherited the sinful nature of Adam. Two verses that are misused to teach this are Psalm 51:5 and Psalm 58:3. In Psalm 51:5, David wrote, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” In Psalm 58:3, he wrote, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

The proponents of this doctrine state that the Psalmist is affirming that we possess a sinful nature, which came from Adam, and that we are born sinners because we are hereditarily totally depraved. This doctrine is based upon several misinterpretations of Scripture. Yet, let’s examine these two. In Psalm 51:5, David is speaking of the environment in which he was born. We know this because we know the nature of sin. The case is simple. What constitutes a sinner? John wrote these words, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law:

for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). One is a sinner by virtue of the fact that he has sinned.

Further, in Psalm 58:3, the argument is made that we are born with the burden of Adam’s sin. Yet, within this context it is easy to see that the Psalmist is figuratively expressing how soon man becomes wicked. The problem with the Calvinist is that he takes this verse literally. However, if that is the case, then as soon as one is born, then he can speak. Can a baby speak lies, let alone speak as soon as he is born? The answer is absolutely not. It is clear that the Psalmist is using figurative language. Thus, the doctrine of original sin is demolished. Many other verses could be consulted to defeat this doctrine; yet, any false doctrine can be defeated within the context. Many other misinterpretations could be examined but space would not permit us to examine them all. The fact is, we must be careful not to draw a conclusion that is not warranted from the text.

Conclusion

The apostle Peter affirmed that there are difficult passages in the Bible, and we can certainly agree. However, not one of them is so difficult that the truth cannot be known. It is our duty to study and arise to the challenge of knowing the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation. We must also understand that many have built false doctrines based upon shaky interpretations of Scripture. One final rule that we all should observe: **if my conclusion of one verse contradicts the teaching of another verse, then my conclusion is wrong.** May we understand that the Word of God is in perfect harmony. Let us never shy away from studying these “difficult” passages but seek to ever learn the will of the Lord.

CHAPTER 15

Not By A Direct Operation Of The Holy Spirit

Curtis Cates

Introduction

THE OLDER GENERATION OF brethren would hardly preach a Gospel meeting [which generally was ten days to two weeks or more in length] without delivering a powerful message from the eternal Word on “Can We Understand the Bible Alike?” How many blessed times I did hear my beloved father, Curtis C. Cates, preach his old cloth chart sermon on that very title! When brethren were preaching that type Bible-based, Bible quoting sermons, the church of Christ was recognized as the “fastest growing” religious organization in the United States. It is crucial that we preach the same urgent message in the Twenty-First Century. Thanks be to the great Southaven congregation, her splendid elders, and her gifted lectureship director, brother B. J. Clarke, for this great theme: “How Can We Understand the Bible Alike?”

God’s Truth is Knowable

God’s truth is absolute and knowable; it is objective truth. Faith and knowledge are not mutually exclusive. Rather, faith is based upon testimony (Rom. 10:17), not on a leap in the dark, mere guesswork or wishful thinking. Christ said, “And ye shall **know** the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

John's readers are praised because they "know it [the truth]," and because "no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2:21). Was Paul correct when he affirmed that the Thessalonians **received** and **understood** the Word of truth? "[Y]e received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). How did the Thessalonians know how to walk? Was it by subjective surmising, or by understandable instruction from the inspired Paul (1 Thess. 4:1; et al.)? Is it just for God to punish those who "**know** not God, and ...obey not the gospel" if such is not possible (2 Thess. 1:6-9)? Did all who appreciated the elect lady and her children really "**know** the truth" (2 John 1)? Did Paul at the same time believe and **know** (2 Cor. 4:13-14; 1 Thess. 4:14)? Paul assured Timothy, "...I **know** him whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12); in the following verse, he charged, "Hold the pattern of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). If truth is subjective, unknowable and unattainable, was that a reasonable, accomplishable command?

The standard is the inspired Word—not the individual. We are to walk "in the truth" (3 John 3; 2 John 9-11). God's people are to "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the [inspired] tradition which he received of us" (2 Thess. 3:6). Now, notice the following verse, "For yourselves **know** how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you" (2 Thess. 3:7). It sounds like Paul **expected** to be followed as an example, does it not? Those who reject the words of the Lord will by them be condemned (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). Could the Bereans understand the Scriptures (Acts 17:11); Timothy (2 Tim. 2:15), the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:21), the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Cor. 1:10), the Ephesians (Eph. 4:20-25, Eph. 6:10-17), the Philippians (Phil. 3:16-18), et al.?

The Bible Can Be Understood Alike

Truth is harmonious. The truth is revealed from the God of truth; by Christ, the truth; through the Holy Spirit of truth. Deity is able to speak so that man can understand; “The Spirit speaketh expressly” (1 Tim. 4:1). We can “hear [understand] what the Spirit saith to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, et al.). The church at Sardis had “received and didst hear; and keep it” (Rev. 3:3). What they did, others/we can do, if they/we will have an honest, good heart (Luke 8:15).

God “would have **all men** to be saved, and come to the **knowledge** [understanding] of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4); does the fault lie in God’s lack of ability to speak/write clearly or in man’s lack of ability to perceive the pure Gospel, or does it not rather depend upon the type heart in the individual, his prejudice, his being misled by errorists, etc.? To ask the question is to answer it! The Word enables the obedient believers to be perfected in one (John 17:23); the antithesis of that is severely rebuked by Paul (1 Cor. 1:10ff).

Through Paul’s writings, it could be **known** “how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church...” (1 Tim. 3:15). Those who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the **knowledge** of the truth” are condemned; from such, Christians are to “turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5-7), for they subvert the truth and lead silly folks into error. “For yourselves **know perfectly** that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2). One escapes the defilement of the world by knowledge; to return to the world is terrible. “For it were better for them not to have **known** the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back...” (2 Pet. 2:20-22). By the same affirmation that one cannot know the way of righteousness, the errorist denies that one can escape the pollutions of the world; if not, why not?

One can understand, indeed, must understand God's will, and those who through knowledge obey God's will and persist in it will be automatically united in Christ with all others who do likewise (John 17:17ff; Eph. 4:13-14; et al.), understanding the Bible alike (Eph. 3:3). Unity [not union] is not just possible; it is commanded (1 Cor. 1:10ff).

The Fact That The Scriptures Can Be Understood And Obeyed Is Challenged By Calvinism

The all-sufficiency and alone-sufficiency of the Scriptures has been challenged by teaching the direct supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit today, that otherwise the Bible is a "dead letter." Loraine Boettner, Calvinist, stated that:

The Scriptures constantly teach that the Gospel becomes effectual only when it is attended by the special illuminating power of the Spirit, and without this power it is to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness.¹

Boettner characterizes as a "great short-coming" the "failure to recognize the necessity for the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit on the heart." That must take place not only upon the alien sinner but also in "sanctification," upon the child of God, this Calvinist affirms:

...sanctification is a process [beyond regeneration, which "is performed by supernatural power and is complete in an instant"]. It consists in the gradual triumph of the new nature implanted in regeneration...Sanctification, however, is not fully completed until death, at which time the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul of every vestige of sin, making it holy....²

...Only those are saved who are regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit [meaning the supernatural—CAC]...God's constant sustaining power.³

Speaking of his having searched the Word, E. G. Sewell affirmed, "I saw not one word about getting religion or any sort of conversion by an abstract operation of the Holy Spirit."⁴ J. Noel Merideth stated that the Bible meets man's spiritual needs "without any miracle performed on it since it was given to the world, without any additional power to make it intelligible or credible." He continued:

We believe the Bible as it is, is adapted to man as he is. Man does not have to have some sort of a miracle wrought upon him so the Bible may be adapted to him. All the change desired in man is to be brought about by the word of God and man's response thereto.⁵

He was speaking of the Word's influence both upon non-saints and saints.

Brother James T. Amis spoke of some who felt the Bible to be an inadequate guide:

Do those men who pretend to interpret God's word claim to be able to make men understand better than God can teach them? Surely the God who created man's mind should be better able to speak intelligibly to it. Do they claim inspiration or spiritual guidance in their interpretation?

If all religionists in the United States would suddenly decide to "accept the whole Bible, plus nothing, minus nothing," there would be no assemblies at denominational churches any more....There would be no doctrines of heredity total depravity, and a necessity for a quickening work of the Spirit upon the sinner to enable him to accept Christ, for the Bible teaches no such doctrine....⁶

Brother J. W. Lowber [F. D. Srygley wrote the introduction to his book] stated about the direct "quickenings" and "renewal" doctrine of the Presbyterian Confession of Faith:

This language certainly destroys the freedom of the will, and makes conversion of a miracle. The

Disciples have always opposed every theory which tended to destroy the responsibility of man. The doctrine of the “**abstract operation of the Holy Spirit**” is as unreasonable as it is unscriptural, and it has greatly impeded the progress of Christianity.

We have space only for a few reasons for the correctness of the position of the Disciples, that the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification operates through the word of God.⁷

Brother Lowber proceeded to give evidence from God’s Word for the fact of the Holy Spirit’s operation, not supernatural, direct, and mysterious, but only through the Word, making clear that the position of members of the Lord’s church “on the operation of the Holy Spirit is distinctive” from the position of the sectarians.⁸ Brethren Lowber and Srygley would be shocked to learn that brethren today who are likewise “set for the defense of the gospel” and of its all-sufficiency are being charged with “new anti-ism” by those who teach the direct operation upon the alien sinners [baptism in the Holy Spirit when a person is baptized in water] and upon the child of God, supernaturally. Z. T. Sweeney wrote:

...There is no more necessity for special illumination and guidance of the Spirit of God, and therefore, no more special illumination by the Spirit. Men talk of being led and guided and controlled by the direct operation of the Spirit. Such men talk blindly and madly.⁹

Brother Gus Nichols affirmed that any direct operation of the Holy Spirit undermines the Word’s all-sufficiency:

It is just advertising unbelief in the all-sufficiency of the word of God as a revelation from God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).¹⁰

He repudiated the idea of a direct, supernatural operation; expecting an “imaginary direct operation” causes some to

“‘turn up their noses’ at the word,” “to belittle the ‘word’ of God and render it ineffective.”¹¹

The Holy Spirit does not reveal ideas and thoughts to people directly, nor guide them directly in some mysterious way....The Holy Spirit has no suggestions to make, no instructions to give, other than what he has given in the Bible.¹²

“The Spirit [operates] only through the word of God upon the sinner, or upon the child of God,” brother Nichols wrote.¹³

The very idea that God cannot sufficiently and fully communicate with His own offspring is absurd. Even the animals can communicate with their offspring. That God cannot adequately express Himself for man to understand and obey is either an absolute denial of God’s nature and power—or, it is Calvinism.

Calvinism Teaches That Human Beings Are Possessed By A “Total Inability”

To Understand And Respond To God’s Word

Lorraine Boettner defined the basic tenets of Calvinism thus:

The Five Points may be more easily remembered if they are associated with the word T-U-L-I-P; T, Total Inability [also termed “Total heredity depravity”—CAC]; U, Unconditional Election; L, Limited Atonement; I, Irresistible (Efficacious) Grace; and P, Perseverance of the Saints.¹⁴

Boettner observed that Calvinism has had a profound influence upon the denominationalism of past centuries and of today. In endeavoring to call people back to the pristine, old Jerusalem Gospel, Gospel preachers and other Christians have had to differentiate between these

foundation teachings of John Calvin and the teaching of God's Word. An integral part of Calvinism is also the doctrine of imputation [transference or representative principle], which is the subject of this study.

Those who studied themselves out of Calvinism two centuries ago had a definitive influence upon those in churches of Christ. They exposed Calvin's system of predestination, total depravity, grace and faith only, impossibility of apostasy, transferred righteousness, et al., on the polemic platform and from the pulpit, and brethren were virtually free of such fatal error until recent years.

Calvinism did not have its beginning with the Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutheranism, Baptists, et al., or even with John Calvin, the reformer who systemized the religion. Boettner correctly stated:

Augustine had taught the essentials of the system a thousand years before Calvin was born...The inherent principles of it had been in existence for long ages before Calvin was born...But inasmuch as it was Calvin who first formulated these principles into a more or less complete system, that system, or creed, if you will, and likewise those principles which are embodied in it, came to bear his name.

Calvin's work is the **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, in which he was greatly influenced by the teachings of Augustine (354-430). Augustine held to the doctrine of man's inherited total depravity because of Adam's sin and man's lack of free will and his inability to act as a result of that depravity.

In order to understand why Calvinism teaches the necessity of a direct, supernatural, miraculous illumination, or help, to understand the Word of God, one must realize that the doctrine of "imputation" [or transference, or representation] is the glue that holds the

five false tenets of Calvinism together. When Adam sinned, all of humanity **lost** all ability to understand, and to respond to, the Father—total depravity [total inability]. Hear again the averments of Calvinist Boettner:

It is easy for us to understand representative. . . . Adam stood as the official head and representative of his people. . . .¹⁵

Adam was made not only the father but also the representative of the whole human race. And if we fully understood the closeness of the relation between him and them we would fully realize the justice of the transmission of his sin to them. Adam's sin is imputed to his descendants in the same way that Christ's righteousness is imputed to those who believe in him. Adam's descendants are, of course, no more personally guilty of his sin than Christ's redeemed are personally meritorious of His righteousness.

Suffering and death are declared to be the consequence of sin; and the reason that all die is that "all sinned." Now we know that many suffer and die in infancy, before they have committed any sin themselves. It follows that either God is unjust in punishing the innocent, or that those infants are in some way guilty creatures. And if guilty, how have they sinned? It is impossible to explain it on any other supposition than that they sinned in Adam (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12, 18); and they could not have sinned in him in any other way than by representation.¹⁶

Now, what are the implications of this imputation of Adam's sin to the whole human race (transferred wickedness)?

But, while we are not personally guilty of Adam's sin, we are, nevertheless, liable to punishment for it. 'The guilt of Adam's public sin,' says Dr. A. A. Hodge, 'is by judicial act of God immediately charged to the account of each and everyone of his descendants [which would include the Son

of God, would it not?] from the moment he begins to exist, and antecedently to any act of his own. Hence all men come into existence deprived of all those influences of the Holy Spirit upon which their moral and spiritual life depends....and with an antecedent prevailing tendency in their natures to sin [compare the Calvinistic translation “sinful nature” in the New International Version, glorified by many liberals—CAC]; which tendency in them is itself of the nature of sin, and worthy of punishment. Human nature since the fall retains its constitutional faculties of reason, conscience and free agency and hence man continues to be a responsible moral agent. [how is this possible, since each person is totally depraved, not of his own making?—CAC]. Yet he is spiritually dead, and totally adverse to and incapable of the discharge of any of these duties which sprang out of his relation to God, and entirely unable to change his own evil dispositions or innate moral tendencies, or to dispose himself to such a change, or to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in effecting such a change.¹⁷

What are the implications of the “imputed sin” heresy?

In the Westminster Confession the doctrine of Total Inability is stated as follows:—“Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”¹⁸

In short, Calvinism teaches that man is therefore: “under the curse of sin,” “actuated by wrong principles,” “wholly unable to love God,” “wholly inclined to all evil,” unable “to be willing to exercise holy volitions,” unable to repent since he loves evil and hates God, possesses “a most obdurate blindness, stupidity, and opposition concerning the things of God,” “uniformly prefers and chooses evil

instead of good, as do the fallen angels or demons,” “cannot hear” Christ’s Word, “cannot produce good fruit,” cannot “perform any spiritual actions,” “abominable, corrupt, and deceitful” from birth, et al.¹⁹

Since, according to Calvinism, every person suffered “primarily spiritual death in Adam,” and since “Adam stood as the official head and representative of his people,” and since Adam’s sin is “immediately charged to the account of each and every one of his descendants from the moment he begins to exist, and antecedently to any act of his own,” therefore “all men come into existence deprived of all influences of the Holy Spirit upon which their moral and spiritual life depends,” “entirely unable...to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in effecting such a change.”²⁰ Boettner is speaking of the “supernatural” working of the Holy Spirit.

As a consequence of this depravity and corruption, one’s “only hope of an amendment of life lies accordingly in a change of heart, which change is brought about by the sovereign re-creative power of the Holy Spirit who works when and where and how He pleases.”

Regeneration is said to be wrought by that same supernatural power which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Eph. 1:18-20). Man does not possess the power of self-regeneration, and until this inward change takes place, he cannot be convinced of the truth of the Gospel by any amount of external testimony.²¹

To the Calvinist, the Word of God, therefore, is a “dead letter,” incapable of bringing one to faith, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins (Rom. 1:16; Eph. 6:17; Luke 8:11; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:14; et al.) In order to be converted, one must have a direct, supernatural working and/or baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thomas Boston, eighteenth century Calvinist, wrote:

So in regeneration, there is not a new substance created, but new qualities are infused; light

instead of darkness, righteousness instead of unrighteousness.²²

Calvinism Affirms The Direct Operation Of The Holy Spirit As Necessary

To Understand God's Word

Because Adam's descendents have absolute inability to understand the Word and to understand the Bible alike, the Holy Spirit must directly "enable" and "strengthen" and "illuminate" human beings. Hear the Calvinists:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who moves everywhere upon the hearts of men to restrain them from evil and to incite them to good, and whom the Father is ever willing to give unto all who ask Him...and to persuade and enable them to obey the call of the Gospel.²³

John Calvin wrote:

By these words he reminds us that if the shedding of his sacred blood is not to be in vain, our souls must be washed in it by the **secret cleansing** of the Holy Spirit (The Holy Spirit works) to open our minds and hearts, and make us capable of receiving this testimony.²⁴

The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches states:

We believe that in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is affected in a manner above **our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit in connection with divine truth**, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.²⁵

Dear reader, does not the Calvinist's claim that the Spirit operates directly "in connection with divine truth" remind us of that which some of our brethren are saying, namely, that the Spirit operates directly "in conjunction with" the Word? Does this "in connection with" or "in conjunction with" make an unscriptural doctrine of men Scriptural? Lewis Sperry Chafer, a dyed-in-the wool Calvinist, wrote:

By the **enabling power** of the Holy Spirit some measure of the experience of divine love, divine joy, and divine peace yet to come may be secured now. So, likewise, the knowledge of God and especially that part which He has caused to be written down in Scripture may be entered into by the same Spirit....

The spiritual man is the theme of the remainder of this volume. Suffice it to say at this point that he is called spiritual because he manifests a right adjustment to the Holy Spirit who indwells him. This manifestation includes the **enlightment** given to such by which the spiritual man may come to know the Word of God....

The Holy Spirit is the Master Teacher, but spiritually this ministry is restricted, **in the main**, to the Word of God. That Word has been given to men by God in good faith and with the expectation that it would be understood and received by those for whom it is intended. That they need to study to show themselves approved into God in making the right divisions of doctrine and in arriving at its true meaning does not lessen the obligation; indeed, few apprehend the fact that the Word of God, **quite different from other themes of knowledge**, cannot be received with understanding other than by **personal illumination** such as the Holy Spirit alone can achieve....

It (sanctification—CAC)) is accomplished by the power of God through the Spirit and through the Word....²⁶

Chafer wrote further:

The two foundation truths which determine all spiritual perception are that, by divine arrangement, (1) the Spirit is given only to those who are saved, and (2) spiritual understanding is made to **depend exclusively on the presence of the Spirit of God in the heart...**

Spiritual understanding is not, therefore, dependent upon human sagacity **or learning**; it depends only on the teaching of the **indwelling Spirit**. Possessing this Biblical testimony, misunderstanding at this point is without excuse....Since the Spirit is given only to those who are saved through faith in Christ, they alone are able to receive the body of truth which the Spirit teaches. Neglect of this fundamental, unalterable fact is the key-error of all modernism.²⁷

The Canons of Dordt—Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 11 reads:

But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, **He** not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and **powerfully illuminates their minds by the Holy Spirit**, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit He pervades the inmost recesses of man; **He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart**, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, **He quickens** from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, **He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it**, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.²⁸

Article 12 of the same document speaks of the Spirit's work in the human heart as "**evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful**,

astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead....”²⁹

A. H. Strong, another Calvinistic authority, affirms that the Holy Spirit works directly, “in conjunction with,” the Word; it is “within the soul itself.” He continues:

Over and above all influence of the truth, there must be a direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. Although wrought in conjunction with the presentation of truth to the intellect, regeneration differs from moral suasion in being an immediate act of God.³⁰

He goes further to say that “soul reaches soul....The omnipresent Spirit penetrates and pervades all spirits that have been made by him....The Spirit of God acts directly upon the spirit of man.” Strong rejects: “the view that God works **only** through the truth as a means, and that his **only** influence upon the soul is a moral influence,” which he says denies “the mystical union of the soul with Christ.”³¹ But Strong is not through:

In ascribing to the Holy Spirit the authorship of regeneration, we do not affirm that the divine Spirit accomplishes his work without any accompanying instrumentality. We simply assert that the power which regenerates is the power of God, and that although conjoined with the use of means, there is a direct operation of this power upon the sinner’s heart which changes its moral character.³²

Conclusion

The thesis of this study has been that the truth of God’s Word is able to be known and is able to be understood alike without a direct, supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. The little end of the taproot of the idea that the Holy Spirit must work supernaturally, or miraculously, to enable a person to understand the Bible is

“total inability [depravity]” heresy of Calvinism. Such false averments destroy the free will of human beings and affirm the Calvinistic error of the imputation of Adam’s sin, depravity, and guilt to all who would be born of Adam and of his descendents (Ezek. 18:4; Ezek. 18:20). The false averment is that, because man is totally unable to respond to God, to do anything right, and to appreciate Deity and understand His will, man must have a direct operation and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Brother Franklin Camp wrote:

If the Spirit operates directly and apart from the Word, what does the Spirit do? Consider the following:

A) The Spirit could not lead contrary to the Word. In 2 Corinthians 13:8 Paul says, “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.” This simply means that as the Spirit directed Paul in inspiration, it was not possible for him to contradict any truth. Indeed, how could the Holy Spirit contradict Himself? This is one of the very arguments that we have made against denominational preachers who have claimed to be led by the Holy Spirit. They contradict each other and contradict the Bible as well. So if the Holy Spirit operated directly, He could not lead anyone contrary to what the Bible teaches.

B) If the Holy Spirit operated directly, He could not add any new revelation. Jude 3 says, “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” This simply means that revelation is complete. Thus, if the Holy Spirit operated directly today, He would not add any new revelation.

C) If the Holy Spirit operated directly today, it would not be to interpret the Word, for if the sinner can understand the Word without the Holy Spirit interpreting it for him, why could not the Christian? There would be no point in giving revelation if it was impossible to understand the revelation when it was given.

In Acts, chapter 2, the Spirit guided the apostles to reveal the truth. The audience did not receive the Holy Spirit to enable them to understand it. In Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 3 to 6, Paul states that he received the mystery by direct revelation, and he was writing it to the Ephesians. When the Ephesians read what he had written, they would know as much about it as he did.

D) The direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the Christian strikes at the free moral agency in man. The claim is that the direct operation of the Holy Spirit empowers man and makes it possible for him to obey. If this is the case, then man's responsibility is eliminated. The Holy Spirit has taken over for him and is doing for him what he is unable to do. The direct operation of the Holy Spirit was never simply for the benefit of the individual, but for people in general. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says in verse 7, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." That is, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of others, not the individual. It was to be used for the benefit of the church. This is also evident as he discusses miraculous manifestation of the Spirit in Chapter 14. If one spoke in a tongue and there was no interpreter, he was to remain silent, for the simple reason that it would not benefit the church. These problems cannot simply be passed off by ignoring them. They are vital to a discussion of this question.³³

So, one of the following implications (both of which constitute false doctrine) must follow if the Holy Spirit operates directly, supernaturally, on the heart of the Christian: (1) Either the Bible is not the perfect, all-sufficient Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, able to accomplish its mission (Eph. 6:17), **or** (2) when each person becomes a child of God by the contact of the precious cleansing blood of Christ, upon obedience of faith, that person becomes at that time too depraved for the all-powerful, all-sufficient Word to strengthen him, and his continued salvation thus depends upon the direct,

miraculous touch of the Holy Spirit. But, we have already proved that the Bible is perfect; and the idea that one who has been transformed out of the power of darkness thereupon becomes depraved is absurd.

Thus, the direct operation of the Spirit is unbiblical. One does not depend upon a direct operation of the Holy Spirit to understand the Word. That is the difference between Calvinism and the affirmations of the all-sufficient and alone-sufficient Holy Scriptures.

Endnotes

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4 E. G. Sewell, "Can All See the Bible Alike?" **Gospel Advocate** (September 23, 1909), p. 1201.

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12 Ibid., p. 73.

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14 Boettner, p. 60.

15 Ibid., p. 75

16 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

17 Ibid, p. 78.

18 Boettner, p. 61.

19 Ibid., pp. 61-66.

20 Ibid., pp. 73-78.

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22 Thomas Boston in R. A., Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al., Eds, "The Nature of Regeneration," **The Fundamentals** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 131-132.

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25 Ibid.

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29 Ibid.

30 Augustus Hopkins Strong, **Systematic Theology** (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press), p. 820.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., pp. 818-819.

33 Camp, pp. 33-34.

CHAPTER 16

On The Days Of Creation?

Brandon Britton

Introduction

O*NE OF THE FOUNDATIONAL* elements of a functional society is the ability of people to understand and comprehend issues alike. What would be the consequences if a group of people tried to associate together, but were either incapable or unwilling to understand the most basic rules and facts alike? Imagine an elementary school on a busy Monday morning. There are signs posted that inform drivers of one way streets, four way stops, fifteen mile an hour speed limits and lanes specially designated for buses.

In a normal society this busy scene would function virtually flawlessly, with everyone understanding and obeying the rules, but in our hypothetical society no one understands these basic regulations alike. The lives of small children are now in grave danger because cars speed past the school, where the children are attempting to cross the street, at speeds as high as seventy miles an hour, often going the wrong direction on a one way street. Why does this happen? When questioned by a police officer monitoring the school zone, the drivers reply, "I believe the fifteen mile an hour sign is more of a suggestion or ideal speed, but not an actual guideline, and I was only traveling one way down the street. The sign pointed the

other direction, but I think it makes more sense for the flow of traffic to go the other way, and many other people agree with me and travel the same way I do.” A major traffic jam develops because the bus lanes are congested with cars and intersections have become impassable due to the collisions. When a solution is sought, the problem is only compounded. There are a few who plead with the citizens to learn and obey the signs that are posted, but the majority shout them down with cries of, “We come from different backgrounds and lifestyles. It is impossible for us to understand these signs alike.” “This is a free society and we all have the freedom to choose what we want to do, so keep your legalism and judgmental attitude to yourself.” “Why should we even try to understand these things alike? We are all going to the same place and we are just taking different ways to get there.”

The problem is only compounded when you enter the school. On the board the teacher writes the rules for solving various math problems and equations, but the children all write down different answers to the same problems. On their papers she writes an F, indicating their failure to answer properly. The children respond to the grades with shouts of joy and elation. As she asks them why they are happy, they respond, “Because F is for Fantastic.” Others explain, “That grade is just based on your opinion and I have a different one.” Still others protest, “I sincerely did my best and that is all that matters.”

The problem is magnified beyond the schoolyard and into the city as a whole when these children become professionals. Perhaps one becomes a doctor and another a pharmacist. Both are respectable and essential parts of the community but a problem arises when the doctor prescribes a medicine for a patient and sends him to the pharmacist. The prescription is for five hundred milligrams of a certain medicine, but the pharmacist comes

from a family that does not believe in absolutes. Although the doctor prescribed a certain amount of one medicine, the pharmacist substitutes a greater amount of a less expensive medicine. His reasoning is that if some is good, more is better and the specific type is not that important. The two medical professionals did not understand the illness and solution alike and the consequence is the death of the patient.

I hope you will excuse this rather lengthy hypothetical situation and understand that I am simply trying to emphasize the fact that we will not tolerate in the “real world” what is almost a universally accepted belief in the religious world. As many have mentioned throughout the ages, and likely throughout this book, if we understand the Bible at all, we will understand it alike. Just as a common comprehension of facts, rules and principles is a bedrock of civilization, understanding the Bible alike is of the utmost necessity in establishing religious unity. While this is true of any Bible subject, ours to consider in this chapter is the Creation week.

As with any Bible subject, the theories, opinions, beliefs and doctrines concerning the days of creation are as varied as the people who hold them. While it is to be expected among the predominantly atheistic scientific community, even within the religious community these opinions run the spectrum from literal interpretation to complete denial. In view of such diverse opinions, is it possible for men to reach an agreement and understand the Bible alike concerning the days of creation? In a word, yes, but before considering how this can be achieved, perhaps it would be helpful to examine these various views, the reasons for the divisions, and the problems it can create.

Various Views On The Days Of Creation

Most anyone would recognize that large-scale division exists in the religious world. Each denomination or group has its own unique doctrines, beliefs and practices,

and although this is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures (1 Cor. 1:10ff), knowing the tendencies of people it is to be expected. However, one could reasonably assume that there would be a number of things about which all would agree.

Surely there would be certain foundational truths that would be universally accepted throughout "Christendom." Things like the Deity of Christ, the day of worship, the inspiration of the Scriptures and the creation, to name a few, are subjects you would think all believers in Christ could agree upon, but they don't. The group that identifies themselves as "Jehovah's Witnesses" deny the Deity of Jesus, claiming instead that He is Michael the archangel and not God in the flesh (John 1:1-14).

The Seventh Day Adventists claim that worship upon the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7) is an invention of the Roman Catholic Church, and the embodiment of the mark of the beast (Rev. 16:2); therefore they choose to continue the observance of the Sabbath day. Although all "Christian" denominations teach from the Bible, one has to question whether they believe it (and it alone) is the all-sufficient, inspired Word of God, since they are governed by creeds, catechisms, manuals and other writings of men.

More and more church pulpits are being filled with men who deny the miracles, the resurrection and any other supernatural elements of the Bible. It should come as no surprise that much of the Bible is viewed with skepticism, since the very opening words, concerning the creation of the universe, are called into question by a surprisingly large percentage of the religious community. The consequence of this type of "reasoning" is if the Bible cannot be trusted to teach the truth on the origin of things, how could it be relied upon for any further information? Although there may be several different specifics or

nuances peculiar to the various opinions about the days of creation, the opinions can essentially be divided into two groups: those who believe Genesis 1-2 is a literal history of the origin of the universe and those who do not.

The Opinion Of The Pope Of The Roman Catholic Church

To nearly a billion Catholics worldwide, the pope is the vicar of Christ on earth. According to their beliefs Jesus reigns at the right hand of the Father in heaven, but He has left a representative on earth to rule over the church. In their faith he is revered as the head of the church and its highest authority. Therefore, any opinion he issues on any variety of subjects will be absorbed by the masses as the truth. Although this chapter is to deal with understanding of the days of creation alike, I feel that I must at least mention that: (1) the pope is not the head of the church, Jesus is (Eph. 1:22-23); (2) he is not an authority figure on things sacred, the Bible is (2 Tim. 3:16-17); (3) although over a billion people may hold to these beliefs, truth is not determined by the number of people who believe something to be true (Matt. 7:13-14; Prov. 16:25). Surely the man considered by most of the world to be the closest thing to God on earth would hold the creation account in Genesis to be an absolute fact. One might make this assumption, but he would be wrong.

On October 22, 1996, then pope John Paul II addressed the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on their 60th anniversary. This organization was established by pope:

Pius XI, who wished to surround himself with a select group of scholars, relying on them to inform the Holy See (sic) in complete freedom about developments in scientific research, and thereby to assist him in his reflections.¹

The subject of this particular address was “Truth Cannot Contradict Truth.”² In this speech John Paul II quotes his predecessor, Pius XI, who wrote in his book **Humani Generis** (1950), “there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man.”³ He then proceeded to say that, “new knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis.”⁴ The impact of this statement sent ripples throughout the Catholic community and even the scientific world. Many began to pose the question, is the pope endorsing evolution? The answer is both yes and no. Although he did not accept the atheistic notion that the material universe, and everything in it, evolved by mere chance over eons of time, he did encourage the notion that a Divinely manipulated evolving of the universe is a reasonable and intelligent possibility and likelihood.

From their own words it is clear the past two popes of the Roman Catholic church have been willing to compromise the teaching of Genesis on creation by giving legitimacy to the theory of evolution, but what about the current pope? On April 19, 2005, German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected the 265th pope and took the name Benedict XVI. Since his election to the papacy he has said very little concerning evolution and the creation account, but he wrote about it extensively prior to becoming pope. In the book, **“In the Beginning...”: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall**, published in 1985, then Cardinal Ratzinger, contributed a commentary on Genesis 1-3. What was his conclusion concerning the creation account recorded in Genesis 1-3?

...the Bible is not a natural science textbook, nor does it intend to be such. It is a religious book, and consequently **one cannot obtain information about the natural sciences from it** (emphasis mine, BAB). Anything else is

an image and a way of describing things whose aim is to make profound realities graspable to human beings. One must distinguish between the form of portrayal and the content that is portrayed. **The form would have been chosen from what was understandable at the time—from the images which surrounded the people who lived then, which they used in speaking and in thinking, and thanks to which they were able to understand the greater realities. And only the reality that shines through these images would be what was intended and what was truly enduring.** The Scripture would not wish to inform us about how the different species of **plant life gradually appeared** or how the sun and the moon and the stars were established. **Its purpose ultimately would be to say one thing: God created the world.**⁵

While it is true that the Bible was not intended to serve as a science textbook, Ratzinger goes too far in declaring, “One cannot obtain information about the natural sciences from it.” In fact, the five components that make up the world, which scientists now recognize, are found in Genesis 1:1. In the beginning (#1-Time), God (#2-Force), created (#3-Energy), the heaven (#4-Space) and the earth (#5-Matter).⁶ Much of what science has “discovered” in the last few centuries, was revealed to man in the Word of God going back to the ancient times. The Scriptures reveal that the earth is in fact not flat, but a sphere (Isa. 40:22), that the life of the flesh is in the blood (Lev. 17:11), that there are currents/rivers that flow beneath the oceans (Psm. 18:15), that the sun is not the center of the universe but in an orbit of its own through space (Psm. 19:1-6) and that human waste must be disposed of in a safe and sanitary manner to protect the populace from disease (Deut. 23:13). Were these revelations meant to be the basis for scientific research and discoveries? No, but they do

teach us sound scientific principles because the Words of the Lord are truth (John 17:17). The conclusions of the current, as well as previous two popes, reduces the Genesis account of creation to nothing more than a myth, legend or poetic representation of the origins of life that is not intended to be a literal historical account. His opinion is that God only wanted to convey to man that He was behind the creation. However, due to man's limited ability to understand such complex matters, the Lord was forced to describe the creation in terms that their primitive minds could understand, and therefore Genesis 1-3 should not be interpreted literally. His view is that these chapters are nothing more than detailed parables and symbols, wherein God speaks in figurative terms to explain something completely beyond our comprehension.

The "understanding" of the pope, both present and past, as well as the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, seems to stem from a dangerous and compromising opinion best known as theistic evolution, which we will examine next.

The Opinion Of Theistic Evolutionists

Theistic evolution is just a big word that means God created everything, but He used evolution to do it. More than a religious opinion, it is a compromise with those who so adamantly insist that evolution is an indisputable fact that cannot be denied, except by the ignorant and superstitious believers in God and the Bible. The theory of evolution has become so popular and widely accepted in the past few decades that even those who once firmly trusted in the truthfulness of the Scriptures are now questioning what is plainly taught. On the surface it seems that many Christians have become intimidated by the "evidence" that science presents in support of evolution, thereby putting their faith in the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5), rather than the Word of God. All honest Christians

would readily admit that God **could** have chosen to bring the universe into existence by means of evolution. The discussion is not whether God was capable of employing this means, but whether or not He actually did, and the resounding answer from the Bible is **No!**

What do those who hold to this belief “understand” about what the Bible says concerning creation? One of their attempts to harmonize evolution with the Biblical account of creation is to suggest that the days of creation are not literally twenty-four hour days, but rather vast epochs of time. In order for their view of theistic evolution to harmonize with contemporary views about evolution, billions of years are required. The Big Bang Theory, which is the predominant theory concerning the origin of the universe, suggests that an explosion took place around twenty billion years ago, setting in motion a gradual evolution that resulted in the existing universe. This is sometimes known as the Day-Age Theory. Instead of being six twenty-four hour days, these “days” were actually millions, if not billions of years, allowing both God to be in control, and time for evolution to take place.

Another attempt to stretch the creation week across billions of years is the Gap Theory. According to this belief, there was a tremendous gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2, allowing enough time for evolution according to the geologic timetable to take place. Both of these theories, and any other attempt to harmonize evolution with the Biblical account of creation, is the intellectual equivalent of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole; no matter how hard you try, it just will not fit. The reasoning is flawed from the beginning because it seeks to bring the Bible into harmony with **evolutionary chronology**.⁷ Christians should know better than to try and get the “cart before the horse” and instead should seek to harmonize science with the Biblical timetable.

The Bible and the geologic timetable are at odds with one another at virtually every turn. The Day-Age Theory cannot be supported by Biblical evidence. Geology says that earth's waters gradually oozed out of its interior over long ages, but Genesis says it was covered with water from the beginning (Gen. 1:2). Science says life originated in the primeval oceans, but the Bible says the first life was on land (Gen. 1:11). The Lord says that birds and fish were created at the same time (Gen. 1:21), but geology says fish evolved hundreds of millions of years before birds developed. The Bible states ten times that the entities created were to reproduce "after their kinds" while evolution says it was a slow ascent of all organisms from a common ancestor.⁸

Thankfully for us, numerous brethren have devoted a great deal of time, effort and scholarship to examining this theory from every angle and have powerfully defended the faith as it is revealed in Genesis 1 and 2. Most of this work has been done in recent years. It is worth mentioning that no real effort was made to lengthen the days of the creation until the development of the evolutionary theory. It is hardly conceivable that anyone would question the interpretation of these as ordinary days were it not for the fact that people are attempting to reconcile Genesis and evolution.⁹

When scrutinized, the evidence from the Bible is overwhelmingly opposed to the theory of theistic evolution. The word repeatedly translated "day" in Genesis 1 is the Hebrew word "*yom*." Admittedly, this word is sometimes used in reference to a long period of time (Gen. 4:3; Gen. 26:8). In Psalm 95:8-9, it refers to the forty years Israel wandered in the wilderness. However, this is not the case in Genesis 1 where "*yom*" is clearly defined. "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5).

This word is used 1, 284 times in the Old Testament and there are few exceptions in which it does not mean a 24-hour day, but when it does not mean a 24-hour day the context clearly indicates this (Gen. 2:4; Psm. 95:8; Jer. 46:10). There is no such evidence in Genesis 1:5, but instead a clear definition of day: Day and Night, evening and morning. Additionally, when this word is preceded by a numeral it always refers to a 24-hour period. It occurs over one hundred times in the Pentateuch alone in this manner and always the meaning of a 24-hour day is conveyed (Gen. 8:3; Num. 13:25; Exod. 20:11; Jonah 1:17).¹⁰ Had Moses wanted us to understand these days as “long geologic periods” he could have used Hebrew words denoting such. For example, Moses could have used the Hebrew term “*olam*,” or the term “*dor*,” both of which would indicate long, indefinite periods of time, but he did not! The question would also remain, “If the days are actually ages, then what are the years mentioned in Genesis 1:14?”¹¹

The other prevailing theory of theistic evolution is sometimes referred to as the Gap Theory, which suggests that a vast gap of time existed between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. It is during this supposed gap that billions of years could have passed, allowing for evolution to occur naturally and under the watchful eye of God. Some even suggest that pre-Adamic men lived during this time, but because of a Satanic rebellion, God destroyed this original creation. Thus the earth that was created by evolution, became without form (waste) and void (Genesis 1:2), and the creation of Genesis 1 is actually a re-creation.¹² It is truly amazing that so much can be assumed from so little. However, there is nothing to fear for the honest Bible student who will trust what the Bible says without addition or subtraction. Scripture plainly states that Adam was the first man (1 Cor. 15:45), not the first of the second

creation or first of the post evolutionary world, but the first man. For centuries Hebrew scholars have translated the verb “*hayetha*” with the English “was” instead of the word “became.” The verb implies that matter was in a state of chaos when created, rather than becoming that way after a period of time. The matter that God created during the first days was initially empty and formless, and He then molded it into the present form, much like He formed Adam from the dust of the earth. In the earliest stages of creation it was not inhabited by life forms, nor was it inhabitable. It did not possess the forms, such as mountains, valleys, forests and oceans, which it now has. This is a much more logical interpretation than it being placed under a curse by God and being turned into a wasteland only to be recreated.¹³

In theory, the concept of theistic evolution may seem logical and to be a convenient compromise between evolution and creation, but in actuality it is contradictory and insulting to the Scriptures. The evidence simply does not exist to support this belief.

The “Opinion” Of Inspired Men

One thing for which we can be thankful is that the Lord settled this controversy before it even arose. The inspired writers, prophets and preachers provide a Divine commentary for interpreting the days of creation. One of these writers was Moses who, in addition to leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and delivering to them the Law of God, was the narrator and penman for the first five books of the Bible. In addition to the description of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, he uses this event as a point of reference when explaining the laws that God had given to Israel. When giving the command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, Moses used the creation week as an example:

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 (Exod. 20:8-11).

If the “days” of the creation week were actually ages this comparison would make no sense. Clearly Moses, who actually wrote Genesis 1 and 2, understood that the days of creation were actual, literal, twenty-four hour periods. If the days of creation were actually millions of years, or anything other than a twenty-four hour period, then the days of the Jewish workweek leading up to the Sabbath must also be millions of years. Moses understood clearly what the Lord revealed to him concerning the days of creation and he faithfully and accurately recorded it. All that is left for us is to accurately interpret and understand what was written, and the simplest way to do that in this instance is to just take the Bible at its word.

Just as it was with Moses, Jesus offered His own commentary on the creation week. Like Moses, Jesus was not discussing the creation, but He used that event as the foundation of His argument, thereby stating His belief in the truth of the Bible record. In answering the question about divorce, He refers to the original husband and wife pairing. In this reference He points out, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female” (Matt. 19:4). Two things are of particular interest to us. The first one is that Jesus referred to the creation of Adam and Eve by God as “the beginning.” The second is that Jesus points His audience to the Genesis record as an authoritative source to answer their question.

Like Moses, Jesus considered the Genesis account of creation to be historically accurate and reliable. Whereas Moses wrote the history of creation, Jesus was responsible for creation itself. “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:9). Having been present at, and responsible for, the creation, He knew first hand what took place and whether what Moses wrote was the truth. By quoting from it and telling others their answers could be found in these Scriptures, Jesus gave His unconditional endorsement of the account. The decision we are left with is this: do we trust in the opinions of religious leaders, the scientific community, those who seek to compromise their faith for the sake of scientific acceptance, or the writings of inspired men and the Lord Himself?

The Key To Understanding Creation Alike

The key to understanding the days of creation alike is the same as every other subject, doctrine, or verse found in the Bible: take God at His Word. Our ability to understand this subject alike comes down to whether or not we believe God and trust His Word. Although the Lord no longer tests the faith of His people in the same manner as He did during the Bible times (Abraham offering Isaac, Israel marching around Jericho, or Peter walking on the water), our faith is tested today by our willingness to believe His written Word. Statements like

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;
but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark
16:16);

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 (Eph. 5:23);

And he is the head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18);

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling (Eph. 4:4)

serve as a test of faith that separates those who walk by faith from those who walk by sight.

The rules of interpretation concerning the entire Bible apply to Genesis 1 and 2. Does the Lord ever use metaphors, symbolism, illustrations and parables to convey a spiritual truth? Certainly He does, but He also clearly identifies when He does this. There is no evidence in Genesis 1 and/or 2, or anywhere else in the Scriptures, to suggest that they should be interpreted symbolically. Quite the contrary, the evidence (Jesus and Moses citing this account in explaining other teachings) supports a literal interpretation of the text.

Reasons Why We Don't See The Days Of Creation Alike

This question is actually quite difficult to answer just as a question like, "Why is there so much crime in Los Angeles?" would be tough to answer. Many things could be cited, but the truth is that it is not really just one thing but also a combination of many factors. One of those would be a poor attitude toward the Scriptures. Sadly, many Christians, leaders and preachers do not believe the Bible is the infallible, accurate, all-sufficient, Word of God. Though they may preach from the Bible and consider it to be a book above all other books, they still believe mere mortals wrote it with a great insight into the Divine, rather than by the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:21). People with this type of thinking would immediately dismiss anything miraculous, and that certainly would include a miraculous, spontaneous, immediate creation. Because of this attitude, nothing that

the Bible teaches would be viewed as authoritative truth. The best response to this attitude is to allow the Bible to defend itself. “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Another factor that would prevent us from understanding the days of creation alike is the temptation to yield to peer pressure. Most of the world believes that evolution is a fact and for this reason creation as described in the Bible cannot be true. Compromising with what is widely accepted is viewed as a means of keeping your Christianity without appearing foolish to the world or having to take a stand for your faith.

I would remind anyone who believes this to be a good compromise that Paul said:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Find strength in knowing that every generation of Christians have faced similar challenges and have been able to overcome. When facing this same type of temptation the apostles declared, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Another point to consider is that today’s scientific “fact” is tomorrow’s subject of ridicule. The realm of scientific discovery is by its very nature in a state of constant change. Rather than placing our faith in the ever-changing wisdom of men, it would be much wiser to place our complete trust in the unchanging Word of God.

Ignorance is another reason why people fail to understand the Bible concerning the days of creation. The

person who is Biblically illiterate will have great difficulty knowing right from wrong, truth from error. I will readily admit, though I have studied about evolution and the so-called “proofs” that science offers, for the most part I would not be qualified to discuss the specifics of why evolution cannot be true from a scientific standpoint. This is not a problem because I can understand and know what the Bible teaches about creation. When banks train their employees to identify counterfeit money they do not teach them all the variations of the fake bills, they simply teach the employees how to identify the authentic ones. If you know the marks of authenticity, anything that does not fit those criteria is to be discarded.

The same holds true for the Bible and science. I do not have to be a PhD in microbiology to know that evolution is false. I only need to know, and know how to prove, the Bible is true. If I do not know what the Bible teaches on this, or any other subject, then I am vulnerable to being led astray and tossed about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). Those who are ignorant of what the Bible teaches concerning the days of creation are likely to go along with anything that sounds good, thus making it impossible to understand the Bible alike with those who know what it says.

The Consequences Of Not Understanding The Days Of Creation Alike

Does any of this really matter? Why is it important for Christians to “see eye to eye” concerning the days of creation? What is the difference between believing that God created the universe and all that is within it, in six twenty-four hour days, and believing that God created all these things over the course of millions of years by guiding the process of evolution? The difference is one view takes God at His Word and believes what He said, while the other assumes that God just told man what he needed to hear.

The implications of denying the Biblical account of creation are far-reaching and destructive. If it is the case that Genesis 1 and 2 are not literal accounts of the events of creation, how can we know for certain that the events of Matthew 1 are? If the authenticity of the Genesis account of creation is destroyed, then the assurance of the virgin birth is aborted with it. Not only is the virgin birth now a questionable doctrine, but also the certainty of the resurrection is buried. If I cannot believe that the Bible accurately details the creation, how can I know that Jesus was really born of a virgin, when conventional science says that is not possible? Science says that evolution is a fact, and it also says that when you die you cannot come back to life. If the Bible got it wrong concerning creation, how can I believe it got it right concerning the resurrection?

The Genesis account of creation is much more than a story, myth or poetic legend about origins; it is a first person (God) account of the events involving the beginning of all things. It is also the foundation for everything taught in the Bible all the way through Revelation 22:21. If the foundation is faulty then we know what the result will be. Jesus explained:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:24-27).

Then again, if Genesis 1 and 2 are not true, we cannot even be sure that what Jesus said here is true either.

Although not dealing with this specific subject, when the apostle Peter set out to write his second epistle he dealt with the solution to such attacks. At the time of his writing nearly a generation had passed since Jesus ascended back to heaven with the promise to come again. It seems that, with the help of some skeptics, many disciples began to question the truthfulness of His promise to come again:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Instead of encouraging the brethren to compromise with these mockers (“scoffers” in KJV), Peter fortifies their faith by pointing them to the Word of God:

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 3:1-2).

The same attitude is needed today when skeptics and unbelievers mock and ridicule the account of creation as recorded in Genesis 1-2, but sadly it seems that it is a willingness to compromise that is spreading.

Endnotes

1 “Address of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,” (October 22, 1996), http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_jp02tc.htm

2 Ibid.

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4 Ibid.

5 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, **“In the Beginning....”: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall**

(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), (<http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/p81.htm>), excerpts from pp.1-15.

6 Jule Miller and Texas H. Stevens, **Visualized Bible Study Series Lesson 1: The Patriarchal Age**, (Houston, TX: Gospel Services, Inc., 1992), p. 6.

7 Wayne Jackson, **The Big Bang Theory vs. God's Word**, <http://www.christiancourier.com/feature/december99.htm>, p.4

8 Henry M. Morris, "Does the Biblical Account of Creation in Genesis 1 & 2 Correspond with the Proposed Long Geological Time Periods?," **Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science** (Baker Book House, 1970), pp. 59-62.

9 Roger E. Dickson, "Are Six Days Six Days?," excerpt from **Genes, Genesis and Evolution**, by Klotz, (Firm Foundation April 15, 1975), p. 89.

10 Ibid.

11 Bert Thompson, "Another Compromise of the Genesis Account of Creation," (The Restorer, March, 1982).

12 Bert Thompson, "Creation and the Gap Theory"

13 Ibid.

CHAPTER 17

On Grace, Faith, Law And Works?

Paul Sain

Introduction

ARGUMENTS, DISAGREEMENTS, DEBATES, AND discussions on the subject of grace, faith and works have existed for years. Most of the denominational world advocates there is nothing that man can do to appropriate the grace of God. One contends that one is saved by “**faith alone**” while another strongly argues that God’s grace is the sole means of salvation, and that we do not contribute “**one whit**” to our salvation. Rubel Shelly and Max Lucado have led thousands into digression on this matter. Others believe that one will be saved eternally when they earn their salvation by works of righteousness.

Is the Bible confusing on this subject? Can the views of the sectarian world (and of the apostate ones within the body of Christ) be validated in Scripture? Some might suggest the Bible clearly states: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men...” (Tit. 2:11-12); “...that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16); “...by grace are ye saved...” (Eph. 2:8); “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Everyone knows these passages exist, but do they teach “**grace alone**” or “**faith alone**”?

Is unity possible on this matter? Can we “**understand**” the truth of God, His inspired Word? What causes the confusion and division, and how can such be resolved?

As others have often stated, we can understand the Word of God (Eph. 3:4). God has **not** placed us in a state of confusion and despair, unable to grasp or know His will (1 Cor. 14:33). Jehovah has spoken (Heb. 1:1-2). Man can hear, know, and believe (Rom. 10:17; John 8:32; Heb. 11:6).

Let us remove all preconceived ideas and seek the truth based upon the inspired truth (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). God is not unable, inept in conveying His will. Our Father is all-powerful, all-knowing and able!

The Law of God (the truth of the Gospel) is of utmost importance to our salvation. Without truth we would not, could not, know the way to heaven (Tit. 2:12; John 8:32). Grace is crucial to our salvation—without the grace of Jehovah we would not have the opportunity (option) of salvation. Faith is critically important to our salvation—without faith we will never be pleasing in God’s sight (Heb. 11:6). Works (actions of obedience) are absolutely essential (Jas. 2:17)—without which we would continue in our sins, lost eternally. There has **never** been a single human being saved without **grace, law, faith and works!**

Definitions

Grace. Found 163 times and is most frequently defined as “**unmerited favour, benefit, joy, pleasure.**” Jim Laws offered this definition: “Grace is an expression of His divine love and mercy. God’s unmerited favour starts with love, as love is a part of His divine nature; God is love (1 John 4:8)”¹ Grace does not suggest “**unconditional acceptance,**” but it does mean “**unconditional opportunity.**” Paul often wrote of the grace of God (Tit. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 15:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:13-15). Redemption (forgiveness of sins) is available according to the “riches

of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). We are “justified freely by his grace” (Rom. 3:23-24; cf. Tit. 3:7). The grace of God is “exceeding abundant” (1 Tim. 1:14); the grace of God “is given you by Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:4).

Winfred Clark (1995 Spiritual Sword Lectures) spoke of the “**Amazing Grace**” of Jehovah. He declared it as “**amazing**” (1) when we consider its recipients; (2) when we measure its tremendous cost; (3) when we observe its extent; (4) when we consider its power to motivate; (5) when we see its benefits.

Lost, helpless, sinful man desperately needed a Saviour. He was unable to save himself. Man’s urgent need of salvation found its solution in the awesome grace of God. Without the shedding of Christ’s blood, there could be no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). Without the offer of pardon from our Father, we would be hopelessly and forever lost! Not all men will be saved, but those who will be saved will be as a result of the marvelous grace of God.

Faith. Faith is accepting the facts of the will of God, demonstrating full trust and obedience to the commands of God. It is “Primarily, firm persuasion, a conviction based on hearing.”² Grace is provided by Almighty God, but faith must be demonstrated by man. God calls all men to receive His saving grace through the powerful, saving Gospel (Acts 20:24; Gal. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:14; Rom. 1:16). The only faith that will yield blessings from our Creator is a faith that submits to the will of God in full obedience. James clearly declares, “Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself ... Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone” (Jas. 2:17, Jas. 2:24). Grace and faith can not be separated (Rom. 4:16; Heb. 11:6).

While faith is crucial, it is not able to save man alone, by itself. Article IX of “The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church” states, “Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full

of comfort.”³ This doctrine may sound good, be a comfort to its hearers, but tragically, it is a **false** doctrine.

Law. Law is the instruction of God. It is a “Rule or principle expected to be observed; that which is laid or fixed; rules having to do with a particular human activity”⁴ Hebrews 1:1-2 states:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

The Law of Moses has been taken away (Col. 2:14). In the Christian age we live under the New Covenant, the New Testament. Without fear of successful contradiction, we live under a law, the perfect law (James 1:25).

Works. Works refers to man’s response or actions. God commands, man believes or does not believe and then either obeys or rejects God’s will. The commands given by God which require works on our part are the conditions upon which His marvelous grace may be received. Christ used the wise and foolish man to illustrate this point in Matthew 7:24-27.

What Are We Taught In The Scriptures?

The truth is powerful, simple and provoking. It does not matter what your or my “**opinion**” or thoughts may be. One opinion is as good as another. But the **truth** found in Holy Scriptures is all important, all that matters. It, and it alone, determines what we should do to please our Creator, our Heavenly Father. On it, and it alone, can we find unity and agreement.

From the Scriptures we learn the truth in various ways. **Commands** are given that we are to obey (Matt. 28:19; 2 Tim. 4:2). **Examples** of first century Christians are for us to follow (1 Cor. 11:1; Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7).

Specific Instructions, which were given to individuals or congregations in the first century, are often applicable to Christians and congregations today.

A sinful man must be **justified**. By what means are we justified? Paul and James answer this question. Paul said we are **justified by “Grace.”** “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). Further in Romans 5:1, Paul states we are **justified by “Faith,”** as we read, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then James adds we are **justified by “works:”** “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24).

An excellent way we learn what God requires of us is to examine a brief segment of man’s history and see what another did (or did not do) in their salvation. Through a series of questions let us examine the following individuals and occurrences as we see that **we can understand grace, faith, law and works** as taught in Holy Scripture:

Noah

The world was evil, corrupt, thinking and engaging in evil continually (Gen. 6). God had created man and placed him in a beautiful garden. God and man walked together. Tragically, man allowed sin to come into his life and increase more and more. Sin continued to the point that God was sorry He had created man. He declared He was going to destroy the world. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Righteous Noah was offered a way of escape from the flood. God told Noah what to do, in order to escape the flood which would destroy all flesh from off the face of the earth.

Was Noah Saved By “Grace”? Yes! Had it not been for the grace of God, Noah would have perished (with the tens of thousands of evil ones). God’s love, mercy, kindness,

compassion for mankind has been evidenced time and time—and was clearly demonstrated in His offer of salvation to Noah from the flood. Even though Noah was “**righteous**,” he did not merit, nor had he earned salvation.

Was Noah Saved By “Law”? Yes! God commanded Noah, “Make thee an ark of gopher wood” (Gen. 6:14). If God had merely looked upon the evil world, acknowledged Noah as a man of righteousness in an evil world, and nothing else, then Noah would have perished. The will of God, the law of God, was critical to Noah’s salvation.

Was Noah Saved By “Faith”? Yes! Had Noah not believed what God said concerning the pending flood, he would not have responded in obedience to the commands of God. What possible reason would prompt one to build a giant ark, requiring years of hard labor, at great sacrifice, were it not based on faith in Jehovah God’s warning (Heb. 11:7)? Was he saved by faith? Certainly!

Was Noah Saved By “Works”? Yes! Even if he believed what God had said in His warning, unless Noah had acted upon, followed the instructions, and fully obeyed God, he would have perished in the flood. Noah built the ark out of gopher wood—just as God commanded! He built the ark 300 cubits in length—just as God commanded! He placed one door and one window in the ark—just as God commanded! Noah was saved by his works of obedience!

Noah was not saved by a single factor, but a combination of all factors. It was only when Noah received the commands of God, trusted in God, and fully obeyed the instruction of God that Noah and his family were saved from the flood. We can **understand** by this Biblical account how God’s grace, man’s faith and obedience blend together.

Naaman

Naaman was captain of the host of the king of Syria, a powerful, influential, honourable and a mighty man of

valour. Yet, the Bible says simply, “he was a leper” (2 Kings 5:1). A young maiden (2 Kings 5:2) informed him of the way in which he could be cleansed. Naaman went to Elisha, the man of God, and was told what to do to be made whole. He was told to “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:10). At first, Naaman was angry because the man of God did not do as Naaman thought he would do. Finally, Naaman did as commanded by Elisha, the man of God (2 Kings 5:14), and he was cleansed.

Can we **understand** this account of history? Is it so complex, difficult, and ambiguous that we can not agree on what took place and how he was cleansed?

Was Naaman Saved By “Grace”? Yes! He was a leper. He would die as a leper without grace being extended to him, by the man of God, Elisha. He could not cure himself. None other could cleanse him. Grace was a crucial element in Naaman’s cleansing.

Was Naaman Saved By “Law”? Yes! He was told to “Go and wash...” To Naaman that was the law, the way, the instruction that he was required to follow. How foolish to think Naaman could just guess what he should do, to suppose that he would do what needed to be done. Rather, Naaman dipped seven times in Jordan “according to the saying of the man of God” (2 Kings 5:14).

Was Naaman Saved By “Faith”? Obviously! Had Naaman not believed the information from the Israelite maid, would he have traveled in horse and chariot for quite a distance? Without faith, would he have stood at the door of the house of Elisha? Then when told (law) what to do, what reason would he have dipped in the Jordan seven times were it not for faith?

Was Naaman Saved By “Works”? Without doubt! Naaman could have known of the little maid, have heard of the man of God and the hope of being cleansed, but

until he went, stood at the door, heard the message of the man of God, and then followed the law (instruction)—he would still have been a leper! Did “**works**” save Naaman from leprosy? Absolutely!

Naaman also was not saved by a single factor, but a combination of all factors. It was only when Naaman heard, believed and obeyed the instruction of God that he was cleansed of his leprosy. By this Biblical account, we can **understand** how God’s grace, man’s faith and obedience blend together.

Walls Of Jericho

Another occurrence that demonstrates how grace, faith, law and works complement each other is found in the walls of Jericho (Josh. 6). God had told them, “I have given into thine hand Jericho” (Josh. 6:2), but then added, “And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days” (Josh. 6:3). Additional commands were given and then they were told, “and the wall of the city shall fall down flat” (Josh 6:5). Hebrews 11:30 states, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.” Was it by faith alone? Was God’s grace involved at all? Were the people required to do anything?

Did The Walls Of Jericho Fall As A Result Of “Grace”? Let’s answer it foolishly for a moment. Would any wall fall down if someone marched around one time for six days and seven times on the seventh day? Absurd! It would never happen! We must conclude that God’s offer was hinged on God’s grace providing a way, with faith and action required by man. It was mandatory that they heard the instruction and followed the commands, exactly as God required!

Did The Walls Of Jericho Fall As A Result Of “Law”? Note throughout the history of man, God has always given man instruction and the responsibility of

doing as instructed. This “**law**” is not optional. If the Israelites wanted Jericho, desired the walls to crumble, the only way was to hear what God required.

Did The Walls Of Jericho Fall As A Result Of “Faith”? There was no reason logically, militarily, nor any degree of common sense that would have concluded that the walls would fall upon their merely marching around them, blowing on the trumpets and shouting. Imagine if someone asked them what they were doing while they were marching around the walls, how unbelievably foolish their answer would have sounded. They believed God. They had faith that what God said would happen would actually come to pass. Faith was absolutely essential.

Did The Walls Of Jericho Fall As A Result Of “Works”? The Israelites heard what God said, and it would have been possible for them to have had faith in what God promised, but **until** they obeyed His commands, the walls stood. Note further, they did not fall after one time on the first day, nor on the trip after the fourth, fifth or sixth! Likewise, not after the first, third or sixth trip on the seventh day! Only when the seventh trip on the seventh day was completed, and they blew the trumpets and shouted—just as God commanded did the walls fall. Complete, full, total obedience is always required by Jehovah.

Can we **understand** this Biblical account? If not, why not? The facts are clear, the details are given, and nothing is shrouded in secrecy or code.

Saul’s Conversion

The book of Acts provides the record of various conversions (Pentecostians, jailor, Cornelius, etc.). The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is an outstanding account of changing from persecutor to proclaimer of the Gospel of Christ. Can we **understand** what happened to Saul; know what he was told, as well as what he did to receive forgiveness of his sins?

Saul was vicious and destructive concerning Christianity. He was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1); “made havock of the church” (Acts 8:3); “imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed” (Acts 22:19); “punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme” (Acts 26:11). He was on the way to Damascus to find and bring bound the disciples of Christ back to Jerusalem. A light shined from heaven and Saul asked “Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 26:15) and “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) Saul was told to go on to Damascus and it would be told him what he was to do. He went into the city. He obeyed the heavenly voice (Acts 26:19). Three days later Ananias said to Saul, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16). Upon his obedience to the Gospel of Christ, he immediately preached Christ (Acts 9:20).

Was Saul Saved By “Grace”? Yes, yes, yes! Paul (as he was later known) himself acknowledged he was the “**chief**” of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul declared that he was saved by the grace of God. But that is only a portion of the passage. Paul fully stated, “for by grace have ye been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8-9). We are saved through the faith, the system of faith, God’s plan or eternal purpose to redeem man (Eph. 3:9-10). Without the grace of God Saul would have been eternally lost, as he would later tell the Ephesians (Eph. 2:12).

Was Saul Saved By “Law”? Saul heard what the Lord told him to do, what he expected of him. Was he still able to decide for himself? Sure! Was he forced to go on into the city? No. He had the choice, but he made the right, righteous, godly choice. Saul was saved by the law, the powerful saving Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; Jas. 1:21).

Was Saul Saved By “Faith”? Absolutely! Without faith in God, were it not for his belief in what the Lord said, he would not have changed direction in his life. He would

have continued as a persecutor, blasphemer, and villain of the church. But (conclusively) he believed, had faith that the Lord was the True Son of the Living God (Acts 9:20).

Was Saul Saved By “Works”? How can anyone successfully claim otherwise? The Heavenly voice told him to go into the city—he went. The messenger of the Gospel (Ananias) told him to arise and be baptized—he was baptized. We can certainly **understand** what took place and agree on what Saul did to be saved.

Are We Saved From Our Sins By Grace, Law, Faith, Or Works?

Our sins have separated us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The price we will pay for sin (if left unrepented, unforgiven) is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). In sin, God’s Word defines one as hopeless (1 Thess. 4:13), without Christ, aliens, strangers (Eph. 2:12), lost (Luke 19:10).

Are We Saved By “Grace”? Without the grace of God, what could we do? Where could we go? To whom could we go for forgiveness of sins? We can be children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus—as a result of the grace of God! Our Father was not obligated to offer salvation. We are the sinners. Because of sin, we left God. Yet, the depth, breadth and height of the love, mercy and grace of God are reflected in Romans 5:8-9:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Our Creator did not owe us a plan of redemption, obligated to offer us a plan of salvation. Man left God. Man sinned. But how wonderful is the marvelous grace of God! Paul told Titus:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that,

denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Tit. 2:11-14, Emp. mine, PS).

While man was yet in sin, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8). Without the shedding of blood, remission of sins would not be possible (Heb. 9:22).

N. B. Hardeman, as recorded in the ever-valuable Tabernacle Sermons (Vol. 1), gave the following excellent illustration regarding God's grace being appropriated through the commands (law) of God:

Let me illustrate: Water so necessary to the human family, is absolutely free and positively abundant, but it runs in channels. I cannot go out here in some field and sit there pining and weeping away my time, begging for water, and expect God to bring it and give it to me in spite of myself; but I know this: that water has its channels in which to run, either in our streams or under the surface of the earth; and if I will dig down deep enough, I will find the channel and nature's beverage absolutely free. This is God's law, and I must conform to it if the blessings are mine.

God has ordained that grace, by which men are saved, shall run through the commandments of God. Therefore the man that is saved by grace must conform to God's commandments, for that is the law by which men are saved, if saved at all.⁵

Are We Saved By "Law"? How could we know the will of God without the law of God? We are saved by law, God's book of instructions for everyone. Faith in the Word of God is necessary, which comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17). Paul told the Ephesians that we can understand (Eph. 3:4).

Are We Saved By "Faith"? How could anyone possibly suggest otherwise. Without faith it is impossible

to please God (Heb. 11:6). Unless we believe, we will die in our sins (John 8:24). We believe to the saving of our souls (Heb. 10:39). If it is possible for us to **know** the truth, **understand** the truth, **realize** that we must obey the truth—and then we fail to truly believe—then we will die in their sins!

Are We Saved By “Works”? If there is nothing that one must do to be saved, and God is a loving, merciful God who extends grace to everyone, then naturally we would conclude that **all** will be saved. But the Bible teaches us that we must “**do**” the will of the Father in order to receive heaven (Matt. 7:21); we must obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9); obey God, not man (Acts 5:29).

Is it possible, within any degree of common sense, that one can be saved from their sins by any single ingredient mentioned thus far? Not at all (if we accept the Bible as our sole source of authority in matters of religion)! We can all **understand** this! Our knowledge of the truth can be based upon the same authority, accepting the same facts, embracing the same commands, fully submitting in reverent and respectful obedience to Almighty God.

We are saved by grace, with a knowledge of the law, in faith, fully obedient to God’s will. All aspects blend together so beautifully. So the question is simple: What must we do to be saved from our sins? The Bible is clear, concise and conclusive regarding this fact—the **grace** of God is essential, the **law** is vital in knowing the will of God, **faith** is absolutely necessary and **works** are mandatory—if we are to receive remission of our sins.

Conclusion

God is love (John 3:16); great (Deut. 5:24); holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16); faithful (1 Cor. 1:9); merciful (Rom. 12:1); good (Psm. 33:5); majestic (Rev. 4:11); longsuffering (Rom. 15:5); and gracious (Psm. 84:11). Our Father desires for

all to be saved eternally in heaven (1 Tim. 2:3-4). He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16) to make possible His eternal purpose (plan) (Eph. 3:9-10).

Yet, God will **not** force man to be saved. He (as from the beginning) allows man the power of choice to determine his own destiny. All mankind faces an everlasting life or eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20–21). The determining factor is one being willing to **hear** of the amazing grace (offer of pardon), **believe** the truth of the Gospel and **obey** (do, work) the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21).

The Scriptures are undeniably clear, time and time again. Let us summarize with these few passages:

For **by grace are ye saved** through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...the **gift of the grace of God** given unto me by the effectual working of his power (Eph. 2:8; Eph. 3:7, all emp. mine, PS).

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

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also (Jas. 2:26).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but **a doer of the work**, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas. 1:25).

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

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

The bold facts are simple and plain! It is only when one hears the Gospel of God's grace, believes the Gospel of

God's grace and obeys the Gospel of God's grace that one will be saved by God's grace!

Endnotes

1 "On Grace, Faith, Law & Works," **God's Amazing Grace**, (1995 Spiritual Sword Lectures, Memphis, TN).

2 **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**.

3 "Article IX," **The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church**.

4 "Are Grace And Law Exclusive Of Each Other?" Paul Sain, **God's Amazing Grace**, (1995 Spiritual Sword Lectures, Memphis , TN), p. 296.

5 N. B. Hardeman, as recorded in the ever-valuable **Tabernacle Sermons** (Vol. 1).

CHAPTER 18

On The Plan Of Salvation

Ivie Powell

Introduction

SINCE THE GIVING OF the Law, all Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem three times a year (Exod. 34:2-23). Pentecost was a Jewish festival observed on the 50th day or 7 weeks from the Paschal Feast. It was upon this day that the New Covenant was established. Luke informs us, "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Although we are not given the total number of Jews present, we do know there were fifteen nations present. It has been estimated that as many as a million Jews were at Jerusalem that day. It was on this day, the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, that the apostles were "... endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) and "... began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

After Peter and the apostles had preached the "good news" that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah, and "that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), the immediate response was:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest

of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we 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 Spirit (Acts 2:37-38).

What caused such an emotional outcry? Why was there a sense of great urgency both on the part of the audience and Peter? Because they became conscious of the fact they had crucified the Son of God and were lost in their sins! When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17), sin entered the world, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Immediately, God made known His eternal purpose of redeeming man, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). From this announcement until Acts 2, man offered animal sacrifices beginning with Adam and Eve (Gen. 4:4-5). This plan of redeeming man was not an after thought or accident on the part of God but, “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11).

The very fact that there was a repetition of sacrifices under the Old Law proved their inefficacy (Heb. 10:2-3)! Every Pentecost there were thousands upon thousands of sacrifices offered. It has been said that the streets of Jerusalem ran with the blood of those sacrifices, yet not one of them could take away sins (Heb. 10:4). It was the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary’s cross that completely satisfied God. This was the supreme sacrifice of all sacrifices, and was offered one time (Heb. 10:10), thus making it possible for man to be saved through the offering of Christ for the sins of the world. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners,

Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Rom. 5:8-9). “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

Pentecost Marks The Beginning

Prior to His ascension, Jesus instructed the apostles:

Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:47-49).

Here for the first time was offered the complete forgiveness of sins. They had been released, set at liberty, restored to a relationship because of the shed blood of Christ. Here at last was the fulfillment of “a shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 10:1) which included the forgiveness of sins! As the Hebrews writer pointed out some thirteen times (Heb. 1:4; Heb. 6:9; Heb. 7:7; Heb. 7:19; Heb. 7:22; Heb. 8:6; Heb. 9:23; Heb. 10:34; Heb. 11:6; Heb. 11:35; Heb. 11:39-40; Heb. 12:24), everything about Christianity is “better!”

One Plan Of Salvation

There was only one plan of salvation offered on the day of Pentecost. The three thousand that obeyed the Gospel were not given an alternative to immersion or an option as to whether they wanted to repent or not. Having been pricked in their hearts from the inspired message, the Jews asked one question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Acts 2:37)? And they were given one answer: “Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). If they wanted to be forgiven of their sins they had to comply with the one plan of salvation as offered by Peter and the apostles!

Some ten years later, the Gospel was offered for the first time to the Gentiles. When Peter went to the household of Cornelius, they too heard the Word of God. Cornelius was told to:

send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do (Acts 10:5-6).

As they assembled they were awaiting the Divine instructions that Peter “shall speak unto thee” (Acts 10:32), and “to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33). Peter immediately established the fact “that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). To fear God and work righteousness is to keep God’s commandments (Psm. 119:172).

After establishing the necessity of salvation through Christ (Acts 10:43), Luke says, “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). The purpose of the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles was not to save them, but to show the Jews that salvation was offered to the Gentiles as it was to the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 11:15); thus Peter said, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...” (Acts 10:47-48).

Therefore, there was not a different plan of salvation for the Gentiles than that which was offered the Jews on the day of Pentecost! As pointed out by Paul:

For ye all are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

Therefore, all accountable people must hear the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24), confess Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 10:32), and be immersed for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Having done that, the Lord will add the saved to the church (Acts 2:47).

Why Then Different Answers?

Often in reading the book of Acts, many become confused with the different accounts of conversion. For example, in Acts 2 the Jews were told to “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38), whereas the Philippian jailer was told to “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

Does this mean there is more than one way to obtain salvation? No, it doesn't mean that at all. While all sinners are lost, not all are in the same stage as they progress toward becoming a Christian. Jule Miller's illustration¹ of a cross-country traveler shows how a person traveling toward salvation can receive different answers to the same question, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer given to this question always depends on how near the traveler is to salvation. While some are in the believing stage, others have passed that and are in the repentance stage. Still others are beyond those stages and are in the confessing and then baptism stage. The fact is, all converts went through the same process of becoming a child of God! One cannot pick what commandments he wants to obey, dismiss

the rest and obey the Gospel. What is required of one person is required of all. God is not a respecter of persons!

Why Do All Not Arrive At Truth?

Since all of the religious world has the Bible or access to a good translation of the Bible (King James, American Standard 1901), why then do we not see the Bible alike or arrive at the same truth? Controversy exists not because there is a lack of information in God's Word for God has "given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Neither do men fail to arrive at truth or see the Bible alike because they cannot understand the Bible. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). To the Ephesians, Paul wrote: "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). And Luke declared:

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou has been instructed (Luke 1:3-4).

People do not arrive at truth or see the Bible alike for a variety of reasons, some of which are:

- (1) Some don't believe the Bible is inspired of God.
- (2) Many believe the Bible is full of errors and contradicts itself.
- (3) Some don't believe one can understand God's Word.
- (4) Others believe that they are too sinful to even study the Bible.
- (5) A great number love the world more than God and His Word, and so they are not interested in studying the Bible.
- (6) Many will study only their creeds, manuals, disciplines and catechisms, and not actually study the Bible.

(7) There are those who are very prejudiced and closed-minded.

(8) Still many believe they are at liberty to interpret the Bible as they see fit.

(9) Some are simply too lazy to put forth the necessary effort to diligently study God's Word.

(10) A great number do not believe it is their responsibility to study; that it is the preacher's obligation only.

(11) Some do not believe God expects everyone to see the Bible alike, and that He approves of denominationalism.

(12) A great number, especially in so-called Christendom, believe they have already arrived at truth, and will not even begin to study anything that interferes with their religious beliefs.

In addition to these points, brother Thomas Warren pointed out:

In order to arrive at truth, there are a number of qualifications which must be possessed by the seeker: (1) he must love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12); (2) he must be willing to search for the truth in a diligent fashion (2 Timothy 2:15); (3) he must be willing to search out all that the Bible teaches on a given subject (Cf. Matthew 4); and (4) he must use honesty and wisdom in the use of sound principles of reasoning in order to draw the right conclusion.²

The diligent student of God's Word will quickly see that it is not what the Bible says that causes confusion, but the practices of man that confuse people!

Departures From The One Plan Of Salvation

That there would be a departure from the faith, a falling away, was foretold by the apostle Paul:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath

made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

The Lord had clearly stated, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1). Again He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). One cannot become a Christian, and enter into heaven other than through Jesus Christ, and His one way! God has never accepted departures from His Divine plan, and those who do so, will give an account at the Day of Judgment!

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

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

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

As predicted, a great falling away took place. As one studies the 1st century church, he sees that it was characterized by unity of doctrine, organization of worship, and work. However, it was not long until departures from God's plan began to surface. One such departure comes from an unknown author and is referred to as the **Didache** or the **Teaching of the Twelve Apostles**. While the exact date is unknown, as pointed out by F. W. Mattox, it was quoted as early as the year 200 A.D.³ What is of great significance is the statement concerning baptism found in this uninspired document:

Baptize in this way...in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in living water, but if you have not living water, baptize in other water. And if thou canst not in cold, in warm, if you have neither, pour water thrice on the head...⁴

Mattox believed that this material was probably written as early as the year 100, and is one of the earliest statements found suggesting that in case of an emergency any other baptism than immersion might be acceptable to God.⁵ Further evidences of departures from God's plan of salvation are the following, cited by Mattox:

Cyprian, while bishop of Carthage (248-258) enlarged upon Tertullian's conception and declared that even though an infant had committed no actual sin it needed forgiveness for the sin inherited from Adam and this was received in baptism. He was the first to approve infant baptism, but he did not urge it.⁶

While baptism was by immersion and for the remission of sins during the Apostolic period, it soon became a ceremony that could only be performed by an approved official. This was usually done twice a year on Easter and Pentecost. There were those who practiced three immersions, one for each member of the Godhead. As for infant baptism, it was occasionally practiced before 325, but it was not until after Augustine, about 450, that it became common practice. And as for sprinkling, it was accepted during this period of time, but only in cases of emergency. The first case of pouring small amounts of water on the head of one seriously ill, and calling it baptism was Novatian in 251. This soon became the norm, and not the exception, although sprinkling was not commonly practiced in this era.⁷

Denominational Plans Of Salvation

Paul instructed Timothy to “Hold fast the form (pattern ASV) of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). It was that message he was to “commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Once men began to corrupt the organization of the church as Luke informs us (Acts 20:28-31), it wasn’t long until the worship began to be corrupted, and the plan of salvation followed in like suit (Col. 2:21-23). What, no doubt, appeared to be a small matter soon developed into full-fledged apostasy. Indeed, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9).

The total number of denominations in this country (main line and spin-off groups) is constantly changing, and could easily number well over 1,000. Yet, by and large, when it comes to the “plan of salvation,” about four major doctrines are preached. When asked, “What must I do to be saved?,” the far majority will cite what they call the “sinner’s prayer.” In discussing “How To Become A

Christian,” Dr. Jim G. Butler, a Southern Baptist preacher says:

...Salvation takes place at the exact moment we pray confessing our sin and placing our faith in Jesus. [He goes on to say,] Salvation involves several things that take place in the life of the believer. First, the person must honestly face and admit his sins...This is called repentance... Second, salvation is putting our trust in Jesus Christ alone...Third, the final impact of the simple sinner’s prayer is inviting Jesus into your life and giving Him control over you.⁸

Under the subheading, “After I pray to receive Jesus, what then?,” Dr. Butler concludes:

Once you pray to invite Jesus into your life and ask Him to forgive you of your sins you are as saved as you will ever be. The Bible then asks the new believer to make the decision public (Matthew 10:33). The new believer should go forward during an invitation time and share his new faith with the congregation. The Scripture also commands us to be baptized as a public testimony to our faith. It is upon this baptism that the new believer becomes a member of the local church.⁹

First, nowhere in the Scriptures can one find the “sinner’s prayer.” If so, where? Furthermore, one cannot find in the New Testament where one is saved by “faith only!” In response to this, many will cite such passages as:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

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

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:13).

Salvation as offered in the New Testament is offered on the grounds or conditions of faith. As a matter of fact, everything about Christianity is a matter of faith:

Faith comes only by God's Word (Rom. 10:17).
 Without faith one cannot please God (Heb. 11:6).
 We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1).
 We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8).
 We become children of God by faith (Gal. 3:26).
 We walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7).
 We are guarded by faith (1 Pet. 1:5).
 We are to live by faith (Gal. 2:20).
 We are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18).
 We are purified by faith (Acts 15:9).
 Salvation is the end/aim of faith (1 Pet. 1:9).

All of these passages are stating a great truth regarding faith, but not a one of them is saying one is saved by "faith only!" Faith is the foundation or the driving force that leads the believer. As Arvy Glenn Freed stated, "Faith is the driving force of all the acts of the believer that brings him into perfect harmony with the will of God."¹⁰ T. W. Brents in his great work referred to saving faith "as the grand mainspring which propels the human machinery in all acceptable obedience to God..."¹¹ Yes, saving faith is an obedient faith!

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16).

If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

Observe carefully John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power [or the "right" ASV]

to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” This passage is not declaring that the believer is a child of God, but is given the “power to become” or “the right” to become a child of God because of his faith! The Lord addressed Jews that “believed on him” (John 8:31), yet of those same Jews Jesus said, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts, of your father ye will do...” (John 8:44). James tells us, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble” (Jas. 2:19). Hence, you have believers in Christ who were not willing to obey Him. James states, “Ye see then how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24). Therefore, faith only does not, and can not save!

The word “believeth” in John 3:16 is a synecdoche, that is, a part that stands for the whole. In this case, “believeth” stands for the entire process of becoming a child of God. Thus, “believeth” includes repentance (Luke 13:3), confession (Matt. 10:32) and baptism (Mark 16:16).

Yes, one must believe in Christ to be saved, but what does it mean to believe in Christ? In Acts 8:12 we are told, “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Therefore, when one believes what they believed they will do what they did! When the Ethiopian eunuch heard the Gospel, he asked, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized” (Acts 8:36)? He was told, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest....” He responded, “...I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). And upon that confession Philip immersed him (Acts 8:38).

Advocates of salvation by “faith only” believe they have found proof positive to support their position by citing Acts 16:30-31. However, an examination of the text proves they stop short of the entire process of the jailer’s

conversion by failing to read through verse 34. Take note, please, of the process in the jailer's conversion:

Acts 16:31: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 16:32: They spake unto him the Word of the Lord.

Acts 16:33: Jailer & household were baptized.

Therefore, Paul's statement in Acts 16:34, "...believing in God with all his house," proves that baptism includes believing in Christ. This is exactly what Jesus said in Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

As for Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," Paul is not saying just utter the words, "Lord, Jesus, save me." As a matter of fact, Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Furthermore, it is clear that one cannot call upon the Lord unless he has faith, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not heard..." (Rom. 10:14). In commenting on what it means to call upon the name of the Lord, Roy Deaver wrote:

In verses 14 and 15 Paul deals with the things which precede calling on the Lord. Those things which precede are: Sending, preaching, hearing, and believing. Before and without faith there can be no calling. Faith precedes calling...It is clear that calling follows after faith (verse 14). It is also clear that calling precedes salvation - "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (verse 13). Calling, therefore, stands between faith and salvation. The order is: faith, calling, salvation.¹²

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes Joel 2:32, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name

of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). After proving that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Jews called out to Peter: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Acts 2:37)? Observe, carefully, that the apostles did not say, “Just say, Lord, Jesus save me” nor did they tell them to pray the sinner’s prayer. Instead the Bible says:

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 Spirit. 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).

The diligent student will quickly see that the Lord called them through the preaching of His Word (2 Thess. 2:14). And when these believing Jews called upon the Lord to save them, Peter told them what to do, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (Acts 2:38).

Another case of what is involved in calling upon the name of the Lord is found in Saul’s conversion recorded in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. Many believe that Saul was converted to Christ on the road to Damascus when the Lord appeared to him (Acts 9:1-5). However, Acts 9:5-6 not only shows a believing Saul, but a lost believer who was told what to do: “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6). Saul being blind

was “led by the hand, and brought him into Damascus” (Acts 9:8). For three days he was without food and drink (Acts 9:9). In Acts 9:11 we find Saul praying; yet he was still lost. Why? Because he had not been told what to do! When Ananias came to him, he said, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Therefore, calling upon the Lord involved doing what the Lord required, that being faith (John 8:24), repentance (Luke 13:3), confession (Matt. 10:32) and baptism (Acts 2:38)!

Another plan of salvation that is advocated by millions is the Roman Catholic Church doctrine of purgatory. This doctrine gives man a second chance after death to be saved. According to Albert J. Nevins:

Purgatory (OF *purgatoire*) - The state in which souls exist for a time after death to work out the temporal punishment due to venial sins or forgiven mortal sins. The soul is purified in this state to prepare it for its entrance into the delights of heaven and the Beatific Vision. “It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins” (2 Mac. 12:46).¹³

The doctrine of purgatory is nowhere found in the Word of God! The reference cited by Nevins is from the uninspired book of Maccabees. This doctrine was established by Gregory I in 593 A. D. According to the Word of God, there is no second chance after death. How one lives determines where he will spend eternity:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:7-8).

As a case in point, the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 lived an ungodly life, died and woke up in hell. Furthermore, Paul says:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Catholics are not the only ones that advocate a second chance after death. It might be surprising for many to learn that the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” also advocate some will be granted opportunity for salvation after death. Wayne Jackson in commenting on this said:

Third, the JWs teach that some will be granted opportunity for salvation after death. In a 1908 debate with L. S. White, Charles T. Russell, founder of the Watchtower movement, denied that salvation is confined to this “present life.” Additionally, he affirmed that when the “unjust” are raised, “vast multitudes of them will be saved.”¹⁴

The “day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2) is in this life; not after death. After death comes the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Again, how one lives determines where he will spend eternity!

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly known as Mormons) teach that accountable people (Moroni 8:8) must be immersed (2 Nephi 11:26; D&C 21:74) for

the remission of sins (D&C 19:31; 84:74). They also teach that baptism can be administered on behalf of the dead (D&C 128). While it is true that only accountable people (Mark 16:15-16) are to be immersed (Col. 2:12) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), it is not true that Mormon baptism and New Testament baptism are one and the same, the reason being, Mormon baptism is for the purpose of entering the Mormon Church, and not the body of Christ! Further proof would be to ask Mormons if they would accept one immersed for the remission of sins into the Mormon Church, even though they do not accept Joseph Smith as a prophet of God nor were they immersed by a Mormon!

As for baptizing for the dead, God's plan of salvation is to be administered only to those who are able to hear the Gospel (Rom. 10:17), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of their sins (Luke 13:3), confess Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 10:32), and be immersed "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Take also into consideration that obedience to the Gospel is an individual matter. "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). Again, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 proves that if one does not obey the Gospel, there is no second chance offered after death! In commenting on 1 Cor. 15:29, brother Guy Woods summed up the meaning as follows:

Whatever 1 Cor. 15:29 teaches, it is with reference to the resurrection of the body - not baptism! It thus adds to our knowledge of the resurrection - not baptism. Some in the church in Corinth questioned the resurrection of the body. They accepted the doctrine of a future life; but they had difficulty in accepting the teaching of Paul, and others of the apostolic age, that the body would eventually come forth from the tomb. Many of them had formerly been pagans; and, the pagan view of evil was that the body was

the seat of it and, to leave the body was to leave the source of all ills; to be told one day they would re-enter their bodies involved grave difficulty for those who still held some vestiges of their earlier beliefs. To prove the resurrection of the body, Paul alluded to their baptism. Baptism is a picture of a burial and a resurrection; some of them were now denying a resurrection of the body; what then, of their baptism? It portrayed that which they now questioned! Why were they baptized for (*huper*), with reference to, the state from which they would come forth by resurrection, if there be no resurrection? Their view actually nullified their baptism!

1 Cor. 15:29, therefore, is illustrative, in the setting in which it appears; and, the lesson it teaches resulted from the clear perception which the Corinthians already had regarding baptism. If we will remember that the subject being considered was the resurrection of the body-and not baptism-and that baptism was introduced to explain the resurrection-and not baptism-all difficulties will disappear...¹⁵

The last doctrine we will examine is a religious system known as "Calvinism." While John Calvin is credited for founding this system, it can be traced back to Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century. Calvin's theology contains five major points which have been identified with the word "tulip." Some have called this "the flower that changed the world." There are few religious groups, including the church of Christ, that have not been tainted by this false and fatal religious system. While not all religious groups embrace all of Calvin's system, they do embrace certain tenets of this deadly flower. The five major errors of John Calvin's system are represented by the acrostic of the word "tulip."

T stands for Total Hereditary Depravity. This doctrine teaches because of Adam's sin, we are born in sin and that we have Adamic sin or original sin at birth.

U stands for Unconditional Election. That is, God arbitrarily selects a certain number to be saved and all others will be eternally lost. Nothing on the part of man, whether good or bad, will change that condition; it is unconditional.

L stands for Limited Atonement. This doctrine teaches that Christ died only for those He “elected” to save; that His atonement was limited and not for all men.

I stands for Irresistible Grace which teaches a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the elect of God so he cannot resist the salvation that God has unconditionally provided.

P stands for Perseverance of the Saints. That is, a child of God cannot fall away and be eternally lost.

The Word of God exposes this particular “tulip” as a deadly flower that will destroy the souls of men. While one is born into a world where sin abounds, he does not become a sinner until he reaches the age of accountability. Sin is something that the individual commits, **not** inherits: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Accountable people die spiritually, not because of Adam’s sin, but because of their own sins! Adam introduced sin into the world as well as physical death (Rom. 5:12), but each individual is responsible for his own sins. Ezekiel forcefully declares:

The soul that sinneth, it shall die, The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son... Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou was created, till iniquity was found in thee. (Ezek. 18:20; Ezek. 28:15)

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that man can choose whom he will serve. “Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;

but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). The very fact that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16) proves one can either accept or reject the Christ. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 proves that God desires all men, not just a select few, to be saved: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

As for Christ’s atonement being limited and not for all men, the Hebrews writer states:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Heb. 2:9)

The very fact that our Lord gave the great commission proves that salvation is for all who are willing to obey the Gospel (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9)!

Concerning the so-called “irresistible grace” of God, Luke informs us that “God is no respecter of person” (Acts 10:34-35), and that the grace of God can be resisted and rejected, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).

Paul did not believe the false doctrine that a child of God cannot fall away and be eternally lost. To the Galatians he wrote, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4), and “Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1).

As one carefully reads Luke 22:46-49 and Acts 1:4-7; Acts 2, he will see that the Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Word of God to convict and convert lost

souls. Never does one read that the Holy Spirit worked directly on anyone, but through human agents as they preached the Word of God. It is only by the Word of God that one acquires faith (Rom. 10:17), and the faith that saves is the faith that obeys the Word of God (Matt. 7:21). If people are waiting for the Holy Spirit to convict and convert them, then they need to read the inspired Word of God, believe it and obey the teaching that the Holy Spirit has given therein.

Why They Do Not See The Truth

There are several reasons why men do not see the plan of salvation alike. First, they study their denominational doctrines and not the Bible. Second, a great number have blinded themselves due to their prejudices. Third, many will re-define terms to justify their doctrines. For example, in an effort to “prove” that baptism is not essential, many will define the Greek proposition *eis* (“for”) in Acts 2:38 to mean “because of,” and thus according to their definition one is baptized because his sins have already been forgiven. However, a proper study of *eis* in regards to the point of being forgiven of sins, shows that is one is immersed in order to receive the remission of sins.

Fourth, there are those who do not believe that God has one exclusive plan of salvation. Therefore, each man is at liberty to choose whatever he believes and God will accept him. When one studies the great commission (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16); along with such passages as Hebrews 5:8-9, and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, he will see all accountable men must obey the Gospel or be forever lost.

Fifth, a failure to distinguish between the Old Testament and New Testament has greatly contributed to a failure to see the plan of salvation (Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:15-17).

Sixth, many do not study the Bible in context. For example, it isn't unusual to hear someone cite Acts 8:22, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee," to support the case for praying through for salvation. This is a prime example of lifting a passage out of its setting to "prove" one's position. The truth is, Simon had been baptized (Acts 8:13) and had sinned by offering to purchase miraculous power (Acts 8:13-23). Peter then informed him of the second law of pardon for children of God, that being repentance, confession and prayer. Nowhere can one find in Scripture where alien sinners were told to pray through for salvation.

Seventh, men do not see the plan of salvation alike, because they abandoned the Word of God for human testimonies. Only God's Word produces faith (Rom. 10:17), whereas human testimonies contradict, subvert and destroy Biblical faith! The Word of God has been once and for all delivered and confirmed (Mark 16:20; Jude 3); therefore, we do not need human testimonials!

Conclusion

The process of converting lost souls involves teaching them the Word of God (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). Since there is **only** one plan of salvation (Acts 10:34-35); all men must be taught that one plan, and be obedient thereto in order to have their souls purified (1 Pet. 1:22). The prayer of our Lord for unity of the believers (John 17:20-21), and the plea of the apostle Paul, "that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10) proves that all men can see the Bible alike!

Furthermore, the fact that all men will be judged by the Word of God (John 12:48) is ample proof that men can see the Bible alike, including the plan of salvation! How then can we get the religious world to see the truth? Answer: "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2)!

Endnotes

- 1 Jule L. Miller and Texas H. Stevens, "God's Plan For Redeeming Man," **Visualized Bible Study Series**, (1999), pp. 20-24.
- 2 Thomas B. Warren, **The Spiritual Sword**, Vol. 1, (October 1999, No. 1), pp. 1-2.
- 3 F. W. Mattox, **The Eternal Kingdom**, p. 62.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
- 5 Ibid., p. 63.
- 6 Ibid., p. 117.
- 7 Ibid., p. 150.
- 8 Jim G. Butler, "How To Become A Christian," **What Every Southern Baptist Should Know**, p. 41.
- 9 Ibid., p. 43.
- 10 Arvy Glenn Freed, "Faith," **Sermons Chapel Talks and Debates**, p. 69.
- 11 T. W. Brents, "Faith," **The Gospel Plan of Salvation**, p. 210.
- 12 Roy C. Deaver, **Romans: God's Plan For Man's Righteousness**, pp. 378-379.
- 13 Albert J. Nevins, M. M., **The Mary Knoll Catholic Dictionary**, p. 422-423.
- 14 Wayne Jackson, "The History And Heresies Of The Jehovah's Witnesses," **Denominationalism Versus The Bible** (Seventh Annual Shenandoah Lectures), p. 329.
- 15 Guy N. Woods, **Questions And Answers: Open Forum**, Vol. 1, pp. 116.

CHAPTER 19

On Which Church Is The Lord's Church?

Garland Elkins

Introduction

THIS IS A TOPIC of supreme importance, and one that is so misunderstood by multitudes of people. With so many different churches in the world today, is there really any way to figure out which one is the Lord's church?

I am happy to point that we can indeed learn the truth about the Lord's one true church. The identifying marks of the church are very clearly set out in the New Testament.

Before identifying the Lord's church as set out in the New Testament, I call attention to some crucial matters. The Bible plainly teaches that every seed brings forth after its kind (Gen. 1:11-13). Paul declared that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7-9). All thinking people know that the above statements are true.

How does it help one to know that he is not a member of some religious organization which is nothing more than a human institution—one invented, established, and maintained by doctrine which was originated by mere human beings and not by God? It helps by being applied to the truth that the "seed" which God uses to bring forth children of God is His Word—His Word and only His Word, not some mere human doctrine (Eph. 6:17; Luke 8:11; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

When Catholic “seed” doctrine is planted in a soil (human mind) which allows it to germinate and grow into a plant (that is, when a human mind accepts and obeys Catholic doctrine), then the result is a member of the Catholic religion, not a member of the church which Jesus built.

When Episcopalian doctrine is planted in a human mind which believes and obeys that doctrine, the result is a member of the Episcopalian church.

When Mormon “seed” (doctrine) is planted in a soil (a human mind) which allows it to germinate and grow into a plant (that is, when a human mind accepts and obeys Mormon doctrine), then the result is a member of the Mormon religion, not a member of the church which Jesus built.

When Baptist “seed” doctrine is planted in a soil (human mind) which allows it to germinate and grow into a plant (that is, when a human mind accepts and obeys Baptist doctrine), then the result is a member of the Baptist denomination, not a member of the church which Jesus built.

I am truly delighted in this lecture to discuss the undenominational nature and exclusiveness of the Lord’s church. A definition of terms is in order. By “undenominational” we simply mean that the church of the Lord is not a sect. The church is not a denomination nor a group of denominations. The term “denomination,” when used in reference to a church or churches, means a sect of division (Acts 24:5; Acts 24:13; Acts 24:14; Jas. 3:14-16; 1 Cor. 14:33). Paul was accused of being a member of a sect. His enemies said of him, “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Paul answered all of their charges. I am so very grateful that he explicitly refuted their accusation that he was a member of a sect. He said:

Neither can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets (Acts 24:13-14).

A denomination is something larger than a local congregation, yet smaller than the church universal. The Bible recognizes no such institution! According to the Bible, the church universal contains every saved person in all the world (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). The local church consists of every Christian in a given locality. The plural form "churches" is never used in the New Testament, except in reference to a number of congregations in some section of the country, as "the churches of Judaea" (Gal. 1:22), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "the churches of Macedonia" (2 Cor. 8:1), "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), or "the seven churches of Asia" (Rev. 1:4). These were the Lord's congregations located in geographically different sections of the country.

It is absolutely inexcusable for anyone to ignore this fact and to "wrest, as they do also the other scriptures unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16), by seeking to make it appear that the above mentioned churches were different in faith and practice. All the congregations were taught the same truth. Paul makes this abundantly clear (1 Cor. 4:17). Laodicea was one of "the seven churches" of Asia. The Colossae church or congregation was located within the same vicinity. Paul wrote epistles to both congregations. He instructs them to read the epistles and then to exchange them. This shows that without doubt all of the different congregations mentioned in the New Testament were to follow the same teaching! The following passage proves this point. "And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the

church of the Laodiceans; and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16). When Paul wrote, “There is one body...” (Eph. 4:4), he did not have denominationalism in mind, for it did not exist.

The church is undenominational, and the following are a few of the many Scriptural reasons why this is the case:

1. God purposed to build the church before time began.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

Therefore, the church is not an after-thought or an emergency measure (per the false assertions of the premillennialists) to bridge a gap in time. The church is not a so-called “mystery parenthesis.” In reality, the mystery is God’s saving plan which makes provision for the Gentiles and provides them equality in Christ with the Jews (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:25-28; Rom. 16:25-28). Far from being a “parenthesis” of any kind, the church is at the heart of the timeless, ageless purpose of God.

It is important to note that Paul does not ascribe glory to Christ only during the “church age” (as the premillennialists erroneously refer to it). If that were the case (though it is not), at the termination of the premillennialists’ so-called “church age,” then He would no longer be glorified “in the church.” The premillennialists are as wrong as wrong could be when they make that argument. Paul rather exclaims, “Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21). “The mystery of Christ” is clearly explained:

How that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Eph. 3:3-6).

The entire premillennial error collapses, when it is shown that the church is the kingdom which Jesus came to establish (Matt. 16:18-19; John 3:3; John 3:5; Mark 16:16; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47).

2. The church of Christ is the church that the prophets saw. The prophets of the Old Testament pointed to the day of Pentecost of Acts, chapter 2, as the beginning point of the Lord's church. Isaiah said:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

Note a number of things predicted in these passages: (1) The mountain of the Lord's house, also called the house of the God of Jacob, was to be established; (2) it was to be established in the last days; (3) when established, "all nations" were to flow unto it; and, (4) the Word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem. All of this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts, chapter 2.

Let us also observe: (1) Peter referred to that time as “the last days” (Acts 2:16-17). (2) The Great Commission, the commission that embraced “all nations” then became operative (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47; Luke 24:49). (3) The Word of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem (Acts 2:16-42).

3. The kingdom came with power on the Pentecost of Acts, chapter 2. The words “kingdom” and “church” are often used with reference to the same institution. From the Scriptures we learn: (1) The kingdom was to come “with power” (Mark 9:1). This simply means that the kingdom and power would come at the same time; one would come with the other; (2) the power was to come when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8); and, (3) the Holy Spirit came “when the day of Pentecost was now come” (Acts 2:1-4).

Since the Holy Spirit came “when the day of Pentecost was now come,” the power came at the same time, for it was to come when the Holy Spirit came! But, the kingdom was to come “with power;” so, the kingdom came when the day of Pentecost was now come!

To further underscore this truth, let us note that this Pentecost of Acts, chapter 2, is referred to as “the beginning.” When the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius, Peter compared it with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost upon the apostles and said, “The Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). The irresistible Scriptural conclusion is, therefore, that the day of Pentecost of Acts, chapter 2, marks the origin of the church of our Lord.

The Udenominational Nature And Exclusiveness Of The Lord’s church Is Seen In The Following

1. The Lord built but one church. In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul states, “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.” In Ephesians 4:4, he plainly says, “there is one body.” If the “one God” is an exclusive God and the “one Lord” an exclusive Lord, then the “one body” is an exclusive body. Paul declared, “But now they are many members, but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). It follows that since there is “but one body” and “the body is the church” (Col. 1:18), then there must be “but one church” (1 Cor. 12:20). That one church is the Lord’s church, the church of the New Testament, the church of Christ.

Paul in Ephesians 1:22-23 said that God “gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body.” He also said, “He is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). In one of these passages, Paul says that “the church” is “his body,” and in the other passage, he says, “...the body, the church.” So, it is Scriptural to speak of the church as the body and the body as the church, since reference is made to the one and same institution.

Further, to add proof to proof, Christ promised to build but one church when He said: “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). In the language of Paul, we are told that He died for but one church. “Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for it” (Eph. 5:25). The words “the church” mean but one. The pronoun “it” can refer to but one. The conclusion is this: Christ loved one church; He died for one church; He built but one church. Therefore, He is the owner of but one church. This one church is the exclusive church of the New Testament.

2. Salvation is in the Lord’s church. The Bible teaches that the true church is the family of God, the body of Christ, the kingdom of God (1 Tim. 3:15; Col. 1:13-18). No person is offered salvation outside of the family of God, for we read in Acts 2:47 that “the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved.” Through the cross, Christ reconciles men unto God “in one body” (Eph. 2:13-16), and

that “one body” is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:20).

3. One cannot be saved outside of the Lord’s church because it is impossible to be saved apart from the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:22; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23; Eph. 5:25). To contend that the Lord’s church is non-essential since it was purchased with the blood of Christ is to take the position that the blood of Christ is non-essential! If one can be saved outside of Christ’s church, then one is forced to the position that Christ’s death was useless. Any doctrine which minimizes and belittles the death of Christ is a false doctrine. Therefore, the doctrine that salvation can be enjoyed outside of the Lord’s church and apart from the blood is a false doctrine.

4. One cannot be saved out of the kingdom of God (John 3:5; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28). The Bible teaches that the church and the kingdom are the same institution. The disciples were to partake of the Lord’s Supper in His kingdom, as we learn from Luke 22:18-19, but we learn that they did this in the church (1 Cor. 1:1-2; 1 Cor. 11:18-34); therefore, the church and the kingdom are one and the same institution.

If a person could be saved outside of the church, that would mean he could be saved outside of the kingdom of God, i.e., he could be saved without submitting to God, but since there are but two kingdoms on earth, i.e., the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, it follows that if a man can be saved outside of the church he can be saved in the kingdom of Satan. That would deny plain Bible teaching.

5. The New Testament teaches that the church of Christ is the family of God (1 Tim. 3:15). If a man can be saved outside of the family, the church of God, that would be equivalent to one being saved in the devil’s family. There are only two families on earth.

Question: Where is salvation? In the Lord's family, the church, or in the devil's family? Remember, there are only two families on earth.

Another question: Does God have any children outside of his family? Can a man be saved while yet in the family of Satan? These questions must be dealt with by every honest person when they are reaching a conclusion as to the necessity of membership in the Lord's church.

6. The Lord's church is different in terms of entrance. Surely no one would doubt the right of Christ to make the terms of admission into the church, since the church belongs to Him and all authority is given to Him. Hence, our interest should be: What does He require? He is the door, and we must enter in harmony with His will. (John 10:9; Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46).

Faith is required. Jesus said: "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). He also said, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). We must believe, for "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]" (Heb. 11:6). Faith is the first step toward righteousness (Rom. 10:10), and, necessarily, the first step toward the church.

Repentance is commanded. Christ requires that we must "repent" or "all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Repentance is a change of will (Matt. 21:28-31), and leads to life (Acts 11:18). God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Confession of Christ is necessary. Christ made the good confession before Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13). Peter made the good confession which is, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). This caused Christ to pronounce a blessing upon him (Matt. 16:17). Christ has promised that "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which

is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32). Confession with the mouth leads to salvation (Rom. 10:10) and must, therefore, precede the saved state.

Baptism is necessary in order to be saved. No one can be saved from his past sins until he has been baptized, according to our Lord’s statement in Mark 16:16. These were among our Lord’s last instructions to His apostles before leaving the earth. Our Lord said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

Faith and baptism, in this passage, are joined by the coordinating conjunctions and coordinating conjunctions join or unite elements of equal rank. Faith and baptism are thus joined in this sentence to obtain the same result—salvation. He that believeth (item No. 1) and is baptized (item No. 2) shall be saved (item No. 3).

Paul taught that baptism is essential to salvation in Romans 6:3-4:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Note that the statement made here by Paul is to the effect that men are baptized into Jesus Christ, and that they also are baptized into His death.

If men can be saved without baptism, they can be saved out of Christ, because in this passage Paul declares that men are baptized into Christ. Can men be saved out of Christ? If men cannot be saved out of Christ, then they cannot be saved without baptism, because Paul says baptism puts people into Christ. Not only so, but we note it was in the death of Christ that His blood was shed. We must, therefore, contact His blood in order to receive the

benefits of His blood. Since the blood was shed in His death, we must reach the death of Christ in order to share its benefits. In Romans 6:3, it is affirmed that “we are baptized into his death.” We reach the death of Jesus Christ when we are baptized, not before we are baptized, and thus reach His blood and the benefits of His blood at that point. Since we are baptized into the death of Christ, and thus into the blood of Christ, then baptism is essential to the forgiveness of sins which is made possible by the blood of the Son of God.

Also, this passage shows that we walk in the newness of life, or that the new life comes after baptism. Please observe in Romans 6:4:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Here is a burial and a resurrection. Paul tells us that, as Christ was raised from the dead, so we are raised to walk in newness of life. Here is a burial and a resurrection. Paul tells us that, as Christ was raised from the dead, so we are raised to walk in newness of life. Here is a burial and a resurrection. Many present-day preachers contend that we walk the new life before baptism, but Paul says that we are raised to walk in newness of life. **The newness of life comes after baptism!**

It is further seen from Galatians 3:26-27 that water baptism is essential to the salvation of the alien sinner. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Note that Paul points out two things: (1) We are children of God by faith. (2) We are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Let us carefully study what Paul said. Paul, did you say, “We are children of God by faith,” and stop with that?

No. Did you say, “We are children of God by faith only?” No. Well, did you say, “We are children of God by faith out of Christ?” No! What, then did you say? “Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

Friends, one must be in Christ Jesus in order to be saved. It is significant that the very next verse informs us how to get into Christ. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Friends, you will never learn how to get into Christ in any other way. You must be in Christ to be a child of God by faith. You can get into Christ only by being baptized into Christ!

Please honestly consider the necessity of baptism from these standpoints.

(1) Baptism stands between the sinner and the salvation of his soul (Mark 16:16).

(2) Baptism stands between the sinner and remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

(3) Baptism stands between the sinner and becoming a child of God (Gal. 3:26-27).

(4) Baptism stands between the sinner and having his sins washed away (Acts 22:16).

(5) Baptism stands between the sinner and getting into Christ (Rom. 6:3).

7. The exclusiveness of the New Testament church is seen in the authorized acts of worship that are set out in the New Testament. We cannot have just anything in our worship and still please God. The component parts of worship are stated by Christ in John 4:24. They involve:

(1) worshipping the right object: “God;”

(2) worshipping with the right attitude: “in spirit;” and

(3) worshipping according to the Will of the Lord: “in truth” (John 17:17). We are instructed how to worship, after the church was established on the day of Pentecost. The early church taught in worship (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7).

Prayer is another item of worship in the Lord's church (Acts 2:42). Christians are told to "continue in prayer" (Col. 4:2) and to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayer is to be addressed to God, not to Mary or to some saint, and prayers are to be prayed in the name of Christ (Eph. 5:20).

The congregations in the days of the apostles gave their contributions on the first day of the week as the Lord had prospered them (1 Cor. 16:1-2). This was a free-will offering. Although the tithe is not bound upon the church of the New Testament, many Christians give more than ten percent. The New Testament church is not bound by the Old Testament law of tithing (Heb. 7:12). Personally, I would not think of giving as little as ten percent; this is of my choosing (2 Cor. 9:6-8), and not because I am bound by the Old Testament law of tithing.

The Lord's church does not resort to raffle contests, socials, and other such methods of raising money for the church. Such was not done by the congregations under the direction of inspired men of the first century, and those who do such things today are not identical to congregations of the first century.

The church of the first century sang as an act of worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We read in Hebrews 2:12, "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Note please, "...in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Nowhere are Christians authorized "in the midst of the church will I sing and play praise unto thee."

The early Christians were limited to vocal music—that is, singing. They did not use organs, pianos, banjos, guitars, or other mechanical instruments in their praise to God. They sang—they did not play. Any church today that employs such mechanical instruments in its worship is not identical to the New Testament church. The true

church of Christ now limits its music to singing, as did the church of the first century.

The early church, in addition to engaging in prayer, teaching, giving, and singing, also partook of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Let us observe:

(1) The fact that Jesus commanded His disciples to partake of the supper (Matt. 26:26-28). Paul mentions the same thing in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. It is, therefore, clearly revealed that the Lord commanded His people to eat of His supper.

(2) Not only so, but the Lord's people are commanded to assemble (Heb. 10:25). This command implies that some day is necessary. There could not be an assembly without some time for the assembly on some day. But what is the connection between eating the Lord's Supper and the assembly?

(3) Simply this: The disciples ate the Lord's Supper when they assembled (1 Cor. 11:20). They were perverting the institution by making a full meal out of it, and thus they were reprimanded for that. But the passage does reveal God's will in the matter. This was not an eating at home, but when they came together into the assembly to worship—"when they came together into one place" (1 Cor. 11:20).

(4) Therefore, Christians came together for the purpose of eating the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:33). They were not to come together in the public assembly to eat common meals; they were to eat such meals at home (1 Cor. 11:34). Bear in mind the fact that the Lord's Supper is the only thing God has ever required Christians to eat in an assembly.

(5) Now, if we can find when Christians assembled—or came together to eat the Lord's Supper, we will know what day we are required to partake of the Lord's Supper. Here is the passage:

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 (Acts 20:7).

No one can Scripturally partake of the Lord's Supper on any day other than "the first day of the week," yet there are those who take it on a Thursday, or on some other day of the week. When they do so, it is without any Bible authority. The Bible plainly teaches it must be done on the first day of the week.

This cannot mean a yearly service or a monthly service. We never refer to an event that recurs annually as coming on a certain day of the week. We say that Independence Day comes on the fourth of July. We never say it comes on the first day of the week, though it may sometimes fall on that day. So it was with the Passover of the Old Testament. It came on the fourteenth day of the first month, and that day was set aside as an annual religious service. If a certain day of the month had been mentioned it would have made it a monthly service. As the fourteenth day of the first month would designate an annual service, and as the tenth day of the months would point out a monthly service, so the "first day of the week" would specify a weekly service.

The early church partook of the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis "upon the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). Since every week had a first day in it, this means that they ate the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. This makes the Lord's Supper a weekly observance. I ask the following questions:

- (1) Do you partake of the Lord's Supper?
- (2) At what time do you partake of it?
- (3) How often do you partake of it?
- (4) Upon what Scripture do you base your practice?

Denominationalism Is Sinful

1. **Let it be plainly stated that no matter who belongs to a denomination now, no one belonged to one in the first century.** Paul was accused of being a member of a sect (Acts 24:5). He denied that he belonged to a sect and stated that such a false charge could not be proved (Acts 24:13-14). There is nothing denominational in Christianity. People must be different from Christians to be in a denomination. It is very clear, therefore, that one can be a Christian without belonging to a denomination. Denominationalism rests upon division. Let us note:

(1) Denominationalism repudiates the teaching of the apostles.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

(2) Denominationalism makes unbelievers.
Jesus prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

Unity among believers would cause others to believe, while division would and does produce unbelievers.

(3) Denominationalism teaches that God contradicts himself. Paul wrote, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). All Christians of the first century were members of the same church, and it took all of them to constitute the church. There were no denominations in the first century, and there would be none now if no one

preached or practiced anything but that which was preached and practiced in the first century. In order to go to heaven, one must repudiate all churches, except the church of the New Testament which includes all Christians.

In other words, the church of the Lord consists of all of the saved of earth. The same process which makes one a child of God constitutes him a member of the Lord's church (Acts 2:22-47). Most all religious people readily admit that a man can be a Christian and go to heaven without belonging to a denomination. **It is a fact that no matter who belongs to a denomination now, nobody belonged to one in the first century!** (Acts 2:38-47; Eph. 4:32, Jas. 3:14-16).

The following excellent comments are right on target:

There are those today who claim that the Bible teaches that there are Christians who are not members of the church of Christ. But I have no hesitation in affirming that the Bible teaches that every person who is a Christian is a member of the church of Christ. This means, obviously, that I am affirming that the Bible teaches that there are no Christians who are not members of the church of Christ. The church of Christ is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The saved are those who have been reconciled unto God, and those who have been reconciled unto God are members of the body (church) of Christ (Eph. 2:13-18). The matter is really just that simple, but in the light of the importance of the matter, let us say a bit more about it.

The Bible teaches that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). To be in Christ is to be in His church (Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:13; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 20:28; Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:7; et al). The Bible teaches that it is impossible for one to "cross the line" into salvation without "crossing the line" into Christ. The Bible also teaches that it is impossible for one to "cross the line" into Christ without "crossing the line" into the church.

The crucial relation of the church to salvation is seen in the statement “And the Lord added (Greek imperfect “was adding.” T. B. W.) to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47, KJV). The English Revised Version, in an excellent treatment, translates Acts 2:47 in this way: “And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved” (Greek present participle).

In short, the Bible teaches that there are no Christians outside of the church for which Jesus died. When one obeys the gospel, being baptized (as a penitent believer) in the name of Christ (that is, by His authority), the Lord adds him to the church. He never fails to do this (cf.: Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:13).¹

In summary, we must teach the undenominational nature and exclusiveness of the Lord’s church. We must also teach that it is sinful to belong to a denomination. To build up denominationalism is but to promote divisions and to perpetuate strife in the world and among the people of God.

Endnotes

1 Thomas B. Warren, Ph. D., **Christians Only and The Only Christians** (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, Inc. 1984), pp. 6-7.

CHAPTER 20

On How The Church Should Be Organized?

Barry Grider

Introduction

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST is the most precious institution on earth. God predetermined a plan whereby sinful man could be saved and His plan included the church.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

Those who are saved are found only in one place today and that place is the church (Acts 2:47). Many institutions have arisen to aid mankind, yet in none of them is God glorified. He is glorified only in the church of Christ (Eph. 3:21). Many say the church has nothing to do with our salvation. Yet, Paul wrote, concerning Jesus and His relationship with the church, "... he gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Suppose you were able to view the mangled body of Jesus as He suffered on the cross, and suppose you asked Him why He was dying such a horrible death, and you heard him reply, "I am dying to purchase the church." Suppose you then were to ask, "Is the church

important to our salvation?” Can you imagine Him responding, by saying, “that the church has nothing to do with our salvation?” Of course, you cannot. The church has everything to do with our salvation. If, therefore, the church is of such value, should we not carefully consider its terms of entrance, pattern of worship, mission, and organization? The latter shall be the focus of this study.

Pattern Authority

Since Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), He has all authority. 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)

Everything we do in matters pertaining to religion must have the authority of Christ behind it. Yet most religious people, including many members of the Lord’s church, seemingly miss this point. The Bible is God’s will for mankind. It is His all-sufficient Word. Peter wrote:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:3).

Has God given us a pattern? He gave those under the Old Covenant a pattern. “And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount” (Exod. 25:40). Paul, writing to those of us under the New Covenant, stated, “Hold fast the form [pattern] of sound words, which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13).

Jesus, likewise, gave authority to His chosen apostles. When speaking about the establishment of the church, Jesus said:

And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys to 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 (Matt. 16:18-19).

Therefore, when the apostles spoke, the authority of heaven was behind their teaching. On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the rest of the apostles preached the Gospel and that message was Divinely sent and approved. Their teaching was accompanied by the miraculous, which gave credence that they spoke words from on high. Some three thousand accepted the apostle's message that day and each soul was added to the number of the saved (Acts 2:41). What happened then? Did they just disperse and go their separate ways? No!

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together and had all things common (Acts 2:42-44).

So, from the above passage, we notice these early Christians or disciples were in some way organized.

In one of the most succinct and concise statements concerning the organization of the New Testament church, the following was penned: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). The word bishop carries the idea of overseer. Paul speaking to such brethren at Ephesus stated, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Those who serve as bishops are, also, called elders. Hence, their spiritual maturity is emphasized. Peter stated:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:1-3)

Concerning the appointment of these elders or bishops, Paul stated to Titus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Tit. 1:5). Elders in every city means elders in every congregation of the Lord's people. On Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas, "ordained elders in every church..." (Acts 14:23).

Always a plurality of men, the elders of a specific congregation only have authority over their specific congregation. Keep in mind that not one elder by himself has authority but the authority lies within the eldership. Where does their authority lie? Certainly not in matters of faith, for these matters have already been determined. Rather their authority lies in matters of judgment or in matters of expedience. For the church to function properly, there must be leadership. The elders provide such leadership and they are the decision makers in matters that pertain to each congregation. The Thessalonian brethren were reminded:

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

Do the elders have qualifications they must meet in order to serve? Indeed they do:

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. (1 Tim. 3:1-7)

So we can see from the above passage that those who serve as elders or bishops are good men who love the Lord, His truth, and His people. Sometimes elders are identified as pastors (Eph. 4:11). This term does not have reference to a denominational preacher, but refers rather to the elders of the congregation. The concept of pastor denotes their shepherding responsibilities.

The writer of Hebrews admonishes:

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 do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Jesus Himself is identified as the chief Shepherd. “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4).

If elders are over the flock does this mean that all other members are inferior to them? Not at all! Wives are not inferior to their husbands, even though the husband

is the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23). God is a God of order. He demands leadership so that there be stability. In the home the husband and wife are equal, yet the godly wife lovingly submits to her husband's headship because of her respect for God's order (Col. 3:18).

In the same way each congregation lovingly submits to her eldership. Deacons serve the congregation and work under the oversight of the elders. The term denotes a servant. All Christians are deacons or servants in the general usage of the word. In fact, Phoebe was a deaconess or servant (Rom. 16:1), but this is not some official office she held; rather she was a faithful member of the church at Cenchrea. However, there is the office of a deacon. Their qualifications are set forth along with the elders in the following passage:

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 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 husband of one wife, ruling their children 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 (1 Tim. 3: 8-13).

Notice, the qualifications for deacons are similar to those of an elder. It is no wonder that from this pool of men we often select our elders. There is no authority granted to those who serve as deacons. They simply carry out the tasks assigned to them by the elders. Often times the work carried forth by deacons is menial, yet necessary. Hence, our deacons often receive little appreciation and are not always recognized for the service they render. Some believe that the first appointment of deacons is found in Acts 6.

Regardless if the men appointed were deacons, the work assigned unto them by the apostles was similar to the tasks often given to deacons.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Phillip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).

A congregation organized according to God's pattern will be overseen by qualified elders and served by qualified deacons. Of course, where there are no men who meet the qualifications set forth in the Scriptures, no men should be appointed. Yet a congregation should always work toward the appointment of elders and deacons and all faithful brethren should be preparing themselves to serve in such capacity. But Paul said something about the saints at Philippi in his salutation to that congregation.

Who are these saints? Listening to the leaders of denominational churches, particularly the Roman Catholic church, saints are superior "Christians" who are sometimes even worthy of worship. Most people seem to think of a saint as an overly religious person who is spiritually minded and filled with piety. Yet, according to the Bible, a

saint is simply a New Testament Christian. While the elders oversee a congregation, deacons serve the congregation, members (the saints at large) also have a role to play if the church is organized correctly and functions smoothly.

The church of Christ is often compared to the human body. In fact, the church is the body of Christ. Paul wrote, "And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). While Jesus was on earth He dwelt in a physical body. In His flesh He died on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). While He is not in that physical body today, He does have a body. His body is spiritual in nature and it is the church. How is the church organized? It is similar to a physical body. There were problems in the church at Corinth because a division was beginning to form. This disturbed the apostle Paul. He wrote:

Now I beseech, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Without unity the body cannot function properly. But how is unity maintained? The only way is through every member maintaining loyalty to truth. In His great prayer for unity, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). But someone asks, "Is it really possible to all speak the same thing today or have all things common?" It is possible, though not probable.

Peter wrote, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..." (1 Pet. 4:11). If each one of us speaks as the oracles of God, we will be speaking the same thing, and, hence, we will have unity. Paul spoke of the unity of the body in the following passages:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of another (Rom. 12:4-5).

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made drink into one spirit. For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet one body (1 Cor. 12:12-20).

What does unity of the body have to do with the organization of the church. If the church is properly organized each member will fulfill his obligations and responsibilities. The physical body is a complex organism with many members. Yet even the most remote member works for the good of the whole body. So it must be in the body of Christ. If every member will take instructions from the head, which is Christ (Eph. 1:20-22), indeed it will be so! Now while each congregation of the Lord's church is autonomous or self governing, there is cooperation between congregations.

One way the work of the Lord is carried forth is through congregational cooperation in worthwhile endeavors. Still, the work is being done through the church, under local elderships, and not through para-church organizations, separate from the church itself, which are sometimes called upon to do the work of the church. The Lord's church trying to accomplish its purpose through separate entities is an unscriptural concept and not according to the Divine pattern in the New Testament.

The organization of the church of Christ is very simple. Most everything about serving God is simple. He has made it so. Why then are there so many different religious groups today that are organized differently from the New Testament pattern?

Pattern Abandonment

While speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul spoke of an apostasy that was to occur shortly thereafter:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Just as Paul stated, an apostasy did take place in the early church. The traditions of men took precedence over traditions Divine (2 Thess. 2:15). This apostasy abandoned the New Testament pattern concerning the plan of salvation, worship, and the organization of the Lord's church. While each congregation was to have its own elders, eventually a representative from one church would meet with representatives from other congregations. In time, a leader would emerge from among those groups and the

formation of what we know today as a diocese began. Thus we have the religious hierarchy that is prevalent in so many denominational bodies today.

The church is not an organization that elects delegates to national conventions to set policy for the church. Nor did our Lord designate a vicar to represent him on earth in the form of the Roman papacy. Such is an abandonment of the New Testament pattern for the organization of the church. While the Protestant Reformation did call attention to abuses in Romanism, it tried to reform a corrupt organization that had no Scriptural right to exist in the first place. Our plea as churches of Christ is to call men back to the simplicity of the Bible.

Conclusion

Recently, in our city of Memphis, the Germantown Baptist Church underwent a serious division over its organization. The “pastor” and others desired the selection of a new board of elders who, along with the “pastor” would make decisions regarding church policy. This would be different from their typical congregational led approach. The problem is that neither are Scriptural approaches to church organization.

Many in the religious world became very disturbed over the appointment of V. Eugene Robinson who was elevated to the role of bishop of New Hampshire. Robinson is a practicing homosexual and many were appalled that one guilty of a deviant lifestyle would be placed in such a position of spiritual leadership. However, one should not be surprised. Denominationalism exists for the purpose of deviating from the truth. If all would abide in truth, there would be no denominationalism, and, hence, no abandonment of the pattern for the organization of the New Testament church.

If our nation were overtaken by aggressors and they abandoned our constitution, and these aggressors continued their domination of our country for 200 or 2000 years, could we ever regain our present system of government? Absolutely! Just return to the constitution and once more we would have a pattern to put in place a democratically elected republican form of government. When men return to the Bible, once again a pattern can be found to determine the organization of the church, and by so doing God will be pleased and He will approve what is done.

CHAPTER 21

On What Day We Should Assemble To Worship God?

Jimmy Ferguson

Introduction

I WISH TO EXTEND my gratitude to B. J. Clarke and the Southaven elders for the invitation to participate in this splendid lectureship program. I appreciate their stand for the Truth and their efforts to spread the Gospel of Christ. The topic assigned me is, “How Can We Understand the Bible Alike On What Day We Should Assemble to Worship God?”

It Is Possible To Understand the Bible

This specific topic will be dealt with elsewhere in this lectureship but I feel it is necessary to give this some consideration in order to lay the groundwork for our study. Paul wrote, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4). The religious leaders of Jesus’ day did not understand the truth He spoke because they did not desire to understand. Jesus said of them:

For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their

eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:15).

But Jesus then said to His disciples, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Matt. 13:16). Mark records, “And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand” (Mark 7:14).

Certainly, one can understand the Scriptures. However, there must first be a desire to understand, a mind willing to listen and a willingness to accept the truth. Furthermore, one must be eager to make whatever changes are demanded by the truth.

We Can Understand Bible Teaching Regarding Worship

God has not left us without instruction concerning worship. According to Jesus, there is a correct and proper way to worship. He said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Thus, our worship is to be sincere, i.e., from the heart (in spirit) and as directed or authorized by the Word (in truth).

Just as important as the individual acts of worship is the consideration of the appointed day of worship. Some in the religious world worship on Saturday (Sabbath worship) while others contend that Sunday is the Divinely designated day of worship. Is there a specific day designated by Deity as the appointed day of worship? If so, what is it and how do we know it?

Certainly, Christians can worship anywhere and at anytime. We gather together on the first day of the week to worship. We assemble during mid-week (usually on Wednesday) to worship. We come together during Gospel Meetings to worship, and members of the church assemble

during lectureships such as the **POWER** Lectureship to engage in acts of worship. Paul and Silas were worshipping in a Philippian dungeon at midnight (Acts 16:25). During the first century, preaching the Gospel (an act of worship) was often done daily (Acts 5:42).

However, there is one day of the week that is not optional where worship is concerned. This is a Divinely appointed day. It will be the purpose of this treatise to determine, from the Scriptures, what this Divinely appointed day is, and how we can know it.

Sabbath Worship

God impressed upon His people in Old Testament times their responsibility of worship and remembrance. There were holy days and assembly days specified by the Lord (see Isa. 1:12-15; Lev. 23:2-4; Lev. 23:7-8; Lev. 23:21; Lev. 23:36; Exod. 12:16; and Num. 28:18; Num. 28:25; Num. 28:26). In connection with this, God enjoined the keeping of the sabbath upon the Jews. God commanded, "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8).

He further instructed:

Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings (Lev. 23:3).

It was such a serious matter for Israel to obey the Lord in this regard that He said, "...everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death" (Exod. 31:14). Israel disregarded the sabbath and the Lord pronounced judgment upon them (Neh. 13:15-22).

But the question at hand is, Does the Bible teach that Christians must keep the sabbath? Is the sabbath (Saturday) the Divinely appointed day of worship today? Several religious groups today would so affirm. But what saith the Scriptures?

When Was the Sabbath Made Known?

And on the seventh day God rested from his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made (Gen. 2:2-3).

This is recorded in the second chapter of the Bible. But when was it made known to man? Note that it is not said that God told Adam to keep the Sabbath; the Sabbath is not mentioned elsewhere in Genesis; and the text does not say when or why God sanctified it. There is not the slightest hint that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, or any other man knew of this until it was revealed to Israel, 2500 years later, and then Moses recorded it after that. The first mention of this to man was after Israel had been delivered from Egypt, and were given instructions for gathering manna, with the double portion supplied on the sixth day.

The time and place where God revealed His instructions concerning the Sabbath is carefully noted:

Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandest them precepts, statutes and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant (Neh. 9:13-14).

Thus, it was at mount Sinai that the Law was given by the hand of Moses; insomuch as the Sabbath was part of the Law, the Sabbath was made known at Sinai. Furthermore, this was after Israel had left Egyptian bondage. Until then, man knew nothing of the Sabbath. Sabbatarians seem to think that since we read of the Sabbath

in Genesis 2:2-3, that all those who lived back then knew of it. But Moses did not write Genesis until after leaving Sinai.

What Was Said Of The Sabbath?

The command regarding the Sabbath is contained in the Law God gave through Moses of which the Ten Commandments was the center. The Law was given at Sinai. God stated, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2). This Law was for the people of Israel delivered from Egypt. The Law which regulated the Sabbath was only for these people and their descendants.

Later Moses emphasized:

The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day (Deut. 5:2-4).

This covenant did not, and never would, embrace the Gentile world. It was given to Israel. Nor did it reach back to their fathers as the Law containing the Sabbath was never given to them.

God also revealed the significance of giving the Sabbath to Israel. "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them" (Ezek. 20:12). Thus, the Sabbath observance was a sign between the Lord and Israel. It signified their deliverance from bondage:

And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day (Deut. 5:15).

The Sabbath As A Perpetual Covenant

Sabbatarians maintain that since the Sabbath was to be a perpetual covenant that it was to continue throughout all generations. However, God promised that the Sabbath would be a perpetual covenant **with Israel** (Emp. mine, JF). Moses recorded:

Speak thou also to the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations: that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you...Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever. (Exod. 31:13-17)

This was equivalent to the words of Exodus 30:8, “He shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.” This means that so long as the nation of Israel endured, they would observe the Sabbath and burn incense.

To try and prove that the Sabbath observance would continue throughout **all** generations Sabbatarians will often quote (but misapply) Malachi 3:6, “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” Sabbatarians reason thusly: since God does not change, then He has not changed the Sabbath law. This verse, however, has no bearing on the Sabbath question. In fact, the Sabbath is not even under consideration. The prophet is simply showing that God’s character does not change and is used to emphasize God’s kindness to Israel. Furthermore, Hebrews 7:12 tells us that God **did** change at least two things: the law and the priesthood.

Along these same lines, the priesthood was said to be an “everlasting priesthood” (Exod. 40:15). But the Levitical priesthood came to an end when the New Covenant came into effect (Heb. 7:11-12). The observance

of the Sabbath was affiliated with all the ceremonies, rituals and ordinances pertaining to the Law given by Moses at Sinai. One might as well lead a sheep to the slaughter and offer animal sacrifices pertaining to that Law, as to seek to bind the Sabbath observance on people of our day.

Obligations and Restrictions of the Sabbath

One of the inconsistencies of Sabbatarians is that they want to bind the Sabbath but they reject the duties and restraints attached to its observance. But if the Sabbath law is still in effect then so are the rituals, offerings and sacrifices, ceremonies and restrictions which God ordained for the Sabbath.

Where are the burnt offerings in modern day Sabbath observances? These were fixed on the Sabbath and were not rescinded as long as the Sabbath endured. Notice:

And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and the drink offering thereof: this is the burnt offering of every sabbath (Num. 28:9-10).

Those who keep the Sabbath should also offer the burnt offerings which accompanied its observance.

The Sabbath observance also restricted every man to his own house for the day and he was not to go into the field. "See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days: abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day" (Exod. 16:29). God provided His people a double portion of food on the sixth day, so that on the seventh day they would stay in. Are these provisions continuing today?

Consistency would also restrict Sabbatarians from building fires and cooking if the Sabbath is still in force. “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day” (Exod. 35:3). Notice this decree:

This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning (Exod. 16:23).

God made provision for them by supplying double on the sixth day so that no labor was necessary on the seventh. Does He still do so today?

The Sabbath and the Death Penalty

The severest penalty of all was imposed upon one who violated the Sabbath:

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death (Exod. 35:2).

The death penalty was never rescinded as long as the Sabbath was in force. Have you heard of Sabbatarians asking that the death penalty be imposed upon one who works on the Sabbath? Yet this law was attached to the Sabbath observance. Again, it was emphasized:

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among the people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death (Exod. 31:14-15).

This was not only stated as Law but it was carried out:

And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation...And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses (Num. 15:32-36).

If the Sabbath is still in effect, so also is the penalty the Lord affixed for its violation.

Is the Sabbath Binding on Us Today?

We have found that the Sabbath was a part of the Law given at Sinai. Paul uses an allegory of two women, Sarah and Hagar, to show that we now answer to the Gospel that went forth from Jerusalem, and not to the Law given at mount Sinai (Gal. 4:21-26). The Hebrews writer draws a contrast between the Old and New covenants:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his

brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:6-13).

The writer also states:

Then saith he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:9-10).

Paul writes, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:14). The Old Law containing the Sabbath vanished away and was replaced by Christ’s New Testament, sealed with His blood (Matt. 26:28).

Jesus Observed the Sabbath

Sabbatarians contend that the Sabbath is still in effect because Jesus observed the Sabbath. However, Jesus was born, lived and died under the Old Covenant. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

Christ came to redeem man from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13), but while He lived under it, He was not only obedient to the Law, He taught His disciples to obey it as well (Matt. 23:1-4). Jesus said:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18).

The Law had served its purpose and could pass away. But while it stood, every descendant of Israel had to observe the Sabbath day. This was also true of Jesus and His disciples.

On What Day Are Christians to Worship?

As noted, a New Covenant was promised. This New Covenant would replace the Old, which contained the Sabbath. In this New Covenant, the Lord's people would be given a new name (Acts 11:26); a new religion (Gal. 1:13-23); a new law (Rom. 8:2); a new mediator (1 Tim. 2:5); a new Priest (Heb. 7:28); and a new day, the first day of the week or the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10).

The first day of the week is not the "Christian Sabbath." There is a vast difference between the seventh day and the first day. The first day of the week holds special significance. Jesus' resurrection took place on this day (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1-3). Jesus met with His disciples after the resurrection on this day (John 20:19; John 20:26). Pentecost was a Jewish feast day (Lev. 23:15ff), and it was on this feast day, ten days after the ascension of Jesus (the first day of the week), that the church was established (Acts 2). The early church assembled on Sunday and the Lord's Supper was observed on that day (Acts 20:7).

Luke records, "And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7). Where is the verse that says, "Upon the Sabbath day when the disciples came together to break bread"? There is none! Sabbatarians contend that the meeting at Troas in Acts 20:7 was a special one and the local circumstances would not be known to other Christians. However, Paul wrote to the Corinthians telling them to

lay by in store on the first day of the week, and in the same context he says he had given the same order to the churches of Galatia (1 Cor. 16:1-2). This hardly seems compatible with a “local custom” theory. We are told that the early Christians continued in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). Since they met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord’s Supper, the implication is that this was part of the apostles’ doctrine.

Conclusion

Sunday, the first day of the week, is the Divinely appointed day of worship. It is on this day that we commemorate the death and resurrection of our Savior (Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-29). When one reflects upon the importance of the Lord’s resurrection, he is made more conscious of how important and meaningful this day is.

CHAPTER 22

On How And When We Should Observe The Lord's Supper?

Cliff Goodwin

Introduction

A *SURVEY OF THE* modern religious world proves to be quite dismal, even when limited to what many term “Christendom.” So many profess to be following Christ, but in actuality they do not obey Him (cf. Matt. 7:21-27). This widespread disobedience, in turn, has naturally produced division among myriad sects, splinter-groups and denominations. Worst of all, such confusion and division have served only to obscure Christ’s true church and its true cause. Jesus prayed concerning His followers:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:20-21)

While the true disciples honor this request of the Lord, so many **professing** Christianity do not.

The tragic result is a religious world wherein abounds confusion—such confusion as might turn away a lost soul in search of the truth. Who is responsible for such a spiritual disaster? One can rest assured that God is not

to be blamed. Paul made it clear that God is not the author, or originator, of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), while James penned that God neither tempts nor is tempted (Jas. 1:13). Of a certainty, then, the one behind religious confusion is the devil. In the very beginning he brought cloudiness and confusion to a matter that God had made crystal clear: partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17; Gen. 3:1-6). From Satan's subtlety and deception arose uncertainty and confusion in the heart of Eve, which ultimately resulted in her disobedience (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3). Satan operated in this fashion in the very beginning. From the looks of the modern religious world, it is obvious he is still in the business of slander, misrepresentation and confusion.

Surely the devil must be especially delighted when he is successful in blurring those matters which pertain to the worship of God. This he somehow did in the case of Cain (Gen. 4:1-7). While God had obviously given the terms and conditions of His worship to the first brothers, Satan successfully tempted Cain to deviate from God's pattern. Abel, on the other hand, met God's terms and, consequently, met with God's approbation (Heb. 11:4; cf. Rom. 10:17). It is important to note that Satan is still at work today in distorting the true and acceptable worship of Jehovah. In this New Testament era, deviations are observed in all five acts of Christian worship (preaching, praying, singing, giving and the Lord's Supper). When man departs from the Biblical pattern in any of these areas, what was intended to glorify God turns out to be a reproach and a dishonor. How Satan must delight in this!

A Forgotten Fundamental

When asked of the reason for one's actions in worship, the sincere though misguided heart might reply, "I'm only doing what I understand to be right." If what one

“understands” to be right, however, clearly differs from the teaching of Scripture, then there is obviously a problem. Why are so many apparently sincere in their worship of God, only to be “at odds” with what the Bible teaches on this subject? Is it the case that the Bible cannot be understood properly? The answer is a resounding “No!”

In writing Scripture, the inspired penmen were revealing and recording the mind of God—His will for mankind:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual...For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 2:16).

It is neither sensible nor Scriptural that God would reveal His will in a format that man could not possibly understand. Further, it would definitely be within the capabilities of an Omnipotent, Almighty God to produce, provide and preserve His will for mankind in a learnable, knowable and understandable form. This God has done, and He holds man responsible for understanding and executing His will.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord **is**,” (Eph. 5:17; Emp. mine throughout, CG). Would God be just in requiring, yea commanding, that of man which he is unable to perform? The answer is obvious. Paul told the Ephesians to understand what the will of the Lord is, after having already given them the means whereby such could be accomplished. He provided such information in chapter three, saying, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery

of Christ” (Eph. 3:4). Paul expected the Ephesians to understand his apostolic knowledge in the mystery (Gospel) of Christ by **reading** what he had written unto them. Only the God of heaven could devise a formula so simple, yet so sublime—read and understand! This is why His inspired Word was written, so that men might read and understand His will!

It is at this fundamental point, however, that Satan has once again attacked, producing confusion in the hearts of men. He knows that if men can be kept from reading the Word of God, they can be kept from knowing God’s will. This is certainly the case with many in the denominational world. Instead of diligently reading and studying their Bibles for themselves (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15), many are content only to listen to their preachers and teachers. They take their word in lieu of God’s, and the result is devastating. They are indoctrinated with men’s teachings and turned from the truth of God’s Word (cf. Tit. 1:14).

Jesus held His audiences accountable for whether or not they had read the Old Testament Scriptures. On a number of occasions He asked His hearers, “Have ye not read?” (Matt. 12:3; Matt. 12:5; Matt. 19:4; Matt. 22:31). The Lord’s implication was simple each time. If the people had read their Bibles, they should have understood matters pertaining to the Sabbath, to marriage, and to the resurrection. The same is true today. People who have been diligent Bible students should understand fundamental Bible subjects such as worship, yet many do not. Many are either too trusting, too busy, or too careless to read the Bible for themselves.

But what of those who **do** read the Bible, and that regularly, and yet they are still mired in religious error? Sadly, there are some instances in which people in denominational error study their Bibles more than lukewarm members of Christ’s true church. How can they

spend so much time in Bible study and still be confused? Perhaps the answer lies in the attitude and manner with which they approach Bible study.

Jesus not only held His hearers accountable for reading the Old Testament, but also for **how** they read it. On one occasion Jesus asked a lawyer a two-fold question, "What is written in the law? how readeest thou?" (Luke 10:26). Jesus knew that it is important **how** a person studies God Word. On another occasion He had taught, "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have" (Luke 8:18).

Still today many approach the Bible with preconceived ideas or even biases. If one permits these to influence his study of the Bible, instead of letting his study of the Bible influence them, then he is certainly in for spiritual trouble. Many do not read the Bible as the inspired Word of God; instead they approach the Bible as some kind of novelty. Those who do this will not give Bible study the sobriety and solemnity it deserves. In order to read the Bible effectively, one must come to its pages with an open mind (cf. Acts 17:11), an honest heart (cf. Luke 8:15), a reverence for what it is (the Word of God, cf. 1 Thess. 2:13), and one must read it in view of eternity (cf. John 12:48).

In this way, God has made it possible for man to know and understand all things pertaining to life and godliness upon this earth (2 Pet. 1:3). This would obviously include matters of worship, and particularly for this study, the Lord's Supper. As the following material is provided regarding the "how and when" of the Lord's Supper, a simple course will be taken in keeping with the maxim, "When all else fails, **read** the instructions!"

The Institution Of The Lord's Supper

Jesus instituted (introduced, inaugurated) the Lord's Supper as He observed the Passover with His apostles for

the last time on this earth (Luke 22:13-15; cf. Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22). All three synoptic writers provide this account in relative detail, while John records much material surrounding the events of that evening, though not elaborating specifically on the institution of the Supper.

Jesus was the epitome of the Passover Lamb. In the very first Passover feast ever observed, way down in Egypt, the paschal lamb was slain, shedding its blood—blood which would be a token between God and His people (Exod. 12:5-7; Exod. 12:13). This lamb was to be a male of the first year (in the vigor of life) and one without blemish (perfect). Not a bone was to be broken in the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:46). All of these descriptions and requirements foreshadowed the coming Christ with inspired precision. Christ is described as the Lamb of God, shedding His blood as a propitiation for the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 1:5b). He was certainly a male in the vigor of life, being killed at roughly thirty-three years of age, and He was the only man ever to live a sinlessly perfect life—without blemish in every way (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21). Finally, not one bone of His was broken (John 19:33-36), in keeping with the Passover precedent. Indeed, Christ is “our Passover,” as the apostle Paul described Him (1 Cor. 5:7b), and it was only befitting He institute His Supper during the time of that Jewish feast. McGarvey and Pendleton observed this fact:

Luke brings out the parallelism between the [P]assover and the Lord's [S]upper. Each consisted in eating followed by drinking, and the closeness of the parallel is emphasized by the use of almost the same words with regard to the cup. The [P]assover was typical of the Lord's suffering **before** the event, and the Lord's [S]upper is typical of the same thing **after** the event.¹

Jesus instituted His memorial feast using items readily available in a Jewish home during the Passover:

unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. All three synoptic biographers record four actions of the Lord regarding the unleavened bread.

First, He “took” the bread (its being nigh because of the occasion of the Passover). Jesus was deliberate in this action, knowing He was about to institute His memorial.

Second, Christ “blessed” it; this He did simply by giving the Father thanks for it. That this is the meaning of “blessed” is easily seen from a couple of passages. Whereas both Matthew and Mark used the term “blessed,” Luke substituted the equivalent “gave thanks” (Luke 22:19). This coincides with Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 4:5-6, “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.” Elsewhere Jesus is recorded as giving thanks before distributing food (Matt. 14:19; Matt. 15:36).

Third, Jesus “brake” (broke) the bread, or loaf.² It seems that **distribution** (among the disciples) would have been the primary purpose for the breaking of the unleavened loaf. In fact, none of the Gospel biographers supply the sentiment “which is broken for you,” a rendering followed by the Textus Receptus (KJV and NKJV) in 1 Corinthians 11:24. There is much debate as to whether or not “which is broken for you” (1 Cor. 11:24) belongs in the text, especially since it is omitted from the American Standard Version as well as many modern versions. Some opponents of the clause advance the following argument: Christ’s bones were not broken (John 19:36); therefore, Jesus would not have made such a statement. Nonetheless, it is the view of this author that such argumentation is not at all conclusive. Having broken **bones** and having a broken **body** could very well be two different ideas altogether. Paul refers to the “body of His flesh” in Colossians 1:22. Was not His flesh “broken” by the spikes

driven into His hands and feet? Therefore, the authenticity of “which is broken for you” in 1 Corinthians 11:24 is best settled in a study of textual criticism, not a possible overextension of John 19:36.

Fourth, Jesus “gave” the broken bread to His disciples. As noted above, in order for this distribution to have been possible, the bread must have been broken. The customary bread of the Passover was in loaves resembling wafers or cakes.³ These are the four actions of Christ pertaining to the unleavened bread: “took,” “blessed” (or “gave thanks”), “broke,” and “gave,” as recorded by all three synoptic writers (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19).

After having given the unleavened bread to His disciples, Jesus then gave them the fruit of the vine. Luke’s wording seems especially helpful: “Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup **is** the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you,” (Luke 22:20). At least two observations need to be made regarding this second emblem, as recorded in the Gospel accounts.

One, the fruit of the vine (the **contents** of the cup, Matt. 26:29) symbolized the blood of Christ. That the cup did not **literally** contain Christ’s **actual** blood should be readily apparent. At the time Christ made this statement, His **literal** blood was still coursing His **literal** veins! Jesus simply used the fruit of the vine as an emblem of His blood. Matthew and Mark both record that Christ’s blood was shed for “many,” Matthew adding “for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24). Christ here used the word “many” in the universal sense—the sense of “all” or “everyone.” This fact is readily ascertained by the consultation of other New Testament passages. Consider the following trio as just a sampling of such passages:

For **there is** one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; **Who gave himself a ransom for all**, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death **for every man** (Heb. 2:9).

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, **but also for the sins of the whole world** (1 John 2:2).

Jesus actually died for everyone—an amazing fact that is full of comfort. When the scope of humanity is contemplated in terms of **individuals**, the number is well described as “many.”⁴ Jesus had earlier used “many” in the same sense, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

Two, the blood symbolized by the fruit of the vine—the blood shed in order that every man might have the remission of sins—would ratify and seal the New Testament. This most significant point is recorded by all three synoptic penmen (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20), as well as the apostle Paul:

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 (1 Cor. 11:25).

The book of Hebrews provides a marvelous contrast between the two testaments, emphasizing the superiority of Christ's law over that of Moses (cf. Heb. 7:22). The inspired author of Hebrews penned:

But now hath he [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (Heb. 8:6).

Man today is blessed immeasurably to live under the Law of Christ—the New Testament; however, this great

blessing did not come without a price. Both God's covenant through Moses and the New Covenant through Christ were sealed, or ratified, by blood (cf. Heb. 9:18-19). Whereas the Old Law was dedicated (sealed) with the blood of animals, the New Testament was sealed with Christ's own blood. God's children are reminded of this grand fact each Lord's Day as they partake of the fruit of the vine during the Lord's Supper.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through **the blood of the everlasting covenant**, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

How Should We Observe The Lord's Supper?

Having examined the two emblems employed in the Lord's Supper and their significance, as well as the Lord's institution of this spiritual feast, attention now needs to be given as to how God's children are to carry out this act of worship. One will remember that the manner in which God's children approach Him in worship is very important to God. The examples of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-7; Heb. 11:4) illustrate this fact as does the example of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2). Jesus also clearly taught this concept as He talked with the woman of Samaria.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God **is** a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship **him** in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24).

These passages and many others notwithstanding, it is a lamentable fact that many today still persist (and some **insist**) in worshipping God erroneously. This is probably as true of the Lord's Supper as it is with any other act of Christian worship. One who will read his Bible with an honest heart, studying its precepts diligently, can overcome the religious error that is so prevalent; he can observe the solemn feast just as God requires.

Congregationally

God intends that all His faithful children participate in the Lord's Supper. Though instituted just "on the other side of the cross," Jesus clearly taught that the Supper was to be a Christian practice—observed within the Messianic kingdom. "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" (Matt. 26:29). In uttering these words, Jesus looked forward to the time when the kingdom would actually be established. This came to pass, just as He promised, on the first Pentecost following His resurrection (cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-47). It is important to note that when one first reads of the church (kingdom) as an established reality, he also reads of her members observing the Lord's Supper. Acts 2 is the chapter containing both of these recorded facts:

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added **unto them** about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41-42).

"Breaking of bread" is a reference to the Lord's Supper. The Supper is identified in an abbreviated form, much like what is common today. One might refer to the

act of “getting ready” for a workday as having a “shower and shave.” Such phraseology does not imply that showering and shaving are all that is involved in “getting ready.” Instead, two integral parts of the “getting ready” process are used to stand for the whole. This figure of speech is known as synecdoche. In the same way, Luke is not conveying that the earliest disciples partook of only one of the two emblems involved in the Lord’s Supper. He was simply identifying the whole (Lord’s Supper) by use of a part (bread)—synecdoche.

Therefore, Luke clearly indicates that all the disciples were privileged to participate in the Lord’s Supper. This concept is echoed in Acts 20:7, as well as in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Any doctrine which excludes faithful members of the church from the Lord’s memorial feast is foreign to Scripture. Such exclusion often stems from the “clergy/laity” concept—a distinction that is also foreign to Scripture (cf. Matt. 23:8-12). According to the New Testament, all faithful members of the church are brethren and, therefore, entitled to the Lord’s Supper. Consider these inspired words of Paul:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Commemoratively

Without debate or discussion, the Lord’s Supper is a memorial feast. It proclaims the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26 ASV), commemorating the body that was **put to death** and the blood that was **shed in death**. Interestingly, however, Luke is the only Gospel biographer who explicitly brings out the memorial nature of the feast: “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” (Luke 22:19). Paul also mentioned the Supper’s memorial nature, writing “in remembrance of me” twice to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

God knows human nature infinitely better than man himself. In providing the church with such a memorial, He knew of man’s need to be reminded. As incredible as it may seem, man has the potential to “lose sight of” the most important things in life. In short, spiritual reminders are essential to lifelong faithfulness in the cause of Christ. Peter touched on this idea:

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance (2 Pet. 1:12-15).

Hence, in His Divine wisdom God has provided the church with a memorial that constantly reminds them **who** they are and **whose** they are. Further, God has arranged New Testament worship in such a way as to ensure that His children are never more than seven days away from this reminder. In observing the Lord’s Supper, a child of God looks back to Calvary, remembering the price that was paid there. Paul wrote, “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (1 Cor. 7:23).

Circumspectly

The word **circumspect** means “watchful and discreet; cautious; prudent.”⁵ As noted earlier, man must always be careful in his manner of approaching God in

worship. This is true of the Lord's Supper as with any other authorized act. Paul vividly conveys this point as he rebukes the Corinthians for their abuse of the Lord's Supper. The American Standard Version is especially helpful in this passage:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body (1 Cor. 11:27-29, ASV).

The manner in which one partakes of the Lord's Supper is very important. It appears that many of the Corinthians had essentially reduced it to a common meal, or at least had combined it with such.⁶ In eating of the Supper in this fashion, they were not **discerning** (distinguishing, recognizing) the Lord's body. This statement has been understood in primarily two different ways. One, many believe they were not discerning Christ's **physical** body—the one put to death on the cross. Inasmuch as the Lord's Supper had been relegated to a common meal, this certainly would have been true. The Supper was designed to be a time of reflection—a time to remember and proclaim Christ's death. This would be lost in an ordinary meal. Two, others believe the Corinthians were not discerning Christ's **spiritual** body, the church. Evidence for this viewpoint is found throughout the entire epistle. Paul identified and condemned their disunity (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 1 Cor. 3:3-4; 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Cor. 11:17-22). Such stood opposed to a central emphasis of the Lord's Supper: many members being one in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17; cf. 1 Cor. 12:27).

Seeing, then, that there is weighty evidence for both viewpoints, which is correct? This author favors the former

viewpoint—that the Corinthians were not discerning the physical body of Christ as it had hung on the cross. That is what Christ symbolized by the unleavened bread, and yet the Supper had lost such spiritual significance (distinction) by being **changed to** or **combined with** an ordinary meal. However, Christians today would do well to learn both lessons. We must be careful to observe the Lord's Supper in such a manner as to preserve its spiritual emphasis and to honor the church's unity.

When Should We Observe The Lord's Supper?

The area of greatest debate surrounding the Lord's Supper is probably that concerning timing and/or frequency. In other words, **when** should we observe the Lord's Supper and **how often**? These questions are probably best answered individually.

When?

There can be no doubt that the New Testament church observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Consider the following passages which show the first day of the week to be the day of assembling for the first-century Christians:

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 (Acts 20:7).

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 (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Luke records that the disciples in Troas came together on the first day of the week to break bread, using a synecdoche

once again to identify the Lord's Supper (cf. Acts 2:42). Paul commanded both the Galatians and Corinthians to give of their means on the first day of the week. To the open-minded, the evidence is clear. The early church came together on the first day of the week in order to worship, and that worship included giving as well as the Lord's Supper.

Further, John used an interesting term in Revelation 1:10: "the Lord's day." Many Bible scholars and commentators, both ancient and modern, are in agreement that "the Lord's day" refers to the first day of the week. Such is perfectly appropriate in light of the fact that Christ was resurrected on the first day of the week (Mark 16:1ff), and His church was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff)—a day which perennially fell on the first day of the week. In fact, the exact construction rendered "Lord's" is found only two times in the entire New Testament: once in the term "Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10), and once in the term "Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). God ordained that the Lord's Supper be observed on the Lord's Day—the first day of the week.

How Often?

There are many who attest that the Scriptures nowhere mandate a set frequency for the church's observance of the Lord's Supper. Nonetheless, as is always the case with error, sound reasoning combined with Sacred Revelation easily refutes such a notion. If it were true that no set frequency has been given by God, then once in the lifetime of a Christian would be enough.⁷ Such a conclusion, however, is not congruent with the Biblical account.

Luke records that the early disciples "continued steadfastly" in their observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). If partaking of the Supper only once in a lifetime were enough, how could such be described as "continuing steadfastly?" The simple truth is that it could not be so described. Winkler offered these helpful comments on the tense of the original language in Acts 2:42:

Furthermore, be it observed that “continue steadfastly” is in the Greek imperfect tense, suggesting that this special event, the breaking of bread or Lord’s Supper, was a customary or habitual practice.⁸

Hence, it is clearly seen that God must have set an appointed frequency for the Lord’s Supper. Whereas “once in a lifetime” would in no wise constitute “a customary or habitual practice,” a regular, weekly observance would (cf. Acts 20:7).

The Scriptures clearly teach that a purpose for the church’s coming together (assembling) on the Lord’s Day is to observe the Lord’s Supper. Luke recorded, “And upon the first **day** of the week, **when the disciples came together to break bread...**” (Acts 20:7). This, too, should have been true of the Corinthian congregation, but their behavior rendered such impossible.⁹ They assembled the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2); many modern translations accurately translate the Greek *kata* as “every”), but the Lord’s Supper cannot be acceptably observed by proponents of strife and disunity (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-20).

For some time it has amazed this author that many balk at the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, while having no difficulty whatsoever in understanding Exodus 20:8, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” When God gave this commandment, it mandated a weekly observance of the Sabbath. Likewise, an honest examination of the evidence—both from Scripture and from church history—warrants the conclusion that God has mandated the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper.

Conclusion

One of the greatest gifts God has provided for this Christian Age is the beautiful memorial of the Lord’s

Supper. A weekly appointment has been set for every child of God—an appointment with the Savior. This Lord's Day, will you meet Jesus at Calvary? Will you kneel at the cross?

Endnotes

- 1 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth, n.d.), p. 646.
- 2 Marvin R. Vincent, **Word Studies in the New Testament**, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), p. 422.
- 3 A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, (Electronic Database, Biblesoft).
- 4 McGarvey and Pendleton, p. 659.
- 5 Jess Stein, Ed., **Random House College Dictionary** (New York, NY: Random House, 1982).
- 6 Guy N. Woods, **Questions and Answers**, Vol. 1. (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1976), p. 97.
- 7 Wendell Winkler, **The Church Everybody is Asking About** (Tuscaloosa, AL: Winkler Publications, Inc., 1988), p. 64.
- 8 Ibid, p. 65.
- 9 Ibid.

CHAPTER 23

On What Kind Of Music In Worship Is Pleasing To God Today?

Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

IT IS AGAIN, AS always, a genuine pleasure to speak on the **POWER** Lectures. If I may boast on this congregation, and particularly B. J. and the elders who lead this church, the themes for this revived lectureship under their direction have been extremely useful and balanced to fit the needs of our great brotherhood. This year's topic is no exception to that commendation! I am delighted to offer this paper¹ and oral presentation on the subject of what type of music is acceptable in worship to God under the New Testament system.

Instrumental Music Is A Scriptural Topic

From the reference to Jubal as “the father of all those who play the harp and the flute” (Gen. 4:21),² to the mention of those who were victorious over the beast having “harps of God” (Rev. 15:2), mechanical instruments of music are certainly mentioned in both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). However, our question in the title of this lesson requires more than just a passage

in the OT or NT showing that instrumental music is **mentioned** in Scripture.

First, the worship of idols is also **mentioned** in the OT and NT, but never with the approval of God as a way to worship Him (Isa. 2:8; Acts 15:29). **Second**, there are some matters spoken of in the OT, **formerly used** to worship God with His approval, that are condemned in the NT worship under Christ. Animal sacrifice is one example (Lev. 8:21; Heb. 10:1). **Third**, many approved OT practices in worship to God are not named **specifically** in the NT as having been done away, but they are **included** in the OT system that was taken away as a whole.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (Col. 2:13-17).

For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar (Heb. 7:12-13).

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity (Eph. 2:14-16).

Therefore, the mere fact of something being mentioned in Scripture, or something as having once been a means of acceptable worship to God, does not mean that such is approved by God for all time.

The Real Issue

Admitting that mechanical instruments of music are mentioned in Scripture and that God once approved them for worship directed to Him is not the real issue facing us. The real question to be answered is: **“Are mechanical instruments of music authorized by God in the NT for use by Christians in offering acceptable worship to Him?”**

Some may argue that this matter is but a trifle, a matter of little or no consequence in discussing our relationship to God. However, as we shall see in our lesson in more detail, those things involved in our worship to God are not small matters. For now, consider two examples. Cain and Abel both sought to worship God; Cain with the fruit of his agricultural farming and Abel with sacrifices from his flocks (Gen. 4:3-7). God accepted Abel’s offerings but rejected Cain’s. Was this a trifle; a small matter? No, not to God, to Abel or Cain. This shows that not all worship is acceptable to God.

The same principle is demonstrated in the example of Nadab and Abihu, sons of the high priest Aaron (Lev. 10:1-3). These men offered incense to God, which He had commanded (Exod. 30:7-8); but the fire they used to burn the incense was not from the proper place (Lev. 16:12) and thus was “profane,” or unauthorized (cf. NIV, Lev. 10:1). The incense was commanded, but they offered fire God “had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1). Was it a trifle that Cain offered a sacrifice other than what God had commanded (cf. Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17)? Was it a small matter to God that Nadab and Abihu offered incense

burned with fire He had not commanded? Ask those two men! Moses, in speaking to Aaron about the matter of those who came near to worship God, said, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified" (Lev. 10:3). Aaron's two sons did not honor God when they changed His authorized worship by putting their own choices before God's.

It is easy to dismiss a matter by saying it is a trifle, but the introduction of mechanical instruments of music into the worship of the NT church has created serious divisions that continue to this day. Is dividing the Lord's church a trifle? Christ prayed, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10). Truth does not fear an honest investigation. Are you ready to search the Scriptures and accept those things it teaches as truth (Acts 17:11)? Can you give a ready defense for what you believe about the type of music God accepts in worship to Him under Christ's law (1 Pet. 3:15)?

Authority Is The Key To Proper Worship

The two examples used above, plus others we will mention later, show that people do not have the right to decide for ourselves the avenues we will use in worshiping God. What we do in worship must be authorized by God. Actually, we will contend and demonstrate that the use of instrumental music in worship to God in this Christian age is sinful and but one example of a faulty approach as to how the Bible authorizes. This same faulty approach leads to additional errors in worship and other areas of our relationship to God.

In considering the question of authority we will ask **how the Bible authorizes** us to act, not just in worship but in other areas of our lives. We will also discuss **the relationship between the Testaments**, considering if OT worship is carried over to the NT. Additionally, we will look at the place of **additions** to authorized worship **versus aids** that assist in the performance of specific commands.³

How The Bible Authorizes

The Bible teaches or instructs us to act in worship (or other areas of obedience) by means of direct statements, approved actions and implication. These three avenues of God's communication are called by many: commands, examples and necessary inferences, but I think the first mentioned designations are better descriptions of these aspects of how God communicates to us in Scripture.

Direct statements. At times the Bible authorizes us to act by means of direct statements. A direct statement may be a **declarative sentence** such as Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." A direct statement may be a **command** such as Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" A declarative statement may be a **conditional** such as the If—then statement of Colossians 3:1, "If then you were raised with Christ, [then] seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Roy Deaver, in his book on "Ascertaining Bible Authority," lists eleven types of declarative statements that teach or authorize. Accordingly, it is not sufficient to say that the Scriptures authorize by commands and ignore the rest of the declarative statements God has made in His Word.

Approved accounts of action.⁴ Not every account of an action performed in the NT is binding upon Christians. Obviously, the deceit and lying done by Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-10 is not an action **approved** for imitation by Christians. The apostle Peter's prejudicial hypocrisy is another example not approved by God (Gal. 2:11-14). Even approved accounts of action can be **required** or **optional**. One must first determine if an account of action is approved or condemned, then decide from the total Biblical teaching on the matters involved whether the actions are binding or optional.

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together (Acts 20:7-8).

This account of action tells us of the time and place the disciples in Troas met to "break bread," which, in a religious context, is a reference to partaking of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17). The **time** is significant because the first day of the week refers to the Lord's Day (cf. Rev. 1:10). The first day of the week was the Lord's Day because He was raised from the dead on that day (Mark 16:1; Mark 16:9); thus it became particularly the Lord's Day (cf. Rom. 1:4). This was the day Christians assembled for worship and the only day designated for partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 11:33). The **time** observed becomes a required account of action because there is simply **no authority** to assemble as a body of Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper at any other time. If this is not so, what other time is authorized?

The **place** (the upper room) is also a detail of this account of action, but there is no spiritual significance

attached to the specific place where Christians are to assemble for worship either here or elsewhere in Scripture. In fact, in John 4:20-24 the Lord said that the location for assembled worship to God, which was restricted in Judaism to Jerusalem, would not be characteristic of the New Covenant. Neither the city of Troas nor the location of the upper room are mandatory places where Christians must assemble for worship, but they are optional—that is, Christians certainly may assemble for worship in Troas or an upper room, but we are not restricted to those places detailed in this example.

Implication. This channel of authority has frequently been called “necessary inference.” However, when we look at the matter from what the Bible teaches we note that the Bible implies and that we, the student, draw necessary inferences from what the Scriptures imply. This seems to me to be the more proper way to express this means by which the Bible authorizes. There are two basic ways in which matters are communicated to us by God or man.

Explicit teaching is when something is stated in an outright and plain manner. For example, I might say, “My pet is a white dog.” I have explicitly made known that: (1) I have a pet; (2) that my pet is a dog; and (3) that my pet dog is white. Those three points are explicitly taught. An example of an explicit Bible statement would be, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (Jas. 2:24).

Implicit teaching is when something is implied without actually being stated. Implicit means “capable of being understood from something else though unexpressed” (**Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition**). For example, is it possible for me to communicate to you that I have a pet white dog without actually saying so outright? Indeed, it is possible. Suppose we go to an

animal shelter to find my lost pet. Upon arriving we find a black dog, a yellow cat and a white dog. If I said, “One of those three pets belongs to me, but my pet is neither black or yellow in color,” would you have any trouble determining that my pet was a white dog? I did not say so outright, but **I have implied it** and **you should infer** from what I did say that my pet is a white dog. If it is true that one of the three pets is mine, and if it is equally true that my pet is neither black nor yellow in color, then the only possible conclusion is that my pet is the white dog.

When we reason properly upon the explicit statements of Scripture to determine what is implied along with the explicit statements, then we have the totality of God’s teaching on any given topic. Of course, we can only draw conclusions that are warranted, based on the evidence given. It must be recognized that things that are implied by the Scriptures are just as authoritative as express statements. The psalmist said, “The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever” (Psm. 119:160, ASV). The word “sum” refers to adding all up that God says on any given topic. Only then do we have the whole truth.

One example of a Biblical implication is the teaching that the church of Christ and the kingdom of Christ are the same institution, even though the NT nowhere says explicitly, “The church is the same institution as the kingdom.” This is taught implicitly in Matthew 16:18-19:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

(See also Luke 22:14-30 with 1 Cor. 10 & 11; and Acts 2:47 with Col. 1:13).

There is need for caution in claiming implication from the Scriptures as authority for a particular teaching. We must not infer that the Scriptures imply something when they do not. For example, those who practice infant baptism often state that household baptisms imply that infants were baptized (cf. Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; et al.). However, remember that implication insists that a thing is so even though it is not specifically stated. In the places where household conversions are mentioned, it is not a necessary inference that the Scriptures imply infants were baptized. **First**, not all households had children, and it is an **assumption** that those mentioned as converting to Christ did have. **Second**, if one assumes there were children, one would have to make the **further assumption** that there were infants among them. **Third**, the very nature of NT baptism implies that those who are proper candidates for baptism must be old enough to express personal faith in Christ (Mark 16:16) and to repent of personal sins in His Name (Acts 2:38; Acts 10:43; Acts 11:18) before qualifying for baptism. This proper implication, based on these Scriptures and others, negates any claimed implication that household baptisms included infants. Likewise, **one must not assume** that instruments of music are implied in certain Biblical passages regarding NT worship.

Summary. According to this part of our study, if God authorizes mechanical instruments of music for use in Christian worship, there must be either a direct statement to that effect, an approved action of such use, or an implication that their use is authorized for NT worship. What passage or passages of Scripture provide this authority? _____

Generic And Specific Authority

Generic Authority. A generic (general) statement authorizes doing a certain thing without giving specific

direction on how to accomplish it. For example, the Great Commission of the Lord in Matthew 28:19 gives the generic commands: “go..teach.” The instruction to “go” commands action without giving all the specifics involved. The “going” part of the command can be obeyed by using our feet or riding as means of going. The methods of transportation are not specified in this verse. Other passages may impact a command by specifying ways of fulfilling the command, but that is not the case in the matter of “going.” “Teach” (KJV) is perhaps better translated “make disciples” (NKJV et al.), but disciples are made by teaching. This teaching is not specified as to method, such as visual aids, tracts, worksheets, literature, blackboards, Powerpoint, etc., but the content is restricted to the things Christ commanded the apostles (Matt. 28:20), which is “the gospel” in Mark 16:15. If we use the aids mentioned above, we are still only teaching—doing the thing commanded.

If God had said, “Make music to Me in NT worship,” that would be a generic command that would authorize playing instruments, singing, or a combination of the two. Whatever was necessary in order to make music, instrumental or vocal, would be authorized by the generic command, unless other teaching prohibited or restricted such acts. However, God did not give a generic command to “make music” in worship to Him; He specifically said to sing.

Specific Authority. A specific statement authorizes more exactly what is to be done, and logically one cannot do what is specified by performing a different act. For example, in Exodus 12 God told each family in Israel to “sacrifice a **lamb**.” The type of sacrifice was specific—a lamb. The Israelites could not obey that command by sacrificing a different animal such as a cow. When God makes it specific we cannot change it. The **kind** of animal was specified. The same principle can be demonstrated by

the action of baptism. Since the Greek word *baptisma* means immersion, one cannot be baptized by having water poured or sprinkled over one's head. Doing these other actions changes the act required by the command to baptize or be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

On the topic of music offered as worship to God in the NT Christian age, note the following passages:

Matt 26:30 - And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. [parallel passage in Mark 14:26]

Acts 16:25 - But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Rom 15:9 - and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: 'For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.'

1 Cor 14:15 - What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

Eph 5:19 - speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Col 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.

Heb 2:12 - saying: I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.

Heb 13:15 - Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

Jas 5:13 - Is anyone suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

Except for the passages in the book of Revelation that figuratively describe worship events **in heaven**,

which we will discuss later, these are the total passages in the NT dealing with music in worship to God in the Christian age. Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 admittedly are before the Christian age began on Pentecost, but they do show that group or assembly singing was a practice of God's people. The passages from Acts 16:25 through James 5:13 deal with worship to God during the Christian age and **the only authority for music they provide is for singing**. There are no direct statements, approved examples, nor implications authorizing the use of mechanical instruments of music in NT worship, but singing is specified.

The Law of Exclusion

When God is specific about the type of music (singing) He requires in worship to Him in the NT period, He excludes (prohibits) all other types of music (such as instrumental music), unless there are other statements elsewhere that authorize their use. This is an important principle to recognize since **it illustrates that God's silence is authoritative in the matter of restricting what we are permitted to do**. For example, many of those in favor of using mechanical instruments of music in NT worship say, "God did not say **not** to use instruments in NT worship," or, "They were used in the OT worship and God didn't say **not** to use them in NT worship."

We understand the principle of authority and exclusion in everyday life, but many reject or ignore it in our relationships to God. Suppose you contracted with a painter to paint your house. You tell him that you want your house painted white and you then leave on a two weeks vacation. When you return you find your house painted white—but it is also painted blue, red, yellow and green. When you call the painter to object to what he has done he says, "Well, yes, you said to paint your house white,

but you didn't say not to paint it blue, red, yellow and green too. I like the multi-colored look." What would you say? You would say, "I said I wanted my house painted white. That is the only color I authorized. When I said 'white' that excluded all other colors!" You would also feel very insulted that your painter ignored your stated desire and did what he wanted to do with your property—and you would be justified in feeling that way. Are we to show less respect for God's Word and what He specifies in worship to Him?

Notice two Biblical examples regarding this matter of specifics and the law of exclusion. 2 Chronicles 26:1-15 tells of a good king in Judah named Uzziah. Of him it was said, "And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done" (2 Chron. 26:4). Such language was not used of many kings in Judah, but Uzziah's attitude toward doing God's will changed. Note 2 Chronicles 26:16-21:

But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the LORD — valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God." Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the

LORD had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD.

When God specified that the sons of Aaron were to be those who burned incense (Exod. 30:7-8), that excluded those from other tribes. Uzziah, of Judah, was not authorized. Could Uzziah have said to God, “Lord, You did not say that kings could not burn incense”? The Lord’s response would have been, “Once I specified who was to burn incense, I did not have to go down the line and name everyone who was not authorized. I excluded all others when I specified the sons of Aaron.” In like manner, since God has specified singing as the type of music in NT worship and there is no other teaching authorizing mechanical instruments, it is excluded.

A second example in Hebrews 7:11-14 is even more impressive.

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.

Again, it is clear that God specified the sons of Aaron of the tribe of Levi to be priests (Exod. 28). God did not name all the other tribes, saying, “No one from Reuben may be a priest, no one from Simeon may be a priest, no one from Judah may be a priest,” etc. God said all He needed to say when He specified that priests were to be from the tribe

of Levi! The Hebrews writer pointed this out, stating, “For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, **of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood**” (Heb. 7:14). In like manner, God said to “sing” in our NT worship to Him (cf. Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; Heb. 13:15; Jas. 5:13), specifying the type of music He approves, and **He has spoken nothing concerning the use of instrumental music in NT worship**, thereby excluding it as surely as He excluded the tribe of Judah from the priesthood.

Music In New Testament Worship

AUTHORIZED

Singing
Ephesians 5:19
Colossians 3:16

Commanded Specific

Expediencies:

Song books
Song leader
Pitch
Parts (soprano, tenor, alto, bass)

APPROVED

UNAUTHORIZED

Mechanical Instruments
What Scripture?

Silence Excluded

Claimed expediencies:

Piano
Organ
Violin
etc.

SINFUL

The Use Of Expediencies

Sometimes proponents of instrumental music in NT worship state that it is merely an “expediency” or an “aid” to the command by God to “sing” in musical worship to Him in the NT. Expediency can be defined as “that which is advantageous or advisable under the circumstances; that which facilitates the motion or progress of a piece of business.” In common words an expediency is that which helps carry out a command or duty smoothly or completely.

For example, baptisteries are expedients to the command to be baptized; so are baptismal garments, towels, wader boots, etc. One could be baptized in a creek, river, lake or any pool of water large enough to immerse someone, but at times it is not as convenient (or even difficult at times) to baptize using those means. However, one could easily be baptized in a natural water source and do so in one's own clothing and drip-dry or air-dry. Expedients or aids like those just named above merely help facilitate the doing of a command or duty; they do not change the nature of a command.

To illustrate, shoes or a cane are aids or expedients to walking. They simply assist the walking process without changing walking into some other type of action. A bicycle is not an aid or expedient to walking; it is a means of **riding**. Riding is a different action than walking. You may still be using your feet and legs, but you have changed the action from walking to riding. Walk is a specific way of going; riding is a different specific way of going. If God commanded us to **go** to town we could go by walking or riding. If God commands us to **walk** to town we cannot fulfill that command by riding.

In the same manner, we cannot obey God's command for us to sing to Him in NT worship by adding or substituting a different action—the playing of mechanical instruments of music. We have added or substituted another element (action) to what was required—singing. Remember our earlier study of the worship experiences of Cain and Abel and Nadab and Abihu? We have no authority to add, substitute or modify what God has commanded in our worship to Him. To do so presumes an authority that exceeds God's!

We previously noted that there are two types of music: vocal (singing) and instrumental. Singing is authorized by God for NT worship, mechanical

instruments are not. When we add the instrument we introduce a parallel or coordinate element into the worship. When we sing with the mechanical instrument we may still be singing, but we have added playing—an unauthorized kind of music. It thereby becomes not an aid but an unauthorized addition.

Consider the Lord's Supper as an example to help you understand the differences between aids and additions. In partaking of the Lord's Supper we are told to partake of the unleavened bread in remembrance of Christ's body given for us on the cross, and we drink the fruit of the vine in remembrance of Christ's blood which was shed for us on that cross (Matt. 26:26-29; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). **Authorized aids** in partaking of these elements of remembrance could be: the use of a common cup or individual cups for distributing the fruit of the vine, a plate or plates upon which to serve the unleavened bread and a table to hold these items of remembrance before and after their distribution to the assembly. In using these items one is still doing nothing more or less than remembering the body and blood of our Lord given for our redemption upon the cross. These are merely expediciencies that facilitate the observance of the commands and duties relative to observing the Lord's Supper.

However, anything that adds to, detracts from or modifies the elements of remembrance (fruit of the vine and unleavened bread) become **unauthorized additions**. Suppose that someone said, "You know, the unleavened bread is rather tasteless. It would aid us greatly in partaking of that element of remembrance if we spread some jelly or peanut butter on it." This would be an unauthorized action by adding another element to the fruit of the vine and the unleavened bread. Those who desire the spread on the bread might call it an "aid" but in truth it is an addition, wholly unauthorized by God's Word. The

table, cups and plates mentioned in the previous paragraph are all **subordinate** to the elements of remembrance given by Scripture. The addition of jelly or peanut butter is introducing elements that are **coordinate** to the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. Authorized aids or expedients are always subordinate, since coordinate elements (something of the same order, rank or power) always add to or change the nature of the specifically authorized action. Remember our previous discussion on using a cane as an aid to walking versus riding a bicycle. A bicycle is coordinate with walking and it changes the way of “going” from walking to riding. In the same way mechanical instruments of music are not an aid or expedient to singing since it adds a different and coordinate kind of music to what is commanded—singing. Legitimate authorized aids to singing would be the use of songbooks, having a song leader, four part harmony, etc.; for in utilizing these aids one is still doing nothing more than singing.

When discussing Bible authority and expediency one must realize that expediencies are authorized only in areas that are governed by NT teaching by direct statements, approved examples and implication. Where there is no law established by these means there are no authorized expedients or aids. Robert Richardson, a Gospel preacher in the Restoration Movement stated the matter as follows:

As it regards the use of musical instruments in church worship, the case is wholly different. This can never be a question of expediency, for the simple reason there is no law prescribing or authorizing it. If it were said anywhere in the New Testament that Christians should use instruments, then it would become a question of expediency what kind of instrument was to be used, whether an organ or melodeon, the “loud-sounding cymbals,” or the “light guitar;” whether it should cost \$50 or \$500 or \$1,000,

and what circumstances should regulate the performance...My position was simply that, as expediency has to do with the manner, times, means and circumstances connected with the doing of things, no question of expediency can rightfully arise until it is *first* proved that the things themselves are *lawful* and proper to be done. I feared, and my fears have been fully confirmed by some who have written since on the subject, that expediency was supposed to occupy a wide sphere *beyond* the boundaries of law, and, in its jurisdiction, to be quite independent of law. My view is, that with us, it can have no place at all until law has first authorized something to be done, and that, therefore, its exercise must be restricted within the limits of some law, or rule of life and action. [West, Vol. 2, pp. 90-91]

J. W. Briney, at a time when he opposed the introduction of instruments into the NT worship⁵ said:

Expediency cannot be allowed to affect the character of a divine ordinance. Whatever adds to, subtracts from, or in any way modifies a divine ordinance, affects its character. Such are the principles that must regulate the work of expediency in the kingdom of God. [West, Vol. 2, p. 91]

Summary. Mechanical instruments of music introduced into NT worship are not expedients or aids, but additions that are without authority because there is no NT teaching authorizing them. There is an authority principle stated in Scripture that says: **“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”** (Col. 3:17). It is not enough to say, “Where does the Bible say **not to** use mechanical instruments in NT worship?” It is proper to ask, “Where in the NT is the use of mechanical instruments authorized for Christians in

worship to God?” To do something in Jesus’ name is to do it by His authority and such authority is shown by direct statements, approved examples and implication. Without such authority our worship will not be pleasing to God. Singing is authorized by both direct statement and example (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15; 1 Cor. 14:26 et al.).

As stated earlier, the use of mechanical instruments in NT worship is a symptom of a much larger problem, that is, how to determine when we have Bible authority. We must know when we have authority to act in worship and other areas of Bible teaching. The use of mechanical instruments in worship simply affords us an excellent means of illustrating the real problem and an opportunity of correcting this abuse in NT worship.

More Old Testament Lessons On Worship

The following NT passages demonstrate that, while the OT is not our Law for today under Christ, there are lessons to be learned by observing the acts of OT characters and God’s response to what they did or did not do.

Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted (1 Cor. 10:6).

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10:11).

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

There are things we can **learn** from these examples and there are **admonitions** (warnings) for us to heed. This is

a proper use of the OT for those of us under the NT Law of Christ (Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 1:25; Heb. 7:12 et al.). We have already discussed Cain and Abel, plus Nadab and Abihu, so let us consider some further examples.

Moses

In Exodus 17:6 when the people of Israel were encamped at Rephidim after the exodus from Egypt, God told Moses to go to the rock in Horeb “and you shall **strike the rock**, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink.” Later, during the wilderness wanderings of Israel at Kadesh there was a similar outcry of the people for water. Note:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. **Speak to the rock** before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.” So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them” (Num. 20:7-12).

These events in the life of Moses are instructive in several ways. **First**, although there were similarities between these two events, Moses was given different instructions to follow. In the **first** event he was told to **strike the rock**; in the **second** he was told **speak to the rock**. **Second**, in the latter of these two events God did not say,

“Moses, do not strike the rock.” **Third**, it is clear that what God approved of at one time He may later disapprove, even if the events are similar. **Fourth**, the fact that Moses did something other than what he was commanded by God is said to be **unbelief** and a **failure to sanctify or hallow God** before the eyes of Israel. In other words, Moses did not do what God said to do like God said to do it. He disobeyed and thus showed unbelief and disregard for God’s sovereignty

Consider these lessons. **First**, although God once commanded (some say God only permitted) the use of mechanical instruments in worship to Him, such would not imply that He would always be pleased with their usage. A **second** lesson would be that if God had wanted Moses to strike the rock, He would have authorized Him to do so—but God did not so command. If God wanted us to use mechanical instruments of music in our NT worship to Him He would have authorized them by the means we have already thoroughly discussed (direct statement, approved example or implication).

Third, God did not have to say, “Do not strike the rock,” for He specified that Moses was to speak to the rock. God has specified singing in our NT worship and did not have to say, “Do not play mechanical instruments in worship to Me.”

Fourth, a refusal to sing only, without the addition of instrumental music in our worship, shows an attitude of unbelief on our part and is likewise an insult to God’s sovereign character. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), but we have no word of God that authorizes using mechanical instruments in our NT worship. Consequently, we cannot do such by faith. Neither do we have the right to say to God, “I know you said sing in NT worship, but I like the mechanical instruments so I’m adding them to my worship.” Moses missed the

promised land of Canaan because of his attitudes expressed in these events; we can miss the greater promised land if we engage in the same type of actions and refuse to repent and correct them.

King Saul

Two events in the life of Saul, first human king of Israel, also provide some lessons and admonitions for us. 1 Samuel 13:1-14 and 1 Samuel 15:1-35 show that Saul's attitudes about worship to God were not according to God's will. When Samuel did not come down to Gilgal at the time Saul thought was proper (1 Sam. 13:8-9), Saul went ahead and offered the sacrifice Samuel had promised to offer in 1 Samuel 10:8. When Saul had finished the offering, Samuel⁶ arrived and rebuked him, for Saul was not a priest and had no authority to offer sacrifices (1 Sam. 13:10-14; cf. Num. 3-4). When questioned by Samuel, Saul blamed the people and the situation and said because of the circumstances "I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering" (1 Sam. 13:12).

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue...(1 Sam. 13:13-14).

Saul's circumstances, his feelings about what to do, and his authority as king, did not permit him to act in disobedience to God's stated command.

A similar situation occurred in 1 Samuel 15. Saul was commanded by God to destroy all of the Amalekites and all their possessions (1 Sam. 15:3).

And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and

utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed (1 Sam. 15:7-9).

When Samuel came down to Gilgal, Saul met him and said, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (1 Sam. 15:13). When Samuel pointed out that king Agag of the Amalekites was still alive and many of that nation's flocks and herds remained, Saul again defended himself.

And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:20-21).

Saul offered what he thought was excellent justification for his actions, stating that he allowed the people to save the best of the flocks and herds to be sacrificed to God. What could possibly be wrong with that thinking? Would not God be pleased that he and the people gave earnest thought to the great number of sacrifices they could offer in honor to God? How could God possibly be displeased with their good intentions?

So Samuel said:

Has 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 heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

O, how the rebuke of Samuel to Saul and the people needs to be heard today! God said, “Sing,” not, “Play,” nor “Sing and play.” Do we think today that we can show more honor to God or worship Him more meaningfully by adding to the way He said to worship Him? Obviously we cannot! All of schemes and plans we can lay out as forms of worship to God mean nothing, in spite of our seemingly good intentions, if we do not do what God says like God says to do it. **Obedience is the key to acceptable worship!** God would rather have our simple submission to the revealed manner He directs us to worship Him than adding to, detracting from, or modifying His commands. When Saul thought he could change what God had already commanded, he became too big to do what was right (1 Sam. 15:17-19).

King David, Uzzah And Israel

After the ark of the covenant had been captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4) and then returned to Israel, it remained at Kirjath-Jearim at the house of Abinidab for twenty years (1 Sam. 6:21-7:2). King David was determined to return the ark to Jerusalem and made a tabernacle (tent) in which to place the ark. The means for transporting the ark was matter of specific revelation from God to Israel.

And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it (Exod. 25:10-15).

It was the duty of the sons of Kohath to personally carry the ark by means of the poles inserted through the four rings of gold on the sides of the ark. No one was to touch the ark of the covenant under penalty of death. All of this was made clear to Israel in the Law of Moses and the king was to keep a copy of the Law beside his throne (Deut. 17:18-20).

This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles.....And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry (Num. 4:4-6; Num. 4:15).

Of further interest is the fact that God gave the other two families of Levites involved in dismantling and carrying the Tabernacle ox carts on which to transport parts of the Tabernacle. The family of Gershon had two carts and four oxen and the family of Merari had four carts and eight oxen (Num. 7:6-8). "But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders" (Num. 7:9).

Kings and priests had the proper information available to them to properly move the ark of the covenant without incident and they evidently put the ark of the covenant on the ox cart by means of the poles for no one was struck dead from touching the ark at that time. However, they really did not pay attention to what God

had said. Consequently, when the ark was being transported on the ox cart and the oxen stumbled, Uzzah, fearing the ark would fall, reached forth his hand and took hold of it. The Lord's anger came against Uzzah for his transgression and he was struck dead (1 Chron. 13:1-10; cf. 2 Sam. 6). David became angry with God and said, "How can I bring the ark of God to me?" (1 Chron. 13:12). Well, David, do what God said to do!

By 1 Chronicles 15, David, the priests and Israel came to realize their error. They simply had not followed God's revealed Word on how to transport the ark:

He said to them, "You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel to the place I have prepared for it. For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order." So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD (1 Chron. 15:12-15).

Were David, the priests and people of Israel ignorant of what God's Word said regarding moving the ark? Did they feel that the trip of approximately ten miles from Kirjath-Jearim to Jerusalem, through the hill country of Judah, was just too much of a burden for the priests to carry the ark on their shoulders? Or, did they know what God had said but felt it really did not matter, that God would not care if they deviated from His commandments? The point of all this is that what God commands does make a difference. When God has specified matters of worship or other areas of obedience we must submit to His declared will. We must not think that we can design a better way

or that God will not really mind if we change what He has specified. Multitudes in religion think that the meaning and purpose of baptism does not matter as long as we are sincere. Even more believe that singing in worship with instrumental music is only a trifle and that one does not need authority for engaging in it, even though God has specified and authorized only singing for NT worship.

Summary. These lessons from the OT are connected with principles of worship and obedience in service to God. While they are not our authority for the specific ways in which we are to worship God under Christ's NT system, they do give us lessons for learning and warnings about the seriousness with which we are to approach our NT worship to God (cf. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6; 1 Cor. 10:11). These examples show that when God is detailed enough to be specific about how we are to worship Him, we had better be concerned to do what He says like He says to do it. In the NT God has said, "Sing."

Is Old Testament Worship Authority For Christian Worship?

Do the elements of OT worship provide authority for Christians to engage in the same elements of worship under Christ's NT system? Many seem to believe so when they state, "God placed mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the OT system and Christ never took them out. The Psalms speak of instruments frequently and we are to sing psalms today, according to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16." The claims above sound good for those who promote instrumental music in NT worship but they do not present the truth on these matters from the NT.

Old Testament Worship Has Been Superseded

We are not saying that the OT is of no value, for we have illustrated a large measure of its value in previous

sections of this lecture (cf. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 1 Cor 10:11). However, the worship of God through Christ has replaced the OT worship of God through the Law of Moses:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (Col. 2:13-17).

The system under Moses was but a shadow prefiguring the NT system of Christ (Heb. 9:1-10). Jesus “abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace” (Eph. 2:15).

Those who seek justification from the OT are serving a Law no longer effective and are fallen from grace (Gal. 3:25; Gal. 5:4). Such persons are duty bound to keep the whole OT law if they try to keep a part of it (Gal. 5:1-2; Jas. 2:10). There are benefits to be derived from all of God’s Word, but the Psalms are not our authority for worship under Christ. They are part of the Law (cf. John 10:34 with Psm. 82:6). God took mechanical instruments of music out of the worship when He took away the Old Law. Christ did take them out of acceptable worship to God when He established His own system of worship in His NT church.

If one contends that Christ never specifically said He took instruments out of the worship, we respond that He never specifically said He removed many things found in OT worship but rejected by many who contend for instrumental music today. Where did Jesus specifically mention taking away burning incense (Exod. 30), infant

membership (Gen. 17:9-14), tithing (Lev. 27:30-33), special priestly clothing (Exod. 28) and many other items? Are we therefore authorized to use these things? If one contends for instrumental music by saying God put it in and Christ never took it out, how can that person reject these other things? Through whatever “crack in the door” one brings mechanical instruments of music from the OT into the worship of the NT church, another can bring in a multitude of other unauthorized practices and impose them on the church.

This Approach Is Not Inconsistent

Someone might ask, “How can you appeal so much to the OT in the arguments you make against mechanical instruments of music and refuse to accept what the OT says that allow instruments in worship?”

First, the teaching in passages we have used to illustrate how the Bible authorizes and how God has dealt with people who do not listen to and heed His Word are not limited to the OT dispensations or the changes between the testaments. These are passages that illustrate “eternal principles” in God’s revealed Word (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6; 1 Cor. 10:11).

Second, we may have authority to do some things today in worship to God that were also done in the OT, but we practice those things either because they illustrate an eternal principle or they are also specified in the NT.

Third, the NT determines what is specifically passed on for Christians to practice in worship to God in the Lord’s church. We have already seen repeatedly that the NT does not authorize mechanical instruments.

The following article by the late brother Franklin Camp is perhaps the best I have read on this particular argument. Consider it carefully.

**IF MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC
ARE RIGHT IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP,
WILL YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?**

Franklin Camp / 1915-1991

Those who use instrumental music in worship think it is simple to justify it. If it is as easy to justify as some think, then it ought not to be difficult to answer these questions. I will first state the argument that is used to justify instrumental music and then ask questions based on the argument.

The most usual argument that is made for its use is to appeal to the Old Testament. Those who use it will say, "I can find it in the Old Testament." If the Old Testament justifies its use in Christian worship, will you answer these questions?

When you appeal to the Old Testament to justify its use, is that not an admission that the New Testament does not authorize its use? If it is authorized in the New Testament, then why appeal to the Old Testament to try to justify it?

If it was right in the Old Testament, was it not right because it was mentioned in the Old Testament? Would you try to prove it right by the Old Testament if it was not mentioned in the Old Testament?

If it had to be mentioned in the Old Testament to make it right, would it not follow that it must be mentioned in the New Testament to justify its use today since we live under the New Testament (Col. 2:14)? Where is it mentioned in the New Testament as being in Christian worship?

To appeal to the Old Testament is an admission that for it to be right there, it had to be mentioned. Does not this argument cancel the argument made by saying, "Where does the New Testament say we cannot use it?"

If the Old Testament is authority for mechanical instruments of music, then why is it not authority for other things as well? When it was authority for instrumental music, was it not also authority for burning incense, animal sacrifice, Sabbath keeping and stoning those who broke the Sabbath? When and how did it cease to be authority for burning incense, animal sacrifice, Sabbath keeping and stoning Sabbath breakers, but continue to be authority for instrumental music?

There are some who contend that instrumental music was prophesied in the Old Testament, in such passages as Psalms 87:5-7. Those who use this passage to justify it think that Zion or Jerusalem is the church. If Zion or Jerusalem is the church, what does Tyre, Babylon, Philistia and Ethiopia mean?

If this is a prophecy of the New Testament church, why did not some inspired men quote it in the New Testament? If this is a prophecy of the church, how do you account for the fact that though there are many quotations in the New Testament from the Old Testament, not one of them mentions instrumental music in Christian worship?

How would you account for the fact when the New Testament does quote from the book of Psalms, the quotations are in connection with singing and not playing mechanical instruments? In Romans 15:9, Paul quotes Psalms 22:22. If instrumental music was prophesied from the Psalms, why did Paul quote two of the Psalms about singing but none about instrumental music?

If instrumental music was prophesied, how can you account for the fact that the prophecy was not fulfilled? It is a certain fact that the early church did not use instrumental music.

If it was prophesied, then it is the only prophecy that I know of that failed.

In Deuteronomy 18:22, God says that when a prophet prophesies a thing and it does not come to pass, you may know that the prophet is a false prophet. Would it not follow that if the Psalms prophesied instrumental music, since it did not come to pass, the prophet was a false prophet?

Does “Psallo” In The NT Require A Mechanical Instrument?

One of the arguments frequently made by those who promote mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship is that the Greek word *psallo* is a translation of OT Hebrew word(s) that were used with reference to playing instruments of music in worship. Some concede that *psallo* does not always require the instrument, but

that it may include it and therefore is authority for us to use it in NT worship. Is this possibly the manner in which the OT authorizes mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship? Below are the places in the NT where a form of the word *psallo* is found:

[A]nd that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing [*psallo*] to Your name (Rom. 15:9).

What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing [*psallo*] with the spirit, and I will also sing [*psallo*] with the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15).

[S]peaking to one another in psalms [*psalmais*] and hymns and spiritual songs, singing [*psalontes*] and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms [*psalmois*] and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms [*psalleto*] (Jas. 5:13).

Not one time does any standard committee type translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into English translate “*psallo*” (or its various forms) in the NT as “to play” or “to sing and play”! A committee type translation is a work that is produced by a group of Biblical language scholars, sometimes dozens, (e.g., the ASV had 101 men working on its translation). This includes these versions: King James, American Standard, Revised Standard, New American Standard, New International,

New King James, New Revised Standard, English Standard, Christian Standard, and others. If the Greek language demands that a mechanical instrument is (or can be) part of the word *psallo*, why did none of the Greek scholars involved in these translations so translate it?

Psallo originally meant “a. to pluck off, pull out (the hair)...b. to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang...” (**Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon**, p. 675). From the radical meaning of plucking it came to mean, “to play on a stringed instrument, to play the harp...” (Ibid.). In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT Scriptures, it sometimes meant, “to sing to the music of the harp” (Ibid.). By the time of the NT the plucking of the hair and playing of the harp were not primary meanings of this word in the common Greek language. Consequently, for its NT meaning Thayer said, “**in the N. T. to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song, Jas. v.13...**” (emphasis supplied). Thus, the significant meaning of *psallo* came to be “sing” and not “play.”

The 1979 edition of the **Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich & Danker Greek-English Lexicon** says the change in the meaning of *psallo* “continued until [*psallo*] in Mod[ern] G[reek] means ‘sing’ exclusively...w[ith] no reference to instrumental accompaniment” (p. 891). Therefore, those passages in the NT where a form of *psallo* is used refer to singing and this point is in harmony with the requirements of God for us to sing in worship to Him (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13).

Still, there are those who, contrary to the evidence, insist that the mechanical instrument inheres (meaning it is inseparable) in the word *psallo*. **First**, the Greek-English Lexicons do not support this claim. **Second**, if a mechanical instrument automatically was included in the meaning of *psallo*, then everyone who worshipped God in song would also have to play a stringed instrument—something that

could be plucked or twanged. **Third**, if one contends that the use of an instrument must be present when one is *psallo*-ing, then one would not be doing what God said to do if one merely sang. It would be necessary for everyone singing also to be plucking an instrument while he/she was singing. It will not do to say the instrument is included in *psallo* and then say it doesn't make any difference if one plays the instrument or not, that one can *psallo* without it.

Consider the following from the pen of the late J. W. Roberts:

The truth is that neither *zamar* nor *psallo* meant “play on an instrument.” Both words primarily meant to prune (*zamar*), pluck, pick, etc. The Hebrew [*zamar*] word is used in Lev. [2]5:3, 4). The Greek word [*psallo*] might mean the plucking of hair (A. Pers. 1062), of bows (E. Ba. 784), or of a carpenter's string (AP 6.103). The noun meant then whatever kind of twitching, etc., the context suggested. The point is that the verb sometimes took an object (usually) in the dative, which meant play “with” or “on” a certain instrument—whatever it was. When that instrument was a musical instrument, the verb had the instrument as a dative object. Thus *psallo* did not mean “playing on an instrument,” nor did *psalmos* mean a playing; but the word **plus** the object might have that meaning. Lev. 25:3, 4 reads, “You shall prune your vineyard,” and the verb is *zamar*.

A check of the concordance of the Septuagint [Greek OT] will show that always when the verb means “play” the object is present. This is true both of the Greek word and of the Hebrew word which it translates. A few examples may be consulted. For example, Psalms 33:2 reads, “Praise the Lord with the harp; play (*psalate*) on a ten stringed psaltery to him.” Consult also Psalms 71:22; Psalms 98:5; Psalms 144:9. But notice that when the word is used in the absolute, with no objects, i.e., simply as an intransitive

verb, the meaning is simply “sing,” e.g., 2 Sam. 22:50 and Psalms 18:49. (These are the passages quoted in Rom. 15:19 [should read Rom. 15:9]); see also Judges 5:3; Psalms 9:11; 30:4; 47:7, etc....

All New Testament references are of this latter type: All are absolute uses without the instrument. All are consequently to be translated and interpreted merely “sing.” The possible exception is Eph. 5:19, where “with the heart” may (as Conybeare and Howson claim) be a figurative use of the heart as an instrument instead of the harps and viols of the pagan or Jewish worship.

That this is all true is proved by the fact that the early Greek church, which certainly knew the language, was in violent opposition to mechanical music in the worship. Compare, for example, Clement of Alexand[ria], **Paedagogus** 2:4 and Orig[e]n Commentary **In Psalm** (Patrologia Graeca 23, 1171). [From: “Psallo—Its Meaning: A Review,” *Firm Foundation*, Austin, TX, March 24, 1959.]

Summary. Nothing from the OT requires that we understand that its practices for worship are bound upon those who follow the Christian system of the NT. The ceremonies and systems of OT worship were done away in Christ (Col. 2:14) and the only authority we have in the NT is to make music by singing praises from the heart in worship to God.

Additional Arguments For Instrumental Music Answered⁷

“Worship Is Emotional Not Physical”

Some have contended that worship is purely emotional and cannot be corrupted by anything external such as mechanical instruments of music as long as the worshiper is sincere. Such an argument is ridiculous and would permit virtually anything intended as worship as

long as it was sincerely offered—including prostitution and infant sacrifice.

We have provided numerous examples where God rejected the worship of people because their actions were improper (cf. Cain and Abel, Gen. 4; Nadab and Abihu, Lev. 10 et al.). As long as we are in this body of flesh God holds us responsible for our actions—good or bad (Matt. 25:34-46; Rom. 2:6-9; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Cor. 7:1). In order to worship God acceptably we are required to perform specific physical acts such as eating and drinking the elements of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), singing praise with our lips (Heb. 13:15), praying in an audible voice (1 Cor. 14:15-16), giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), etc.

“The Culture Of The Early Church Stifled The Use Of Instruments”

Supposedly we are now more culturally refined and willing to use our refinements in our worship to God. Of course, if using mechanical instruments of music in worship is merely a matter of culture and not a command then it makes no difference whether they are used or not. Those who use this argument destroy many of their other arguments, such as contending that the instrument is a part of the command to *psallo* and must be used. Didn't the early church understand the meaning of *psallo* and *psalmos* as advocates for the instrument do today? The fact is that mechanical instruments of music were readily available in NT times and some types were not at all expensive. If God had required them the church could have easily complied. Neither the sacred history of Scripture nor early church history recorded by uninspired man will bear out this contention that culture stifled the use of instruments by the early church. It was nearly seven centuries before instruments began to make their way into

the church and over a thousand years before they were in widespread use. See comments in the history section below. Some teaching of God's revealed truths took longer to be practiced widely, such as the Great Commission of the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16), but by the second half of the first century the revelation of God's will was widespread and being practiced by the churches (Col. 1:23; Col. 4:14; 2 Pet. 3:15-18; Jude 3).

“The System Of Interpretation By Non-instrumental Groups Is Divisive”

Simply making such a charge against those opposed to the instrument does not prove it to be true. One must prove that our “system of interpretation” is responsible for the divisions and not the refusal to follow God's will by those who divide. Any abuse of a system does not argue against the proper use of it. The system is right because it is Biblical, although we may sometimes fail to apply it properly.

Instrumentalists are divided with each other over more matters than non-instrumentalists are. Given their argument stated above what does that say about their system of interpretation? Mormons claim that the Protestant church is badly divided because they don't have an earthly church head and continuous revelation. Are they right on those matters? Should we quickly abandon our beliefs merely because someone says those beliefs are the cause of division? Certainly not! The Bible is the standard by which all spiritual matters are to be decided (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Those instrumentalists that make such a charge could easily have the charge thrown back at them. It was the instrumentalists who split the Lord's church with their insistence on using the instrument and driving the wedge of division into the church. Faithful brethren were then and are now occupying the same position as

the first century NT church. They didn't move from their original position, but the instrumentalists insisted on pushing the instrument into the churches and divided the brotherhood of Christ. Now tell me whose method of interpretation is divisive!

“Some Worship With Instruments At Home, Why Not The Assemblies?”

God only has one way to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Singing to God at worship in the home would be governed by the same rules for worshiping Him in the assemblies. If some do try to worship in song at home with the instrument, but not in the assemblies, they are inconsistent, but such does not prove that the instrument is right in NT worship.

“I Can Worship With The Instrument And Just Ignore It”

If one can say this about the instrument one could say this about any innovation imposed upon the worship such as bowing before statues, incense, tongue speaking, dancing, etc. When the instrument is used in the worship it is a part of that service devoted to God (2 Chron. 5:3, 2 Chron. 5:12-13; 2 Chron. 29:25-28). We are not guiltless when we participate in a wrong act even if another is leading in the wrongdoing (1 Tim. 5:22; 2 John 9-11).

“Instrumental Music Is Not Sinful In And Of Itself”

No one has said that all instrumental music is sinful; just that God has not authorized its use in NT worship and thus it would be sinful in that context. One can enjoy secular music and songs that are not contrary to God's laws, but we must recognize their place. The medical act of circumcision or the washing of hands are not wrong either, but we have no right to insist that they are acceptable acts of worship (Gal. 5:6; Matt. 15:1-9). Many OT practices were certainly not sinful in and of themselves but they are not authorized as law in the NT.

“The Bible Does Not Say, ‘Sing Only’”

The Bible does not say, “Immerse only for baptism,” but shall we accept sprinkling or pouring water on a candidate as proper actions for baptism? The Bible doesn’t explicitly say, “Baptize only believers,” so shall we accept infant baptism? On and on we could go. The NT does say to sing, but no where says to play an instrument in worship to God.

“People Should Use Their Musical Talent To Play Instruments To Worship God”

This would make an individual’s talent the standard of determining acceptable worship rather than the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Foy E. Wallace, Jr. has said, “[I]f natural talent is the principle of Divine worship, why did Paul specify anything? In that case we would need no legislation at all—just do what is ‘natural’ in everything” (Bales, 246). Do we walk by faith that comes from hearing God’s Word (2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17) or by a self-determined will that puts our desires over God’s (Col. 2:23)? If individual talent is the determining factor a belly dancer or gourmet cook could both worship God equally by their talents. Some say that these talents should be “spiritually stimulating,” but who is to determine which talents are spiritually stimulating? Once you leave the Bible you swim in a sea of the uncertainty of personal opinion in which one idea is as good as the next (cf. Judg. 17:6; Judg. 21:25).

“There Are Singers With Harps In Heaven, So We Can Have Them In The Church”

There are harps mentioned in worship settings in heaven in Revelation 5:8; Revelation 14:2 and Revelation 15:2, and in a secular setting in Revelation 18:22. The harps in worship settings may seem to be an extremely strong argument in favor of their use in NT worship today; however, when properly considered there is nothing in the

book of Revelation that authorizes the use of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship.

The book of Revelation is full of signs and symbols that are not intended to be taken literally. This is characteristic of the apocalyptic style of literature. Revelation 1:1 notes that God “signified” (**sign-i-fied**) the contents of the book to the apostle John. Think about this. Heaven is not a physical place with a literal street of gold and gates made of literal pearls. Heaven is a literal (real) place, but not a physical place. What would spirit bodies (Eccl. 12:7; 1 Cor. 15:42-49) do with literal harps? Heaven is a spiritual place in the spirit world, but in order for God to try to describe the beauty and precious nature of heaven He had to use things with which we are familiar, using as a comparison the material things of this life.

Frequently, God uses figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, metonymy, etc. to describe the things of the heavenly realm. Notice as John describes Christ in Revelation 1:10-16. For example, the Lord’s voice was not really “a trumpet,” but “**as** of a trumpet,” and “**as** the sound of many waters” (Rev. 1:10; Rev. 1:15). These are similes, using “as” or “like” to compare what John saw and heard with things with which we are familiar. The harps in Revelation are another example of such figures of speech.

We also learn from a comparison between heaven and earth that not all things are the same in both places. The list of differences would be massive. One example is marriage, which God legislated for earth but not for heaven (Matt. 22:30).

Beginning on the next page is a tract written by brother James D. Bales on this subject.⁸ Study the following tract, and all the Scripture references it provides, and you will be convinced that there is no authority in the final book of the NT for using mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the NT church.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

James D. Bales

It is simple to learn from the New Testament that vocal music is authorized. However, a thousand and one arguments are used by individuals who try to justify instrumental music. This article will consider arguments taken from the book of Revelation. In order to make each answer to each argument complete within itself there is some repetition since similar points often fit the different arguments.

It is argued that harps are used in heaven and this makes it right to use them in the church, since it “would be inconsistent for him to approve an institution in his presence which he disapproves in the church.” This contradicts the argument that instrumental music is not based on a command, or a necessary inference, or an example but is simply an aid or expedient in carrying out the command to sing. This argument says that it is justified by the example of the use of instruments in heaven.

There is really no parallel between what is done in heaven and what is authorized for the church on earth with reference to instrumental music. If the harps in heaven are spiritual harps used by spiritual beings, they cannot be parallel to the use of literal harps by men in the body on earth. Furthermore, the authorization for the use of harps in heaven cannot be a parallel to their use on earth unless God authorized them for earth.

If these are literal harps, God put them in heaven, but he did not put them in the church on earth. So we have no authority to use them in worship. Leave them where God left them—out of the church and in heaven.

Abandoning New Testament Authority

The very people who appeal to God’s word to show it is in the Old Testament, and who argue that the Bible teaches that it is in heaven, forsake the appeal to the authority of the Word when it comes to the New Testament church. In this case,

they assume that it must be in the New Testament church although they cannot appeal to the Scriptures as they do with reference to the Old Testament and to heaven. Surely if it is necessary to prove by the Scriptures that it was in the Old Testament, and that it will be in heaven, it is necessary to prove by the Scriptures that it is in the New Testament church. We would accept harps in the church if the Bible authorized them. But to prove something about Old Testament worship, and something about heaven, is not the same as proving something about New Testament worship.

Matthew 6:10

Argument: God's will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). There are harps in heaven, therefore we should have them in the church.

Answer: First, those who die before the age of accountability go to heaven, for they have not sinned. Shall we have infant membership in the church? One could argue that they had infant membership in the Old Testament, that infants go to heaven, and that the Bible does not say "thou shalt not baptize infants." A similar argument is made for instrumental music. However, the fact is that the New Testament authorizes neither. Angels are in heaven. Shall we baptize them into the church?

Second, one might as well argue that that which is not practiced in heaven need not be practiced in the church on earth. People are not baptized in heaven, so why baptize on earth? There are no sins to be remitted in heaven, so why baptize anyone on earth unto the remission of sins? The Lord's supper is observed until Christ comes (1 Cor. 11:26). There is no proof that it is observed in heaven, so why observe it on earth? Marriage does not take place in heaven, therefore it should not take place on earth (Matt. 22:30). We should be on earth as the angels!

Third, Matthew 6:10 means that we should strive to be obedient to God's will for us on earth just as spirit beings are obedient to God's will for them in heaven.

Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 2:6; Ephesians 3:10

Argument: The church and heaven are the same for we sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; 3:10; Heb. 12:18-24). Therefore, instruments used in heaven are instruments used in the church (Rev. 14:1-3; Rev. 15:2).

Answer: First, this places incense, infant membership, etc., in the church.

Second, although in some sense we are with Christ in the heavenly places, we are on earth and not in heaven. We are God's family on earth, not his family in heaven (Eph. 3:14-15). Heaven and earth are referred to in one of the chapters which mentions harps (Rev. 5:8-13). They are not identical.

Third, Revelation 14:3 referred to a limited number who were redeemed from the earth.

Fourth, heaven is God's throne, and earth his footstool (Acts 7:49; Matt. 6:9; John 14:1-2). Christ reigns from heaven to which he ascended (Acts 1:9-11; Acts 2:32-34; Acts 3:19-21; Eph. 1:20-23; Zech. 6:13; Heb. 8:4). Did Christ ascend to earth from earth?

Ephesians 3:14-15

Argument: God's family includes those on earth and in heaven (Eph. 3:14-15), instrumental music is used in heaven, and it can be used on earth unless God's family is divided on the subject.

Answer: First, infants are not lost, so they go to heaven. Shall we have infant membership on earth so as to be united with that part of God's family which is in heaven?

Second, shall we use incense?

Third, shall we confine the singing to 144,000 of the tribes of Israel? They only know the song (Rev. 7:4-8; Rev. 14:1-5).

Fourth, the Lord's supper, as a memorial of the absent Lord, is observed only until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). There is no proof it is observed in heaven. Shall we refuse to observe it on earth in order to be united in worship with those in heaven?

Fifth, "If God wants his heavenly children to worship one way and his earthly children another, that does not divide the family. We are a unit as long as we obey the law governing

us; we are a unit in trying to do his will, though our items of worship be not identical.”

Revelation 5:8-9

Argument: The elders each had a harp, so we each have harps in the church.

Answer: *First*, the same type of argument justifies our having four living creatures, which are not men, in the church (Rev. 5:6, 8), horses (Rev. 6:2,4,5,8), a temple like Israel’s and an altar (Rev. 11:1-2; 15:5-8; Acts 7:44, 47), and every living thing to praise God (Rev. 5:13). Since every living thing cannot be in the church unless they are baptized into Christ, we must baptize them so they can praise God with us in the church.

Second, are we to have literal bowls of incense? (Rev. 5:8). It may be replied that Revelation 5:8 says that the golden bowls full of incense “are the prayers of the saints.” We accept this, but what will those who argue for instrumental music do when it is pointed out that in Revelation 8:3 the golden censer and the incense are distinguished from the prayers? “And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunder, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake” (Rev. 8:3-5). Shall we introduce into the worship a golden censer, incense to be added to the prayers of the saints, a golden altar and the fire on the altar? Are not these things in heaven as surely, and as literally—if the harps are literal—as the harps? This argument may not cause a literal earthquake on earth but it certainly shakes up New Testament worship and changes it!

Third, these things have no reference to worship on earth. We are bound by what Christ revealed for the church on earth (Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:42; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Revelation 14:1-4

Argument: In heaven there is the voice of harpers harping with their harps, so it is scriptural to do this on earth.

Answer: First, after arguing for harps, it is rare that people use a harp in a church service.

Second, their use of this passage would prove: (1) The church embraces literal Zion and a literal Lamb (Rev. 14:1). (2) The worshippers should have God's name "written on their foreheads" (14:1). (3) Literal harps should not be used, but the voice of worshippers should be "as the voice of harpers harping with their harps" (Rev. 14:2). (4) The singing must be limited to the 144,000 for the new song they sing is known only to them (Rev. 14:3). (5) The 144,000 must be made up of male virgins (Rev. 14:4). This would exclude married people. (6) The singers are the "first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb" (14:4). (7) Shall we have many waters and a great thunder in our worship? (14:2).

Third, John does not have reference to their using literal harps, but "*the voice* which I heard was *as* the voice of harpers harping with their harps" (14:2). "In rhythm, it sounded like many waterfalls; in volume, it was like a great thunder; and in melody, it was like harpers harping with their harps."

Fourth, they were singing, not playing, for "they sing as it were a new song" (14:3).

Revelation 15:2

Argument: Harps of God are used in heaven, why not on earth?

Answer: First, we are not authorized to use the instruments that David made under the Old Covenant (1 Chron. 23:5), nor the harps of God used in heaven (Rev. 15:2), but we are authorized to use the heart and to offer the fruit of lips as a sacrifice of praise (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15).

Second, why not argue that we *must* use harps in church services? It is rare that harps are used in church services by those who justify instrumental music in worship.

Third, why not argue that each of us must use harps? Not only is the plural of harps used in Revelation 14:1-3; Rev. 15:2-3, but each one mentioned in Revelation 5:8 had a harp.

Fourth, do spirit beings pluck literal harps?

Fifth, shall we have "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony" on earth because they had it in the Old Testament (Acts 7:44), and because it is in heaven? (Rev. 11:1-2; Rev. 15:5-8).

Sixth, is “a sea of glass mingled with fire” literal? Are we to stand by such a sea in the assembly worshipping God with harps? (Rev. 15:2).

Seventh, some of the imagery in the book of Revelation is drawn from the Old Testament—the temple, harps, golden censers, incense—but this does not bind these things on us; [n]or does it authorize us to use them in the church.

Revelation 15:3

Argument: Paul said to “sing the ode” or song (Eph. 5:19), the victorious ones in Revelation 15:2-3 sang the “ode” accompanied by harps of God; therefore, we can do the same with God’s approval.

Answer: First, this was done in heaven, and not in the church on earth. This argument would justify, as we have already seen, the temple, incense, the altar, and a fire on the altar.

Second, the song was sung, for it said: “They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying...” (Rev. 15:3). Singing is not the same as playing. We are told to sing (Eph. 5:19). A harp was named—whether literal or figurative—in Revelation 15:2. If it had not been named we would not have been able to say it was present. God has told us to sing, but he has not told us to use the harp in the church on earth. If God had intended that the harp be used in Ephesians 5:19 he would have named it, just as he named it in Revelation 15:2.

Revelation 18:22

Argument: “God approves by permitting in his presence instruments of music in Revelation 14:3 and Revelation 15:3, but he specifically forbids instruments of music to those who had rebelled against his authority and were among the inhabitants of the wicked Babylon” (Rev. 18:22).

Answer: First, see my comments on Revelation 14:3; 15:3.

Second, this argument has no bearing on those who believe that the New Testament forbids the use of instrumental music. Revelation simply tells us of the downfall, and disappearance of Babylon. Neither the use of instruments,

marrying, trading, lights, or craftsmen would be found there, for the city would be no more at all. "And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying. Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers and minstrels and fluteplayers and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in thee; and the voice of a mill shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee; for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived" (Rev. 18:21-23). None of these things would take place in Babylon, because Babylon would "be found no more at all." All this was a description of her desolation due to God's judgment.

Third, does Dunning⁹ have harpers, minstrels, fluteplayers and trumpeters in the church because to forbid them might be to classify one among the rebels of wicked Babylon?

Revelation 22:16-19

Argument: Instrumental music is included in the testimony of an angel, and we are not to add to or take from this testimony (Rev. 22:16-19).

Answer: First, the book of Revelation, if it authorizes instrumental music, authorizes the harp. What right have they to take away the harp and add other instruments? What right have they to add other instruments even if they retain the harp? What right have they to take away the golden censer, the incense, the altar, and the fire on the altar?

Second, no angel, or apostle or prophet, has testified that instrumental music should be used in worship on earth in the New Covenant age.

Spiritualize Water, etc.?

Argument: If one says that the harps in heaven are not literal, how can one argue that the water mentioned in connection with baptism, and the bread and fruit of the vine are literal?

Answer: First, if the harps are literal, it does not prove they are to be used in the church.

Second, if the harps are literal, why are not the temple (Rev.15:5), and the censer, incense, altar, and fire literal? (Rev. 8:3-5).

Third, there are indications that the harps are symbolical (Rev. 14:2). This may be also implied in the fact that it does not seem fitting that spirit beings pluck literal, earthly harps.

Fourth, literal water, and literal bread and fruit of the vine are specified in the Bible (John 3:23; Acts 8:36; 10:47; 1 Cor. 11:23-28).

[end of Bales' tract]

“There Is No NT Teaching On What Type Of Music To Use In Worship To God In The Assemblies Of The Church”

This is an argument made years ago and defeated then, but recently revived by Don DeWelt, a Christian church preacher, in a letter to Guy N. Woods, then editor of the **Gospel Advocate** paper in Nashville, TN. DeWelt also co-authored an article with Lynn Hieronymus on this position in the June, 1985 edition of **One Body**.

One Body was (is?) an irregular publication of the Christian church designed to promote unity between the church of Christ and the conservative Christian churches by removing objections to the use of the instrument. In the letter to Woods (published in the **Gospel Advocate**, May 16, 1985), DeWelt said, “There is no command, apostolic example or necessary inference in the New Testament for congregational singing with or without an instrument!” In his letter and co-authored article DeWelt proposes to show that none of the passages commonly used to uphold congregational singing truly do so. Keep in mind that DeWelt says, “This does not mean that congregational singing is wrong...;” but he believes that the instrument

and congregational singing are “in the realm of choice or expediency.” Remember what we studied previously about making choices not authorized by God and what constitutes an expediency.

Please note that in making his argument DeWalt wipes away every other argument that has ever been made by the Christian church to attempt to support their use of the instrument. Brother Woods answered the aforementioned letter by DeWalt in an article in the same issue, entitled, “Is Congregational Singing Required in the Worship of God in the New Testament Church?”

Whatever else may be said about DeWalt’s amazing affirmation, in this unprecedented pronouncement, he sweeps forever away every defence every Christian church preacher has ever attempted, to justify the use of the instrument in congregational worship, on the ground that it is authorized in Ephesians 5:19, by the word *psallo*! Neither here, nor elsewhere in the sacred writings, he avers, is congregational singing commanded; hence, neither here, nor elsewhere in the New Testament is there authority for instrumental accompaniment for such use. Gone, then, according to him, because they never existed, are the grounds upon which Briney, Boswell, Payne, Walker, and all other scholars among them, for a hundred years past, sought to show that the Greek word *psallo* signifies the use of a mechanical instrument accompanying singing in congregational worship. In the city where this is being written, Ira M. Boswell affirmed in debate with N. B. Hardeman the proposition, “Instrumental music in church worship is scriptural,” by which of course, he meant when accompanying singing. We have known all along that the effort is a vain and impossible one, and now DeWalt, *unable to prove* that instrumental music is authorized in such services, *attempts to disprove* singing in them. He cuts, because he cannot untie, the “Gordian knot,” and (to mix the figure!) throws

out the baby with the bath water! Instrumental music, a human innovation, he cannot justify; singing, a divinely authorized act, he would put in the same category, and though he alleges that neither is sanctioned by the scriptures in congregational capacity, he freely engages in both!

The basic argument used by DeWelt et al. is that there are no NT passages that speak of music in worship to God (singing or instrumental) in a group worship setting. Particularly it is denied that Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 pertain to assembled worship. DeWelt says:

There is no thought of congregational singing in this paragraph [Eph. 5:15-20], neither is there an example in the entire New Testament of congregational singing of Christians. *Nor is there a command or example for corporate singing.* If we obeyed the instructions here, we could not do it congregationally since we do not speak to one another when we sing for we all sing the same song simultaneously to the Lord NOT to one another.

First, what DeWelt and those of his persuasion do not seem to realize is that it makes no difference whether our worship is group or individual, we are bound by the same authority for what we do and how we do it. There is no authority for mechanical instruments of music in worship to God for an individual or assembled group. Worship is to be done in spirit and in truth at all times.

Second, it is not true that the contexts of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are to individuals and thus negate any application to assembled worship. The almost unanimous consensus of Greek scholars and commentators from the earliest times have set forth these passages as pertaining to the assembled worship of the church. What

has forced this united agreement on this subject? The language and grammar of the NT Greek! Note Dave Miller's comments from his **Singing and New Testament Worship**:

Additional insight is derived from the reflexive pronouns [*heautois*] (Eph. 5:19) and [*heautous*] (Col. 3:16). Greek scholars unanimously note that these reflexive plurals are used in a reciprocal sense. Their meaning is "one another, each other, mutually." Ray Summers comments on the nature of reciprocity: "In function it represents an interchange of action between the members of a plural subject."

The very nature and essence of reciprocity is that the activity is engaged in together (though not necessarily simultaneously). If all present do not participate **together**, reciprocity is not occurring and the use of reciprocal pronouns is superfluous. Greek grammars so indicate. In his **Grammar of the Greek Language**, Kuhner states that "the reflexive pronoun is very often used instead of the reciprocal pronoun"—the precise condition found in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. He then notes that: "the reflexive may take the place of the reciprocal, in cases where it is readily perceived that several persons so perform anything together that the action appears reciprocal."...

Why use a reflexive as a substitute for the reciprocal instead of just using the standard reciprocal? Lightfoot provides the answer in his comment on Colossians 3:13—"The reciprocal [*heauton*] differs from the reciprocal [*allelon*] in emphasizing the idea of **corporate unity**." Several Greek scholars concur with Lightfoot's distinction, including Moulton and Milligan, Nicoll, Hanna and Abbott. If this observation is correct, further confirmation is given to the fact that the entire assembly of Christians is to sing **together** as a corporate body—a single chorus uniting and blending their voices together in joint worship to God (pp. 16-17).

There is no validity to the argument of DeWalt and others that there is no authority in the NT for singing as

assembled worship. The language of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 requires this action of singing together. In this action we are “teaching and admonishing one another” **and** “singing with grace in [our] hearts to the Lord.” Scripture says we can do both (teach one another and sing praises to the Lord) at the same time, though DeWalt says we cannot. I’ll take what Scripture says.

A Brief History Of Instrumental Music In The Church

We have already mentioned several times the references to mechanical instruments of music in worship in the OT. There is a reference to instruments in Genesis 4:21, but there are no references to its usage in worship during age of patriarchs. Instruments were definitely a part of worship under Law of Moses (2 Chron. 29:25-28; Psm. 150:1-6), but there are no references to using mechanical instruments of music in NT worship. References in the book of Revelation to “harpers” are figurative and deal with events in heaven, not in church worship. We have already discussed these passages.

There are many references to the worship of Christians outside of the Bible. We refer to some of these resources not to demonstrate them as inspired accounts nor as possessing binding authority, for one can prove almost anything using different church histories. However, **the unanimous voice of church historians** proves that early Christians did not use mechanical instruments of music in worship to God.

Instrumental music was not a part of the synagogue worship of the Jews:

Instrumental music was introduced into some synagogues early in the 19th century (Jewish Encyclopedia, IX, 432). A.Z Idelsohn, a Jewish author, wrote: “The strict order of the Church Fathers that only one instrument should be

employed, i.e., the human voice, has been observed in the Syriac, the Jacobite, the Nestorian, and the Greek churches to the present day. So also the synagogue did not use any instrument in the service up to 1810, in which year the organ was introduced in the first Reform Temple in Seesen, Germany. . .” (Quoted in Bales, p. 259).

Instruments were not used in the worship of the ancient synagogue. They belonged to the tabernacle and the Temple, especially the latter; but were never in the congregational assemblies of God’s people (McClintock & Strong , Vol 6, p. 762).

***Voices Of Historians, Commentators And Reformers
On Early Church Music And The Scriptures***

Frank Landon Humphreys, author of “The Evolution of Church Music,” gives this testimony:

One of the features which distinguishes the Christian religion from almost all others is its quietness; it aims to repress the outward signs of inward feeling. Savage instinct, and the religion of Greece also, had employed the rhythmic dance and all kinds of gesticulatory motions to express the inner feelings, some of them entirely unsuitable to purposes of worship. The early Christians discouraged all outward signs of excitement, and from the very beginning, in the music they used, reproduced the spirit of their religion – an inward quietude. All the music employed in their early services was vocal, and the rhythmic element and all gesticulation were forbidden [p. 42] (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 150).

Source after source affirms this same truth:

The American Cyclopedia: Pope Vitalian is related to have first introduced organs into some of the churches of western Europe, about 670; but the earliest trustworthy account is that of the one sent as a present by the Greek emperor

Constantine Copronymus to Pepin, king of the Franks, in 755 [Vol. 12, p. 688] (Quoted by Kurfees, p. 152).

Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia: In the Greek Church the organ never came into use. But after the eighth century it became more and more common in the Latin Church; not, however, without opposition from the side of the monks. Its misuse, however, raised so great an opposition to it, that, but for the Emperor Ferdinand, it would probably have been abolished by the Council of Trent. The Reformed Church discarded it; and though the Church of Basel very early reintroduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly, and after long hesitation [Vol. 2, p. 1702] (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 152).

McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia: The Greek word (psallo) is applied among the Greeks of modern times exclusively to sacred music, which in the Eastern Church has never been any other than vocal, instrumental music being unknown in that Church, as it was in the primitive Church. Sir John Hawkins, following the Romish writers in his erudite work on the History of Music, makes pope Vitalian, in A.D. 660, the first who introduced organs into churches. But students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date; for Thomas Aquinas, A.D. 1250, has these remarkable words: "Our Church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize." From this passage we are surely warranted in concluding that there was no ecclesiastical use of organs in the time of Aquinas. It is alleged that Marinus Sanutus, who lived about A.D. 1290, was the first that brought the use of wind organs into churches, and hence he received the name of Torcellus. In the East, the organ was in use in the emperor's courts, probably from the time of Julian, but never has either the organ or any other instrument been

employed in public worship in Eastern churches; nor is mention of instrumental music found in all their liturgies, ancient or modern [Vol. 8., p. 739] (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 153).

Lyman Coleman, an eminent Presbyterian author and noted for vast learning and accurate scholarship, says: The organ constituted no part of the furniture of the ancient churches. The first instance on record of its use in the church, occurred in the time of Charlemagne, who received one as a present from Constantine Michael, which was set up in the church at Aix-la-Chapelle. The musicians of this city, and of Mentz, learned to play on the organ in Italy, from which it appears that they were already known in that country. – **Antiquities of the Christian Church**, p. 192 (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 162).

Professor John Girardeau. In his work on “Music in the Church,” written while he was “Professor in Columbia Theological Seminary, South Carolina,” this Presbyterian scholar says: It has thus been proved, by an appeal to historical facts, that the church, although lapsing more and more into defection from the truth and into a corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental music for twelve hundred years; and that the Calvinistic Reformed Church ejected it from its services as an element of Popery, even the Church of England having come very nigh to its extrusion from her worship. The historical argument, therefore, combines with the Scriptural and the confessional to raise a solemn and powerful protest against its employment by the Presbyterian Church. It is heresy in the sphere of worship. – **Instrumental Music in Public Worship**, p. 179 (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 177).

Charles Buck, English Independent minister, referred to by the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia as “the never-to-be-forgotten author of the Theological Dictionary,” – a work which still holds a place in the libraries of scholars, says: Much has been said as to the use of instrumental

music in the house of God. On the one side it is observed that we ought not to object to it, because it assists devotion; that it was used in the worship of God under the Old Testament; and that the worship of heaven is represented by a delightful union of vocal and instrumental music. But on the other side, it is remarked, that nothing should be done in or about God's worship without example or precept from the New Testament; that, instead of aiding devotion, it often tends to draw off the mind from the right object; that it does not accord with the simplicity of Christian worship; that the practice of those who lived under the ceremonial dispensation can be no rule for us; that not one text in the New Testament requires or authorizes it by precept or example, by express words or fair inference; and that the representation of the musical harmony in heaven is merely figurative language, denoting the happiness of the saints – **Theological Dictionary**, Art. "Singing" (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 179).

Adam Clarke, the illustrious Methodist commentator, says: But were it evident, which it is not, either from this or any other place in the sacred writings, that instruments of music were prescribed by Divine authority under the law, could this be adduced with any semblance of reason, that they ought to be used in Christian worship? No; the whole spirit, soul, and genius of the Christian religion are against this and those who know the Church of God best, and what constitutes its genuine spiritual state, know that these things have been introduced as a substitute for the life and power of religion; and that where they prevail most, there is least of the power of Christianity. Away with such portentous baubles from the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship him in spirit and in truth, for to no such worship are those instruments friendly (**Clarke's Commentary**, Vol.2, pp. 690- 691, note on 2 Chron. 29:25).

Then, on Amos 6:5, the same author says: And invent to themselves instruments of music, like

David. See the note on 1 Chron. 23:5; and especially the note on 2 Chron, 24:25. I believe that David was not authorized by the Lord to introduce that multitude of musical instruments into the Divine worship of which we read; and I am satisfied that his conduct in this respect is most solemnly reprehended by the prophet; and I further believe that the use of such instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is without the sanction and against the will of God; that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion, and that they are sinful. If there was a woe to them who invented instruments of music, as did David under the law, is there no woe, no curse to them who invent them, and introduce them into the worship of God in the Christian Church? I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire; but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity. The late venerable and most eminent divine, the Rev. John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into the chapels of the Methodists, said in his terse and powerful manner, "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither HEARD nor SEEN." I say the same, though I think the expense of purchase had better be spared [**Clarke's Commentary**, Vol. 4, p. 686] (Quoted in Kurfees, p. 180-182).

John Calvin, This illustrious Reformer and reputed founder of Presbyterianism says: Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews.

Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to Him [**Calvin's Commentary** on the Thirty-third Psalm, and on I Sam. 18:1-9] (Quoted in Kurfees, pp. 190-191).

James William McKinnon summed up his study of the “church fathers” with such statements as: The Fathers of the early Church were virtually unanimous in their hostility toward musical instruments. Many scholars have explained this phenomenon by saying that the Church Fathers were reacting against the instruments which played a prominent part in the Greco-Roman cults. This is quite plausible, yet a systematic investigation of the subject reveals a substantially different situation (Quoted in Bales, p. 260).

The most important observation one makes about the numerous patristic denunciations of instruments is that they are always made within the context of obscene theatrical performances, orgiastic banquets and the like, but not within the context of liturgical music. Evidently the occasion for speaking out against instruments in church never presented itself. One can only imagine what rhetorical outbursts the introduction of instruments into church would have elicited from Fathers like Augustine, Jerome and Chrysostom [James William McKinnon, “Abstract,” 1-2] (Quoted in Bales, p. 260).

The fact that instruments were not used, however, is related to the positive Christian attitude toward music which was characterized by an enthusiastic fostering of psalmody, a type of music performed unmetrically and without instruments [McKinnon, 209] (Quoted in Bales, p. 260).

Eastern “Fathers.” The execution of Byzantine church music by instruments, or even the accompaniment of sacred chanting by instruments, was ruled out by the Eastern

Fathers as being incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ. 'The Fathers of the Church,' observes G.I. Papadopoulos, 'in accordance with the example of psalmodizing of our Savior and the holy Apostles, established that only vocal music be used in the churches and severely forbade instrumental music as being secular and hedonic, and in general as evoking pleasure without spiritual value'" [Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Sacred Music*, 18; G.I. Papadopoulos, *A Historical Survey of Byzantine Ecclesiastical Music (in Greek)*, Athens, 1904, 10-11]. See McKinnon's discussion of the Eastern "Fathers" (Bales, p. 261).

Clement of Alexandria. The seeming exception to the universal condemnation of instrumental music in worship is Clement of Alexandria. He wrote around 200 A.D. (Burgess, 105-109) He said: "And even if you wish to sing and play to the harp or lyre, there is no blame." First, Clement is not discussing the assembly, or even a private devotional service, but "How to Conduct Ourselves at Feasts." Second, he spoke of the use of musical instruments at banquets and called them "instruments of delusion." "Let the pipe be resigned to the shepherds, and the flute to the superstitious who are engrossed in idolatry. For, in truth, such instruments are to be banished from the temperate banquet, being more suitable to beasts than men, and the more irrational portion of mankind" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, II , 248). In this context he speaks of "the licentious and mischievous art of music." McKinnon said that: "All subsequent Church Fathers make blanket condemnations of instruments, never explaining whether one instrument is worse than another, or anything of that sort. No other Father will except the lyre and kithara from the general prohibition. Hence Clement's remarks must not be taken as evidence of widespread differentiation in patristic attitudes toward instruments; they are quite exceptional... Clement expresses toleration for the lyre and

kithara at a Christian banquet, not at a liturgical service” [McKinnon, 152] (Quoted in Bales, pp. 262-263).

Summary. Much more could be said about the history of the early church and the fact that they used no mechanical instruments of music in their worship, but such extended quotes would simply mirror the unanimous voice of the quotes already given. No reputable historical source Scriptural or secular has been found that states that the early church used the instrument in their worship. It has always been and forever will remain an innovation that lacks the authority of God.

These Matters Are Still A Problem

Elders and preachers need to be aware that the majority of Christians do not know how to establish Bible authority for what to do in worship or any other Christian responsibilities! The use of mechanical instruments of music in NT worship is a serious problem, but it is merely (and sadly) a symptom of the larger problem of brethren and denominationalists not knowing how to establish Bible authority.

I strongly urge elderships and preachers to insist these principles be taught regularly to their congregations. Elders, if your preacher does not know how to do so, write to me and I'll send you information on excellent resources to train him to teach others. If he still refuses to teach on these matters, fire him. He doesn't deserve to be preaching to God's people. Preachers, if your elders balk at this type of preaching, try to educate them on the importance of such teaching. If they still refuse to let you preach on these matters, pack your bags and teach as many lessons on these principles as you can before they fire you. You must be true to God's Word and preach the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Due to the influence of Christian church efforts over the past twenty years or so there has been a drifting of our large congregations, colleges and some papers into the errors of denominationalism, particularly in this matter of instrumental music. **Many in the Christian church and other denominations do not believe that we need authority for what we preach and practice, so basically anything goes.** That is spreading into the Lord's church more rapidly and on a wider scale than many can imagine. Why? Because many in the Lord's church are being intimidated by Christian church and other denominational people who say, "You people aren't nice, you aren't loving, you're too narrow minded." The people making those charges haven't a clue about how the Bible authorizes us to do our Christian duties and most of our members do not know how to teach them the truth! No wonder we are drifting! We need to teach them the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

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Endnotes

1 The format of this printed lesson on my topic is somewhat different than my previous contributions to the lectureship books. Several years ago I went through most of the major works I had on the subject of music in worship to God and gleaned from them the major arguments for and against mechanical instruments of music in NT worship. I put this material in outline form for teaching a class in a school for Christian service in Indianapolis, Indiana. In that outline I did not provide extensive footnotes to the material included in the outline. Rather, I provided a bibliography of all the works consulted and occasionally mentioned a work from which much of the material was gleaned in a particular section of the outline. While the majority of the text of this manuscript is in my words, I have no desire to plagiarize anyone's work and have their work attributed to me. Unfortunately, a number of recent circumstances have prevented me from having the time to go back and locate in these works where their words end and mine begin in this lesson. Therefore, please consider this lecture as a compilation of most of the various books, tracts and other resources in the bibliography. My apologies to all the authors whose works should have been cited more properly.

2 All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

3 Roy Deaver, **Ascertaining Bible Authority**, Many of the elements of teaching in this section can be found in greater detail in this excellent little book. This work by brother Deaver does not (in my edition) promote any of the errors of Mac Deaver (Roy's son) relative to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians.

4 Thomas B. Warren, **When Is an "Example" Binding?** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1975), for a full study of the topic of how and what "examples" are binding on us in the Christian age.

5 Briney later adopted the use of the instrument in NT worship but could not defend his later practice against his own arguments that he made when opposed to its use. See the Otey-Briney Debate.

6 The fact that Samuel's father Elkanah is identified in 1 Sam. 1:1 as an Ephraimite likely refers to his residence in that country rather than his tribal ancestry, for in 1 Chronicles 6:22-34 both Elkanah and Samuel are listed among the Kohathites of the tribe of Levi, priests under the OT law.

7 James D. Bales, **Instrumental Music and New Testament Worship**, much of the material in this section comes from this book.

8 James D. Bales, **Instrumental Music and New Testament Worship**. While he was still living brother Bales gave me oral permission to print this tract in my outline on the topic of instrumental music in NT worship. Mark McWhorter, who has publishing rights for brother Bales books since brother Bales' death, also told me that he had no problem with me reprinting it for this lecture. A somewhat expanded edition of this material is in brother Bales' book, (see Bibliography). You can get a list of all brother Bales' books that brother McWhorter has reprinted by e-mailing him at mtmcvb@chulavistabooks.com.

9 References to "Dunning" refer to Dwaine Dunning, a Christian church preacher who has been very vocal in promoting instrumental music in worship, writing several articles and debating Rubel Shelly in 1976.

CHAPTER 24

On The Scriptural Use Of The Church Treasury?

Bobby Liddell

Introduction

WHAT A BLESSING GOD has provided in teaching us to give (John 3:16; Acts 20:35)! Not only has He made possible our giving, by placing the earth under our dominion (Gen. 1:26-29), and by providing us with the ability to get wealth (Deut. 8:18), but He has also taught us Scriptural principles which, when properly understood and applied, insure our correct attitudes and actions in accomplishing the work of the Lord's church. We must not forget or forsake the mission of the church of Christ.

The church is a spiritual institution, and as such, it has a spiritual mission....The truth of the superiority of the spiritual over the physical is evident throughout the Bible, and must be recognized in the study of the mission of the church. The mission of the church is still spiritual—it is the proclamation of the message of redemption.¹

How could we misuse the church treasury? To loose where God has not loosed, in using the Lord's money for carnal desires rather than for the spiritual purposes God intended, is a wrong use of the church treasury. Thus, to

heed the call of the world (to provide entertainment, recreation, etc.) instead of the call of the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; 1 John 2:15-17), is to leave the God-given pattern for the church's work. Additionally, to prohibit doing that which God has authorized, by binding laws which God has not about the use of the church treasury, is also wrong. Either extreme is error: "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 17:15).

Has God's Word anything to say about the church treasury and the Scriptural use of it? Does the New Testament set forth principles which we must follow? If so, what are they, and how can we understand them alike? To answer these questions, we shall consider these points: (1) Scriptural Authority for a "Church Treasury," (2) Scriptural Additions to the Church Treasury, and (3) Scriptural Application of the Church Treasury.

Scriptural Authority For A "Church Treasury"

The Pattern Of Laying By In Store

Some argue against a church treasury, claiming that individuals should save their money and give it to "needy people or worthy causes of your personal choice."² Brother Guy N. Woods replied to this request:

Please discuss 1 Cor. 16:1-2; and explain how this passage may properly be cited as a pattern for a church treasury from which funds may be taken for many purposes when it was originally intended to provide for the needs of the poor saints only.³

Brother Woods' response included these points, portions of which I have recorded here.

- (1) The *time* when the contribution was to be gathered was “upon the first day of the week.” The Greek phrase is *kata mian sabbatou*, literally, “upon one of the sabbath,” Hebrew idiom for the first day of the week.... We thus learn that the church was accustomed to meet on the first day of the week (see also Acts 20:7), and it was, therefore, appropriate that the obligation being enjoined by the apostle should be performed on that day.
- (2) The duty embraced “every one” capable of giving of his means....
- (3) The amount each was to give was to be determined in harmony with the prosperity he had enjoyed....
- (4) The *design* of this arrangement was to avoid the necessity of contacting each disciple for his contribution when the apostle arrived. With their gifts pooled into a common treasury, the contribution would be ready on short notice, thus freeing Paul and his associates from the arduous and often unpleasant task of raising the money directly by personal appeals. This is sufficient refutation of the conjecture of some commentators, and all Sabbatarians, that the disciples were merely asked to place in a treasury *at home* their gifts, in which case the “gathering” which Paul desired to avoid would yet be required to be made. *Each* disciple was to give; each disciple was to give as he had been *prospered*; each disciple was to give upon the *first day* of the week, into a common treasury of the church.
- (5) The *purpose* of this contribution was to relieve want and destitution among the poor saints in Jerusalem. (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:3.) It is worthy of note that *only here* is a Lord’s day contribution enjoined; and the only *specific* purpose for it was to relieve the poor in the Jerusalem congregation. There is here *no* definite and detailed *pattern* of using the Lord’s day contribution to “pay” the preacher, purchase Bibles, song books, literature and communion supplies, or to erect auditoriums in which to meet for worship. There is indeed no apostolic *example* of using the money thus raised for the poor saints

of the congregation raising the money—only for the poor of another congregation! It is therefore absurd to insist, as do some extremists today, that *general* authority (as, for example, the command to “visit” the fatherless and the widows, in James 1:27), is not sufficient; and to demand a *detailed* description of every duty from the Scriptures, while they hesitate not to cite 1 Cor. 16:1-2, to justify the use of the money for all the purposes indicated above, and many others besides, excepting, of course, a *home* for the *homeless*, sometimes styled orphanages!

But do not all of us cite 1 Cor. 16:1-2, as the proper way in which to meet all the financial needs of the church in its work and worship today? Indeed so; but, not on the ground that it provides a specific and detailed pattern of such, because it *does not*. We have, in this passage, a demonstration of the way in which apostolic congregations, under the direction of an apostle, *met a legitimate* need. The need, in that instance, was to relieve the poor which then abounded in the congregation in Jerusalem....

The churches thus *met a need* by means of a Lord’s day contribution. We reason, therefore, that in any instance, *when a need has been established*, it may be met in the same way. Support for the preacher, literature, songbooks, Bibles, the communion supplies, church buildings, and other matters in the same category, are proper and legitimate needs of the church. They may, therefore, be provided for from the treasury of the church supplied from the Lord’s day contribution.⁴

Especially important to our study is this statement from the above: “The churches thus **met a need** by means of a Lord’s day contribution. We reason, therefore, that in any instance, **when a need has been established**, it may be met in the same way.” To this, we heartily agree.

In his second **Questions and Answers** book, brother Woods answered this question: “Is the case for a common treasury dependent on a necessary inference in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2?”

No. The obligation here is a direct command. (1) It was an obligation to be discharged on “the first day of the week.” (2) It was to be put into a common treasury. If to this the objection is raised that the words “lay by him in store,” suggest only that it was an action to be discharged at home, such vanishes in the face of the fact that (3) the reason for the common treasury was to eliminate the need of a “gathering” when Paul arrived. This points irresistibly to a “common treasury” in Corinth. Contributions at home would have required the “gathering” Paul sought to avoid by means of the common treasury. Recognized here is the common meeting of the church on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), and the obligation to give as prospered on that day.⁵

Brother Thomas B. Warren (in his book, **When Is An Example Binding?**) wrote these comments on 1 Corinthians 16:1-2:

The passage lays upon Christians the *obligation* of meeting *every* first day of the week in order to lay by in store (treasure up, put into the treasury). The word *kata* is *distributive* in its effect, meaning, “on the first day of *every* week”....

Also, it must be noted that the total context makes clear that this was a matter of general *command*. Paul said, “...as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye” (i.e., the church at Corinth, 1:1-2). The members of the churches were commanded to put into a common treasury *every* first day of the week.⁶

Conclusions derived from the above statements, made by two of the greatest Bible scholars and thinkers of the last century, are: (1) the church was commanded to contribute during the worship assembly on the first day of every week; (2) all the brethren gave as prospered to meet the legitimate, Scriptural needs of the church’s work; (3) their giving was into a common church treasury; and,

(4) this was a general command; thus, applying to all congregations everywhere.

The Provision Of Things Honest

Great care should be taken with the Lord's money. Brethren should insure the safeguarding of the treasury, as well as the reputations of those who deal with it. Contributions and entire treasuries have been stolen, or otherwise dishonestly handled. Common sense and tragic experience teach us that the contribution should be counted immediately after services, by at least two men, and deposit made as soon as possible (contributions have been stolen from the building, or a member's home). Likewise, two signatures should be required for checks written for expenditures, all of which should be approved by the elders/brethren. A published budget along with regular financial reports and bank statements should be provided. These are simple, precautionary steps to the proper receiving and distribution of funds.

Who shall be treasurer? Lipscomb and Sewell's book, **Questions Answered**, demonstrated the appropriateness of the church treasury, and right ways to handle it.

It is certainly right to appoint some faithful brother to serve the church as treasurer, to keep a strict account of all money paid to the treasury, and to pay out as the elders may direct, and keep an account of all that is paid out also. In this way all that is done is done by the congregation. And surely the money ought to be paid in regularly on the first day of the week, so it will be ready when needed and not have to be gathered when the time comes that it ought to be paid out. Paul told the Corinthians to have their means by the time he should come and not have to gather it up after his arrival.⁷

What kind of men should be treasurers? Not stingy men who look upon the Lord's money as if it was their

own, and who seem intent on “saving” as much of the Lord’s money as they can. Not pessimists—pessimism scares brethren away from doing what the Lord has commanded the church to do, saps the strength, weakens the faith, and curtails the work of the local congregation (cf. Num. 13:27-33). Not thieves (cf. John 12:4-6). Questionnaires indicate one out of twelve congregations of the Lord’s church have lost funds due to theft.⁸ There is a great need to provide things honest in the sight of all men (2 Cor. 8:18-24).

Scriptural Additions To The Treasury

Let us look more closely at how, and from whom, the church obtains the funds necessary to accomplish its work. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth:

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 (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

The collection was for the saints in Judea (1 Cor. 16:3). Gentile Christians at Corinth (and other places [cf. 2 Cor. 8:1ff]) helped Jews who were in need, through their “liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men” (2 Cor. 9:13).

The Collection Of Their Giving (1 Cor. 16:1)

Christians must understand the Savior’s teaching on the blessedness of giving (Acts 20:35), and that giving proves “the sincerity of your love” (2 Cor. 8:8). As the Corinthians promised (2 Cor. 8:10), so they needed to perform (2 Cor. 8:11). Thus, Paul’s pleading encouragement (2 Cor. 9:1-5). Laying by in store on the first day of the week was God’s plan for the church everywhere (1 Cor. 4:17), and it is God’s plan for the church everywhere today.

If this was not/is not the Divinely authorized pattern, what is? Lipscomb and Sewell correctly affirmed:

The contribution, as we understand it, is a part of the worship of Christians on the first day of the week...The doing of what God has commanded to be done is worship to him, and he has commanded the contribution on the first day of the week, and to attend to it is worship.⁹

Must the church refuse contributions from those not members? Tommy Hodge wrote, concerning “Church Finance,” that “receiving money from their members is the only God authorized source of income the congregations of the church have,” and included, in a list of unauthorized sources, receiving “volunteered financial support, from a person who is not a member, or from a place of business.”¹⁰ Are we to ask each one attending if he is a member and if not escort him out of the assembly, or just refuse to allow him to contribute? Neither.

The Command Of Their God (1 Cor. 16:2)

The day, in 1 Corinthians 16:2, obviously means the Lord’s day (cf. Rev. 1:10), and refers to every first day of every week as the day of assembly and worship (Acts 20:7). The word the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use, translated “order,” indicates authority given by command (which Paul received by inspiration)—as to what was to be done on the first day.

The duty for “every one of you” (1 Cor. 16:2), extends to every member of every congregation everywhere. The responsibility to give into the treasury of the church is just as important as any other action God has ordained to be a part of corporate worship, and must be conducted with a proper attitude (John 4:24). The treasury comes from such free-will offerings.

The deposit, “lay by him in store,” commands a continuing action. Interestingly, some consider “by him” to be better rendered “by itself,” having reference to the gift, not the giver. In addition, “in store” refers to the church’s treasury, not a storing in one’s own house, but in one location with the funds at the disposal of, and under the oversight of, the local congregation.

Under, “The First Day of the Week is the Time for Laying-By in Store,” brother Rex A. Turner, Sr. penned:

The Corinthians came together to eat the Lord’s supper, and they came together to so eat on the first day of the week. (1 Cor. 11:33; 1 Cor. 16:2.) Thus the natural and most convenient time for the Corinthian members to give of their material means—or lay by in store—was when they assembled on the first day of the week to eat the Lord’s supper. There is no wonder then that Paul enjoined: “Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper.” Emphasis should be put on the fact that the Christian is under obligation to give, or lay by, as he has been prospered.

While Paul was giving instruction relative to the bounty that was being raised from the Gentile churches for the poor saints in Judea, the case of instruction serves a precedent for all the Christians’ giving for all times with respect to either special programs of the church, or for the general support of the financial program of the church. Paul had given the same instructions to the churches of Galatia that he gave to the church at Corinth.¹¹

Lipscomb and Sewell made this observation:

There can be no mistake but that the command to contribute of our means to advance the cause of God on the first day of the week is as binding now as it was when Paul uttered it, and all who love the Lord well enough to esteem it a privilege to give of their means for the good of his cause will so regard it....¹²

The Calculation Of Their Gift (1 Cor. 16:2)

God, through the inspired apostle, gave the Scriptural principle (1 Cor. 16:2). They were to give “as prospered” by God, according to what they had—not according to what they had not (2 Cor. 8:11-12). Their giving was to be proportionate to their prosperity, planned (predetermined; cf. 2 Cor. 9:7), and put aside in the common treasury for the work of the church. The plan for the collection of their giving was commanded by God, Who also gave the procedure for the calculation of their gift. The provision of every member, on every Sunday, was/is according to these principles: as prospered, as purposed, and as prompted by their love.

Scriptural Applications Of The Treasury

What Is The Work Of The Church?

How can we use the treasury to do what God intended the church to do if we do not know what the work of the church is? Too many church members (and elders) have failed to learn, or have forgotten just what the mission of the church is.

What is the basic purpose of the Christian Church? It is important that Church leaders spend as much time as may be necessary on this question, for a program founded upon an inadequate theology of the Church will be a house built upon sand.¹³

The mission of the saved (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23) is to save (Mark 16:15-16). The work of the church is the work of Christ—to save souls (Luke 19:10), and this work the church does through evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

Instead of affirming that there are three separate but equal works of the church—evangelism,

edification, and benevolence—would it not be truer to the Book to say that the church has only *one* mission—and that mission is to save souls—and with this mission in mind, the gospel is proclaimed, the saints are edified, and the needy are helped?...In all that the church does there must be this desire to save men and women, and the works of edification and benevolence must really serve this purpose.¹⁴

To edify means to strengthen, or build up, and refers to the building up of church members (1 Cor. 14:12; 1 Thess. 5:14). Benevolence means helping those in need by doing good (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 4:28; cf. Acts 10:38). Evangelism means preaching the Gospel, heralding the good news, and that to every creature in the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20).

The church must do right in the realm which God has authorized. Brother V. P. Black wrote:

Almost everything the church spends money for comes under four headings: (1) Preaching the gospel, (2) Benevolence, (3) Operational expense, and (4) Self-edification.¹⁵

To further the cause of Christ, in providing for these expenses, the giver gives to the Lord, not to the preacher, the elders, or himself. The church's work, so important and needed, demands generous, liberal, sacrificial support. Covetousness (Col. 3:5; Luke 12:15), perennially prevalent among too many brethren, prevents the church from doing its work.

Rex A. Turner, Sr., wrote:

Such a tremendous program of work as rests upon every local church requires money. The greater the financial ability of a church, the greater the work of the church can be, all things being equal.¹⁶

Leon C. Burns gave these motivating comments:

Any congregation that is content to do no more than keep its doors open is completely void of

leadership and unworthy of the name of Christ. Any congregation that can do no more than pull its own weight (unless it be a mission point itself) is not a New Testament church, and members of such a congregation who are content to do no more than this can hardly be called Christians.¹⁷

As elders oversee the church (Acts 20:28), so they are to oversee the use of the treasury to accomplish its work.

Many members of the Lord's church have the mistaken impression that an elder is to concern himself with only the spiritual needs of the congregation and therefore should not worry about the fundamental responsibilities of keeping up with the financial assets of the church. This doctrine is not to be found in the New Testament....Elders certainly have the right to delegate the time-consuming functions of counting, depositing, and record keeping, but cannot escape the responsibility to make sure that these delegated functions are properly carried out....Elders, therefore, in addition to the responsibility to give as prospered have the tremendous added responsibility of providing good stewardship for the entire contributions of the church.¹⁸

How Can We Know What God Authorizes To Be Done With The Church Treasury?

We may ascertain Bible authority by observing from God's Word: (1) Example, (2) Implication, (3) Direct Statement, and (4) Expediency. While the first three might be more easily discerned, obviously some uses of the church treasury are in the realm of expediency. To circumvent the need for Divine authority, some have made disbursements from the church treasury for actions they have falsely declared to be in the realm of expediency. Brother Roy Deaver defined expediency:

Expediency is that which expedites. There is no expediency where there is no advantage. So far

as concerns obligations of the local church, an expedient is that which is in harmony with the Scriptures, in which there is an inherent advantage, and which may be selected by the elders in carrying out any obligation of the church—that obligation growing out of that for which there is approved example, an implication, or a direct statement.¹⁹

Is There An “Exclusive Pattern?”

Walter H. Adams wrote: “It is wrong to waste the Lord’s money; it is wrong to use ill-advised plans in doing the Lord’s work when better plans can be devised.”²⁰ Sometimes, doing the work of the church in the best possible way requires cooperation of congregations. H. A. Dixon observed: “Such cooperation is functional. Such plans seem to be the best within our reach to expedite evangelization in our generation.”²¹

Brother Woods, in debate with Roy Cogdill, in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1957, proved “there is no exclusive method of church cooperation taught in the Bible”; thus, to argue for one, exclusive pattern of cooperation is, as brother Woods put it, “absurd.”²²

Cooperation of congregations has been the case since the first century. There are some works, which are good and necessary, but which would never be done (and could not be done) without churches cooperating with one another. When a Scriptural work is larger than that which one congregation can successfully accomplish, others may, and should, help. Otherwise, some of the greatest works ever carried out by our great brotherhood would have never begun. When a congregation is too small to support a missionary, it can, and should, join with other congregations to do so. Otherwise, it is powerless to do its part to help take the Gospel to the world. John H. Banister made these points about ways in which congregations can cooperate. Congregations may cooperate in (1) benevolence;

(2) in communicating and maintaining relations with each other; (3) in honoring withdrawal of fellowship; and, (4) in evangelism by joining to support an evangelist, a radio or television program, city-wide meetings, printing of tracts, teaching materials, advertising, and so on.²³

An important point to remember is this: congregations have the right to choose to cooperate with others, and in what ways to cooperate, and do not have to submit to demands, or commands, of other congregations or elderships concerning what works they will support. Local exercise of judgment and congregational autonomy must be preserved. When a church decides not to cooperate in a work designed to save souls, it should not impose its decision upon others, or make a law that others sin if they do cooperate—doing the work of the church.

We must also remember that the work of the church is not conducted through organizations such as a Missionary Society. Brother E. R. Harper wrote concerning the church's doing its work: "The Missionary Society [or any organization like it, BL] has **no right to do such things; it has no right to live**. That is what is wrong with it, it has no right to do these things."²⁴

Churches may cooperate in the area of benevolence, but such cooperation does not constitute an unscriptural "society." Hear brother H. A. Dixon's words:

Paul took collections, too, from churches of Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia for the needy saints in Palestine on the occasion of another famine there....By such cooperation Paul demonstrates how Christians who have, should respond to the needs of those who have not (see 2 Cor. 8:13-14). It is clear, therefore, that early Christians did cooperate in taking care of the needs of other Christians. They gave, as opportunity was afforded and ability extended, to all who were in need (see Gal. 6:10). They cooperated in pure and undefiled religion (see James 1:27).²⁵

Congregations may also cooperate in taking the Gospel to the entire world as shown by the comments of Truman E. Spring and John H. Banister:

We as children of God need to co-operate in order to accept the responsibility placed upon us by opportunity. Those without prejudice, those not bigoted in their thinking know that Christians should work together. Though there is a negative school of thinking being promoted by a few that denounce and reject the co-operative efforts of the children of God, I stand before you firmly convinced that as long as the autonomous feature of the congregation of the Lord's people is respected and is advanced that people from various congregations can and should work together in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and providing for those less fortunate than ourselves....Why should there be coordinated effort among the children of God? Because the cause is one, the extension of the kingdom by the proclamation of truth.²⁶

The New Testament teaches that we, as Christians, are all members of the same (one) body or church. This is true in spite of the fact that we have membership in different congregations and are under the oversight of different elderships. While, in our congregational capacity, we recognize the oversight of elders, yet, we all recognize allegiance to Jesus Christ, the one supreme head of the church universal!...Today congregations of the Lord's people, if they choose, can scripturally engage in cooperative ventures to advance the cause of Jesus Christ. This principle is well established in the New Testament.²⁷

The Problem Of Consistency

Some brethren, while not denying the Scriptural authority for a church treasury, deny the Scriptural usage of the treasury for certain works of the church. Charles A. Holt, in debate with G. K. Wallace, in Florence, Alabama,

in 1959, denied it was Scriptural for churches of Christ to “build and maintain benevolent organizations for the care of the needy,” but in his First Speech of the First Night, showed the church treasury to be Scriptural.²⁸

Brother Wallace, in his Second Affirmative of the First Night, used a chart which had the following information concerning the financial expenditures from the “common treasury” of the East Florence church, where Holt, at that time, preached.²⁹

CHART NO. 3

“The only contribution which any congregation made out of its treasury in the New Testament day was to the ‘poor saints’ (Roy E. Cogdill, “**Walking By Faith**,” p. 70).

EAST FLORENCE BUDGET—1959

| | |
|---|------------|
| 1. <i>Preacher's salary</i> | \$5,720.00 |
| 2. Payment on <i>Preacher's home</i> | 1,520.00 |
| 3. <i>The Contender</i> (once a month) | 2,500.00 |
| 4. Radio Program | 1,600.00 |
| 5. Building Fund | 1,000.00 |
| 6. Utilities (church building/ <i>preacher's home</i>) | 1,300.00 |
| 7. Preaching (Norway and Canada) | 900.00 |
| 8. Church building repairs | 600.00 |
| 9. Two gospel meetings | 850.00 |
| 10. Insurance on church building | 300.00 |
| 11. Insurance on <i>preacher's house</i> | 45.00 |
| 12. Repairs on <i>preacher's house</i> | 105.00 |
| 13. Improvement on church lot | 200.00 |
| 14. Extra preaching | 250.00 |
| 15. Mission work | 150.00 |
| 16. Additional song books | 100.00 |
| 17. Lesson study helps for classes | 350.00 |
| 18. Church stationery and bulletin | 400.00 |
| 19. <i>Charity</i> | 310.00 |

| | |
|--|-------------|
| 20. <i>Needed</i> to increase bank balance | 500.00 |
| 21. Teacher's Training Program | 360.00 |
| 22. Miscellaneous | 200.00 |
| 23. Janitor and janitorial supplies | 640.00 |
| 24. <i>Gospel Guardian</i> | 900.00 |
| Total | \$20,800.00 |

Commenting on the budget of the East Florence church, brother Wallace said:

I think brother Holt will agree with brother Cogdill. I think he is afraid to disagree with him. "The only contribution that any church, or any money, that any church paid out of its treasury in New Testament times was to the poor saints." There is one thing about this—that is not so or East Florence is not a New Testament church. They have something in their budget besides poor saints. Look at it. There is the preacher's salary—\$5,720. Watch it. Payment on preacher's home, \$1,520. Now that is paying the rent. You find where any church took money out of the church treasury to buy or build a preacher's home. Where any church took money out of its treasury except to do mission work somewhere out yonder. And again for the *Contender* once a month, \$2,500 taken out of the treasury. The support for the *Contender* is not all out of the treasury as I can show where they have a *national* collection, to meddle in the affairs of other churches. Here is a church that sits up down here and says, "We know how to do it and we are putting out a paper to meddle in your affairs and to fool with your operation." And they say, "You can not take money out of the treasury except for poor saints." The *Contender* is not a poor saint and neither is Charles. He may be poor but he ain't no saint. Then here is the radio, \$1,600. Building fund, \$1,000. Utilities, church building and preacher's home—that is for the preacher—\$1,300, \$5,700, \$1,520, \$2,500. That is going up pretty high for a preacher.... Of the \$20,800 most of it is for the local preacher, and

you can not take money out of the treasury except for poor saints.

Now, improvement on the church, extra preaching, mission work, additional song books, lesson study aids for classes, church stationery, and bulletin and charity, \$310. *CHARITY, \$310*. Now that is the church that sends the *Contender* all over the country and says, "All you churches in this country just let us run your business. Let us send you the *Contender* and tell you what to do." *\$310 FOR CHARITY*. Did this charity money all go to saints or was there some little unbaptized child in that group?

Now, "Needed to increase bank balance." They say you can not send to a church unless it is in need. They are in need. What is their need? *Increase the bank balance*. That is their need....Now, brother Holt says, "What I am worrying about is this collection, this collection, this collection." He is not worried about it over at East Florence as he gets in there and gets what he wants in the budget. I will tell you what he is worried about. He does not want to get a little orphan in the budget. He can put a preacher in the budget. He can draw all the money and yet he could not take a sanctified dollar out of the treasury to buy a loaf of bread for a starving child. If that is Christianity we will all go to heaven. If that is Christianity I do not know what the Bible teaches. Now that is what this debate is about. These brethren sit up here and make rules and regulations that God Almighty did not make.³⁰

While some declare cooperative works have "deadly parallels to the Missionary Society," they have argued for putting "a box in the vestibule," into which contributions could be made for those very works!³¹ It appears some can do all kinds of things, with the money in the church treasury, **except** help a child in need. Let anyone of them produce a New Testament passage which shows the care of an orphan, or the way by which that care was given. As one brother, commenting on the inconsistency of such law-

makers, said, the church can take money out of the treasury to buy fertilizer to feed a lawn, but the church cannot take money out of the treasury to buy food to feed a starving child (or any non-saint). Yet, God gives to both the just and the unjust, and we are to be “perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48). Roy Deaver wrote:

Certain brethren are terribly inconsistent in their views with regard to the realm of expediency....When L. W. Hayhurst left the anti-Sunday school position he said: “I have decided that when I build a church building I do the same thing in principle which they do when they have a Bible class. How can I do the same thing which they do, and then condemn them for what they do?”³²

Is The Work Of The Church To Provide Entertainment Or Recreation?

Some have the false idea that their giving to the local church results in a collection of funds which stay with the local church, like their making deposits in a bank, and that “their” money should come back to them in services rendered by the local congregation. (Thus, the call for facilities and opportunities for sports, games, fitness, and “such like” provided by the church.) According to Ronsvale, some say, “There’s a sense in which a gift to the church is a gift to myself. When I give to the homeless shelter, I don’t get anything from that.”³³ Billions are lost, dying in sin, having never heard the Gospel, and some “churches of Christ” are selfishly spending multiplied millions on pleasing themselves, fulfilling their “needs,” and providing for their carnal desires.

Misusing the church treasury, in this way, also arises from following the denominational plan for church growth. This has led some congregations to fund provisions of entertainment and recreation in vain attempts to entice

prospects and to keep members.³⁴ Many congregations have spent large sums of the Lord's money for this very purpose. Is it wrong for brethren to enjoy entertainment and recreational activities together? No; however, providing funds from the treasury for such is not the work of the church.

Attempts to grow, by bypassing the teaching of truth (which alone results in genuine conversion [Rom. 10:13-17]), will fail. The power is still in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), and God's plan for church growth still works (2 Tim. 2:2). The sad truth (which some have learned too late) is this: if one "comes to church" because of the entertainment/recreation which the church provides, he will leave when it ceases, when he grows tired of it, or when someone else offers something better. Robert R. Taylor, Jr., wrote concerning Christ as head of the church:

As head He determines the mission—evangelism, edification and benevolence (Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 14:12; James 1:27; Gal. 6:10). Ruled out entirely is entertainment or recreation. These should stem from parents and the home!³⁵

Using The Church Treasury For Benevolence

God has commanded us to be compassionate friends of those in need. Christ, Who perfectly exemplified such care, declared its significance at judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). Some teach that the church **cannot** discharge the responsibility enjoined by Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," but the individual **only** may "do good unto all men." Some go so far as to say that any church which helps anyone except those who are saints is hell-bound!

In the May 30, 1963, issue of the Guardian their man, Brother A. C. Grider, is affirming this proposition: "The Bible teaches that it is a sin for the church to take money from its treasury

to buy food for hungry, destitute children and those who do so will go to hell.”³⁶

If Galatians 6:10 refers to individual action only, the church **cannot** do the following, (and would sin and be hell-bound if it did): (1) Restore a brother overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1); (2) Bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2); (3) Fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2); or, (4) Pay the preacher (“communicate [give] unto him that teacheth” [Gal. 6:6]). The logical conclusions of the “saints only” doctrine demand individuals **only** are responsible for these actions—including paying the preacher. Every individual Christian would have to obey God’s command to pay the preacher, and would be lost if he failed to do so. Likewise, the church could not pay the preacher, but would sin if it attempted to do so.

Consequently, if Galatians 6:10 refers to the action of individuals **only**, the church **cannot** help the “household of faith.” The ones who are to “do good unto all men” are the same ones who are to do good unto “the household of faith.” The question arises as to who these “doing good” ones are. Our erring brethren say, “Individuals only!” Paul, by inspiration, wrote this epistle to the “churches of Galatia,” which included individuals (cf. 1 Cor. 12:20)—but not to individuals **only** (Gal. 6:1-2).

The word translated “all men” (Gal. 6:10) means all men, anyone, or everyone. Those who deny the God-given command for the church to help **all** men say “all men” refers to “saints only.” If so, the passage should read: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto them who are of the household of faith, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Obviously, “all men” must refer to those other than “the household of faith.” Other passages, referring to these two classes of men, have wording very similar to Galatians 6:10.

John 12:32 says, Jesus died for all men—not for saints only (1 John 2:2; Heb. 2:9)! Otherwise, we must join the Calvinists in the false doctrine of Limited Atonement. Jesus invites all men—not “saints only”—to come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17)). **Acts 5:11** says, “The church” feared, but “as many as heard” (including those not of the church) also feared. In **Corinthians 9:13** “Unto them” is a reference to the saints (see the context). “Unto all men” obviously refers to someone else—all others who were **not** saints. In **1 Thessalonians 3:12** the writer mentions “you” (the brethren at Thessalonica [1 Thess. 1:1]), and includes another class, “all men.” In **1 Thessalonians 5:15**, “Yourselves” indicates those in the church (saints), and “all men” must be those not saints. “All men” means **all** men, not “saints only,” and the church is to do good unto all men.

Can the church practice pure religion? “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” (Jas. 1:27). “Saints only” advocates falsely affirm this refers to the response of individuals only. Individuals must practice pure religion, but this verse does not limit the practice of pure religion to individuals only. Those who bind their laws upon others, by inserting the word “only,” are like denominationalists who teach “faith only.” They add to the inspired revelation, binding where God has not bound (Rev. 22:18-19). Salvation is by “faith,” but not by “faith only” (Jas. 2:24). Likewise, God’s Word teaches individuals are to help the fatherless and widows, but does not teach such help must come from “individuals only.”

James wrote to the “twelve tribes,” spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:16), the church, and addresses “brethren,” regulating among other things, by his epistle, activities in the “assembly” (Jas. 1:1-2; Jas. 2:1-2). Also, the Greek word

for “himself” (Jas. 1:27) refers to an individual action which is discharged collectively (cf. Eph. 5:19). If, however, James 1:27 refers to individual action **only**—if the church **cannot** “visit with the intent of rendering aid the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” then, it must be true that the church **cannot**: (1) practice pure and undefiled religion; (2) keep itself unspotted from the world; or, (3) help the “fatherless” (thus, those who are not saints). It cannot help “widows” either, for the same verse enjoins rendering aid to both.

The church, individually and collectively, must be concerned about the welfare of “all men,” and “do good unto all men.” Such benevolence is a work of the church, and enhances and facilitates the God-given task of the church to win souls. Those who teach otherwise err, binding upon men that which God has not bound. John Moore wrote:

Doing unto others is a scriptural principle which must govern the church of Jesus Christ. Going about doing good is a characteristic manifested by Jesus which must also characterize the church. Pure religion necessitates the church being involved in benevolence. Through benevolence, the church lets its light shine, showing the good works and thereby glorifying the Father which is in heaven.³⁷

What About Schools And Colleges?

Alexander Campbell said, “Of all people in the world we ought then to be, according to our means, the greatest patrons of schools and colleges.”³⁸ Claude A. Guild noted these contributions of a “Christian College”: (1) It builds the church in the school’s community; (2) It reaches people with the Gospel that would not otherwise be reached; (3) It preaches the Gospel over a wide area; (4) It helps students have a practical and vivid conception of faith; (5) Through Christian education, it brings redemption; and, (6) It inspires cooperation.³⁹

Brethren in the United States have found that the Christian school and college are very expedient. Take a map and look over these United States and see where the church is strong. Then see where the schools and colleges are. You will find that they live side by side. Then do a little historic research and you will find that in the parts of the country where the church has opposed the use of the schools and colleges, operated by our brethren, that the church has not grown, and in many cases has retrogressed in the last generation.⁴⁰

For example, the Memphis School of Preaching, a work of the Forest Hill Church of Christ, is under the oversight of the elders of the Forest Hill congregation. Hundreds of churches, and numerous individuals, help financially in the School's preparing men to preach. The church has the responsibility of training Gospel preachers (If not, who does?), as shown by 2 Timothy 2:2. Others, like MSOP, who train men to preach, or those schools which teach the Bible, and do so faithfully, are worthy of support, including funds from the church treasury, in their teaching the Gospel and furthering the true cause of the church. It is not the work of the church to provide a secular education for engineers, policemen, biologists, and such.

Conclusion

The study of the Scriptural use of the church treasury is much needed, for into the too often present vacuum of confusion have freely flowed inaccurate conclusions and false doctrines. In spite of God's warning to be on guard (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11), too many brethren have fallen to errors. Churches and brethren have divided over the use of the treasury. Concerning blame, Ralph D. Gentry stated: "The truth of the matter is, **whoever is anti-scriptural is responsible for whatever division that exists.**"⁴¹

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CHAPTER 25

On Marriage, Divorce And Remarriage

Sam Willcut

Introduction

OF ALL THE ISSUES facing the church over the past several decades, none seems to have infiltrated and disrupted the church any more than this issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage. We have seen the divorce rate in America rise at a staggering rate, but we have also seen the divorce rate rise among members of the Lord's church. We are continually dealing with a convoluted, tangled mass of problems relating to those who divorce and remarry. In fact, it has become such a problem, that we have even given it a nifty acronym for reference (MDR). Nevertheless, the heartaches that have resulted from such difficulties are too numerous to elaborate.

Thus, from the overall theme of this lectureship, many are wondering whether we can understand the Bible alike concerning this controversial issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It is bad enough that the religious world does not respect the authority of the Bible, but when it comes to such an emotional, personal issue as this, even some in the church have gone astray concerning these issues.

Before we proceed any further, let us make something clear—in all actuality, this is not one issue, but three separate issues. Therefore, we are going to treat them as such.

Of course, these issues relate one to another, but they are still different issues, as we will examine them.

God's Arrangement for Marriage

In Matthew 19, we have the Pharisees tempting Jesus with a question about divorce, but let us not overlook the context of Matthew 19 with what Matthew records in the previous chapter. The disciples of Jesus ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1), and the rest of the chapter, including most of the events of Matthew 19, tie into the answer to that question. Thus, when we come to Matthew 19, we will learn from Jesus that greatness begins with the home, and specifically, a properly arranged marriage. The success and happiness of individuals depends upon the home. While society may emphasize all the physical, material, fleshly things of this world as its standard of greatness, these do not build a happy home. If it did, America would have happy homes on every corner due to their affluence. Just pick up a local tabloid newspaper to see the homes of the rich and famous floundering with divorce. Thus, to answer their question, Jesus lays down some principles about God's arrangement for marriage, going all the way back to "the beginning" (Matt. 19:4).

God's arrangement for marriage is a Divine arrangement. The first thing we learn about God's arrangement for marriage is that it is a Divine reflection of men and women: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). Something about marriage reflects the quality and character of God, but it takes both male and female. Man alone does not give a complete picture of God—God also created women to have qualities of His image. For example, man signifies dominion, just as God has power and authority. Yet, woman signifies

tenderness, mercy, sympathy and understanding, which are things that God also has. Thus, when we put these together, we have what God intended in marriage.

God's arrangement for marriage is for mutual companionship. When God created Adam and Eve, placing them in the Garden of Eden, He placed them in the position of ultimate happiness without any corruption in the relationship. Man needed companionship (Gen. 2:18-20), and God created both man and woman so that each satisfies the needs of the other. Nevertheless, some Divine principles of God's arrangement for marriage must be the foundation of the fact that we need each other. Without such, a spirit of selfishness will grow that eventually wreaks havoc and destroys the marriage.

God's arrangement for marriage calls for mutual closeness. God made man from dust (Gen. 2:7), but when God made woman, He did not create her from dust. Rather, He took a part of man's body—how could anything symbolize the deep abiding unity and closeness of marriage any better than this? Therefore, there is to be closeness in marriage that this fact signifies (cf. Eph. 5:28-30). If Adam hated Eve, he would have hated his own flesh. He could not hate her without hating himself (Gen. 2:23), but many do not think about marriage in that way. How could Eve fail to “respect” Adam (cf. Eph. 5:30, NKJV), knowing that God created her from the body of her husband?

God intended for marriage to supersede every other human relationship (the only other relationship above this is an individual's relationship with God). We see this when God said, “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5; cf. Gen. 2:24). Think about the close ties of parents with their children. Yet, as close as they may be, the marriage relationship is to supersede

such, which is necessary to keep in mind. In other words, this signifies the attitude each is to have toward the other in the relationship—the marriage relationship becomes the predominant thing in the physical life of each one. In earthly, human relationships, nothing can take the place in the heart of a husband for his wife or in the heart of the wife for her husband. If in the heart of a wife for her husband or vice versa, something ever supersedes and takes the place of the other, that marriage will never be what it needs to be.

This is so significant, important and fundamental that Jesus says nothing should interfere with it: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6). This is why man and woman are to leave everything and understand that the relationship into which they are entering demands commitment to make marriage as beautiful as God arranged it. Therefore, whenever we recognize these principles and develop this type of closeness, we will have God’s arrangement for marriage.

God’s arrangement for marriage calls for mutual responsibilities (1 Cor. 7:3). Since the Bible teaches that the husband is the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23), we may fail to realize that there are **mutual responsibilities**. In the area which Paul is discussing, there is equality—each one owes the other certain things. Every marriage would be better if both the husband and wife realize that there are mutual responsibilities that each owes the other. Think about the problems in marriage that couples could solve if both met the mutual responsibility to another. Yet, one of the major difficulties in counseling with couples is for them to realize this important point, because generally, each one wants to discuss the problems, mistakes and faults of the other. By such, there will never be any solution. The very fact that God has ordained that

the two should live together shows that there are mutual responsibilities. Wives should “submit themselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). Husbands should love their wives “as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Understanding these respective responsibilities to each other will remove self-centeredness from the marriage. Young people who are contemplating marriage need to consider whether their fiancé is self-centered. Thus, to avoid such attitudes, we must recognize our mutual responsibilities.

God’s arrangement for marriage calls for mutual obligations (1 Cor. 7:3). The word “due” indicates an obligation. Jesus used this same Word in Matthew 22:21 when He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Are we not to meet the obligations of the state? Do we have a choice in the matter? No, they are obligations. Therefore, a successful marriage involves the understanding of meeting mutual obligations.

God’s arrangement for marriage calls for mutual surrender (1 Cor. 7:4). This is true, not only in the realm of physical relationships as Paul is discussing, but it is also true in the other areas. If one has the idea, “I have my right and I am going to do what I want to do,” then that marriage will never be successful. By mutually surrendering personal rights, this complements the deep concern each is to have for the other and the motivation to be interested in the welfare of the other.

God’s arrangement for marriage calls for mutual understanding (1 Cor. 7:5). Whenever separation occurs, the couple must mutually understand and agree that this separation is temporary and not permanent—“for a time.” The emphasis that Paul gives here is for spiritual growth. When couples are having

problems, if they would sit down and say, “I need some time to think, study and pray,” bringing their own heart and life into the presence of God for examination, think what that would do to help solve marital problems! Therefore, we see in this the importance of thinking about our own personal problems in relationship to God and seeking to correct such for spiritual growth. However, they must understand that Satan will try to take advantage of them and tempt them with adultery or fornication.

God’s arrangement for marriage includes children. Since God’s arrangement for marriage includes children (Gen. 1:28), then successful marriages will affect not just husbands and wives but also children. It is interesting that Matthew 18 begins with the introduction of children and this section of greatness concludes with a discussion of children (Matt. 19:13-15). God’s arrangement for marriage with children includes training children with the principles that enable them to learn the proper values of life to apply in their lives (Eph. 6:4; cf. Deut. 6:7).

To conclude this point, some may argue that celibacy is the best life. In fact, after the disciples heard God’s arrangement for marriage, divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19, they said, “If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry” (Matt. 19:10). Yet, in the next two verses, Jesus explains that in the cases of some people, celibacy is acceptable, but the majority of the people could not receive it. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul states that there are some advantages to living a celibate life (1 Cor. 7:25-35). However, if life is to be fulfilling and reach its highest mission, then God’s arrangement for marriage has a place in the life of the average person.

God’s Abhorrence for Divorce

God abhors divorce because it indicates a malady of the heart. Again, in Matthew 19, the Pharisees

tempted Jesus with a question concerning divorce. Some during that time thought that divorce for “every cause” was sufficient. In other words, there is not much difference in their thinking and the thinking of today—incompatibility was justification for divorce. Yet, we see in this text the cause of the problem: “because of the hardness of your hearts” (Matt. 19:8). Success depends upon the heart, which is what Jesus emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount. There will never be a successful marriage relationship without the attitudes of the Beatitudes, because these attitudes enable people to live together in all relationships of life, especially the marriage relationship, which is the most intimate and closest relationship in physical life.

Now, what is the first basic destructive malady of the heart that leads to divorce? The answer is pride. This is why Jesus, in the context of Matthew 18, says that we need to become humble as a child (Matt. 18:1-4). Pride is a real problem for all of us in all areas of life, including that which keeps us from correcting and solving our problems (cf. Matt. 18:15-35). If husbands and wives applied these simple principles to their marriage relationship, think of the number of problems they could solve overnight without ever getting to the point of divorce! My concern ought to be the salvation of my wife, and her concern about me ought to be my salvation. Thus, if it can work in solving problems between brethren, certainly it would work in solving marital problems.

Pride leads husbands and wives to think that they are perfect. Yet, in the midst of our imperfections, we must learn to deal with our problems and handle them properly. My concern with the weaknesses of my spouse should not be one of merely nagging or fussing, but I am to be concerned in trying to help solve them by encouraging and aiding in their correction. Yet, far too many times, because

our frailties activate the other, the tendency is for the aggravated one to say, “Well, I am just tired of putting up with that. You ought to know better than that and do better than that.” Where is the help? Ah, if only more husbands and wives would come together and say, “We are going to work on this together—instead of making your problem worse, I am going to help you with it, because I want to do what I can.”

In addition, a lack of forgiveness leads to divorce. Peter would not have made a great marriage counselor if we heeded his advice in Matthew 18:21. Husbands and wives spend a lifetime together with the commitment to work through their problems, which includes forgiveness. If I have a problem in forgiving my spouse, I need to remind myself how many times God has forgiven me. Thus, I will understand that an appreciation and realization of God’s forgiveness for me will create within me a forgiving spirit toward my spouse.

Jesus said that the real problem with divorce lies in the heart. Until we correct our hearts, marriages will never resolve their problems. The only way to correct the heart is to allow God to teach us through His Word. No matter how rocky the marriage may be, the principles of marriage that we find in the teaching of the Bible—God’s marriage manual—can save any marriage from divorce. Only when we apply the principles we have learned in God’s arrangement for marriage will we ever eradicate the problem of divorce.

God abhors divorce because it defies His arrangement for marriage. Note that the Pharisees asked, “Why did Moses command...” divorce, but Jesus said, “Moses...suffered,” or allowed it because of what sin had done to the heart. Moses instituted regulations controlling marriage in Deuteronomy 24. Yet, this was never God’s arrangement for marriage. For this reason,

God abhors divorce. In fact, these are almost His exact words in Malachi 2:16: “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16, NKJV). From the context of Malachi 2:10-16, these Jewish men were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying foreign women that would lead them into idolatry (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-8)—a clear violation of the Law of Moses. By ignoring what the Law said, they were neglecting the proper teaching of the priesthood, which is why question of divorce comes up in Matthew 19. Although the Law of Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of hearts, Jesus showed God’s arrangement for marriage. In like manner, the homes of our nations are falling apart because of divorce and the neglect of God’s pattern for the home. The homes within our congregations will also crumble and ruin in divorce courts if we neglect God’s original design. Therefore, God abhors divorce because the breakup of the home gives a false view of His Divine arrangement for marriage.

If God ever wished divorce to take place, He would have created two women for Adam, so that if Adam did not like Eve, he could have the other as his wife. In addition, God could have created two men and two women, so that they could divorce and swap later. Yet, God did not do it that way. Marriage is to be permanent. When men and women allow the Scriptures to guide them, then there will be permanence in marriage that only death can separate (cf. Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

God abhors divorce because of what it does to children. Generally, children suffer more than any others who are involved in the matter. Children are caught in the middle of two feuding parents. In many instances, the husband and wife are so angry at each other that they try to get the children to aggravate the other and manipulate the children against the other. Such actions literally tear

the children apart. God designed homes to be shelters from storms instead of the center of the storm.

God's Allowance for Remarriage

No matter what loopholes one may try to find in the Bible, there is one and only one allowance for remarriage after divorce. Jesus gives that in Matthew 19:9:

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

Sometimes, people will question its meaning, but the fact is that people can understand what Matthew 19:9 states. It does not need any explanation. In fact, Jesus did not go into any further explanation Himself, because it means exactly what it says—fornication is the only exception for remarriage when one's mate is still living.

Some claim that Jesus, in Matthew 19, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, taught two different things about remarriage. In fact, some claim that Paul was uninspired when he wrote this section. Note what he said:

But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment....And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband...But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away...Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful (1 Cor. 7:6; 1 Cor. 7:10; 1 Cor. 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:25).

What does Paul mean when he uses such terminology? Is he inspired in this writing? Does this mean that there is no apostolic authority behind such? No, this cannot be the

case. He closes this chapter by writing, "...and I think also that I have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:40). In addition, he later wrote:

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

Therefore, Paul was speaking in the place of the Lord, who authorized him to say what he did. We can answer what may appear to be a contradiction to some by noticing that Paul discussed matters that the Lord did not discuss. This is what these verses mean. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:10, he writes, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband." This is what the Lord dealt with in Matthew 19, but Paul deals with other questions that came up in an area with which the Lord did not deal. For example, He had given no instruction concerning mixed marriages or the matter of whether virgin daughters ought to marry or not. Therefore, we must keep this distinction in mind so that we may understand the uniformity that exists in the realm of marriage, divorce and remarriage, even among the teaching of Jesus and the apostle Paul.

With this being the case, what does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 7? Specifically, does he provide another reason for remarriage? Paul's direction to the first group is to those unmarried (1 Cor. 7:6-9). He advises them to remain single due to "the present distress" (1 Cor. 7:26). Then, Paul addresses a situation of which Christ already spoke (1 Cor. 7:10-11). Keep in mind the situation in Corinth—a husband or wife would obey the Gospel as preached by Paul, but the other spouse might be an unbeliever or pagan. Thus, the question would arise: "Should they maintain their home and marriage relationship, or should they

separate?” Jews would remember well their background in the Law of Moses of not being able to have mixed marriages with pagans (cf. Ezra 9-10). Therefore, the question would come to mind of whether a believer and an unbeliever could remain married. Paul said that they could continue the marriage relationship. Yet, if there is a separation, then that does not allow for remarriage. I believe that is clear because of the alternative to reconcile, which we need to keep in mind. Thus, this is what the Lord has addressed about marriage.

Now, beginning in 1 Corinthians 7:12, Paul is going to address the situation further by discussing some things that Jesus did not discuss. He stated that this mixed marriage is to remain intact, if the unbeliever is willing to live with the believer. In fact, consider this important point. Before people become Christians, God recognizes the institution of marriage, and after one or both become Christians, He still recognizes their marriage. Surely, this shows that the idea that God does not recognize the marriage of non-Christians is foreign to what the Scriptures teach. There are some who attempt to argue this way, but they are wrong. Paul simply says that this mixed marriage is not an unholy relationship, and children born into such would not be illegitimate (1 Cor. 7:14).

The next question that Paul addresses is this: “What if a pagan unbeliever in Corinth leaves by refusing to live with the partner who has become a Christian?” In spite of the encouragement for them to remain together, if the unbeliever decides that he or she cannot live with a Christian spouse who has obeyed the Gospel, Paul says, “Let him depart” (1 Cor. 7:15). Some will say that in a situation where there is desertion, the one remaining is free to remarry, but I do not believe this is the case. Some believe that the statement, “A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” means that one is not bound

to that marriage that would lead them to have to give up Christianity and forsake the Lord in order to maintain the marriage. While I do believe this to be true, it may go further than this. Again, consider the pagan worship of Corinth, where even Corinthians practiced prostitution in connection with it. As such, Corinth was a city that encouraged fornication. If a pagan spouse left a Christian under circumstances where fornication and prostitution were prevalent, is it possible that what is under consideration is that this pagan would likely become guilty of fornication, and by this, break the marriage vow? According to what Jesus says in Matthew 5:31-32, I believe this may be the possibility. If Jesus said that putting away his wife would cause her to commit adultery, might it not be possible that in Corinth, with the prevalence of fornication on every side, the likelihood is that a pagan who left his spouse would become guilty of fornication or adultery. However, remarriage cannot take place by the innocent **unless** such happened.

One painfully difficult situation is when someone puts away their spouse and then each try to wait the other out. When one of them commits adultery or fornication, the idea the other is free to remarry is misconceived. First, such depends upon whether one tried to do everything that he could to keep the marriage intact and opposed the divorce—he begged, pleaded and went to the furthest degree to avoid such. If one spouse pushes the divorce in spite of all that they could do, with the other not contributing to such in any way, then it is my judgment if the one who pushes the divorce remarries, the other partner, the innocent party, is free to remarry. However, both parties may be guilty of contributing to the divorce, which is a different matter—it is my judgment that neither could Scripturally remarry, even if one of them remarries.

Therefore, I believe the idea that Paul gives an additional reason for divorce and remarriage is without

any foundation at all. I do not believe what some call “the Pauline privilege” has one iota of basis for it. I do believe that Jesus and Paul harmonize between Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7. This is why we need to teach our children the permanence of marriage. Paul states:

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39).

Allow me to mention one further point while we are in 1 Corinthians 7. Some try to use 1 Corinthians 7:20-21 to justify an adulterous relationship. Paul is not talking about a man who is involved in a sinful relationship becoming a Christian and remaining in that sinful relationship. That is to read into this something that Paul is not discussing. Yet, some who marry, divorce and remarry for causes other than fornication will later become a Christian and try to use this as justification to remain in that relationship. Paul is now discussing circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom; he is not discussing marriage.

Conclusion

Can we understand the Bible alike on marriage, divorce and remarriage? Yes, we can. Yes, we should. Yes, we must! If this is the case, then why is there so much confusion and division over this subject? Those who are interested in understanding the Bible alike are those who are seriously interested in arriving at truth, no matter what the cost. Jesus stated the proper attitude in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). The Pharisees were “tempting him” in Matthew 19; thus, they were quibbling and not serious about

searching for truth, and those who follow in these footsteps will never understand the Bible properly on this subject.

I cannot conclude this lecture without saying that I believe there is nothing sinful in a marriage relationship with a Christian married to a non-Christian (as we have seen from 1 Corinthians 7), because if it were sinful, then God would not recognize the marriage and we would have another reason for divorce and remarriage. Yet, I believe there is nothing in the Bible that would encourage us to marry a non-Christian. There are too many dangers involved. The Bible teaches us the danger of becoming so closely related to people that it can have a tremendous influence upon our lives (i.e., Solomon in 1 Kings 11). In view of the importance of our salvation, we ought to think a long time before we consider marrying one who is not a Christian or encouraging our young people to do so.

As I conclude, I do not know how to unravel all the tangled confusion in problematic marriages. I simply cannot solve all the problems that everyone has in relationship to marriage, divorce and remarriage. I have heard of situations where people had marriage difficulties so involved that I do not believe that Solomon in all of his wisdom could ever unravel them completely. Yet, I do believe God can; thus, the only thing I can do is to turn to what the Bible says and read it. I do believe we can all understand what the Bible says alike concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Due to the confusion and controversy of this subject, we need more preachers who will stand more firmly on the Scriptures to convince those who are in such adulterous unions to extricate themselves. We need more elders who will exercise firm, but loving church discipline upon those who will not repent of living in adultery (1 Cor. 5). We need more Christians who will see the importance of not entering into such unlawful relationships, but will pattern their marriages after God's arrangement without divorce and without infidelity.

CHAPTER 26

On What Constitutes Modest Apparel?

Michael Light

Introduction

IT IS A PLEASURE to be a part of the **POWER** Lectures this year. The Southaven congregation is to be highly commended for their willingness to undertake and maintain such a work. We appreciate the hours of labor that go into such an effort. No doubt the Lord's work in the opening years of the 21st century will be greatly aided by the foresight of the elders, and the effort of the members of this fine congregation. May God continue to bless you as you walk with Him.

Can We Understand The Modesty Issue Alike?

The answer is, "yes." Modesty, like every other Biblical doctrine can (and must) be understood and obeyed (Heb. 5:9). It must also be stressed that while we can (and will) decipher the Biblical principles of modesty, there will by the nature of the issue be some variations. In other words, some may very well live a life dressing more modestly than the Bible demands; while others may live in harmony with the Biblical principles; but not go beyond them. For instance I would argue that there is such a thing

as a modest pair of shorts; and no sin in wearing such. Another individual may decide not to wear any shorts whatsoever as a matter of personal preference or conviction. Both of these examples would be right (this fact in no way even hints that there is no standard of modesty). We will look primarily at the more traditional problem of immodesty and its adverse effects on the church and society as a whole.

Immodesty Defined

The best place to begin a discussion on Christian attire is to look at the basic concept of “modesty,” followed by its opposite, “immodesty.” Vine’s offers the following under the heading, “Modest:”

Kosmios, “orderly, well arranged, decent, modest” (akin to *kosmos*, in its primary sense as “harmonious arrangement, adornment,” *kosmikos*, of the world, which is related to *kosmos* in its secondary sense as the world), is used in 1 Tim. 2:9 of the apparel with which Christian women are to adorn themselves; in 3:2 (RV, “orderly;” KJV, “of good behavior”), of one of the qualifications essential for a bishop or overseer. “The well-ordering is not dress and demeanor only, but of the inner life, uttering indeed and expressing itself in the outward conversation.”¹

As you can see from the above definition modesty includes much more than just clothing, or the lack thereof. Modesty, in the Biblical sense incorporates that which is appropriate. There are considerations beyond the amount of material hanging from our bodies. Conversely, “immodesty,” would be the opposite, “disorderly, not well arranged, not decent, without modesty.” In 1 Timothy 3:2, modesty is applied to one’s behavior (*kosmois*); specifically elders, “good behavior.” When taken together we see that modesty, encompasses both our outward dress as well as our inward character.

Biblical Passages On The Subject

Let's now look at some verses in the Bible that deal with modesty, immodesty and our Christian character. Paul wrote:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Again he wrote:

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that *[they be]* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *[To be]* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:1-5).

In 1 Peter 3:1-4 we read:

Likewise, ye wives, *[be]* in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation *[coupled]* with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward *[adorning]* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But *[let it be]* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *[even the ornament]* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Notice the overall message from these passages when looked at together. In the first text God tells women “to adorn themselves in modest apparel.” This would suggest that there is such a thing as immodest apparel. A Christian lady (the same would also be true of men) is to be known for her godliness, not her physical beauty, fashion and jewels.

Far too many young ladies (and not a few older ones) seem to think very little about the way they dress. The low-waisted pants and tight fitting, short shirts that are so popular today, are without question extremely immodest. The shirts ride up well past the belly button (many of which are pierced – perhaps another reason for the short shirts [to show the jewelry stuck in the navel]). Parents should be more aware of what their children are wearing and should act like parents (making sure they only wear that which is acceptable).

More Comments On The Negative Power Of Immodesty

One writer has stated, “Immodesty is wearing clothing that reveals or emphasizes parts of the body that, when seen by the opposite sex, draw attention to you and create evil desires.”²

Notice some definitions and comments from an article by Wendy Shalit, author of **A Return to Modesty**. The article is entitled; “Respect For Modesty Made Women Powerful.” There are several different motivations for dressing in a modest fashion. The most pressing of course is a recognition that it is God’s will. But there are some other very practical reasons to wear the proper attire.

Under the heading “The Consequences of Immodesty” she gives the following definition, “The word modest means a boundary or standard of measure, therefore, immodesty is having no standard or measure in regard to sexuality.”

Brethren, when we discuss modesty, sexuality is an underlying issue. Often times this aspect of the issue gets glossed over, but in truth it lies at the heart of the matter. Notice further, the same article states:

1. Immodesty is distracting: “Thinking deeply (which is natural) and sexual desire (which is natural) cancel each other out (which is natural)... This relationship is not confined to sexual passion. Such distraction of the intellect occurs with most other passions as well: ‘I was so hungry, I couldn’t think’; ‘I was so angry that I wasn’t able to concentrate’... Can we admit that these other passions disturb our ability to think but exclude sexual passion? If anything, sexual passion is a stronger distraction. Thus the more immodesty the more distraction.” (Benjamin D. Wiker, Professor at Franciscan University of Steubenville).

Parents and young people should read this material honestly and as objectively as possible. Our discussion on this aspect of modesty (or lack thereof) is dealing with human sexuality. And far too many people want to ignore the power of the sexual appetite, especially in men.

2. Immodesty makes us worry more about how we look which can lead to many types of disorders, including, but not limited to, anorexia, bulimia, depression, and low self esteem.

This idea is also one that bears looking into. Peter clearly instructs women to be more concerned about their inward beauty than physical beauty. However, to wear some of these modern “fashions” young ladies are forced to weigh next to nothing. This constant obsession with ones physical condition is contrary to the Biblical ideal for our priorities.

Jesus taught, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). When we become obsessed by our

looks (which dressing immodestly tends to stress); we lose focus on Who should come first in our lives, God.

3. Immodesty encourages men to become less honorable. “Do people imagine men courted women in the past because they simply found it more fun than casual sex? No, it was because women’s modesty required it.... It is today’s male who is thought manly by ‘scoring.’ In a different time he proved his manhood by being honorable. Success with women used to mean being faithful to one of them.... Ultimately, it seems that only men can teach other men how to behave around women, but those men have to be inspired by women in the first place, inspired enough to think the women are worth being courteous to... Women can’t tell men how to behave—they can either inspire, or fail to inspire.”

Again the way we dress (or fail to) says volumes about us. God knew exactly what He was doing when He set up the male-female relationship. He also knew that to which each gender would respond. The appetites of man, when left unchecked, can lead men to think on evil continually (Gen. 6:5). All right thinking people should do everything in their power to dress and act in a way that appeals to man’s more noble qualities, not the more base ones. We would never want to be a stumbling block to others.

4. Immodesty may lead to more pre-marital sex which in turn can lead to many problems including STD’s, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and emotional consequences.

While some will roll their eyes at this point it is still the truth. Lascivious dress will usually lead to lascivious deeds. Brother Billy Bland (an elder at the Coldwater congregation in Coldwater Mississippi [also an instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching]) once argued that

immodest dress often leads to an increase in abortions. He mentioned statistics that showed the increase of rapes when women were scantily clad (the fact the victims were immodest of course in no way justifies the actions of their attackers). These unwanted pregnancies are more times than not terminated (aborted). The point is, women need to consider the possible ramifications of lewd dress. The attitude and total disregard for the effects of lewd dress by some women is indeed astonishing.

5. Immodesty leads to a blurring of right and wrong sexual behavior – at what point do we draw the line?

Provocative dress does just that—it provokes sexual desires. In fact prostitutes have long been known for their scanty, “sexy” clothing. They know that their dress advertises their interest in sex. The same clothing worn by non-prostitutes still has the same “advertising” effect. God’s moral code is static, but poor planning on our part can place us in compromising situations. Youngsters in a sexually charged atmosphere will struggle to remain pure. Men and women of God are to make every effort to avoid living (and looking) like the world (Psm. 1).

6. Immodesty reduces women to a collection of body parts which cancels out their intellect, heart, and soul.

We sadly, have lived to see a day in America where women have been reduced to sex objects. Our television commercials are filled with sexually explicit advertisements. When Christian women succumb to the pressure of our “fashion” establishment to dress trampishly, they actually lend their support to such foolishness.

The Bible teaches us to honor women, not degrade them as “things” whose sole purpose for existence is to

sexually satisfy men. Dressing seductively (again the idea of seducing) and then being “shocked” at unwanted sexual advances is something of a wonderment.

Contrast God’s Word On Modesty Versus Mary Quant’s

Let’s look closer at Paul’s instruction to Timothy:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

God is interested in the whole man (body and spirit). We must accentuate our spirits more so than the body. Each woman is to express her sexuality to her husband and him alone (Gen. 2:24). The godly woman is not going to advertise her feminine form to those to whom she’s not married. The same is true of non-married women; they are forbidden to act as if they are sexually available.

God’s Word expressly limits sexual activity to the confines of marriage. In Hebrews 13:4 we read, “Marriage [*is*] honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” The modern epidemic of pre-marital and extra-marital sexual activity is clearly abhorrent to God.

Now contrast that with the following quotes from Mary Quant (often referred to as the mother of the mini-skirt). She once stated, “mini-clothes are symbolic of those girls who do not want to wait until dark to seduce a man into bed.”³ In another statement she said that clothes are worn for, “decoration, provocation, and look-at-me, a lot of look-at-me about it.”⁴ In the July 1971 issue of the **Spiritual Sword** (p. 9), David Lipe quotes Quant, as

saying, “most fashions for women are made with the man in mind.” While Quant didn’t invent lust, she did develop a way to bring it out into the open. Jesus condemned lust in the heart (Matt. 5:27-28).

We have seen a great “devaluation” of women and chastity in our day. The clothing (or lack of it) has certainly assisted in this change. God’s way elevates women to an almost poetic status (Prov. 31), while the world’s oversexed approach reduces women to nothing more than objects. The result of following God’s way is a happy well-adjusted home life, in which the husband and wife are mutually loving and caring (Eph. 5:22ff), while the result of the world’s approach to dress, sexuality and the home, is the disharmony and outright travesty we see occurring in our country every day (Prov. 13:15).

Immodesty In The Church

Let’s now turn our attention to a different set of “modesty problems” that present themselves in the church from time to time. As stated earlier, there is more to modesty than simply being fully clothed. It is true that far too often we see members dressed in inappropriate fashions. But there are other types of dress that are just as offensive, while not sexually charged.

Remember that the definition of modesty carries the idea of “appropriateness.” When we see young men waiting on the Lord’s Table wearing a **Megadeath** T-shirt and flip-flops, we are witnessing an act of immodesty (inappropriate dress for the occasion at hand). How someone can participate in a memorial service wearing a heathen Rock band’s shirt is beyond me. Those who argue, “the clothes don’t make the man,” are missing another Biblically based principle. While the clothes may not make the man, they do tell us much about the man (God gave multiple instructions concerning appropriate dress in the

Old Testament worship system). The Bible never endorses a nonchalant attitude in worship to God.

Similarly, when we attend church outings, youth gatherings or church camps, we need to make sure our clothing is appropriate. Our minds should be focused on worshipping and glorifying God. When we put some thought into what we are supposed to be doing, our clothing will take care of itself. In John 4:23-24, we read:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *[is]* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *[him]* in spirit and in truth.

When we are aware of the fact that God desires true worshippers, we will be more meticulous about what we wear. From time to time we meet individuals who are very defensive about their clothing and their “right” to wear what they want to. God is our Creator and we are to always strive to please Him, more than self.

Some Biblical Examples Of Immodesty And Its Tragic Results

David And Bathsheba

One of the greatest tales of tragedy and woe in the Old Testament is about a king who gave into lust, caused by immodesty. I’m not overly harsh toward Bathsheba, and yes, I recognize that King David should have looked away, but the fact remains that when she took her bath she did so in a place where she could be seen. Ladies, please think of this story as a reminder to take extra care concerning modesty. We read of this event in 2 Samuel 11:

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof

of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman [*was*] very beautiful to look upon (2 Sam. 11:2).

Read the above verse again and note that David saw her, and she was beautiful to look upon. This is the same man who slew the giant Goliath, the same man who had shown great courage and wisdom in his dealing with the evil King Saul. Yet, when the trap was baited with a beautiful nude woman, this great man of God fell.

This story is a shining testimony to the power of female sexuality over men. Women should read this story and take a serious and responsible look at their dress and demeanor as it affects the men around them. Men should read the story as a stern warning. If David fell (a man of more moral strength than most of us); so can we all. It is foolhardy to think somehow we are strong enough to play with fire and not get burned.

Judah And Tamar

There are many lessons that can be taken from this story, but modesty is one of them. When Tamar conjured her plan to become pregnant by her father-in-law (Judah) her first step was to change her clothes. Notice, she took off the clothes of a mourning widow and put on the clothes of a harlot.

When Judah saw how this woman was dressed he assumed she was a prostitute. The end result was an incestuous relationship (Gen. 38). Here again we see a man seduced by a woman inappropriately dressed. The Bible consistently points to the dangers of scantily clad women. We need to heed the message.

Other Warnings

We've already given much material concerning some of the problems with immodesty. Jesus deals with this in principle:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matt. 5:27-28).

We must guard our heart with all diligence. When we see someone who is immodestly dressed, we must look away. While it is true we cannot control what others wear, we can control lingering looks. Jesus warned us not to get caught in a cycle of lust.

Paul warned us to abstain from the appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). Jesus also warned us about becoming stumbling blocks (Matt. 18:6ff). We need to be careful how we dress so as to watch out for the souls of others.

A Word To Parents

When it comes to teenagers in the church who dress immodestly, the first responsibility lies with the parents. God has commanded parents to nurture their children. In Ephesians 6:1-4, we read:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

In truth there is no excuse for our children to dress immodestly. Parents complain about what their kids wear, yet they (the parents) buy it for them (or at least pay for it). The ultimate responsibility lies with the fathers. We are to bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord.

We are to teach them the ways of God (Deut. 11:19). We are to set a good example and then enforce our rules upon them. They do not get to choose what they are going

to wear (if it is inappropriate). They are kids and in many cases not emotionally or spiritually able to discern what is best. Too many parents take the coward's way out and do nothing concerning their kids. They blow and growl but never get anything done in regards to training children that will be worth a thing to the Lord's cause.

Without proper training more than likely our children will burn eternally in hell (Prov. 22:15; Matt. 26:41). When we show more concern over their grades in school, than their knowledge of the Bible, we have a serious problem. Our children can see the hypocrisy and they will despise us for it. In fact, immodest dress among children can be a cry for help—a cry for a parent to care enough to say, “No, you’re not wearing that.”

A Word To Elders, Deacons, Preachers, And Teachers

Unless we've had our heads firmly planted in the sand, we are aware of the temptations facing our country. I cannot overemphasize the importance of the role of the church in this fight against immodesty. Parents and children need to be encouraged by the leadership of the church to do what's right. Many young people are trying to do right in this area of life; let's support their good works. Those who don't dress appropriately should be taught better and rebuked if they persist in their ways.

We need to actively address these subjects in our youth programs and summer camps. We must realize that there is a struggle going on for the hearts and souls of each one of us (especially the young and vulnerable). We need to play fewer games and have more heart to heart, Bible in hand discussions with our young people and their parents. We must confront the true issues at hand and deal with them as God would have us do.

We should heed the words of the apostle Paul:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *[places]*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs, *[and]* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and *[that]* he might comfort your hearts. Peace *[be]* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace *[be]* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen (Eph. 6:10-24).

This passage comments on a dress code to which all of us must submit. The whole armor of God (not literal clothing of course) is to be worn by each and every Christian. Paul is reminding us that we are not playing games. We are in a life or death struggle with Satan. If we fail, we lose our

souls. If we succeed we will live with God in glory forever. Jesus stated:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *[it were]* not *[so]*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *[there]* ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Conclusion

This lesson will end as it began, thanking the elders of this congregation for taking these matters seriously. Sermon series' like this one are a step in the right direction in trying to get members to see the seriousness of complying with God's will. Far too many ignore God's way and doom themselves in the process.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:1-3).

If we refuse to stay with God and His way we will of necessity become His enemy. In Matthew 12:30, we read, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." The same sentiment is found in 2 John 9-11:

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

I hope these passages help us realize the seriousness of ignoring God's Word on any subject, including what we wear. May we consider these things in light of eternity.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 27

On Whether Social Drinking Is Acceptable To God?

Terry Mabery

Introduction

MANY WOULD AGREE THAT alcohol is a societal problem in the United States. For instance, in 1999, the National Center for Health Statistics reported that there were more than nineteen thousand alcohol-induced deaths in the United States each year, not including motor vehicle fatalities. There were 26,259 deaths in 1999 from chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, which was the twelfth leading cause of death in the United States. They also reported that 52% of those Americans interviewed in 1999 who were twelve and over had drunk alcohol in the previous month. Of those, 15% were “binge drinkers,” consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the previous month.¹ The **Infoplease Almanac** reported in 2002, “...nearly 14 million Americans—1 in every 13 adults—abuse alcohol or are alcoholics. Several million more adults engage in risky drinking patterns that could lead to alcohol problems.”²

The use of alcohol can lead to traffic deaths. It can cause abuse in families. It can be very costly to the economy due to lost hours and poor workmanship. However, many people will see no problem with the use of alcohol as long as it is moderate and controlled. Many think nothing of

being with a group of friends and “having a drink or two.” In addition, the argument is often made that having a beer or two, or a glass of wine, at home, or with a meal, is no problem at all. It is argued that such is no different from having an occasional soft drink.

It should be obvious from the following statistics that most people in the United States see no problem with having a few drinks now and then. In 2000, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 61.5% of persons eighteen years of age and over were current drinkers, having had at least one drink in the past year. Of those current drinkers, 70.6% were light drinkers, consuming up to three drinks per week. An additional 22.2% were moderate drinkers, men consuming four to fourteen drinks per week and women consuming four to seven per week.³

There are even those in the Lord’s church who do not seem to have a problem with an alcoholic drink now and then. A man considered by many to be a faithful Christian was observed at a restaurant by another Christian. He was drinking a beer with his meal. When he was later approached regarding the situation, his response was, “Well, if that’s all I have to worry about...,” and his voice trailed off as he turned and walked away.

One can call it social drinking, light drinking, moderate drinking, or whatever he wants. Regardless, whether or not drinking alcoholic beverages is a problem is not left up to society or any individual. When one considers the health costs, the destruction of property, the loss of work, and other costs related to the use of alcohol, one can understand the tremendous drain on the economy. In addition, when one considers the homes and individuals that are ruined by the use of alcohol, one understands the great destructive power it has. However, there is a matter of far greater importance that one should consider. Not

only can alcohol destroy an individual's life and family here on this earth, but it also can bring one's eternal soul to destruction, which is far worse. For a man's soul is worth more than all the world (Matt. 16:26).⁴ Alcohol therefore becomes a problem if it is sinful. For sin separates one from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and will bring eternal damnation. Therefore, one should ask, "Is social drinking, light drinking, moderate drinking, or any drinking of alcohol acceptable to God—or is it sinful?"

In answering such a question, there are those who will argue that one cannot really know the answer. They argue that two people might not understand the Bible alike. Each has his own interpretation. Yet, if the Bible is God's inspired Word, which it is, people can understand it alike. After all, the inspired apostle Paul wrote that one reading his epistle can comprehend his insight or understanding of the "mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). He also wrote to those same Ephesians, "Wherefore be Ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Now, an inspired apostle would not give a command that could not be obeyed. It is possible to understand God's will. Not only is it possible to understand God's will, but also two people must understand it in the way God intended because it is His Word that will judge us (John 12:48). If they both understand it in the way He intended, then they will understand it alike. That is true with regard to the drinking of alcoholic beverages or any other subject having to do with man's moral and spiritual life.

In considering whether social drinking, light drinking, moderate drinking, or any other drinking of an alcoholic beverage is acceptable to God, three matters will be considered. First, it will be established that drinking and drunkenness is unacceptable to God. Yet, there are those who argue that social drinking is acceptable in the Bible and is therefore not the same as drunkenness. So,

second, there will be a brief examination of some of the most commonly used arguments made from the Bible in favor of social drinking. Third, after showing the discrepancies of those arguments, the coffin will be nailed shut. It will be shown that (1) the alcoholic beverages of today fall into the category found in the Bible called strong drink, (2) Christians are commanded to abstain, and (3) drunkenness is a matter of degree which begins with the first drink.

The Bible Condemns Drinking And Drunkenness

First, there is no doubt or argument that the Bible warns of strong drink and condemns drunkenness. Wine is called a mocker (Prov. 20:1) and brings one to poverty (Prov. 21:17; Prov. 23:21). It causes contentions and brings sorrow (Prov. 23:29-30). It distorts thinking and behavior (Prov. 23:30-35; Prov. 31:4-7). The priests were warned against wine and strong drink (Lev. 10:8-9). Nazarites were forbidden to take wine or strong drink (Num. 6:2-3) and kings were warned against it (Prov. 31:4). Paul warns that one should not walk in drunkenness (Rom. 13:13), and he lists drunkenness as one of the works of the flesh which will condemn one's soul (Gal. 5:19-21). He wrote to the church at Corinth that the drunkard will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Second, alcohol defiles the body. The term drunkenness merely indicates intoxication. According to Strong, the Greek word, *methai*, drunkenness (Gal. 5:19-21), is "apparently a primary word; an intoxicant, i.e. (by implication) intoxication."⁵ Intoxication is "an abnormal state that is essentially a poisoning," and poison is "a substance that through its chemical action usually kills, injures, or impairs an organism."⁶ Now, the Christian belongs to God and should use his body with this in mind.

Paul wrote:

Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

From this passage one understands that the Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. One does not belong to himself, but to God. Therefore, the Christian is to glorify God in the body. Can one really believe that he can glorify God by introducing poisons into the body, the temple of the Holy Spirit? Can one really think he can defile the temple of the Holy Spirit with a mind-altering drug, alcohol, and be pleasing to God? Can one actually think he can glorify God in his body while under the influence of a mind-altering substance like alcohol? The Christian, realizing that his physical body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and is to be used to the glory of God, will not defile it with a substance used to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, a substance which destroys the body God has given. To do so would be sin.

Third, drinking alcohol causes one to yield to a master other than God. According to the Controlled Substance Act of 1971, there are five categories of drugs. Alcohol falls into the category of acting as a depressant to the central nervous system.

Some have falsely thought alcohol to be a stimulant because after a few drinks the subject feels he can perform amazing feats. This is of course due to the euphoria produced by the central nervous system sedation.⁷

As with all drugs in this category, alcohol is addictive. That means that one comes under the control of the drug and is not in full control of himself. In addition, drugs in this category, including alcohol, usually affect the ability of the

user to think clearly and rationally, to react normally, and behave ordinarily. All of this describes one who is no longer in control of himself but is being controlled. This does not mean one is forced or overwhelmed, but that one has yielded himself to another master, a chemical substance (Rom. 6:16). No one is forced to misuse or abuse the drug of alcohol. The choice is made by the individual to do so. One does not have to go very far, then, before he is under the control of the drug. The Christian is to be under the control of God, as His servant. Jesus said that one cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24), and Paul made it clear that one is not to be brought under the control of anything other than God, even if it is an expedient (1 Cor. 6:12). One enslaved to alcohol, one brought under the power of alcohol, is no longer yielding himself to the control of God, but to a chemical substance. That one has sinned against God.

Fourth, the Christian is to be a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16). He is to be blameless and harmless, a light shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). Thayer defines harmless as “of the mind, **without admixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple.**”⁸ Paul, using the same word, wrote, “...I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple unto that which is evil” (Rom. 16:19). The English Standard Version has “...innocent as to what is evil.” Paul took great pains so as not to bring reproach upon himself, upon the church, or upon Christ with regard to the handling of the money collected for the poor saints. He took “thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21). From Scriptures referred to above, there can be no doubt that alcohol is depicted as an evil in the Bible. How can a Christian partake of the same and think he is a light of the world, that he is innocent in the matter, and that he is honorable

in the sight of God and man? This author is aware of even non-Christians that have said that a Christian should not drink. In addition, even in matters of expediency, the apostle Paul makes it clear that one sins against others and against Christ when he becomes a stumbling block to them (1 Cor. 8:9; 1 Cor. 8:12). It should be evident, then, that the user of alcohol sins against Christ and against those they influence, for they become a stumbling block to them.

From the above, the Christian should clearly understand from God's Word that the use of alcohol is condemned by God. The use of such is a work of the flesh, it defiles the temple of God, it brings one under a master other than God, and it destroys one's influence, causing one to sin against others. The Bible can be understood alike in these matters when people honestly consider God's Word to seek His way rather than man's way.

Examination Of Arguments In Favor Of Social Drinking

Many, however, view the occasional drink of alcohol in a different light. They do not place such in the category of the arguments above. These agree that drunkenness is condemned, but they rationalize that drinking small amounts of an alcoholic beverage is not drunkenness and, therefore, allowed by God.

The American society is a drinking society. One might feel out of place at a business luncheon or a social gathering unless one drinks lightly with the others. Some have even lost employment because of a refusal to do so when it is expected of them in the business world. Others think an occasional drink at the restaurant or at home is of no harm.

One argument often appealed to for approval of such actions is that Jesus turned the water to wine at the wedding feast (John 2:1-11). This, after all, was a great social event. There would be feasting and merriment. One

cannot, however, hastily conclude that the “wine” produced by the miracle of Jesus was fermented and alcoholic in nature, thus intoxicating. One cannot even assume that the original wine served at the wedding feast was alcoholic in content. The term *oinos*, translated wine, was used in various ways, not always meaning a fermented drink.

Nothing is clearer to those who have studied this question than that the Hebrew word *yayin* and the Greek word *oinos* were, as Professor Sir R. Jebb says of *oinos*, general words in those early days, and were used to describe sometimes the fruit on the vines, the juice in the grapes, the juice when it was being pressed out, when it was preserved in an unfermented state and therefore unintoxicating, and when it was fermented and intoxicating.⁹

De Welt went on to give examples of different uses in antiquity: Anacreon wrote some five hundred years B.C., “Only males tread the grapes, setting free the *oinos* (wine).” Varro spoke of “gathering wine,” Columella of “unintoxicating wine,” and Cato of “hanging wine (grapes on the vine).” Ovid said, “And scarce can the grapes contain the wine they have within.”¹⁰ Some have argued that there was no method in antiquity that allowed preservation of the unfermented juice. Jeffcoat gives several methods in antiquity by which the process of fermentation could be prevented so that the juice of the grape was kept or preserved fresh.¹¹

The idea that the wine at the wedding feast was an intoxicant comes from John 2:10. Some take the term “drunk freely (ASV)” or “well drunk (KJV)” to mean they were intoxicated, implying, therefore, that what Jesus produced would have been intoxicating as well. Jeffcoat, on the other hand, consulted forty-three versions or translations of the Bible and found eighteen different

renderings of the phrase, all of which stressed quantity rather than quality.¹² This makes sense when the situation is considered. It is highly questionable that the ruler of the feast, having become drunk, would have been able to distinguish with his impaired and drunken senses that what Jesus had miraculously produced was of greater quality than what had made him drunk. Also, even without the above considerations, one can know without a doubt that what Jesus produced was unfermented juice of the grape. Habakkuk makes it clear that one who would give his neighbor drink, adding his venom to make him drunken, would sin (Hab. 2:15-16). Yet, both Peter and Paul wrote explicitly that Jesus was without sin (1 Pet. 2:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:21). With confidence one can know that Jesus did not turn the water into an intoxicating drink.

A second commonly heard argument used to support “social drinking” is from the qualifications of elders and deacons. The elder is to be “not given to wine” (KJV) or “no brawler” (ASV) (1 Tim. 3:3), while the deacon is to be “not given to much wine” (1 Tim. 3:8).

Is it possible, as some argue, that Paul is saying only that an elder is not to drink wine in excess or become addicted? Paul would be contradicting himself if he meant that the elder could imbibe intoxicating beverages as long as he was not addicted. For the elder is also to be “vigilant” (KJV) or “temperate” (ASV) (1 Tim. 3:2). The Greek word from which this comes, *neefalion*, means “sober, temperate; abstaining from wine.”¹³ Vincent adds that it means “to be sober” with reference to drink.¹⁴ For the elder to be not given to wine “cannot, therefore, mean merely freedom from their excessive use. On the other hand, they probably carry their literal signification, ‘not near wine,’ and even forbid the presence of an elder at drinking parties.”¹⁵ Paul, also, creates for himself a dilemma if he means that the deacon can have a little intoxicating beverage, but not too

much. If that reasoning would be correct, does Paul then mean that a little desire of filthy lucre is acceptable, yet being greedy of it is not (1 Tim. 3:8)? Likewise, does Solomon mean to indicate that a little wickedness is acceptable when he wrote, "Be not overmuch wicked" (Eccl. 7:17)? Though Paul is saying the deacon must not be one who gives himself over to much wine, he is not necessarily condoning the use of a little wine.

One of the qualifications of the deacon is that he cannot be given to drunkenness. While other passages condemn the use of alcoholic beverages, this one condemns the excessive use of the same.¹⁶

A third argument commonly used in support of social drinking is that Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim. 5:23). Actually, this confirms the idea that Timothy knew to abstain. Why else would Paul have needed to encourage him to use the wine?¹⁷ Besides, this was an exhortation to use the wine for medicinal purposes. Such is not the case with social drinking. It would be more along the line of the legal use of a prescription drug ordered by a doctor. Such use is not prohibited. Jesus approved the use of a physician to maintain good health (Luke 5:31). That would include approval of the methods and practices available to the physician who has the well-being of the individual in mind. In addition, one cannot assume that the wine spoken of by Paul was an alcoholic, intoxicating wine. Various forms of unfermented "wine" were used for medicinal purposes in ancient times.¹⁸ Therefore, this does not in any way approve of the use of a small portion of an alcoholic beverage in social settings, with a meal, or as a relaxing drink.

There are other passages of Scripture that are appealed to, but these will suffice to demonstrate the

principles involved. In order to understand the Bible alike relative to such passages, one must make no assumptions. Unless it can be clearly proven without a doubt that alcoholic beverages are under consideration, a passage cannot be used as proof that social drinking or light drinking is approved of by God. If there is any reasonable explanation of a passage of Scripture which brings in question the so-called proof that social drinking is approved, one cannot be certain of its validity.

Removing All Doubt

First, it should be understood that today's beverages with even the smaller percentage of alcohol falls into the "strong drink" category of the Bible. According to J. W. McGarvey, "The liquors of this land in the strength of their intoxicating properties differ so widely from the light wines of Palestine that even the most moderate use of them seems immoderate in comparison."¹⁹ Jeffcoat, quoting from **A Dictionary of the Bible**, recorded:

The wines of antiquity were more like syrups; many of them were not intoxicant; many more intoxicant in a small degree; and all of them, as a rule, taken only when largely diluted with water. They contained, even undiluted, but 4 or 5 percent of alcohol.²⁰

Alcoholic beverages today can contain far greater percentages of alcohol. The lowest percentage of alcohol is found in beer, which ranges from 3.5 to 6 percent. The alcohol content of wines range from 12 to 23 percent. Distilled liquors will contain as much as 40 to 45 percent alcohol.²¹ One can see, therefore, that the alcoholic beverages of today fall into the strong drink category of the Bible, a category of drinks that God always warned against and condemned.

Second, if one will honestly and sincerely accept what the Scriptures teach, he will understand with all alike that drinking even small amounts of an alcoholic beverage is to be abstained from. Peter, writing to Christians, recorded:

But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for (God's) own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

The word “excellencies” in the ASV (praises in the KJV) is from the Greek word, *aretas*, meaning moral goodness or excellence. Vine’s says that it “properly denotes whatever procures preeminent estimation for a person or thing; hence, ‘intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue.’”²² The word is also translated as “virtue” in both the ASV and KJV in Philippians 4:8 and 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Peter 1:5. The Christian, therefore, chosen by God through the Lord Jesus Christ, belongs to God as a holy priest. He is to show forth, or proclaim, the moral excellence of God. In almost the next stroke of the pen, Peter explained himself. He went on to record:

Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Regarding “abstain,” Guy N. Woods wrote:

‘Abstain’ (*ape-cho*, to hold back from), here, present, middle, infinitive thus to keep constantly holding oneself back from fleshly lusts, as a constant, ever-present duty.²³

Peter is indicating that the Christian must constantly and continually keep himself from, hold himself from, those

fleshly lusts that constantly war against the soul to bring damnation. Is there any better description for alcoholic beverages than that phrase or term? Alcohol is a beverage that robs the user of so many things. It causes heartache. It brings destruction. It robs the user of his own self-control. As Peter indicated, the Christian is to abstain from alcohol if he is to walk properly among the Gentiles.

Finally, one of the problems when dealing with alcoholic beverages is the question of what drunkenness is. Must one rely entirely upon subjectivity in defining drunkenness? What will be the standard by which drunkenness will be defined? Will one use the standard that many states have posted along highways, .08 blood alcohol content? Is drunkenness determined when one begins to stagger or slur his words? Is the person truly “one drink drunk” with the first drink? Just how does one know when a person becomes drunk? That must be determined if one is to know at what point one sins.

The final nail in the coffin against social drinking depends upon the answer to the above dilemma. That question can be answered finally and completely from Paul’s comments to the church at Ephesus. Paul wrote, “And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). The term, “drunken,” is from the Greek, *methusko*. Vines defines this as “signifies to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process or the state expressed in No. 1), to become intoxicated.”²⁴ Young gives, “to begin to be softened.”²⁵ Another defines it, “to inebriate, make drunk.”²⁶ Paul, therefore, was exhorting the Ephesians not to even begin to become drunk. It is true, then, that a person becomes drunk, one drink drunk, with the first drink. It is sin to take the first drink.

Medical science agrees with the concept that one begins to be drunk from the very beginning, the very first drink. Jeffcoat states:

[A]s previously indicated [pp. 85-91, TLM], the finer grades of judgment, concentration, and understanding are the first to be affected. Such effect, which may occur *after as little as one drink* [emphasis TLM]...Tests by delicate instruments have indicated that small doses of ethyl alcohol also affect the functions of sight, hearing, and touch sensation...This is the reason, that after an extensive study, it has been determined that the efficiency of operating an automobile is affected progressively from the first measurable quantity of alcohol in the blood.²⁷

British scientists have found that even modest amounts of alcohol will make the opposite sex appear better-looking.²⁸ That explains the commercial this author has heard for a particular cut-rate liquor establishment, “The more of our beer that she drinks, the better you look.” As pointed out earlier, after a few drinks one feels extremely confident and euphoric. One will not realize the true effect the alcohol, or other drug, has had on oneself.²⁹

Conclusion

God intends for all men to be able to understand His Word and to do so according to His will. The following has been shown. Drunkenness is condemned and the Bible warns against the use of strong drinks. Alcohol defiles the body and is sinful. One sins when under the master of alcohol rather than God. And the Christian cannot be a light to the world as a user of alcohol.

With regard to claims that the Bible approves of social drinking, an examination of the Scriptures shows that such claims cannot be proven.

The Bible is clear. Even light or moderate amounts of alcohol are forbidden because today’s alcoholic beverages are in the category of the Bible’s strong drink. The Christian is to abstain from fleshly lusts, including alcohol. Even the first drink is the beginning of drunkenness and therefore condemned.

Every Christian should heed the words of the apostle Paul. “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to (Fulfil) the lusts (thereof)” (Rom. 13:14).

Endnotes

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19 J. W. McGarvey, **Four-Fold Gospel**, Electronic Database, (Copyright 2004 WORDsearch Corp.).

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CHAPTER 28

Can Young People Understand The Bible?

Wayne Jones

Introduction

IT IS OF ETERNAL significance that we know God and His will as it pertains to our lives. Without such knowledge, it is impossible to serve Him and to please Him. Like the Galatians, we should desire to “come to know God” (Gal. 4:9). After all, Divine punishment will be handed out to “those who know not God” (2 Thess. 1:8).

What a daunting task! Comprehending the will of God might seem like an unattainable goal for which to strive. After all, we were not there when God formed the heavens and laid the foundation of the world (Job 38:4). We were not consulted when God arranged Divine law whereby we might live happy lives in preparation for eternity (Isa. 40:12-13). We do not sit above the earth’s circle with an understanding of all things (Isa. 40:22). Nor do we stand outside of time not limited to the physical boundaries of space and matter (2 Pet. 3:8). Truly God’s ways and thoughts are too high for man to grasp or completely understand (Isa. 55:9). Like the Psalmist, we might say regarding the knowledge of God, “such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it” (Psm. 139:6).

Adam and Eve’s quest to be like God and know things as God knows them resulted in failure, sin and separation.

Remember that their sin was propagated by a ploy that Satan knew would work—the enticement that they would see things and know things as God sees and knows them. Over the years pride has lifted up many to seek God's position as Authority and Standard in all things. Men and women who have tried to thwart God's plan and His authority in favor of their own opinions and agendas fill the narratives of history. The New Testament even speaks of a man who would exalt "himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). In each attempt those men (or women) were soundly defeated by **the** Ruler and Maker of all things—Jehovah God! It is an understatement to say that we will never even hope to grasp the smallest percentage of the perfect knowledge of God. Nor will we understand those things God has deemed unknowable or unavailable for man's finite mind (Deut. 29:29).

That does not mean that we cannot know those things that God has revealed for us to know. Friends, let us state clearly that there is a marked difference between understanding Who God is and thinking like God thinks. There is a supreme difference in understanding all of God's ways and understanding what God wants for us as His followers. We may never know the "why," "how" and "when" of certain things, but we can know them nonetheless!

Those things which God has prepared for men (that includes you and me) have been revealed "to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Daniel declared the God of Heaven as the One who "reveals deep and secret things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Dan. 2:22). God sent Christ that He might make known the mysteries or the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13:11; Matt. 13:35). Paul, under the

inspiration of the Spirit, continued to make known those things that were once kept secret or hidden (Eph. 3:8-9; Col. 1:24-27). It is those things that are revealed in the Holy Scriptures for which humanity is held accountable. God affirms that we can know the truth (John 8:32) and understand (Eph. 3:3-4).

Thinking logically, if God is wise enough to create man and to sustain man's life then He is also wise enough to communicate with man so that man can understand Him. God's straightforward and non-confusing dialogue with man started in the very beginning. His messages have always been precise and clear. We do not read of Adam wondering what God's boundaries really were in the Garden of Eden. We do not find Noah unsure about the dimensions of the ark of safety. We do not read of a confused Abraham in ancient Ur. Moses does not appear to be confounded at the foot of the burning bush unaware of what God really expected of him. Continually, throughout the Old and New Testaments, God plainly reveals His will to man through the means of human words (either spoken or written). The commands of Christianity are all simple, yet profound. God says love, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, teach, grow, forgive, etc. Each of these commands require a great deal of work to accomplish, but in their simplest form they are not difficult to understand. Christ spoke so the common person could understand Him (Mark 12:37). It is our contention that God has always spoken with such language so that we have no reason to misunderstand His will for us.

However, the question of this subject goes beyond whether or not mankind can understand the Bible and asks whether or not young people can understand the Bible. We would argue from the same logical standpoint in answering this question. Did God give instructions to young people? Does God allow teenagers citizenship in

the kingdom? Did God ever give a young person special tasks to undertake? Yes! Yes! Yes! Knowing this, we can say assuredly that God has made His Word understandable to that age group. God spoke to young Samuel in the house of Eli and Samuel understood Him (1 Sam. 3:1ff). God spoke to young people on many occasions through the pen of Solomon (Eccl. 11:9-10; Eccl. 12:1). God expected young men like Daniel and Joseph to carry out His will in their generations.

Even Timothy was addressed as a young man in the Scriptures and even given special instruction as how to use his youth to his advantage (1 Tim. 4:12). Timothy's age only increased God's message to Him and required (to some degree) a greater mental maturity than those older than him.

Most notable of all the examples regarding young people in the Bible is that of Matthew 19. In this chapter, Christ had a conversation with a young man who failed to carry out His commands—we know him as the rich young ruler. The Bible says of him that “when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matt. 19:22). This young man did not fail to obey God because His commands were too confusing or complicated. He failed to obey God because they did not coincide with that young man's selfish desires. As God has been with every generation of young people, God was clear with His requirements for this young man. Failure, again, was attributed to a lack of **desire** to fulfill God's commands not a lack of **understanding** those commands! Obviously, it is clear that God expects young people to study, know and understand His message to them and that message is recorded in the Bible. Yes, from God's vantage point it is possible and essential that young people understand the Bible.

If the above were not sufficient to support the belief that young people can understand the Bible, consider the various Divine injunctions placed upon us to teach young people the Law of God. Moses instructed those who would first inhabit the promised land to teach their children the statutes of God daily (Deut. 6:6-9). Similar instructions are given to parents under the New Covenant as well: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Even those older in the church are expressly commanded to teach the younger (Tit. 2:2-7). If they had no possibility of understanding it, why then would God want us wasting our time in teaching them?

Therefore, the answer is undeniably, unavoidably, unequivocally, **yes!** Young person, you can understand the Bible. Since we have answered the question, let us consider in the space we have remaining what that means for the young people of today and those who influence them (i.e., parents, preachers, youth ministers, elders, teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.).

Yes, So Don't Sell Them Short

We expect our children to study and learn certain things that are noticeably hard to grasp. Subjects like Algebra, Chemistry, Trigonometry and Calculus fill our teenagers' class schedules. Many high school students take advanced, college level courses as a way to get ahead of the field in their education. Students are routinely assigned tasks such as memorizing portions of the United States Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. Nearly every day they are expected to recall places, people and dates of events that often seem insignificant and mundane. They are required to read pages upon pages of material, solve mind puzzling equations and write papers on scientific experiments that ought to be reserved for

those employed by NASA. Still, to some it is a shock that we would expect them to memorize verses of the Bible and grasp religious concepts so early in life. Dear friends, we need to wake up and realize that we are missing out on training some of the most intelligent minds God ever created. If they can fill their minds with facts of science and numbers of mathematics, they can surely understand the simple and grace-filled Word of God! We must not sell them short!

Perhaps in anticipation of those who would deem Bible study “too deep” for young minds, the Spirit reveals that Timothy first learned the “Holy Scriptures” while he was still in his childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). One modern translation actually uses the word “infancy” in this passage to describe Timothy’s stage of life when he first learned about God.

It is true that children learn in stages. For example you cannot teach a child long division without first teaching that child to count. Furthermore, you cannot teach a child to write an essay without first teaching that child his letters. However, these facts do not lead us to not teach our children anything at all. Should we throw up our hands and say that since our children cannot diagram a sentence that we should never teach them the parts of speech? Absolutely not! To come to such a conclusion would be, at best, short-sighted, and at worst, an insult to the intelligence of our children.

Likewise, our young people may not be able to discuss at length the authorship of the book of Hebrews or give an exhaustive list of the kings who ruled Israel and Judah during the divided kingdom. They can, however, know about God’s perfect plan to redeem man and how that plan came to fruition on Calvary’s cross. They can understand the principle of authority and how we must have Divine authority for all we do (Col. 3:17). They can know the

difference between right and wrong, good and evil, the church and denominations, and between truth and error. This writer firmly believes that the Bible teaches differing levels of spiritual maturity and that on those levels certain things are harder to understand than others (Heb. 5:12-6:2). But, just because they cannot fully fathom the subject of Divine providence, does that mean we should throw up our hands and refuse to teach them that God loves them and has a plan for them? Again, absolutely not! That too would be, at best, short-sighted, and at worst, an insult to the intelligence of our children.

Yet, in many places, many people are selling our Christian young people short. Youth days and devotionals are centered around “trendy” or “hip” themes that are supported by little or no Scripture in hopes of appealing to a shallow-minded audience. Bible classes have become discussion hours because young people are incapable of sitting and listening for that length of time. In some places children are not ever required to assemble with the saints on Sunday evenings because they “get nothing out of services.” Personally, this writer would challenge any who hold such a position to listen to the songs that can be learned by a one year old child. Listen to that child sing “Jesus Loves Me” or about the wise man and the foolish man of Matthew 7. Hear the tenderness in the voice of a two year old sing about the miraculous creation of the world or the light that we will not let Satan blow out. Listen to those precious voices and then try to honestly sell our young people short.

Such perceptions of Christian young people are insulting and demeaning. Some of the most challenging and thought provoking questions this writer has ever been asked have been asked by teenagers. Their minds are fresh, alert and for the most part unpolluted by years of fixed, but wrong opinions. Selling them short does the church

locally and universally a tremendous injustice. Instead, our aim should be to challenge their minds, stimulate their thinking and cause them to dig deeper and thus strengthen their Bible knowledge. By doing this, they will be more studious, more alert and ready to give a defense of their faith in Christ.

Yes, So Don't Leave Them Out

Misunderstood, unappreciated and overlooked might be exactly what every teenager feels they are at some point in their formative years. Looking to gain their own independence and to be accepted on their own merits and abilities, most young people are overly sensitive and feel they have been slighted when indeed they have not been. Through the learning associated with maturity, most young people come to see the absurdity of their claims later in life.

Having said that, there are some who do limit the good that a young person can contribute to the church, simply because of their age. Sadly, sometimes the ones who would limit them are in leadership positions. Nothing can be more detrimental to the enthusiasm and willingness of a young Christian than to limit them simply based on age. Keep in mind that there are Biblical limitations placed on those of a certain age. There are various roles in the church that can only be filled by those who are older and who have more experience. We are not suggesting, in any way, that we bypass God's ordinances to cater to the whims of the younger generation. Such would be a direct violation of Divine Law.

David, who would later become king and defeat many armies with God's protective hand, was once discredited as a soldier simply because of age. Familiar to us all is the account of David and Goliath. We are aware of the reason that David first went to the battle field and what he found

upon arrival. Furthermore, we are aware of the end result of his visit—victory for God’s people and the slaying of the heathen giant. The events that transpired after David arrived and before he killed Goliath, so often, go unmentioned. Are you aware, young person, that David was told, basically, because of his age that he was incapable of fighting Goliath (1 Sam. 17:33)? Does that seem slightly humorous? Here were grown, trained, and armed men unwilling to go fight. Yet, they were eager to dismiss David as a viable candidate for fighting Goliath simply because he was not as old as they were. Even if David would have been defeated in battle, he would have done more than the cowards did who stood on the sidelines “dreadfully afraid” (1 Sam. 17:24).

Knowing that while the days of history would pass, some men’s reactions would remain the same, God gave this instruction to Timothy through the inspired pen of Paul: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers...” (1 Tim. 4:12). In the context, Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to be their “local preacher.” Timothy would be responsible for preaching to those older than him. Sometimes those to whom Timothy preached were not faithful and needed to be corrected (1 Tim. 1:3). What a tremendous load to place on Timothy’s shoulders. This writer can attest to the mental burden it is to preach to those who are older, but are not, in all ways, wiser regarding spiritual matters. It is true that in such cases some will argue that Truth is not Truth simply because the one delivering it is young. Paul commanded Timothy to not allow himself to be looked down on simply because he was young. While some were willing to limit Timothy based on age, Paul was willing to entrust the souls of the Ephesian Christians to Timothy despite his lack of years or experience.

Some will, without thinking, refer to the young people as “the church of tomorrow.” While there might be some truth to that statement, in reality, young people are a significant and crucial part of the church today. If not, simply consider what the local church where you attend would be without the young people. This writer can say with certainty that the church at Southaven would be weaker and its future would be very dim if not for the young people that help complete this local congregation.

Consequently, the talents and abilities of our young people should be utilized and sharpened in their teenage years. Why are so many 30, 40, and 50 year old men afraid to lead a public prayer? Could it be because they were never given the opportunity to do so when they were 15 or 16? The leadership of the local congregation ought to be conscious of the need to use young people in a capacity wherein they feel needed and they feel a part of the local church. This not only applies to the young men, but also the young ladies. As mentioned earlier, God’s Divine principles should be respected and honored, but where there is opportunity in God given roles, the young ladies of the local congregation should also be encouraged to use their talents.

Leaving out our young people will leave a void in their lives and a void in the local church as a whole. Since they can know the will of God and what their roles are in His church, may we not be guilty of limiting them simply because of their youth.

Yes, So Don’t Let Them Down

Smaller children are sometimes naive enough to believe one thing while their parent or parents actually do another. Unsuspectingly many small children allow their parents to successfully use the “do as I say, but not as I do” philosophy of life. Until they learn better or see

differently, many are duped into buying into this ridiculous school of thought. Sadly, some continue to live by this mindset long after their children are older and can see through the fallacy of such a value system. In reality, most young people follow the actions of their parents much closer than the words of their parents. With such a poor example of Christianity, many young people lose confidence in their own ability to remain faithful. The hypocritical approach to Christianity becomes the normal way of looking at life.

Young people, as they begin to understand the Bible and God's message to man, begin to see the marked difference between genuine Christianity and play acting. They are wise enough to understand that weekly attendance to Bible classes and worship services are mandatory (John 4:24; Heb. 10:25). Yet, some young people who understand this see adults who confess faith in Christ and routinely put travel, family, work or school functions ahead of their weekly obligations to assemble.

Young people are also wise enough to comprehend God's laws regarding lying, cursing and gossiping. Still they see their parents or other adults "shave the truth" a little when calling in sick to work; let curse words "slip" when their guard is down; and talk regularly about other members of the church and their shortcomings.

Again, young people are wise enough to realize the commands to pray and study are parts of a committed Christian's daily routine. Yet, those who are influential in the lives of many young people are not the greatest examples of daily prayer and daily study. The saddest part of these examples is that the young people involved are often wise enough to see through the inconsistencies. As a result of this hypocritical leadership, we let them down and their faith falters. It is true that no one's faith should be directly tied to one man or group of men, but it is also

true that the negative influence of hypocritical “Christianity” does have a deadly effect on those who are weaker.

Jesus addressed this very situation with the Pharisees of His day and their relationship to the other first century Jews. While they were supposed to be the wisest and spiritually strongest of their generation, they were often condemned for their hypocrisy. They were hypocritical in their giving (Matt. 6:2). They were hypocritical in their prayers (Matt. 6:5). They were hypocritical in their fasting (Matt. 6:16). They were hypocritical in their judging of others (Matt. 7:5). They were hypocritical in their keeping of the Sabbath (Luke 13:15). They were hypocritical in their service to God in general (Mark 7:6).

Even one of Christ’s apostles, namely Peter, failed to consistently practice that which he preached. As a result, Paul’s inspired letter to the Galatians labeled Peter as a hypocrite (Gal. 2:11-13). With such actions, those who should have been looking to Peter for strength through a godly example were carried into sin. They were hindered in their service to God by the one who was supposed to assist them in that service. No doubt, to the man who would later become an elder in the church, this episode at Antioch was a regrettable memory in Peter’s earthly service.

As adults, teachers and influences we must be consistent in our lives in order that the young people might be all they can be for Christ. Whether we ask them to or not, they will watch us for an example of how to live and make decisions. If we are anything but consistent, they are wise enough to see the discrepancy between our actions and our claims! They can understand the Bible well enough to see our own shortcomings. If we are not humble enough to admit when we are wrong and strong enough to change when needed, we will do our young people a great disservice and stunt their growth in the kingdom of God. We must not let them down!

Conclusion

Because God has plainly revealed His Word and through His grace has given us the mental capacity to understand it, all accountable men and women (this includes young people) will be judged according to that Word (John 12:48).

Solomon, in addressing young people stated:

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; **but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.** Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity (Eccl. 11:9-10; emphasis mine, WJ).

The expectations of God for young people are not made any clearer in Divine revelation than in these two verses from the pen of Solomon. Young people, you will be held accountable for your actions. You will answer for your decisions. You will be judged by the same words by which preachers, elders and parents will be judged.

Can young people understand the Bible? Yes, therefore, they must be held accountable for their actions. They should not be given a free pass to sin or to apathy because they are young and will grow out of it or because they “don’t know any better.” Such an attitude could cost us, as their teachers, our souls and will definitely have a negative impact on our young people attaining their spiritual potential.

CHAPTER 29

Can We Understand The Book Of Revelation Alike?

Gary McDade

Introduction

W^{E LIVE IN A} world of books. The **Encyclopedia Britannica** contains more than 6,500 pages, the **IRS Tax Code** contains more than 60,000 pages, and even the **Spiritual Sword** quarterly journal published by the Getwell Church of Christ in Memphis contains more than 7,500 pages. Volumes of new books are coming from the presses every day. The Bible itself is a library of books, sixty-six in number. Thirty-nine are in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New. People write books to be understood; God has written the Bible to be understood.

This book, **How Can We Understand The Bible Alike?** is based on the premise that the Bible can be understood and focuses needed attention on the practical approach of demonstrating “how” it can be understood alike. One application of this effort is to strengthen appreciation for the Divine directive to desire to bring all men into the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13).

Admittedly, understanding the book of Revelation alike presents one of the more formidable challenges. The effort to bring us to more of a consensus on its meaning will flow through three channels in this study. One, the Bible can be understood. Two, the book of Revelation can

be understood. And, three, the book of Revelation can be understood alike by its readers.

The Bible Can Be Understood

The fundamental principle of the revelation of God in the Bible is that God has communicated His will to man in such a way that it can be understood. The nature of God being such that He is in possession of infinite wisdom would necessitate the corresponding position that He is capable of communicating to His creation on a level His creation could understand; otherwise He would be wasting His time and effort and it cannot be substantiated that He has ever been inclined to be inefficient or ineffective in His purposes. Absolute corroboration of these facts may be seen within the revelation under consideration, that is, the Bible. At the dawn of time the Creator communicated with the first human pair. Moses wrote:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat (Gen. 3:8-13).

Observe the clarity with which our father Adam is seeking to shift responsibility for violating the stated will of God over to our mother Eve. Yet, in his apparent desperation he never intimated that the words communicated from God were in any way beyond his grasp of comprehension.

Therefore, since the position is sustained deep in the recesses of human existence that God is both capable of communicating His will to man, and has efficiently and effectively communicated His will to man, then, unless it can be shown that God has changed His mode of operation with man down through the centuries as it relates to communication, the initial and vital point that God has and does communicate in words to man in a way and on a level that man can understand incontrovertibly has been made.

The view presented is based on what Adam did not say or attempt to argue before God, therefore, to strengthen the affirmation that God has communicated His will to man in such a way that it can be understood, a brief overview of three passages from critical placements in the Bible will establish beyond question the premise of this discussion. 219 times in the Bible the phrase “the Lord said” appears. 46 times the phrase “God said” appears. And, 845 times the familiar phrase “thus saith the Lord” appears. The material universe was created with eight statements from God (Gen. 1:3; Gen. 1:6; Gen. 1:9; Gen. 1:11; Gen. 1:14; Gen. 1:20; Gen. 1:24; Gen. 1:26). His infinite power is connected with His Word from the beginning.

But, the subject of the present study is the ability of man to understand His Will. So, again mother Eve will serve to begin the illustrations. Eve demonstrated an understanding of the command of God from Genesis 2:16-17 in her discussion with the devil when she said:

We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of
the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,
neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die (Gen. 3:2-3).

Could Eve understand the Word of God in the beginning of the Patriarchal age? Indisputably. Next, an obvious example at the beginning of the Mosaic age would be the selection of writing handwritten with the finger of God,

the ten commandments (Exod. 31:18). Whether the children have always lived by them or not, no one has ever questioned the ease with which they are understood. “And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 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. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. *Thou shalt not covet* thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's (Exod. 20:1-17).

An example from within the New Testament that states the Bible can be understood in no uncertain terms is Ephesians 3:4, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” While it is an

overstatement to simply say, “**All** you have to do is read to understand,” yet understanding is both possible and facilitated by reading the Bible. In the long experience of preaching and teaching the Bible for more than three decades, careful reflection observes that the great majority of questions about the Bible arise not from an inability to understand its contents but either a lack of knowledge of its contents or a lack of willingness to appropriately and personally apply its contents. Therefore, we can understand the Bible.

The Book Of Revelation Can Be Understood

The opening passage from the book makes a significant affirmation concerning understanding the contents of the book. Revelation 1:1 says:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.

First, **the affirmation**: it is the “revelation” from *apokalupto* meaning “to take off the cover, i.e. disclose: KJV – reveal.”¹ It was written “to show” His servants something. If this premise can be understood, then the proposition that “the book of Revelation can be understood” successfully has been sustained. Even a denial that the book can be understood in light of this opening statement constitutes not a substantive denial but rather a baseless rejection of the book itself before its contents can be brought into investigation.

Second, **the authorization**: it is the Revelation of **Jesus Christ** to whom God has given “all authority in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). The revelation is what God the Father gave Jesus Christ. The messenger was an angel. The recipient of the message was one of the disciples

hand-picked by Jesus Himself to be an apostle who, among the other apostles, was “guided into all truth,” namely John. So, the authorization for the Revelation is God, to Jesus Christ, to an angel, and ultimately to the apostle John.

What did John do with the communication he received? The text next says he “bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.” The communication to its destination, the seven churches of Asia, was to be in written form, specifically, in the form of a book. From behind John a great voice, as of a trumpet, said:

I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea (Rev. 1:11).

As a general statement, what was John told to write? Revelation 1:19 answers, “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” An understanding of the book begins right here. “**The things which thou hast seen**” may be placed as a heading over chapters 1-5. “**The things which are**” may be placed as a heading over chapters 6-18. And, “**the things which shall be hereafter**” may be placed as a heading over chapters 19-22.

“The book of Revelation must be viewed through first century glasses.” This advice and perspective is inextricably linked to the late scholar, educator, preacher, and personal friend, W.B. West, Jr. No one in modern times is known to have a greater love, appreciation, devotion, and understanding of the book of Revelation than did brother West. Among the cherished privileges of my life were several times I spent in study courses of the book of

Revelation at the feet of W.B. West, Jr., including a course on the graduate level.

On one occasion my wife and I were visiting with him and his second wife, Gladys, in their home in East Memphis. He sat at his desk in his office surrounded by hundreds of impressive volumes of books with bookshelves continuing across the hallway into their bedroom. I commented about what a nice library he had, and he replied, “Oh, these are just my books on the book of Revelation; my other books are housed on shelves to the ceiling with tight isles in what was our double car garage.”

His son-in-law, Bob Prichard, posthumously compiled and abridged brother West’s commentary on the book of Revelation which is fittingly called **Through First Century Glasses**. Adherence to this principle by students of Revelation truly is “attaining unto wise counsel” (Prov. 1:5).

What is meant by the statement “the book of Revelation must be viewed through first century glasses”? Brother West explained that when a person wears rose tinted glasses, the world takes on that rose tinted color. The glasses one wears when studying Revelation determines the meaning he draws from it. If a person has on twenty-first century glasses when viewing Revelation he will draw out contemporary meanings that people in the first century to whom the book originally was written would never have understood. Material vital to the understanding of any book, particularly any book of the Bible, is when was it written, why was it written, how was it written (genre), and, especially important to this book, to whom was it written? Let’s answer each of these questions and show that “the book of Revelation can be understood.”

When was Revelation written? The weight of scholarship presses between two possible dates: AD 64 and AD 96. A discussion of factors to be considered in support of the late date will be limited to three.

First, the practice of emperor worship appears to be high universal later in the first century (Rev. 13:4; Rev. 13:15-18; Rev. 14:9-11; Rev. 15:2; Rev. 16:2; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:4).

Second, the level of persecution fits conditions later in the first century best. The writer is being persecuted (Rev. 1:9). Antipas was killed at Pergamum (Rev. 2:3). Warning of imprisonments at Smyrna were given (Rev. 2:10). Some had already suffered martyrdom (Rev. 6:9). An “hour of trial” was coming to try “the whole world” (Rev. 3:10). A number of passages speak of the “great harlot” (Rome) being drunk with the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6; Rev. 18:24; Rev. 19:2; cf. also Rev. 16:6; Rev. 20:4). All of these references suggest widespread persecution and fits the latter part of the reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96).

Third, the condition of the Asiatic churches. Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians holds that the church did not exist at Smyrna till after AD 60-64. Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, so the luxurious setting of Revelation 3:14ff. may have taken longer to develop than four years. The letter to the Ephesians written about AD 62 does not envision apostasy to the degree of Revelation 2:1-7 (cf. also Acts 19). And, the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2:6 and Revelation 2:15 are spoken of without explanation suggesting their errors were well known. Therefore, strong indications are that Revelation was written in AD 96.

Why was Revelation written? The growing intensity of the persecution of the church was a cause for concern that the church might be snuffed out of existence; therefore, without fail each of the churches who received the letter were encouraged to overcome the adversity they were facing because Christ and His cause would be victorious over every foe (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:26; Rev. 3:5; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 3:21). Early on in Revelation 6 John saw:

under the altar the souls of them that were slain
for the word of God, and for the testimony which

they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9-11).

Later in the book they will see the proclamation of the victory of Christ:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

How was Revelation written (genre)? “Genre” means a composition of literature characterized by a particular style or form. The symbolic genre of Revelation is perhaps its best known feature. It shares this style with the latter part of Daniel, Ezekiel, and parts of Zechariah. What the symbols used in all these books mean represents the greatest challenge to understanding them. But, the challenge the correct interpretation of the symbols represents, also constitutes a remarkable safety feature because one thing these four books have in common is that they were all written during times of great persecution of God’s people. And, perhaps the most obvious feature connected with this type of language is that it would reveal the message God chose for his people during these trying times and yet protect them from their enemies because the enemies would not likely understand the symbolism or go to the effort necessary to understand it.

In regard to the symbolism of the book, the very first verse states that its contents were “signified” or given in signs or symbols. Within the book there are candlesticks

and stars, four multi-featured beasts or living creatures about the throne of God, a lamb, a lion, horses of various colors, a multi-headed red dragon, and horrifying beasts from the sea and land.

In addition to the animal kingdom finding strong representation in Revelation, the field of numerology is also represented. Numbers will have either a positive or a negative connotation. For example, the numbers 3, 7, 10, 12, and multiples thereof like 1,000, 12,000, and 144,000 all are associated with positive developments as the context where they appear bears out. Contrariwise, numbers like three and a half, 6, and multiples thereof like 666, all carry negative connotations again as the context where they appear bears out. The number 7 suggests perfection; the number 6, falling one short of perfection, suggests imperfection. Phenomenons of nature like earthquakes, thunder, and lightning dot the book. It would be an understatement to merely say that the book is dramatic in its presentation of its message.

Many times throughout the book the symbols are identified. For example, in the opening chapter the seven stars are identified as the seven angels or messengers of the churches, and the seven golden candlesticks are identified as the seven churches. In chapter five, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who became a Lamb, is the same one who redeemed us with His blood and made us kings and priests of Jesus Christ. The great red dragon in Revelation 12:3 is identified as the devil in verse Revelation 12:9. Identifiers such as these appearing within the book itself remove from speculation the meaning of many of the symbols in the book.

Revelation was written to whom? Revelation 1:3 and Revelation 1:11 tells that the book was written to the seven churches in Asia, namely “unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna,

and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.” While this point easily is determined, often it is just as easily forgotten when the desire to manipulate the contents to apply to contemporary events emerges. Honest students of Revelation never forget that “the book must be viewed through first century glasses.”

Therefore, the book of Revelation can be understood and, furthermore, it was understood by the audience that received it in the first century because the cause of Christ that was in serious jeopardy from persecution unto death did survive and does survive even till today. The message of hope in the victory of Christ over every foe contained in the book instills confidence and inspires conviction in the hearts of every faithful Christian in every age of the world’s existence showing that the book of Revelation can be understood and will be understood on through to the return of Christ in victory and into eternity in heaven.

The Book Of Revelation Can Be Understood Alike

The more complicated the subject the more difficult it is to understand. Once the book of Revelation affirms that its message is sent using symbolic language the die is cast from which its contents may be understood and understood alike by all who search out its meaning. In a sense, the entire Bible which precedes the book of Revelation has prepared the reader to understand this final revelation from God. For example, there are more allusions to the Old Testament in the book of Revelation than in all the other books of the New Testament, including the book of Hebrews. Therefore, the better the entire Bible is understood, especially those books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah which abound in instances

of symbolic language, the more likely the book of Revelation is to be understood alike by its readers.

In order to understand the book of Revelation alike it is imperative to agree on its contents. Entire systems of eschatology (last things), like premillennialism, are predicated on assumptions not actually supported from the text. The scholar Wayne Jackson has written:

Does Revelation 20 teach that Christ is going to reign for 1,000 years on David's throne from the city of Jerusalem? If it does, there is something very strange about the narrative—most all of the key components of the millennial theory are conspicuously absent from this context. . . .

First, there is no mention in this context of the Rapture, the Tribulation Period, the restoration of Judaism, the Anti-christ, or even the second coming of Christ.

Second, nothing is stated in this section regarding Jerusalem, David's throne, the kingdom of Christ, or the Lord's presence upon earth.

Is it not strange that the vital ingredients of the dispensational scheme are not even remotely alluded to within this narrative? Put this segment of Revelation 20 under the microscope, sift it through a strainer, and still you will not find the coveted components. And yet, many people take for granted that these elements are found in Revelation 20—but they are not!²

Herein lays the chief reason why all do not see the book of Revelation alike—a lack of knowledge of or assumptions about the actual content of the book.

An easy to remember five-point outline of the book with a listing of the chapters developing each point and a very brief heading for each chapter follows:

Outline Of Chapters

I. The Seven Churches

- 1 John Exiled to Patmos
- 2 Four Letters to Churches
- 3 Three Letters to Churches
- 4 God on His Throne

II. The Book With Seven Seals

- 5 Christ Alone Worthy to Take Book with Seven Seals
- 6 Six Seals are Opened
- 7 The Sealing of God's Saints
- 8 The Seventh Seal Reveals Seven Trumpets

III. The Seven Trumpets

- 9 The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets
- 10 The Little Book
- 11 Seventh Trumpet Sounds the Victory of Christ
- 12 The Great Red Dragon Attacks Christ
- 13 The Mark of the Beast
- 14 The Hour of God's Judgment Has Come!

IV. The Seven Bowls of Wrath

- 15 Seven Angels are Given Seven Bowls of Wrath
- 16 Seven Bowls of Wrath are Poured Out
- 17 Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots
- 18 The Fall of Babylon the Great

V. The Finale

- 19 The Army of God is Victorious
- 20 The Devil's Doom
- 21 A New Heaven and A New Earth
- 22 A Final Description of Heaven

Most people can remember what a key number seven is in the book, so if you can remember churches, seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath concluding with a finale, then an overview of the contents of the book is readily gained because each of these items appear in seven's—seven churches, a book with seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls or vials of wrath, and then the ending of the book or the finale.

In order to understand the book of Revelation alike it is imperative to agree on viewing it first with those to whom it was written in the first century in mind or “through first century glasses” before applications of its message may appropriately be made to men living today. The late Wendell Winkler discussed five common approaches to a study of the book of Revelation in **The Spiritual Sword**:

- (1) ***Preterist***. This approach views the events of the book as having already been fulfilled; fulfilled before A.D. 70 and/or up to the time of Domitian and/or up to the time of Constantine. If such be the case, of what value is the book to our time?
- (2) ***Futurist***. This approach views the events of the book as yet to come, primarily occurring before the second coming. Premillennialism grows out of this approach. If such be the case, of what value would the book have been to the early suffering saints? Too, such disregards Revelation 1:1.
- (3) ***Continual historical***. This approach views the book as a history of the church through the ages, including the rise of Mohammedanism and Catholicism. But again, of what benefit would the book have been to the first-century disciples?
- (4) ***Spiritual***. This approach views the book as merely a struggle between good and evil. But, such an approach gives no attention to the most apparent historical facts to which the book makes reference, nor to the historical background to the book.

(5) *Contextual/historical background.* This approach views the book as having been written primarily to the early church who needed comfort from the persecutions of the Roman empire, but with application in principle to us and future generations.³

The “contextual/historical background” approach is the only one of the five views presented that views Revelation “through first century glasses” and is the most understandable and readily defensible position in the field of options suggested.

In order to understand the book of Revelation alike it is imperative to agree on its key words and verses. The key word of the book is the word “overcome.” It appears thirteen times (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:26; Rev. 3:5; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 3:21 (twice); Rev. 11:7; Rev. 12:11; Rev. 13:7; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 21:7). The word “overcome” is central to an understanding of the message of the book because amid the fires of trial coming from the Roman authorities in order to gain the ultimate victory over sin and the devil the seven churches of Asia, and subsequent generations of Christians in similar circumstances, must “overcome” through love and loyalty to Christ. The key verses in the book are Revelation 11:15 and Revelation 17:14 which read:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

At a time when it appeared that the cause of Christ was about to be snuffed out of existence, the prophetic message

of Revelation was timely to strengthen the courage and deepen the resolve of persecuted Christians and these passages exemplify that message. These key words and passages constitute the reason that many see the theme of Revelation to be the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ and His church over every foe and spending eternity in the paradise of heaven with God. One thing is for certain: those who overcome and enter that heavenly city will have found it possible to understand the book of Revelation and to have understood it alike!

Endnotes

1 **Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary**. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.).

2 Wayne Jackson, **Select Studies From The Book Of Revelation**, (Courier Publications, 1995), pp. 86-87.

3 Wendell Winkler, **The Spiritual Sword** (30:4, July 1999), p. 51.

CHAPTER 30

Must We Understand The Bible Alike On Every Issue?

Wayne Cox

Introduction

ALLOW ME THE LIBERTY of adding—for emphasis’ sake—the word “single” to our question, thus asking, “Must we understand the Bible alike on every **single** issue?” Or, to put it another way, are there **any** issues in Scripture upon which we may safely “agree to disagree?” And if so, which issues?

When one considers that there are over six billion people on our planet,¹ each with different dispositions, characteristics, levels of maturity, and temperaments, and that there are 66 books, 1,189 chapters, and approximately 31,102 verses consisting of 788,258 words in Scripture,² one would logically answer “no” to our question. “There are too many variables involved for everyone to see eye-to-eye on every issue in the Bible.”

However, if everyone handled Scripture correctly, and if everyone were of the same level of spiritual maturity, and if God had revealed every aspect of every issue and every nuance of every verse, it would be possible to be in complete agreement on everything in Scripture. Of course, that’s the ideal, but not the real. That being the case, there are “unknowns” as well as matters of option upon which we can safely differ. But, more on that in a moment.

Let's note the following objectives which we shall strive to cover in this lecture: (1) Biblical matters on which we must agree; (2) Biblical matters in which we may agree to disagree, and (3) what our attitude should be in everything.

Biblical Matters On Which We Must Agree

Since this is not the primary focus of this lecture, the following is by no means an exhaustive list of essential areas of agreement. But because enough has been revealed in these matters of faith, we are not at liberty to set aside these crucial issues as if they are unimportant.

Surely we agree there is one God, our Father, Who is infinite in size, knowledge, wisdom and power—powerful beyond human comprehension. One God, the very definition of Whose name is love (1 John 4:8). One God, Who is the Creator, Giver, and Sustainer of life (Psm. 33:6; Heb. 11:3). One God, Who is highly offended because of sin (Hab. 1:13). One God, Who only is to be worshiped (Matt. 4:10). One God, Who is both good and severe (Rom. 11:22). One God, Who is from everlasting to everlasting (Psm. 90:2).

There is no room for debating the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of man, sent by His Father as an act of sacrificial love to atone for the sins of man (John 3:16). Our Lord, Who was both human and Divine. Our Lord, Who never committed one single sin, never thought a bad thought, never said a bad word, and never did a bad deed – perfectly sinless in every respect (1 Pet. 2:22)! Our Lord, Who while on earth and even now “does all things well” (Mark 7:37). Our Lord, Who was crucified by the hands of sinful man and died a shameful death. Our Lord, Who was buried in a borrowed tomb and Who then on that glorious Sunday morning came out of that tomb. Our Lord, Who not long after His resurrection ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2), where He reigns as King over His kingdom and as Head over His church.

Without question the Bible is the inspired Word of God, originating not from the mind of men, but rather “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). The New Testament is the Will of Christ for man today (Heb. 9:11-15), and by Jesus’ Word we will be judged (John 12:48). The Bible, able to convert the soul (Psm. 19:7), also has the power to enlighten the eyes (Psm. 19:8), lighten the way (Psm. 119:105), provide peace (Psm. 119:165), impart hope (Rom. 15:4), admonish (1 Cor. 10:11), thoroughly equip (2 Tim. 3:16-17), pierce and discern (Heb. 4:12), and save (Jas. 1:21). Indeed, God’s Book fulfills our greatest need, and gives us our greatest hope.

We can understand the Bible alike on the issue of the church. In spite of the beliefs of many, Scripture says there is only one body (Eph. 4:4), and since the body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23), there is only one church. The church, planned, prophesied and prepared by God, was firmly planted by Christ on Pentecost (Acts 2). The church, whose head is Christ, whose members are Christians, whose organization and work is outlined in the New Testament, is also known as the called out, the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9), the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), and the sphere of the saved (Acts 2:47).

On these and other matters, there is no “wobble room;” we must understand the Bible alike on such subjects that are so clear-cut and decisive. If it is the case that I’m not in agreement on certain essential issues, it may be that I have not studied enough, have misapplied Scripture, have taken Scripture out of context, or have simply been misguided. Perhaps all can identify with having done such, including me.

I personally have been guilty in the past of teaching false doctrine. Not intentionally, of course, but guilty

nonetheless. The elders of the church where I grew up placed me – a teenager fresh out of high school – in charge of teaching a fifth grade boys’ class on Wednesday nights. I looked forward to the challenge with a great amount of anticipation as well as some degree of trepidation; it was, after all, my first teaching assignment. Our assigned text for study one Wednesday evening was Matthew chapter 24. I can vividly remember telling those eager young minds that before the world ends, days will become shorter, based on Jesus’ words: “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Matt. 24:22). However, much to my embarrassment now these many years later, in that section of the chapter, the Lord was discussing the shortening of the siege of Jerusalem by Titus and his Roman army,³ not end of time events. For me, it was a case of “zeal without knowledge” and of not “rightly dividing” Scripture. When we learn better, then we teach better, and, when we learn better, then we are in more complete agreement on vital issues. Having said that, let’s now note some:

Biblical Matters In Which We May Agree To Disagree

The Text Of Romans 14

If it were necessary to understand the Bible alike on every issue, God would never have inspired Paul to pen the words of Romans chapter 14: “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Rom. 14:1). Here, Paul is addressing the seasoned, veteran Christian about a Christian who is “weak in the faith.” Note that the believer was not weak in his faith concerning Christ, but his conscience did need more instructing pertaining to nonessential matters, labeled “doubtful things,” or “opinions” or “disputable matters.”⁴ In other

words, to set up man-made rules of fellowship in opinionated matters is wrong; we respect one another's conscience in those areas.

In Paul's day, two things that caused divisiveness among believers were circumcision and what to or not to eat. This side of the cross, both were relegated to optional matters, but were not conditions of salvation. In this text, Paul devotes prime attention to the latter—dietary restrictions.

“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables” (Rom. 14:2). The “one” of this verse refers to the strong Christian, who knew that the mere eating of meat was not wrong, whether it be beef, pork, fish, lamb, or whatever. The “he who is weak” refers to the Christian who felt it wrong to eat meat. Among those of this number would be Jews who struggled to break from the rituals of their past. After all, if you've never eaten bacon in your life, and were taught all your life that eating it was wrong, the moment a slice is put in your plate, you would struggle with the issue too, right?

But Gentile Christians wrestled with this problem as well, as they had come from a past steeped in pagan sacrifice. They worried about the nature of the meat on their plates:

They carefully checked the source of their meat or gave up meat altogether to avoid a guilty conscience. This problem was especially acute for Christians who had once been idol worshipers. For them, such a strong reminder of their former paganism might weaken their newfound faith.⁵

Prior to their conversion, most Gentiles had eaten meat in conjunction with sacrifice to idols. All the meat in such a sacrifice would not be consumed, but would be sold at the market. Odds were good that if you ate any kind of meat, you were eating meat that had been offered in sacrifice to

an idol. These Gentile converts now knew that idolatry was wrong, but mistakenly assumed the meat was too!

Here was a Bible issue upon which first century Christians strongly disagreed. What was to be done? Paul counsels: "Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him" (Rom. 14:3). The strong are cautioned against "despising" the vegetarian. To "despise" another as used here meant to treat with contempt, to regard as nothing, to have a disposition of prideful superiority.⁶ One would despise the weak with the attitude "Your views don't matter at all;" or "You can like it or lump it;" or "Shape up or ship out." A timeless lesson to always keep in mind is that ridicule will not win a person over, but will usually just drive him deeper in his own position.

The weak Christian also had an obligation in this matter, as he was not to "judge" the one who ate meat. These vegetarians had concluded that what was wrong for them was wrong for everyone else too. By passing judgment on this matter of option, they were destructively criticizing those who ate meat. Such judgment was wrong, since the Judge Himself "has received him."

Paul continues: "Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4). Judging another as wrong on optional matters is itself wrong, as each Christian stands or falls "to his own master." Each brother was a servant of the Lord, not of each other. The Lord is the owner of us all, and to Him "each will be made to stand" because both were right with regards to these optional practices. Likewise, our standing before God is on an individual basis, and does not depend on the opinions or attitudes of other Christians.

Another optional issue, but no less divisive for the church at Rome, was the observance of certain "days": "One

person esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5). Paul may be referring to Jews who still placed significance on certain days and feasts. Perhaps for them, Saturday was still a day of rest. To bind that this side of the cross would be wrong, but an individual did have the choice of resting or working on the seventh day of the week.

For us, congregations have the responsibility of worshiping God on Sunday, but as long as the Lord is put first, one may then opt to do whatever on the first day of the week. Others choose to rest on this day, which again is a legitimate choice. A congregation does not have to have Bible study on Wednesday evening either. Elders may decide to have it on Thursday morning, or not to have a period of Bible study at all during the week. Some congregations have all of their assemblies on the first day of the week, especially in areas where members have to drive a great distance to come to worship.

On these kinds of issues, “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.” On matters of option, what is right for one may not be right for another, but whatever we decide, it is done for the Lord:

He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks (Rom. 14:6).

We consecrate our actions, attitudes, and habits “to the Lord.”

Before leaving this text, let’s note three principles Paul gives that can help us remove contempt and a judgmental attitude from our relationships with others whenever we may differ in areas of liberty.

One, all Christians are on the same team: “For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself” (Rom. 14:7).

It is impossible to live an isolated life! Because we are linked together in the bond of Christ, our actions affect each other. Therefore we should seek to support one another—not use our energy to tear each other down. Since we’re on the same team, we are pulling for each other. We have the same purpose and goal, even though we may look at certain optional matters in a different way.

Two, all Christians are under one Head:

For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living (Rom. 14:8-9).

In the sporting world, championship teams have players who respect each other’s roles and trust each other to obey the coach’s instructions. As members of God’s “team” we all submit and answer to Jesus Christ, our Head. We answer to no one else, and certainly not to certain preachers; preachers aren’t the last—or the first word on any matter.

Three, all Christians will face judgment:

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:10-12).

In the end, on optional issues, we will not be judged by which side we took, but we will answer for wrong attitudes toward others. We have enough to be concerned about in our own lives with regards to judgment, without passing judgment on others in these areas.

The point we’re making from Romans 14 is this: it is not necessary to understand the Bible alike on matters of

opinion; there is no right or wrong side on these issues. At the same time, it is vital that each differing side treat the other with respect and love, regardless of the position held.

The Case Of Paul And Barnabas

Paul and Barnabas were two highly dedicated, devoted disciples of Christ who were determined to do their part in spreading the Gospel “to all the world.” After a highly successful first missionary journey (Acts 13–14), they journeyed to Jerusalem to take part in a conference concerning circumcision and matters pertaining to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church (Acts 15:1–29). At the conclusion of this meeting, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, gave the report, and taught and preached God’s Word with others. We pick up the narrative now with these words from the historian:

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (Acts 15:36-41).

To understand the scene in Acts 15, we have to hit rewind and go back to Acts 13. On missionary journey number one, John Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas a portion of the way on that trip, serving as a “minister” or “assistant” to them both (Acts 13:5). However, when the company came to Pamphylia, John Mark parted

company and went back to Jerusalem. For some reason, John Mark left the work and went back home. Some suggest he became homesick, or that he was worried about his mother's safety, or that he simply didn't have the courage to face the most difficult trip which did lie before them—the treacherous trek through the Taurus Mountains. Travel in this region was dangerous because those mountains were extremely high in altitude, and were crossed by a hazardous road known to be infested with thieves and thugs. This was also a place where people were prone to get malaria and other potentially fatal diseases. Whatever the reason, John Mark left.⁷

Now, back to Acts 15. After spending some days at Antioch, Paul expressed his desire to Barnabas for them to revisit and strengthen the churches they had planted on the first journey. Barnabas was in complete agreement, with the stipulation that John Mark be taken as well. He “determined,” “continually desired”⁸ to take John. However, Paul was against this proposal; he was just as adamant that John Mark not go along.

The ensuing disagreement was so sharp that it was labeled a “contention” (Acts 15:39), which means “to irritate, a sharp disagreement.”⁹ As the controversy could not be resolved, and as they could not effectively work together under such conditions, both went their separate ways—Paul and Silas to Syria and Cilicia—Barnabas and Mark to Cyprus.

Who was right and who was wrong in this dispute? Some side with Barnabas, averring that Paul was a bit too harsh in this case.¹⁰ Others take Paul's position, one writer going so far as to say that Barnabas “lost his temper” on this occasion.¹¹ But, could it be that neither was right? Or, could it be that both were right—that they were just viewing the same matter from a completely different perspective?

I take the latter position. Take Paul, for instance. He was enthusiastic about evangelism and wanted to do everything in his power to spread the good news of Jesus to the lost, so much so that he would allow nothing and no one to hinder his efforts. Perhaps Paul felt that John Mark might prove an embarrassment and a hindrance to their efforts to revisit and strengthen churches new in the faith; after all, the Lord's work was far too important to entrust to a person who might once again turn back. Keep in mind that "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint" (Prov. 25:19), and that "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

But what about Barnabas? He was no less excited about mission work than his partner Paul. And, at the same time, Barnabas had a keen interest in John Mark; after all, they were family in more ways than one! Not only was John Mark the brother of Barnabas in Christ, he was also his kinsman in the flesh, being his "cousin"¹² (Col. 4:10). Who could blame Barnabas for wanting to give his relative a second chance, and having a forgiving spirit? How could Paul forget what Barnabas had done for him early in his ministry, coming to his defense when so many others were highly suspicious of him (Acts 9:26-27)?

This was simply a judgment call, and though at first it appears to have ended on a negative note, when you read the rest of the story, "all's well that ends well." Instead of one missionary team going in one direction, you now have two going in different directions, giving that many more people a chance at salvation! Though there was somewhat of a "falling out" between these men at this juncture of the record, there was no permanent alienation and no malice held. Although separated for a time, Paul would later speak of both Barnabas and Mark in a

commendable way (1 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11–Mark became “useful;” Phile. 24–Mark once again was a “fellowlaborer.”)

Matters Of Option

This case of Paul and Barnabas proves that we are not expected to understand the Bible alike on every issue. There is flexibility for Christians in matters of option, expediency, and judgment calls such as this.

Thus said, why destroy the body of Christ over such incidentals as the color of the carpet, the time and order of services, the paint on the walls, mowing one’s yard on Sunday, going to movies, playing cards, et al.? I’m told there was even a time when some opposed Christian radio. Why? Because Satan is said to be the “prince of the power of the air!”

I can allow my brother the liberty of choosing how he best sees fit to “visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (Jas. 1:27); if his preferred method is adoption, fine, if supporting a home for such individuals, fine. If he chooses to assist from his own wallet, good, if he chooses to give through the church, equally good. God bound the “doing good” to all men (Gal. 6:10), but did not bind the “how” of our benevolence.

If my brother refuses to eat in the church building for conscience’ sake, I respect his position, as long as he doesn’t judge me for so doing. If my brother only wants to use one container on the Lord’s Supper for the fruit of the vine, fine, as long as I’m granted the liberty of either being first in line or using multiple containers.

If, however, I demand that others see things only my way and judge them when they don’t over such opinionated issues, I destroy the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17), and can be guilty of doing irreparable harm to the church of Christ in the process.

Additional Areas Where There Is Room For Disagreement

We should not expect to understand the Bible alike on certain texts, for the simple reason that not enough information has been revealed. Scholars have long debated what the mark of Cain was (Gen. 4:15), what kind of bush it was that Moses saw burning but that didn't burn up (Exod. 3:2), what Jesus wrote on the ground (John 8:8), what Paul's thorn in the flesh was (2 Cor. 12:7), and the ever popular "mark of the beast" (Rev. 13:18). Commentaries are filled with pages of explanations from experts that purport to solve these mysteries. To read some of their lines, you would think they were actually there when those events happened! Instead of leaving the impression that we know everything, why not be honest? Why are we so afraid of saying, "I don't know" to these and other questions that arise, when the bottom line is—we really don't know because we haven't been given enough information?

Even on matters where much has been revealed, still we differ at times. Can I not allow my brother the freedom of viewing the gift of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a different way than I do, as long as no doctrinal harm is done, or at least until we can sit down and discuss these matters in a loving, rational way? Should I view as suspect every Christian who chooses to use a different version of the Bible than I do, even when he or she still teaches the truth? Am I to frown upon an individual just because he didn't go to the same school as I did, or didn't go at all?

Our Attitude In Everything

There are some things that are clearly wrong, that the Bible condemns, and there are some things that are clearly right, that the Bible commands, and then there

are matters of option; everything is not “black or white.” Plus, there are texts of Scripture where our knowledge is incomplete, as well as areas in which we all could use further study and discussion.

What should the Christian’s attitude be throughout? We agree with one, who said, “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”¹³ More importantly, we agree with Peter, who said, “Above all things have fervent love for one another” (1 Pet. 4:8).

Conclusion

If you are like I am, you appreciate what the poet had to say concerning the folly of expecting everyone to see absolutely everything alike:

Believe as I believe, no more no less;
That I am right (and no one else) confess.
Feel as I feel, think only as I think;
Eat what I eat, and drink what I drink.
Look only as I look, do always as I do;
And then—and only then—I’ll fellowship with you.¹⁴

If I expect or demand that everyone agree with me on every single Bible issue, I’m going to find myself mighty lonely. My circle will have been drawn so small that I’m the only one in it. I will have even excluded God in the process!

Endnotes

1.As of the writing of this manuscript (5/5/06), 6,514,043,326 to be exact, <http://census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/popclockw>.

2.As found in the King James Version. Different word totals are explained by not counting the Hebrew alphabet of Psalm 119 or the superscriptions listed in some of the Psalms, <http://www.biblebelievers.com/believers-org/kjv-stats.html>.

3 H. Leo Boles, **Matthew** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1936), pp. 466–467.

4 John Stott, **Romans: God's Good News for the World** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 398.

5 **Life Application Bible Series** (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), p. 261.

6 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), p. 300.

7 Stanley Toussaint, "Acts," **The Bible Knowledge Commentary**, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983) Toussaint does a good job in a concise way of summarizing different views as to why John Mark defected, pp. 388–389.

8 Fritz Rienecker, **A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, Regency Reference Library, 1980), the verb here means "to will, to want, to wish," Luke uses the imperfect tense, emphasizing Barnabas' tenacity in the matter, p. 300.

9 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 629.

10 Simon J. Kistemaker, **Acts: New Testament Commentary** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), Kistemaker summarizes both positions, p. 569.

11 H. Leo Boles, **Acts** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1941), p. 249.

12 W. E. Vine, The original word meant "cousin" and was used for "nephew" (KJV) only in later writings, p. 250.

13 Many attribute the origin of this slogan to Augustine, while others dispute that claim, saying that a Lutheran theologian named Peter Meiderlon was its creator, http://www.restorationquarterly.org/Volume_039/rq03903rollmann.htm.

14 Charles R. Swindoll, http://www.bible.org/illus.asp?topic_id=548.

CHAPTER 31

Why Do So Many Not Understand The Bible?

Kevin Beard

Introduction

D*IVISION ABOUNDS IN EVERY* facet of life. People disagree over just about everything, from the trivial to the momentous. But few areas of diversity arouse the kind of fervor that religion does. Examining religion in its broadest scope reveals a wide variety of beliefs and practices. This is no surprise when considering the differences between such religions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Paganism, and so forth, because different religious leaders founded them and they hold to different standards of religious authority.

But even among the so-called “Christian” religions, extreme diversity exists. All of these groups claim to follow Jesus Christ and the teachings of the New Testament. Common sense would seem to say that these groups should be united, even identical; yet they are not. They are divided over many different issues into many different groups. The World Christian Database claims to have “extensive data” on 9,000 Christian denominations throughout the world.¹ Assuming this count is accurate, why do 9,000 different religious groups exist when there is only one Bible? The answer to that question lies in the fact that not all people

understand the Bible alike. Different people see different things in what the Bible says; therefore they believe and practice different things in their religions.

Since the religious division that exists owes its existence to differences in people's understanding of the Scriptures, the next logical question to consider seems to be: "Why do so many not understand the Bible alike?" Is there something inherent in the Bible that precludes people from understanding it alike? Is there something inherent in people that precludes them from being able to understand the Bible alike? Has God just played a big joke on the human race by giving them the Bible in such a form that one person sees one thing in it and another person sees the total opposite thing? None of these three options is viable. Each implies imperfection in God—either He was unable to produce either the Bible or people in such a way that His Word could be understood, or He was unwilling to provide a Bible that would accurately reveal His will.

So why do people not understand the Bible alike? Actually, to say that people do not "understand" the Bible alike may imply that such different interpretations are necessary. If people do not "understand" the Bible alike, it is because some (or all) of those people do not understand it **correctly**. It is not the case that one person understands one passage of Scripture this way, and another person understands the same passage that way, and both of them are correct. If they "understand" the same passage differently, then one or both of them do not understand the passage at all; they have misunderstood the passage. But when both people understand the passage correctly, they will see it alike.

Different factors contribute to the misunderstanding of Scripture. Three seem to be significant and will be examined here: (1) Some people don't want to understand

the Bible correctly; (2) Some people don't try to understand the Bible correctly; (3) Some people's minds have been blinded by different things.

Some People Don't Want To Understand The Bible

Many of the problems that people have could be fixed if those people would just decide that they wanted to fix those problems. Problems in understanding the Bible are not much different. Many people do not understand the Bible correctly because they are too enamored with other things. They understand enough of the Bible to know that they aren't really all that interested in learning and understanding any more of it than they already do. Therefore, they don't exert any energy in trying to learn and understand.

Sin hinders the proper understanding of the Bible when people become enthralled with sin's pleasure. If sin were not pleasurable, then would anyone really have that much trouble staying away from it? James said, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1:14).² One's lust, or desire for unlawful things, brings sin. Satan uses sin's pleasurable nature to lure men into it. Louw and Nida said the Greek word (*deleazo*) translated "enticed" in this passage "... may often be translated as 'to make sinning look attractive' or 'to make sin taste good' or 'to wave sin in front of a person's nose.'"³ Woods said:

Desire, seeking satisfaction, prompts to sin; and the individual is caught, trapped, ensnared, or, as we sometimes say, *hooked!* . . . As a fisherman uses the most attractive sort of bait, or the most alluring fly to induce the fish to strike, so Satan tempts us by means of those things which are to us most desirable.⁴

Those enticements and allurements often prove to be very powerful forces. People become so used to the pleasures of sin that they begin to think that they cannot live without them. When confronted with the teaching that they must abandon the practice of sin, they cannot imagine life without those sinful pleasures. Therefore, they turn a deaf ear to what the Scriptures plainly teach.

Some people who do this make no claims of being religious or of any spiritual emphasis in their lives at all. It would be expected that these kinds of people would show little understanding in Scriptural matters. But there are others who do claim to be religious people, yet they continue in things the Bible plainly condemns.

For example, in many churches people who have been divorced and remarried without the God-approved right to do so take very active roles in leadership and service. They teach Bible classes, they help make decisions for those churches, and they are generally accepted among the membership without any question regarding their marital state. But what would they do if someone approached them to help them understand the simple teaching of Jesus on the subject of divorce and remarriage? He said:

Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Matt. 19:9).

Sadly, too many people who are married to a person whom God says they have no right to have as a mate reject the simple teaching of Jesus for something easier to accept. There is no way to know how many people will stand before the Lord in judgment to be condemned for living a life of adultery because they chose not to understand His teaching and chose rather to follow one of the contrived

theories of men regarding God's view of divorce and remarriage.

Sometimes people don't want to face the fact that they or someone they love has been wrong. Generally speaking, people hold tightly to their religious beliefs. If someone shows them that their beliefs contradict what the Scripture plainly teaches, sometimes they react negatively. They may appeal to the fact that this position is not what their now-deceased mother or father believed. "If I accept this I'll be condemning my parents to hell," they may proclaim.

Others may be reluctant to consider the truth because it would require too much change for them personally. This writer received a telephone call one Sunday afternoon from a woman looking for help with a problem. She said she had come to believe that what she had previously thought about baptism was wrong. She now understood that the Bible teaches that baptism is for the remission of sins. The reason this posed a problem for her was that her husband was a Baptist preacher who had promised to divorce her if she accepted that doctrine as true. Since she lived in another state, and would not identify herself, we were not able to meet and study the Scriptures together. She has not called back again. What options did this woman have? If her husband seriously intended to divorce her over her acceptance of the truth, she would have to make a tremendous personal sacrifice because of her proper understanding of Scripture. On the other hand, she could have chosen the easy way out by ignoring the proper understanding of Scripture for the sake of her marriage. While some might object and say that the Lord certainly would not want someone to jeopardize a marriage over something like this, the Lord Himself did not see it that way:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:34-37).

No family relationship could ever outweigh the Lord's will. Of course, whatever sacrifice one might be forced to make for the Gospel's sake would be well worth it. When Peter told Jesus that he and the rest of the twelve had left everything to follow Jesus, the Lord said:

Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Apparently, some people choose to disregard what the Lord said. If a proper understanding of Scripture brings about a personal sacrifice of some sort, some people simply choose to continue in their ignorance of the truth, unwilling to understand correctly what the Scriptures teach.

Some People Don't Try To Understand The Bible

It is important for people to realize that it is possible to understand the Bible. Paul told the Ephesian church, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). David said, "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every

false way” (Psm. 119:104). To understand the Bible one must attempt to understand it by reading it. Does this mean that understanding everything in the Bible will always be easy? Of course not. Many things in the Bible are simple to understand, but other things are more challenging. However, whether the text is simple or complex, it is understandable.

Despite the Bible’s own assurances that understanding it is possible, many people still do not go to the trouble to try. Some are like the little boy who knew he did not like broccoli, even though he had never tried it; they know they will not understand the Bible, even though they have never tried to do so. Common misperceptions are often hard to overcome, and one of the most common misperceptions about the Bible is that it is difficult, if not impossible to understand. Therefore, those who have accepted the conventional wisdom about understanding the Bible see no point in what they would consider to be a waste of time in studying it.

One of the problems in American society is the desire for the convenience of instant gratification. When just about everything is being engineered to be faster and simpler, consumers tend to frown on things that require patience and continued effort. To understand the Bible thoroughly and correctly, one must devote time and effort to the process; it will not come instantly. Therefore, many feel as though they do not have the time, and they spend only a few minutes at a time in a cursory reading of a short Bible passage. This only reinforces their misconception about understanding the Bible. They quickly read through a Bible passage, fail to understand or see much meaning in it, and conclude that they were right all along—“People really can’t understand the Bible anyway.” The servant of God cannot afford to have this kind of attitude toward the Word of God. David displayed

the beautiful attitude of one who dearly loved God and His Word: “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psm. 119:97). A proper understanding of the Bible requires diligent effort and devoted thought. The word “meditation” indicates a devoted effort at thinking about the things that one has studied. It means, “giving considerable thought about a person or subject, with a focus of responding properly to the information.”⁵ Notice that David said God’s Word was his meditation **all the day**. That is the way to acquire deep and abiding knowledge and understanding.

While some may be discouraged by the amount of time that is necessary to fill one’s heart with the proper understanding of the Word, others are content to let someone else do their studying and thinking for them. These people are not disinterested in what the Bible says; they are just disinterested in investigating it for themselves. The only thing about the Bible that some religious people know is what their preachers tell them. Since it is a preacher’s “job” to study the Bible, whatever he says about it must be correct, they “reason.” Thus, whenever someone engages them in a discussion about the Bible, they are forced to try to recall what, if anything, the preacher has said on the subject. This kind of thinking puts the preacher in the position of being the final arbiter in settling differences in religious discussions.

Some people were discussing whether or not one must be baptized in order to be saved. During the course of their discussion a student at a local denominational seminary walked into the room. One of the people in the discussion knew the young man and said, “Here’s someone who is studying to be a preacher. Let’s ask him.” So she asked the young man whether a person had to be baptized in order to be saved. The seminary student said, “No.” So

the young lady said, “See, you don’t have to be baptized to be saved,” and for her the discussion was over.

This kind of “reasoning” completely contradicts the instruction found in the Bible itself. Isaiah warned the people of his day about false prophets who would turn the people to mediums and wizards. He told the people not to listen to them and gave them this advice: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).

Paul warned the churches of Galatia about false teachers who would turn them away from the Gospel Paul had preached to them. He said, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Someone might object and say, “Well isn’t Paul doing exactly what you’re arguing against?” No, not at all. Paul went on to remind the Galatians 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).

So Paul directed the Galatians to the Word they had originally received from him and reminded them that that Word had come from Jesus Christ. In other words, he commanded them to follow the Scriptures, not what any preacher would say. Jesus warned of the coming judgment and explained how that judgment would be carried out: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Every person ought to heed Jesus’ warning. His Word will judge the world in the last day; therefore every person would be wise to learn it for himself and submit to it.

The people of Berea are a perfect example of what everyone ought to do when investigating religious teaching:

These 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. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few (Acts 17:11-12).

This example shows the natural progression of an honest person who seeks the truth correctly.

First, they received the Word Paul taught them with a ready mind. One must be open-minded in order to learn anything. Whenever a person listens to any teaching with his mind already made up, he will never give an honest consideration to the things he hears.

Second, they searched the Scriptures daily regarding the things they heard. Open-mindedness is not the same as being gullible. They gave Paul a fair hearing, but they resorted to the Scriptures as the final authority about what he taught.

Third, they believed. When honest people listen to Gospel preaching with an open mind and then compare what they hear with the Scriptures, they will believe what they were taught. That formula worked then and it continues to work today.

Some People's Minds Have Been Blinded

General attitudes toward the Bible itself have a tremendous impact on whether or not people will study it correctly. There are also some general philosophies that also have a negative impact on people's attitudes toward the Bible, which hinder them from understanding the Bible correctly. These philosophies blind people's minds to the truth, so that their approach to the Bible is incapable of resulting in proper understanding.

Atheism

Though America is often called a “Christian nation,” atheism has had a tremendous influence on many people’s thinking. The vast majority of outlets for “scientific”⁶ information, from children’s books to university lecture halls, operate from the assumption that all life evolved from non-life through a series of completely random and undirected accidents.

Many people view these “scientific” experts as authorities whose positions are unassailable—after all, they have the weight of “scientific” evidence behind them. This has a tremendous detrimental effect on people’s confidence in the Bible. Since these generally accepted “scientific” positions directly contradict the Bible’s explanation of things, those who have been convinced by the “scientific” proof conclude that the Bible must not be true in those areas of contradiction. Therefore, they conclude that the Bible’s account of the Creation, for example, is merely a myth. Once people decide that “science” is right and the Bible is wrong in matters like the origins of life, it is a very short step to deciding that the Bible is wrong in other matters, too.

Atheism has also hindered people’s understanding of the Bible through direct attacks on the Bible’s reliability. Militant atheists love to point out what they claim to be inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible. A search on one Internet search engine for the phrase “Bible Contradictions” produced more than 2,270,000 results. Many of these were sites devoted to answering the Bible’s critics, but this illustrates how prolific the atheists are in trying to produce doubt in people’s minds about the reliability of the Bible.

Of course many of their claims are fairly easily answered, when one considers that these so-called contradictions often involve a basic misunderstanding of

correct Biblical interpretation. For example, some claim there is contradiction regarding whether human beings are allowed to eat any meat, only some meats, or no meat, whatever. They point to God's instructions for Adam to eat from the herbs and fruits that God had caused to grow (Gen. 1:29-30); then they point to the various passages in the Law of Moses that forbade eating various kinds of meats; then they point to a passage like 1 Timothy 4:4, which says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." So they ask, "Does God allow people to eat no meat, some meat, or all meat," thinking this is an obvious contradiction. What they fail to consider is the fact that God has changed His laws regarding eating meats at various times and to various people. The passages do not contradict one another because they were directed to different groups of people.

Some alleged Bible contradictions focus on parallel passages that give different amounts of information on the same event. If one passage says two people were present at a certain event and another passage only mentions one, they believe they have found a contradiction. However, this is not the case.

An example of this is the healing of the blind men at Jericho. Mark's account of this only mentions a blind man named Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46), while Matthew's account says there were two blind men present (Matt. 20:30). Is this a contradiction? Only if Mark said that **only** Bartimaeus was present, which he did not say. Matthew's inclusion of more detail than what Mark gave does not contradict Mark's account; it complements it. Why then did Mark only mention the one blind man? Mark mentioned the blind man by name, specifying also that he was "the son of Timaeus." This might indicate one of three things: (1) Bartimaeus was well known to Mark; (2) he was well known to Mark's readers; or (3) he was well known to both Mark

and his readers. If that were the case, it is understandable why Mark would have mentioned only Bartimaeus.

Sometimes atheists find passages that seem to be contradictory, yet they fail to consider the fact that one word or concept can be used in different senses. For example, one may say, "Samson was a very strong man," and then in another setting say, "Samson was a very weak man." Do the statements contradict one another? They only contradict one another if the concept of strength is used in the same sense. But if the first statement referred to Samson's physical strength, while the second referred to his spiritual strength, then they do not contradict one another.

Paul told the Corinthians to become fools:

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise (1 Cor. 3:18).

Then he told the Ephesians not to be foolish: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15). Though many atheists would point to these two passages and claim they have found a contradiction, they are wrong. Paul did not use the concepts of wisdom and foolishness in the same sense in these two verses. The first speaks of worldly wisdom; the second speaks of Divine wisdom. To be wise according to God's wisdom one must divest himself of the world's wisdom, that is, he must become a "fool" in the eyes of the world.

Though every alleged Bible contradiction can be explained, many people still choose to believe them. Atheism has blinded their minds and thus, they refuse to consider the Bible for what it is.

Modernism

The term "modernism" refers to the philosophical views that began to prevail during the period in history

known as “the Enlightenment.” During this time, those who espoused this philosophy held a strictly secular world view and sought to explain all things by means of reason and science. Emerson wrote:

Strongly influenced by the rise of modern science and by the aftermath of the long religious conflict that followed the Reformation, the thinkers of the Enlightenment... were committed to secular views based on reason or human understanding only, which they hoped would provide a basis for beneficial changes affecting every area of life and thought.⁷

As modernistic thinking began to affect theology, the supernatural concepts of the Bible were soon discarded in favor of naturalistic explanations. The more this kind of thinking took over in the realms of theological academia, the less the religious scholars believed in the supernatural and miraculous events recorded in the Bible. This development in thinking has affected the average person in at least two ways.

First, in many of the seminaries and universities where religious leaders are trained, modernistic philosophy has become the norm. The men and women who attend these institutions learn from professors who have bought into the modernistic approach to the Bible. Thus, they learn such things as the Documentary Hypothesis, which claims that Moses did not write the first five books of the Old Testament by inspiration, but instead, they are a conglomeration of writings from different eras, edited and compiled into one around 400 B.C. They study prophecy from the viewpoint that since no one can look into the future, the only way to explain the predictive nature of the prophetic language is to assume that the prophets wrote after the fact, not before. Since there are no natural or scientific explanations for the miraculous events recorded in the Bible,

those accounts are dismissed as either myths and legends, or the superstitious beliefs of people who could not explain the things they did not understand. These students graduate from these seminaries and universities and go out to teach and preach to members of their local congregations. At worst they repeat all of the modernistic ideas to their churches and at best they merely preach and teach in such a way that takes the emphasis away from the supernatural aspect of the Bible. This results either in people doubting their faith or never being given any reason to believe in the first place.

Second, in today's entertainment-intoxicated world, people will believe just about anything they see on television or in the movies. Organizations like the Discovery Channel and National Geographic have seized this opportunity to spread their disbelief of and hatred for the inspired Word of God. They often present television shows about the Bible, and they seem to spare no expense at producing them. They hire well-known and respected actors to narrate them; they make sure they have the highest quality photography, music, and artwork; they send their crews to far-away locations to produce a show that has the ring of authority and credibility.

Invariably, these shows will interview various religious experts in the fields they are examining. However, these experts rarely, if ever believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired Word of God, nor do they believe in the miraculous and supernatural nature of the Bible. Then, almost invariably, they present the subject of their investigation and production to the audience as the "real" story of the Bible.

Their agenda is blatantly clear: one cannot trust the Bible to mean what it literally says. So when people who are generally ignorant of the Bible see these

programs, they often believe everything that is said. Based on these kinds of things it is little wonder that books like Dan Brown's novel, **The DaVinci Code**, have had such tremendous success and popularity.

Postmodernism

As implied in the name, Postmodernism is the philosophical view that has arisen after Modernism. It rejects many of the tenets of Modernism and instead views truth in a much looser, more subjective light. Postmodernism does not think of any particular group as having a monopoly on truth, so that the views of all cultures have equal value and validity. Postmodern thinking is responsible for today's subjective, multicultural, pluralistic approach to truth. What is true for one person may not necessarily be true for another. One person's views of morality are just as valid as another's. And one person's religion is just as meaningful and relevant to him as another person's religion is to him.

The extreme effect that Postmodernism has had in religion is the development of the concept of Religious Pluralism—the notion that the world's many different religions all offer access to spiritual truth equally.

On March 11, 2003, CNN's "Larry King Live" addressed the issue of Jesus' attitude toward the war in Iraq. King's guests included religious leaders from various "Christian" religious organizations. King began his broadcast by stating that Saddam Hussein says he prays. He then asked his panel how they could argue that Hussein's belief in the god to whom he prayed was any less real than the God in Whom Christians believe. From that discussion, the following exchange between Larry King and Bishop Melvin Talbert, ecumenical officer of the United Methodist Church, illustrates this concept of Religious Pluralism:

KING: Don't you believe, Bishop Talbert, that Christianity is the right path?

TALBERT: I do believe for Christians, but we're not here to settle which religion is right. That dispute belongs to God. We are here to practice what we preach.

KING: Do you believe your religion is right?

TALBERT: Yes I do.

KING: Or else why believe it?

TALBERT: That is right.

KING: So therefore, the other religions have to be wrong.

TALBERT: No, I don't say that at all.

KING: If you believe your religion is right. The other religions are wrong.

TALBERT: I believe my God is large enough to be inclusive of all human beings who were created in God's image, and that includes those religions that are not Christians.⁸

Religious Pluralism is being forced down the throats of Americans. Day by day the emphasis on tolerance and acceptance grows stronger. Sadly, many of those who are in charge of making the decisions choose to squelch any kind of public expression of faith in the Bible while allowing and sometimes even promoting the teachings and traditions of religious groups that do not follow the Bible—all in the name of tolerance and sensitivity.

As an example of how ridiculous this kind of thinking is, consider the uproar caused recently when many department stores refused to use the word "Christmas."⁹ Instead of "Christmas trees" they sold "holiday trees." Instead of wishing people a "Merry Christmas," they said, "Happy Holidays."

This kind of thinking is having a great impact on many people in today's world, especially the younger ones who are exposed to more of this philosophy through their education. If every person's beliefs are equally valid, how can one religion be exalted above any other? In a world where government agencies, schools, and news and

entertainment media are all preaching the message of tolerance, acceptance, and sensitivity to other's beliefs, many people have been either brainwashed or intimidated into accepting the notion that it is wrong to declare anyone's faith to be in error.

Not everyone has completely accepted this notion of Religious Pluralism. However, the postmodern concepts of subjectivism and relativity have affected many of those who might reject the more radical ideals of Pluralism. The notion that truth is not absolute has gained a tremendous acceptance among average people.

As an illustration of this, consider the subject of religious debates. There was a time when Gospel preachers could challenge denominational preachers to debate their doctrinal differences and those denominational preachers would accept the challenge. They would then meet on a certain date to present their arguments in support of their positions based on what the Bible says. People often showed great interest in attending those debates and much good often came from the discussion.

Today, religious debates are almost unheard of. One of the main causes for this decline in religious debating is that most denominational preachers seem to have adopted this subjective, relativistic approach to the Bible. They have accepted the idea that truth is not absolute and that it cannot be absolutely known. So as long as people agree on what is most important—that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for the sins of the world, etc.—then the matters of lesser importance should not be reason for dispute. Therefore, many of the issues that preachers of past generations debated are no longer considered to be matters of great enough importance to divide what they would consider to be the body of all believers.

Thus, postmodernism has produced the “just do whatever feels good to you” approach to religion. The

concepts of Scriptural authority have been cast aside in favor of the concepts of mass marketing. Church growth experts rely more on public opinion polls and glitzy marketing schemes than they do on Divine truth. The end result is that there are many religious people in America today who know little to nothing about what the Scriptures actually teach, and they are perfectly content to remain in that ignorance, so long as their religious organizations continue to make them feel good about themselves.

Conclusion

Why do so many **not** understand the Bible alike? There are many contributing factors. Though God has given us the Scriptures in such a way that we can and should understand them, many people have disregarded what the Scriptures plainly teach in favor of things they like better.

Some do not understand because they do not want to understand. They like the pleasures of sin more than what the Bible has to offer. Others do not understand because they do not try to understand. Whether it be because of laziness, indifference, or the false assumption that they couldn't understand the Scriptures even if they did try, they leave Bible study out of their lives.

Still others have been blinded by the false philosophies of men, like atheism, modernism, and postmodernism. These concepts prejudice their minds against the Scriptures and against the notion that we ought to study them in order to ascertain the unchanging, absolute truth they reveal. Whatever the cause, when men fail to understand the Bible correctly they have closed the door of salvation to themselves.

Endnotes

1 World Christian Database [online], available from <http://worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd>; Internet.

2 All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

3 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains**, vol. 1, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), p. 774.

4 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on The Epistle of James** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1987), p. 59.

5 James Swanson, **Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)**, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), HGK8491.

6 The word “scientific” is placed in quotation marks in this paragraph to indicate that while these ideas are **presented** as scientific facts, they have not been **established** as scientific facts. Though evolutionary scientists point to evidence that they **claim** proves evolution to be true, there is a mountain of evidence that proves that their assumptions about evolution are not true. Evolutionists, however, tend to ignore this evidence in favor of the position they have **assumed** to be true. True scientific facts never contradict the Bible, because God is the Author and Creator of all truth, and all truth is harmonious—whether it comes from God’s **natural revelation** in the world around us, or from His **special revelation** as given in the Bible.

7 Roger L. Emerson, “Enlightenment,” **Academic American Encyclopedia**, Vol. 7 (Danbury, CT: Grolier, Inc., 1990), p. 206.

8 From the transcript of the March 11, 2003 episode of “Larry King Live,” as reprinted in “Religious Pluralism” [online], available from <http://www.allaboutreligion.org/religious-pluralism-2.htm>; Internet.

9 Nowhere does the New Testament authorize the recognition of a special day to celebrate the birth of Christ. This illustration is not intended to imply that recognizing Christmas as a religious holiday is any part of true New Testament Christianity, but to show what the world’s attitude is toward what it perceives to be Christianity in this postmodern age of pluralism and relativism.

CHAPTER 32

What Difference Does It Make Whether We Understand The Bible?

Tyler Young

Introduction

THE BIBLE IS AT once simple and complex, its meaning both obvious and obscure. Understanding it, therefore, is sometimes easy, requiring scarcely more thought than is necessary to read the text. But frequently, coming to a correct understanding of its teaching is a challenging endeavor. The application of the science of Biblical hermeneutics—the field of study dealing with the principles of interpreting the Bible—is at times difficult. God’s will can be known (Eph. 5:17), but there are some things about it “hard to be understood” (2 Pet. 3:16)¹ which require diligence and discernment to discover (Heb. 5:12-14). To arrive at a full knowledge of saving truth, we must take a journey that requires honesty and persistence. Truth is sometimes veiled from those unwilling to put forth the effort to make that journey (Matt. 13:13-15). God has revealed Himself and His will to us so that we can find him (Acts 17:26-28). But to find, we must seek, and seek diligently (Luke 11:9; Luke 13:24; Deut. 4:29).

Is it really essential that we apply ourselves to the task of ascertaining a knowledge of the Bible? Whatever we may **think** the Bible teaches, is it critical we examine

our beliefs to make certain they are, in fact, what the Bible actually teaches? When it comes to those things necessary to our salvation, if it is possible to understand the Bible correctly, is it also **necessary** that we do so? In the end, is understanding the Bible a matter of any consequence? It seems that most who profess to believe the Bible contend that, as long as we sincerely believe we understand the Bible, then whether or not we actually do so is not crucial to the well being of our souls. One person has his understanding, another has his own. Although they contradict, and whether their convictions are right or wrong, what is important is not determining which one is actually correctly understanding the Bible, but that each one thinks he does.

Although its advocates may not realize it, this view implies that, in the final analysis, a knowledge of saving truth is irrelevant to salvation. Our purpose is to show an understanding of the Bible—in other words, a knowledge of the truth—is indeed absolutely essential to salvation. Whether or not we understand the Bible has profound implications both in this life and in eternity.

Our Salvation And Understanding The Bible

Obedience And Understanding God's Will

Because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), we need God’s grace to be saved. While we cannot therefore merit salvation through good works, Scripture maintains throughout a clear connection between what we do—both morally and religiously—and our spiritual condition. Jesus paid the price for our redemption, and through the atonement He accomplished in His sacrifice on the cross we can be cleansed from sin and stand justified before God. But the Bible unequivocally informs us that there are conditions with which we must

comply in order to receive the benefits of that atonement. We must submit to God to be saved by Him. “In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). Jesus saves “all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9), and affirmed that only those who “doeth the will of my Father” will be in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Obedience to God, therefore, is essential to salvation. But to obey the commands of God, we must understand the commands of God. It’s one thing to read, it’s another thing to understand. Phillip asked the treasurer from Ethiopia, who was reading Scripture, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30). With regard to essential matters, we must not only know what the Bible **says**, we must also know what it **means**. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6, telling the Pharisees to “go ye and learn what this meaneth” (Matt. 9:13). No doubt they knew the text, but they failed to properly consider what it meant, and therefore were unable to understand what God was telling them they should have done about themselves and Jesus in that particular situation.

Take, for example, the matter of baptism. Despite the controversy surrounding the subject and the emphatic denial of the necessity of baptism by most denominationalists, the Bible plainly teaches that one must be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). But what, exactly, is baptism? Even if one understood from an honest examination of God’s Word that he must be “baptized,” he must understand what constitutes baptism in order to be baptized. According to the New Testament of Christ, baptism “in the name of Christ” is immersion in water of a penitent believer for the remission of sins, at which point a person enters the body of Christ—which is composed of those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ—thus becoming saved (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 8:38-39; Rom. 6:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:13).

But suppose a person has been taught—as millions have been and continue to be—that baptism is the sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of an infant. If he was sprinkled as a baby, he may be confident that he has obeyed God’s requirements with regard to baptism. He may be convinced that Biblical examples of “households” being baptized (Acts 10:48; Acts 11:14; Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33) prove that infants may be baptized. This, however, would not be an understanding of God’s Word, but a **misunderstanding** of it. In fact, he would be wrong on two counts: First, the baptism of what Scripture designates as a “household” is no proof that persons too young to be accountable to God (obviously infants fall into this category) were in such a household. The assumption that baptized “households” included infants is unfounded and would contradict other passages which make clear that only penitent believers (and to be penitent one must be guilty of committing sin, which infants are not) are fit subjects for baptism. And second, even if an infant were a fit subject for baptism, sprinkling with water is not Biblical baptism, but something else entirely. Affusion is not baptism in the name of—which is by the authority of and in keeping with the instruction of—Christ. Thus, one who has been sprinkled or had water poured upon him—whether as an infant or an adult—has not understood God, and therefore has not actually complied with one of God’s requirements for salvation.

On this matter of infant baptism, rather than appealing to the Bible, others may contend that it does not matter what the Scriptures say on the subject because the tradition of their church, and not the Bible, is the ultimate authority in religion. Therefore, the “reasoning” goes, if church tradition endorses the practice, it is acceptable to God. But this too is a misunderstanding of the will of God due to either a misunderstanding of the Bible’s teaching on its own authority

(2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3, et al) or an explicit rejection of the Bible as the inerrant, inspired Word of God. To believe that tradition or anything else trumps the Bible is itself a failure to understand the Bible.

Suppose someone believes—as most denominationalists do—that the Bible teaches salvation is obtained by faith alone, apart from any obedience on his part, and that therefore baptism is not necessary to salvation. He may find texts in the Bible which affirm that salvation is by grace through faith or which declare that those who believe will be saved (Eph. 2:8-9; John 3:16); from these, he may suppose he can be saved at the very moment he first believes, or simply by saying a prayer and inviting Jesus Christ into his heart to be Lord of his life, a belief widely advocated by professing “Christians.” He may later be baptized—immersed in water—believing God requires this of him, but denying (or unaware) that he must do so “for the remission of sins.” Instead he is baptized as a sign of salvation already received and/or to join a particular denomination. He may be immersed, but he has not been immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, because Christ, through the inspired writers of the New Testament, requires that we be baptized “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

In either case above, one’s ignorance or incorrect understanding of what the Bible teaches results in a failure to **know** what God requires, and therefore a failure to **do** what requires. Tragically, this is precisely the predicament of many today who believe they are saved, but who in fact have never complied with the conditions of salvation, or are otherwise not abiding “in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). Whether because of pride, prejudice, lack of honesty, or false teaching, a failure to understand the Bible when it comes to what God requires to be saved not only makes a difference—it makes all the difference. When it comes to obligatory matters—things we must do to be saved and

remain saved—it makes the difference between being saved or lost.

Persistent Misunderstanding Amounts To A Rejection Of God

Misunderstanding God’s Word actually results in a rejection of God himself. Consider what happened to the Jews of Jesus’ day who refused to acknowledge Him as the Christ. Many did not believe on Him because of their misunderstanding of what the Old Testament Scriptures taught concerning the Messiah. When a question arose among the multitudes in Jerusalem during the feast of the tabernacles as to whether Jesus was the Christ, some argued, “Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence he is” (John 7:27). Jesus did not fit with the notion some of the Jews had about the Christ’s origins. Later, just days before He would be crucified, Jesus spoke of being “lifted up,” referring to His death (John 12:32-33). “The multitude therefore answered him, We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?” They thought the Scriptures precluded the idea of the Christ ever dying. Their incorrect impression of the Law simply ruled out the idea that the Messiah, for whom they had been waiting to bring the kingdom of God, could ever be humiliated and tortured to death at the hands of His enemies. Though this is precisely what their own Scriptures foretold (Psm. 22; Isa. 53), their faulty Messianic model made it utterly unthinkable. From these instances, as well as a study of other Scriptures and extra-Biblical sources, we find that the Jewish community of Jesus’ day carried deeply embedded misconceptions of the Law concerning their own Messiah.

Because of these preconceived, erroneous notions of the Messiah and the nature of the kingdom of God, which were based on a failure to understanding God's Word, many of the Jews found it difficult to accept Jesus' claims—despite the undeniable evidence He gave in support of them. The Jewish leaders justified their rejection of Jesus by appealing to their perverted concept of the Law. In a deeply ironic declaration, the Pharisees responded in frustration to the pilgrim crowds gathered in Jerusalem who were favorably impressed by Jesus: "But this multitude that knoweth not the law are accursed" (John 7:49). Note the elitist condescension. Only ignorance of the Law, they supposed, could explain how anyone might believe in Jesus. They prided themselves in their knowledge and faithfulness to the Law which, they believed, required them to oppose Christ as a blasphemous imposter. Yet it was their willful ignorance of the Word of God which led these Jewish leaders to reject their own Messiah, bringing a curse upon themselves and their nation (John 5:45-46). "For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts 13:27).

Though they heard the "voices of the prophets" every Sabbath, they did not "know" them, meaning they did not understand them. Did it make any difference? Throughout the book of Acts we see how the apostles labored among the Jews, as Jesus did during His ministry, to get them to see the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Messiah—that a proper understanding of the Law would not compel them to reject Christ, but point them to Him. "Christ is the end of the law," Paul argued (Rom. 10:4). But the cross was to the Jews "a stumbling block" (1 Cor. 1:23), for, the same apostle revealed, "unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart" (2 Cor. 3:15).

Their hardness of heart veiled the true understanding of God's Law. And their failure—their refusal—to understand the Law did indeed make a difference. It was the difference between accepting their Savior and crucifying Him, between salvation and damnation, between being saved by Him or judged by Him, between being welcomed by Him into heaven or cast by Him into hell.

So it is with us today. A failure to understand the Word of God results in a rejection of the Word of God, which ultimately is a rejection of Christ Himself. “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

Condemned For Misinterpreting The Bible?

Will someone really be condemned for sincerely misunderstanding the teaching of the Bible? Are there not millions of sincere, devout souls whose erroneous beliefs are not based on a rebellious spirit—a desire to supplant God's will with their own—but merely honest misapprehension? After all, no one understands everything in the Bible perfectly; we all struggle at times in our efforts to arrive at a correct comprehension of Scripture. It hardly seems reasonable that someone who wants to please God would be lost eternally for being mistaken in his interpretation of the Bible. How shall we reply to this objection?

Certainly many who do not understand the Bible properly have merely been misinformed or simply do not have enough familiarity with Scripture to grasp the significance of what they read. Still, we are to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17), which means we can and must interpret the Bible correctly in order to ascertain God's will for us (2 Tim. 2:15). There are in the Bible “some things hard to be understood” (2 Pet. 3:16), but this is not to say that all things are impossible to

understand. When it comes to arriving at a knowledge of saving truth, those who persistently, diligently seek, can find. Despite the failure of the Jews to understand fully the significance of the Abrahamic covenant and the prophecies pointing to Christ, Jesus told them, “If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself” (John 7:17). It was possible for them—expected of them, in fact—to critically examine the claims of Christ and come to know if He really was the fulfillment of Scripture—if they were willing.

The will is the key. If one has a good and honest heart (Luke 8:15) and truly wills to know and do the will of God, no matter how distorted his perception of the Bible may be, he can overcome prejudice and indoctrination, forsake error, arrive at a knowledge of the truth and surrender to God. Here again we can return to the Jews and their response to Christ as a demonstration of our point. Remember that, due to their misconceptions of the work of the Messiah, the Lord’s disciples themselves did not understand the plain statements of Jesus when He warned them of his impending death (Mark 9:31-32). The Lord’s words on these occasions were hardly enigmatic (see Mark 10:32-34), but apparently the disciples did not understand them because they did not know how to reconcile them with what they thought they knew from the Scriptures about the Messiah.

Despite their confusion, they knew Jesus’ had provided them proof of His claims (John 6:69; cf. John 3:2; John 10:32-33). Eventually, they came to understand their error and not only embraced the truth but gladly gave their lives to proclaim it to others. Tragically, most of their own countrymen, particularly their leaders, rejected the evidence, refusing to renounce their cherished beliefs. “But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him...For this cause they could not believe” (John 12:37-40).

Here we see why so many fail come to a correct understanding of God's will—the condition of their hearts prevents it. Scripture both reveals and conceals the will of God, depending on the attitude of the hearer. When His disciples asked Jesus why He was teaching in parables, He replied:

Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; And seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, And their ears are dull of hearing, And their eyes they have closed; Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And should turn again, And I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear (Matt. 13:13-16).

Notice the reason some “shall in no wise understand” the truth while others “hear...and understand” is not, as the Calvinist alleges, because God directly, arbitrarily and irrespective of man's will hardens some hearts while opening others. Some “see not...neither do they understand” because “their eyes they have closed.” The Lord taught in such a way that those who truly desired to understand His teaching could do so, while others with hardened hearts would be incapable of understanding because their resistant disposition prevented it.

On another occasion Jesus said:

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the

Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him (Matt. 11:25-27).

In the context, Jesus was dealing with those who had seen His miracles, yet “repented not” (Matt. 11:20). The evidence was before them, yet they had refused to accept it. Jesus went on to invite those who were willing to “Come unto me” (Matt. 11:28). The meaning of God’s Word is therefore, in a sense, hidden from “the wise and understanding”—those in their pride who simply refuse to see the truth—while it is revealed to “babes”—the humble, seeking souls who are willing to accept it. Those who hear the Word but do not understand it fail to know the truth ultimately because they do not will to understand it. It is our spiritual condition that makes us “dull of hearing” and therefore the Scriptures “hard of interpretation” (Heb. 5:14; cf. Mark 6:52). If we **cannot** see, it is because we **will** not.

This means, then, that those who die without salvation in Christ—without arriving at a proper understanding of God’s will as revealed in the Bible—will be lost not merely for being ignorant of or misinterpreting the Bible, but for a failure to diligently seek the truth with a good and honest heart. God has revealed Himself to us in the world and in His Word (Rom. 1:20; Acts 14:17), and can be found by those who want to know Him (Acts 17:27-28). Though interpreting Scripture at times is challenging, especially when the mind has been clouded by false doctrine, the things we must know and do to be saved are revealed in a way that they can be found by those who truly desire to find them.

Consider again the case of the Ethiopian treasurer. He was seeking God. He had been to Jerusalem to worship and was reading Scripture. When asked if he understood what he was reading, he replied, “How can I, except some

one shall guide me” (Acts 8:31). The Lord knew he desired to know the truth and would obey it when he learned it. In His providence he brought Phillip to him to guide him into the knowledge he needed. When a God-fearing seeker named Cornelius wanted to know God’s will, God in His providence arranged circumstances so that he could hear the word, obey it and be saved (Acts 10-11). If one is truly seeking God, the Lord has promised he will find (Matt. 7:7).

Perfect Understanding Not Required

We should emphasize here something we have only mentioned in passing thus far. When we say that we must understand the Bible to be saved, we do not mean that we must have perfect or complete understanding of everything in the Bible. One need not have a full comprehension of the mysteries of the Godhead (if such is even possible) or be able to give an accurate exposition of all the difficult texts of the Bible to be able to go to heaven. There are profound themes and challenging passages throughout Scripture we may never fully comprehend even after a lifetime of careful contemplation. Our knowledge of the Bible accumulates as long as we continue to study it (2 Pet. 3:18). At any given time we may be mistaken about any number of topics or passages in the Bible, and adjust our beliefs as we grow in our knowledge.

When we say an understanding of the Bible is necessary to be saved we are speaking of understanding those things which are essential to our salvation. When it comes to what we must know and do to receive salvation, how to worship God acceptably, what we are to teach and practice in the church and similar obligatory matters, God’s will is ascertainable. Whatever deep things of God may be beyond our ability to grasp, what is required of us is within our reach, both to know and to do.

Other Consequences Of Failing To Understand The Bible

We have established that whether we understand the Bible on essential matters makes a difference of whether we are saved or lost. There are related consequences of failing to understand the Bible to be considered in connection with this point. Misunderstanding the Bible affects not only our eternal condition but can be detrimental to us in this life as well.

A Life Of Vain Religion

How many people give their lives to the practice of false religion, believing all the while they are adhering to the Bible? Nuns, priests, monks, from pulpit to pew, denominational clergy and laity alike, pursue a daily ritual of devotion, but their worship is vain because they are “teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” (Matt. 15:9). Imagine standing before God in judgment, realizing what you thought was service to God was a lifetime of vanity stemming from a perverted understanding of the Bible.

Prompted by a distorted view of the Bible’s teaching, some deprive themselves of marriage and the joys of domestic life, believing serving the Lord requires celibacy. Misinterpreting Scripture, some radically modify their dress and behavior, denying themselves things that are perfectly acceptable, such as our Pentecostal friends who believe the apostle Peter forbids wearing makeup or jewelry (1 Pet. 3:3-5). Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to celebrate birthdays or holidays in any manner because they have accepted the teaching of those who have mishandled the Word of God. Far more serious, some have refused simple medical treatment, such as a blood transfusion, for themselves or their loved ones on the mistaken notion that Bible prohibits it. Others have had their spirits crushed and their faith destroyed, believing

the Bible teaches miracles of healing, such as were performed in the first century, are available for all today and wondering why God did not heal them. Origen, one of the most distinguished of the anti-Nicene “church fathers,” is believed to have castrated himself based on his reading of Matthew 19:12. From the trivial to the terrible, missing the meaning of the Bible is not without consequence.

Unnecessary Hardship

Failure to understand the Bible’s teaching can bring misery into our lives here and now. Divorce and remarriage is a prominent example of this sad reality. Those with a proper understanding of the teaching of the New Testament know that God does **not** permit divorce and remarriage, except for the case of one putting away a spouse for that spouse’s fornication (Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9). If one divorces for any other reason and remarries, his subsequent marriage is condemned by God as adultery. Since adulterers cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10), repentance requires those in such adulterous relationships extricate themselves from them. For obvious reasons this can be a painfully difficult process. There are those who, upon discovering they are in unscriptural marriages, deeply regret that they did not understand earlier God’s will on divorce. If only they had known, they might not have become entangled in a sinful relationship to begin with.

Harmful Influence

We harm not only our own souls, but the souls of others when we fail to understand the Bible. Elders, the Lord’s shepherds, have allowed the flocks committed to their charge to be divided and destroyed, all because they did not recognize the wolves bringing in damnable heresies. They ought to be able to hold “to the faithful word

which is according to the teaching...to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayer” because there are those whose “mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things they ought not” (Tit. 1:9-11). In many cases they cannot, though, because of their limited knowledge of the Bible. And countless preachers and teachers have caused “divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the doctrine...and by their smooth and fair speech” they have “beguiled the hearts of the innocent” (Rom. 16:17-18) because “they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm” (1 Tim. 1:7). When teachers do not understand the Word, both teacher and student may be lost (Jas. 3:1).

Then there are those parents who, due to their misunderstanding of the Bible, lead their children into error, which damns their souls. Parents, particularly fathers, are to make a conscientious effort to indoctrinate their children in God’s truth (Eph. 6:4). When Moses rehearsed the commands of God to Israel, he told them “and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,” but first he said, “These words which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart” (Deut. 6:6-7). We cannot teach our children if we do not ourselves know the Word. A failure to properly understand the Scriptures results in a failure to hand the truth down to the next generation, leaving those who follow us in darkness. We are witnessing this very phenomenon in our own time, as a generation has been raised in the church like the one spoken of in Judges 2:10: “And there arose another generation after them, that knew not Jehovah, nor yet the work which he had wrought for Israel.” What was the result? “And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah” (Judg. 2:11). This is precisely parallel to what is happening today, as parents and churches have raised up a generation that “knows not Jehovah” and is therefore doing “that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah.”

These are just a few of the areas in which we can see that whether or not we understand the Bible can make the difference, both for us and for others, between happiness and hardship now, between heaven and hell in the hereafter. For ourselves and those we influence, for both time and eternity, it does indeed make a difference whether we understand the Bible.

A Knowledge Of The Truth And Understanding The Bible

Truth Matters

To say we must understand the Bible is simply another way of saying that we must come to a knowledge of the truth to be saved. It makes a difference whether what we believe the Bible teaches is actually what the Bible teaches—whether our beliefs are true or false. The Bible, as God’s Word, is truth (John 17:17), and knowing and obeying the truth is essential to salvation. Jesus said, “If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Likewise, Paul tells us that God “who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). According to Peter, we purify our souls in “obedience to the truth” (1 Pet. 1:22). Those who “turn away their ears from the truth” are condemned (2 Tim. 4:4), and the lost are those who “received not the love of the truth that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

The view entertained by most is that it does not really matter if we understand the Bible correctly so long as we are sincere. Whether or not we know the truth is not crucial, some would say, so long as we believe we have a “personal relationship with Jesus.” When it comes to anything else, so long as we honestly believe whatever it is we believe, then the truthfulness of the content of that

belief is ultimately immaterial. This is why it is difficult to get people to examine their beliefs to see if they really are in harmony with Scripture. If someone already has his own sincere convictions about the Bible, he considers it offensive to suggest that what he thinks is true may not be true and that therefore he might need to abandon error for truth.

Yet this is exactly what the Word of God calls upon us to do. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). We must test what we hear to be sure we do not accept what is false. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Note also Peter’s words:

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

Warnings such as these, against false teachers and false teaching, abound in Scripture, but they would be completely unnecessary—utterly meaningless—if in fact it makes no difference whether or not what we believe is true or false. To the churches of Galatia, Paul said:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say

again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

He went on to tell them that he refused to compromise with the false teachers troubling them, “that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal. 2:5). Paul made it clear that the difference between believing the truth and something “different” was the difference between being saved and being accursed.

Sincerity is necessary to be saved, but if sincerity is all that is necessary, then we don’t really need the Bible at all. Truth is essential, and all the sincerity in the world does not change error into truth. According to the Bible, we will be judged, not by what we sincerely believed the Bible teaches, but by what the Word of God **actually** teaches (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12).

Does Everyone Have A Right To His Own Interpretation?

Many argue that it doesn’t matter if we differ over what the Bible teaches, since on any given topic it is subject to more than one interpretation, and each person has a right to his own understanding. Who is to say that one interpretation is right, another wrong? In addressing this we should point out that if we interpret a given text differently, we cannot all be correct—someone is wrong. While we acknowledge, as we have already pointed out, that we may be wrong about some things in the Bible, there is truth revealed in Scripture that is essential to salvation. And arriving at a knowledge of that truth requires interpreting the Bible correctly. If we pervert the Word, we’ll be condemned (Gal. 1:6-9). We must “Give diligence” to handle “aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

When the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he cited the Word of God in an attempt to persuade Jesus to comply with his request to cast himself down from the

pinnacle of the temple. But Jesus responded by quoting Scripture as well, saying, “Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God” (Matt. 4:7). The Lord’s reply shows that the devil did not have a right to his own interpretation; he was mishandling and misapplying God’s Word. Many, like the devil, cite Scripture to support their views but are simply wrong in their interpretation of the Bible. The notion that any interpretation of the Bible is valid is itself a perversion of the devil.

On the issue of the resurrection, Paul told Timothy that Hymenaeus and Philetus were “men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18). Apparently Paul did not think these two renegades had a right to their interpretation about the nature of the resurrection; he simply said they have “erred.” And their error was harming the faith of others. Paul’s concern over the matter would be entirely unnecessary if one interpretation is as good as another.

If we may all interpret the Bible differently and still be acceptable to God, then what are we to make of Paul’s command that we “all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10)? And what of Jesus’ plea that those who believe on Him “all be one” (John 17:20)? Why did Paul command Timothy to “charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3) and to “Hold to the pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13)? The notion that we are all free to reach different conclusions renders these and numerous other texts meaningless, and makes a mockery of God. Are we to suppose that God cannot make Himself understood? That He would communicate His will to us and allow us to understand it any way we please? Does God’s Word not have meaning, or dare we suppose we may make it mean for us whatever we choose?

Can We All Be Right?

If different denominations have different interpretations on fundamental matters of the faith, they cannot all be abiding in the truth. When Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth, he proclaimed the resurrection of Christ. Later, some in the church at Corinth contended that there is no resurrection. Paul addressed this problem:

Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. Yea, we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

The logic of his argument is undeniable: If it is true that there is no resurrection of the dead, then the apostles could not have been right when they affirmed that Jesus had been raised. If the materialists in Corinth were right, then the apostles were wrong; if the apostles were right, then the materialists were wrong. What difference did it make? In this case, it made all the difference. For if the materialists were right, then the apostles were “false witnesses,” the Corinthians’ faith was vain, they were still in their sins and without hope. The saints in Corinth could not dismiss these contradictory viewpoints as inconsequential differences of interpretation. It was a matter of truth and error.

What Is Truth?

To believe that sincere people in all churches may all be saved while holding contradictory views on matters of faith, one must either argue that truth is irrelevant to salvation, or completely redefine truth in a way that renders the very concept meaningless. That is exactly what postmodern philosophy has done. In the minds of many, truth is no longer something which exists independently of the individual; it is a personal construct, an invention of the mind. This accommodates the pluralism of our time, the seemingly comforting notion that all viewpoints are equally valid. This is why some will argue that what is true for one may not be true for another.

I recall well a conversation I had with a woman about Catholicism. She was a Protestant, and I was suggesting to her that if Catholics were right in their doctrine that God speaks through the pope, then all of us were obligated to heed the dictates of the papacy; but if they were wrong, then they ought to abandon their false religion. Not believing Catholic doctrine herself, but not wanting to believe Catholics were wrong, she said that if Catholics believe God speaks through the pope, then they were obligated to follow the pope because that would be true **for them** since that's what **they** believed. It was an exercise in futility to get her to see that God either speaks through the pope or He does not, regardless of what anyone's opinion on the subject might be. Like many others, she thought believing it made it true; that we do not believe something because it's true, but the opposite—**something is true because we believe it**.

In another case I was trying to help a woman see that, because there are many churches holding conflicting doctrines, yet all claiming to follow the Bible, we need to study the Scriptures to see which views are actually true. To help her see this point, I asked her a simple question:

“If one person believes the Bible teaches God wants us to baptize infants, and another person believes the Bible teaches God does **not** want us to baptize infants, can they both be right?” She paused for a moment and replied, with a puzzled tone, “I don’t know.” Now if I had asked her, “If one person said O.J. Simpson murdered his wife and another person said he did not murder his wife, could they both be right?” she would have known. If I had asked her, “If one person said your car is in the garage and another said your car is not in the garage, can they both be right?” she would have known the answer. Because we are rational beings, we understand intuitively that contradictory viewpoints cannot both be true, yet somehow people become irrational when it comes to religious matters, making it necessary before studying the God’s truth to first get people to reflect on the very nature of truth itself.

Several years ago, at a meeting of preachers, I expressed concern over participating with a congregation in our area because their preacher was known to be a false teacher. One of the preachers at the meeting took me to task, saying, “Now, wait one minute. Why do you say this brother is a false teacher? Just because he teaches something different from what you and I teach, doesn’t mean he’s wrong.” In response I asked him, “Brother, are you teaching the truth?” He said he was. “Well,” I replied, “if you are teaching the truth, and he is teaching something different from what you are teaching, then he is not teaching the truth.” He had no response. It’s a sad day in Israel when we have to instruct our own preachers not only on the content of truth, but on the very concept of it.

God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, “thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16). The devil said to the woman, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Either what God said was true, or what the devil said was true; Eve knew that both could not be

right. If one man states that the Bible teaches baptism is essential to salvation and another affirms that the Bible teaches baptism is not essential to salvation, they both cannot be teaching the truth. When Protestant denominations contend that justification is by faith alone and the Bible says it is not by faith alone (Jas. 2:24), if the Bible is true, then those Protestant denominationalists are wrong—they are not interpreting the Bible correctly.

Truth exists. It is not a subjective, personal construction. It is objective. It is absolute. And it is essential to our salvation. Before we can effectively study the Bible with people, more and more we find ourselves having to engage in a sort of “pre-evangelism” in which we must help them to think correctly about this fundamental issue, showing them there is a difference between truth and error, and that what we believe does make a difference. And as pathetic as it is, even with our own brethren it has become increasingly necessary to teach the truth about truth.

The Revolt Against Reason

A growing segment of the brotherhood, lacking conviction for truth and desiring to extend fellowship to all who profess Christ, want to dismiss doctrinal differences within the church and between us and denominations as unimportant. Interpreting the Bible correctly is not essential, they argue, because we are fallible human beings and our reasoning is sometimes faulty. To be dogmatic about “our beliefs” on any issues that divide us is therefore arrogant and exclusivist. After all, we could be mistaken in our interpretation. To insist that correct beliefs—in other words, correct interpretation of the Bible—is essential to salvation is to elevate reason to the place of Savior. One of our own has even argued that we are not saved by our brains, but by the blood of Christ. We cannot rely on reason, they protest, but on grace to be saved.

This undermining of the use of reason is, of course, a self-defeating proposition, since its proponents utilize reason in order to advance it. They appeal to reason to suggest we cannot appeal to reason. Apparently, we may rely on reason to reach the conclusion that we cannot rely on reason to be saved; our salvation is dependent upon our ability to understand that our salvation is not dependent upon our ability to understand. To characterize this as foolishness is too complimentary.

God appeals to his people, “Come, let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18). In a discussion of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus condemned the Sadducees for not reasoning properly, for their failure to infer what an explicit statement of the Bible implied. “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God,” Jesus told them (Matt. 22:29-32). In preaching the Gospel and throughout their epistles, the apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament made arguments to support their case, which required correct reasoning to understand. There is not one thing in the Word of God that we can understand without reasoning correctly. We are to love God with all of our minds (Matt. 22:37), and cannot go to heaven without using our minds properly. Brethren only revolt against reason when reason proves them wrong in their efforts to justify what is contrary to the Word of God.

Do We Have To Be Right?

Another tactic taken by brethren to suggest that it does not make a difference what we believe about the Bible is to assert that salvation is about trusting Christ, not about having the right answers. Faithful brethren are shamed for thinking that they have all the right answers. Whenever I am confronted with this charge, I ask this question: “Do we have to be right about **anything** to be saved?” If not, then of course the Bible is superfluous. If

we can be wrong about everything and still go to heaven, no one needs the Bible. Recognizing this, most will say, “Yes, there are at least some things we have to be right about to be saved.” Then I will ask, “Are you right about those things?” If they say “No,” then they are saying they are not saved. If they say “Yes,” then they are affirming the very thing they are condemning in others.

To avoid this hypocrisy, one brother actually answered this way: “Yes, there are some things we must be right about to be saved,” and then, “No, I am not right about all of those things.” When I pointed out that, according to his own admission, he was not saved, he confidently affirmed that he was saved, even though he had just said he was not right about the things we must be right about in order to be saved. It does not bother some brethren in the slightest to abandon any semblance of rationality when they are pressed on issues. In fact, some pride themselves in doing so, unaware that their irrationality betrays their abandonment of truth. When Scripture affirms that truth saves, then obviously there are things we must be right about in order to be saved.

Conclusion

We have answered our question. Not only can we understand the Bible correctly, but when it comes to essential matters, we must do so. A correct understanding of the Bible reveals that a correct understanding of the Bible makes all the difference to our well being in this life, and in eternity. May we never be ashamed to say so.

Endnotes

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

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*Lectures
For
Ladies*

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CHAPTER 33

The Role Of A Woman As A Mother

Brooke Tate

Introduction

I *WOULD LIKE TO* express my appreciation to the elders here and to B.J. for having the confidence in me to speak at this lectureship. I was so thrilled when B.J. told me the topic he had chosen for me. I love being a mother. If you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have replied, “a mother.” Some people will occasionally say that I should go back to school and get my degree because no one can take that away from you. Sometimes it seems that they may feel sorry for me because I don’t have a degree in something. To them it seems like such a waste. What they fail to realize is that I have been working on a degree, everyday. It is a lifelong degree, a commitment to motherhood and no one can take that away from me. However, being a full-time mother is not the profession that many women seek in today’s world. More and more women are seeking to have a life outside the home rather than devoting their time to home and family.

The World’s View Of Motherhood

Since the introduction of women’s lib in the late sixties, the role of motherhood as it was once known took

on a whole new meaning. Women were told that the job of being a mother was a waste of their talents and that they could not possibly have a fulfilled life by making a commitment to full-time mothering. Thus, women believed that they needed to combine a job outside the home with being a mother, and as a result very few families now fit the traditional mold of the man being the only bread winner.

The feminist movement believes that when a woman chooses motherhood over having a career that she, in a sense, is slapping the face of the women who worked so hard to pave the way for women's rights. The feminist movement, which to so many women is a positive thing, is really nothing more than a negative and destructive attack on the family and its structure. This movement has had a major impact on our society and is a major factor in the reason so many women are abandoning juice boxes for jobs.

How To Understand The Role Of Motherhood

Can we understand alike the role of motherhood? How can we know how to be good mothers? The bookstores are filled with books on parenting. They are too numerous to count. Some of these books are wonderful tools in assisting us to train our children in certain areas. Other books are too permissive regarding discipline and like matters. While these books can be beneficial, we have the ultimate parenting guidebook, the Bible. The Bible tells us in 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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.¹

God's Word is not only a guide for parenting but also is the textbook for our lives. If women would search the

Scriptures they would see the instruction God gives to mothers, and then we could agree on the importance of motherhood. Let the Scriptures guide us to be the kind of mothers God would have us to be. Let God's Word be the "lamp unto our feet and the light unto our path" (Psm. 119:105).

God's Law

Before we can become mothers we must first become wives. It was not God's intent for women to bear children outside of marriage. Paul writes: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Tim. 5:14). In this verse we are given the order in which God intends for things to happen. Unfortunately, this order is ignored by many in the world today. Thus many unwanted children are aborted or are born to neglectful mothers who could not care less about their obligations to that child. We need to instill in our children that God's order in this (and all matters) is always best and that when we stray from that order we will be punished. Hebrews 13:4 states: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

What The Bible Says About Motherhood

In Paul's epistle to Titus we read:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:3-5).

Here the apostle Paul gives women the keys they need to be successful mothers. The Cretan women needed to learn how to love their husbands and children. They needed teaching on how to be sober, discreet, chaste, keepers at home, and to be in subjection to their husbands. In much the same way, women of today need to be taught these things. We read here that the older women are to teach the younger women. Younger women need to be open and receptive to this instruction and not resentful. It is a God-given right for the older, experienced women to instruct us in these matters of the faith.

Just as we need to learn from the older women, we too have to be teachers to our young, our children. “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). The training that is spoken of here requires time. Are we around our children enough to give them the training they need to one day be Christians, or are we absent much of the time, leaving the training of our children to others?

What does it mean to be a keeper at home? The word “keeper” in the Greek is *oikouros* and means “a watcher or guardian.”² To be a guardian or watcher over the home we need to be present in that home. It is always best if a mother can be at home to raise her own children. We realize that some women do not have a choice in the matter. There are single mothers and widowed mothers who have to work because they are the sole support of their family. Some mothers have to work because their husbands do not make enough to survive financially. But let’s be honest about what it means to be able to make it financially. To many, this means to have everything that they want. I have heard some say that they work outside the home so that their children can have the things that they didn’t have growing up. I have also been told by some that they choose to work outside the home so that they can “live the way they want

to live.” I am saddened by these approaches to motherhood. Some women are sacrificing raising their children for material things. They convince themselves they have to work because they cannot financially afford not to.

The question that needs to be asked is, “Are we making our wants our needs?” Do we tell ourselves that a weekly manicure and satellite television are the necessities in our lives? Are we conforming to the world when we trade staying at home to train our children for two expensive cars in the driveway? What a price to pay at our child’s expense! We read: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). If a mother chooses to work outside the home for reasons other than that of necessity, she is not only shortchanging her child, but she is making a choice to abandon the role that God has given to mothers.

I think most women would agree that raising children is a full-time job. Women who choose to work outside the home are attempting to work two full-time jobs. When two full-time jobs are attempted, one job will suffer. Which job will that be? Can you truly give your job as a mother your full attention when you don’t even show up for work? No one can give children the love and guidance they need and deserve better than their own mother. It is not the responsibility of the baby-sitter to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). We, as mothers, need to be sure that our motives for working outside the home are in keeping with the Word of God.

Bible Principles

Our Children Need To Know

Most parents are concerned about their children’s academic record. Many a parent can be found clapping in an assembly when their child receives a reward for a job

well done. Mothers will tirelessly stay up late working on school projects to ensure the child gets a good grade. We wouldn't think of neglecting the oversight of their school assignments to make sure they are correct and completed. Why? It is because we want to train them to understand that doing well in school will help to prepare them for their future lives. Are we equally concerned with their preparations regarding eternal life? Do we spend the same amount of time with our children telling them of our Creator and of the abundant life they will have if they seek first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33)?

The Bible speaks plainly of our charge to instill in our children God's truth. We read in Deuteronomy 6:7:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

We are to impart God's Word to our children throughout each and every day. In order to instill the Word of God in our children we read here of four times daily that are opportunities to teach our children. This teaching takes time. Our love for Christ should motivate us to make the time to teach them of the spiritual necessities they will need to obtain a home in heaven. We manage to make time for ballgames, getting together with friends, and chauffeuring our kids from place to place.

Time is made for those things because we enjoy them. We should equally enjoy taking the time to cultivating the minds of our children regarding spiritual matters. Our priority should always be to make time for spiritual things first and everything else should be second to that. These priorities are something that our children learn from us. When we allow our children to miss assembling with the saints because of a ballgame or some other school activity we are showing our children where our priorities lie.

When your priorities differ from what your children will read in the Scriptures, then you have created confusion that will lead them to wonder how seriously they should take Scriptural requirements for their service to God.

We all realize that there are emergency situations that require us to be absent from services, but when we allow things that are not emergencies to affect our attendance we open the door for anything that will keep us from doing what God expects of us.

Do we put our soul and the souls of our children in jeopardy when we choose making time for worldly activities over making time for spiritual activities?

Will our children “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [them] a reason of the hope that is in [them]” (1 Pet. 3:15) because of the time we made to instill the knowledge of God’s Word?

In Psalm 78 we read of our responsibility to train our children to know God’s Law:

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psm. 78:5-7).

Most mothers don’t neglect their children’s need for nourishment so that they may grow physically. May all mothers seek to make the time to give their children the spiritual nourishment that they need to grow in Christ. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Examples Our Children Need To See

Godly Examples

Children need to see their mothers being godly examples. I think that most mothers would agree that our children are like walking sponges that soak up everything they hear and see whether it be good or bad. What are our children soaking up in their sponges through our example? Are those sponges filled with examples of good works and images of a mother in prayer and Bible study? Have their sponges absorbed seeing their mother put God first in all things, or are their sponges filled with infestations such as hatred, selfishness and irreverence toward God?

Our example as mothers will go a long way when we practice what we preach. We must be a living example of what we teach them. **Hannah** was a woman who longed for a child. She had much grief over the fact that she could not have a child. Hannah believed in the power of prayer. We read:

And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head (1 Sam. 1:11).

Hannah's prayer was answered and Samuel was born. Once he was weaned, she fulfilled her vow to God and took Samuel to Shiloh. Hannah's faith is an example for all mothers. She truly put spiritual things first. When she was grieved over not being able to have a child, she, because of her faith, went to God in prayer. After her prayer was answered and Samuel was born she could have been tempted to break her vow to God, but her love and faith in God moved her to keep her promise. Out of that promise,

came a holy man of God who did much good. Hannah was an example to her son through her earnest belief in God and her willingness to give her son over to the Lord so that he too could put spiritual matters first.

As mothers, we also can give our children over to the Lord by putting our children's spiritual welfare over everything else. **We should never underestimate the power that we have as mothers to influence our children.** Mothers need to live out the principles that God's Word sets forth. Jesus said:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy speaks of the genuine faith that Timothy possessed because of the wonderful examples he had in his grandmother and mother:

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother **Lois**, and thy mother **Eunice**; and I am persuaded that in thee also (2 Tim. 1:5).

Ask yourself this question, "Am I the most godly woman that my children know?" "Do I limit my children from watching certain programs due to their improper content myself, and then watch shows that include improper language and conduct?" "Do I teach them to love one another and then allow them to hear me talk badly about someone who has upset me?" Our children are watching our every move, and nothing goes unnoticed. They will follow in our footsteps. Will our footsteps lead them to a beautiful home in heaven or will our footsteps lead them to the fiery pits of hell?

We would never throw our children into a fire; yet, are we fully preparing them on how to prevent their souls from experiencing an eternal fire? Mothers need to prepare their children from the moment they are born. The Bible says:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if a child's first memory was that of their mother reading to them from the Holy Scriptures? What a marvelous foundation to start off our children. One of my fondest memories as a child was having family devotionals. We would sing praises to God, have a prayer, my dad or brothers would read from the Bible, and we would discuss what we had read. It is such a special memory that my loving parents cared enough for my soul and for my brothers' souls to put God first and to lead us by their example. I know how that memory makes me feel and I want my children to carry on those memories.

When You Thought I Wasn't Looking

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I immediately wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking I saw you feed a stray cat, and I learned that it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favorite cake for me and I learned that the little things can be the special things in life.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I knew there is a God that I can always talk to and I learned to trust in God.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make a meal and take it to a friend who was sick and I learned that we all have to help take care of each other.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you give of your time and money to help people who had nothing and I learned that those who have something should give to those who don't.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you take care of our house and everyone in it and I learned that we have to take care of what we are given.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw how you handled your responsibilities, even when you didn't feel good and I learned that I would have to be responsible when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared and I wanted to be everything that I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I learned most of life's lessons that I need to know to be a good productive person when I grow up.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked at you and wanted to say, "Thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking."³

Ungodly Examples

We see how a mother's ungodly example can affect her children when we read about **Jezebel** and the wickedness that carried on through generations due to her deplorable actions. Jezebel was an evil woman who

hated God and sought to replace worship to Him with worship to Baal. The Bible tells us “There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up” (1 Kings 21:25). From reading the Scriptures we can see that Jezebel’s life was totally void of any goodness.

Her malicious ways influenced her daughter **Athaliah**, and she too became wicked. Athaliah became the wife of Joram, who was the son of King Jehoshaphat. Joram’s eight year rule in Judah was full of wickedness. The Bible says of Joram:

And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 8:18).

We also see that the wickedness was further passed down to the next generation when we read of Athaliah’s influence on her son, Ahaziah. We read:

Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly (2 Chron. 22:2-3).

Jezebel and Athaliah did not have any of the qualities that a godly mother should possess. They both were selfish in their wicked ways and aided and influenced their own children to do the same. It is so unsettling to me that a mother would counsel her own son to be wicked as Athaliah did.

There are mothers even today that are guilty of encouraging their children to do evil. It may seem of a lesser degree than that of Jezebel, but a sin is a sin. I had a friend who was crowned homecoming queen by her peers.

As many of you know, there is sometimes a homecoming dance where the queen and king are crowned. My friend told her mother that she didn't feel right about going to the dance because she was fully aware of what went on at these dances and the emotions that are stirred up when girls and boys dance together.

She expressed these concerns to her mother and instead of her mother being overjoyed at her child's choice to please God, her mother was upset and very strongly encouraged her to go to the dance. Her mother was more worried about what people would think if she didn't go to the dance and how ungrateful it might seem if she didn't participate. This girl was "remembering the Creator in the days of [her] youth" and seeking to be an example to her peers (Eccl. 12:1).

Sadly, the encouragement and influence of this mother was successful and the girl went to the dance. What a marvelous opportunity was lost because of this mother's misplaced concerns. May we only encourage our children to do that which is right in the sight of God and hold up their hands when they do so. Abraham Lincoln was once asked, "What is a child?" The following is his response:

A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone he will attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they will be carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities, and corporations. All your books are going to be judged by him. The fate of humanity is in his hands.⁴

Love

Love, what a beautiful emotion. It feels so good to love and to be loved. The love that a mother has for her children can be a beautiful thing to watch. Seeing the love

in a mother's eyes as she holds her infant for the first time is so sweet. I remember thinking when I first became a mother that I couldn't possibly love them more than I did when they were babies. Oh, how I was wrong. The love I have for my daughters just grows more bountiful every day.

Children need love from their mothers. Mothers need to show love to their children. Be affectionate toward your child; praise them often. Children need a certain amount of self-esteem in order to be able to stand up for what they believe in. Naomi Wolf said: "A mother who radiates self-love and acceptance actually vaccinates her daughter against low self-esteem."⁵

Mothers can show self-love by doing that which is right. We need to be concerned with our inward appearance and be sure that our self-love is born out of having a pure heart. "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Samuel 16:7). God showed the ultimate gift of love for us when He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins (John 3:16). The love we have for our children can also be found in the form of discipline. We find in Hebrews:

And ye have forgotten the exhortations which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that

we might be partakers of his holiness. Now not chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Heb. 12:5-11).

Most mothers do not enjoy disciplining their children. How many of us can remember our parents saying, “This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you”? I never understood what that saying meant until I became a mother. But, the temporary hurt the mother and child feel during discipline can spare you a lifetime of anguish and heartache that you both may feel if you don’t discipline.

You may have heard it said that “discipline is something that you do **for** your child not **to** your child.” If we do not discipline when our children are young, we will regret that choice when they are older and decide they don’t want to listen or obey us anymore. When we don’t enforce consequences for wrong doing then life to them becomes a free-for-all with an “anything goes” attitude.

Too many mothers care more about whether or not their child is going to “like” them if they enforce discipline. We certainly want to get along with our children, but being their buddy and pal can create a relationship that lacks respect. Children will begin to see you as an equal and not as a person who has any authority over them. They need to understand when they are young that there are rules for everyone, even adults have rules. Children need to understand through our teaching that we have rules for a reason and it isn’t just something that parents cook-up to be mean.

When we enforce discipline for bad behavior, we need to explain to them why they are being punished. I have seen mothers hop up from their seat and go over and spank their child without ever muttering a word. How can our children understand how to correct an undesirable behavior when we don’t explain to them why it is undesirable and why they were punished?

God has made it clear to His children through His Word what is unacceptable and the punishment we will receive if we are found guilty of such behavior. We also must make it clear to our children where the boundaries lie and consistently enforce discipline when those boundaries are crossed.

Consistency is key in anything we hope to accomplish. Mothers must be consistent in discipline if they want to raise obedient children. It is unfair and confusing to the child when we discipline them for throwing toys on Monday but by Thursday that rule is forgotten all because we're too tired and frustrated to make them stop. This inconsistency could set the precedent for other things in their lives, maybe even spiritual things. We need to remember:

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul (Prov. 29:15-17).

Conclusion

The role of motherhood is not a role to be taken lightly. It is an awesome responsibility that God chose women to carry out. Although some women in the world would have us to believe that such a role is a degradation, we know through reading and studying the Scriptures that our worth as godly mothers is far above rubies. All children deserve to have a Christian mother. Robert R. Taylor, Jr. wrote regarding Christian motherhood:

These two words have a natural affinity for each other. They have been approvingly linked from the beginning of the Christian movement. How tragic though when motherhood has to be termed non-Christian. I shudder to think of a non-Christian mother rearing children. Real mothers

by all means must be zealous and dedicated Christians. That is not optional if they wish to do right with their offspring. Women should be Christians first of all due to their own great need for salvation. They should be Christians in the second place in order that they may be Christian mothers to their little boys and girls.⁶

The children we are raising now are the future of the church. Will they be prepared to uphold the truth and oppose error? Will our sons and daughters be ready and willing to further the cause of Christ? Our diligence and dedication in raising godly children will reap great rewards when this life is over. In Proverbs 31 we read of the virtuous woman who encompasses the beauty of motherhood. What a tribute when it says, “Her children arise up, and call her blessed” (Prov. 31:28). Will your children do the same?

Endnotes

1 All Scriptures references are from the King James Version of the Bible.

2 “oikouros,” **A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature**, eds. William F. Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich & F.W. Danker, 3rd edition (Chicago:The University of Chicago, 2000), p.700.

3 Mary Rita Schilke Korzan, **When You Thought I Wasn't Looking**, original poem found at <http://www.storybin.com/wisdom/wisdom136.shtml> (modified by author unknown).

4 Gary Glenn Colley, Sr., **The Ideal Home Bible Class Notes**, second printing, p. 27.

5 Naomi Wolf quoted on **The Oprah Winfrey Show**, http://www.oprah.com/tows/slide/200604/20060424/slide_20060424_284_114jhtml

6 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Christ In The Home**, (Abilene, Texas, 1983) p.170.

CHAPTER 34

The Role Of A Woman As A Wife

Tish Clarke

Introduction

IT IS A PLEASURE to speak on the topic of a godly wife at the **POWER** Lectures. Twenty plus years ago, when I began my journey as a wife, I thought I knew all the “ins and outs” of being a wonderful spouse. This idea was born out of the “know-it-all” teen years! Experience, wisdom, and examining happy marriages throughout the years taught me a different concept: I had a great deal to learn! I want to approach this lesson from two main areas: (1) identifying and removing the stressful areas that affect the daily life of being a wife and (2) identifying and incorporating the attributes God desires in our lives to be the kind of wife our husbands need and deserve.

Stressed Out, Maxed Out, What’s Left For Him?

Several years ago, B. J. and I were asked to speak at a marriage enrichment seminar in Pigeon Forge, TN. Immediately I thought of all the areas in my life that made it difficult to be the kind of wife I should be for my husband. So often we women are stressed out, maxed out, and have nothing left for our husbands! I jokingly said as much to

my husband, and he said “Sounds like you have your theme.” If your mind works like mine, you are probably thinking at this time: “I am completely, utterly, and absolutely worn out! I am already in the fast lane and if I have to add anything else to my list, I will crash and burn!”

On the other hand, you may be thinking “What is her problem?” You still need to listen, because I guarantee you that your life will not always run as smoothly as it is at this time of your life! With that in mind, I felt it was necessary to recognize what is causing stress in our lives and eliminate it as much as possible in order to be all that we can and should be as wives.

What Kind Of Quilt Are You Sewing With Your Life?

Many years ago I discovered an appreciation for quilting. My great grandmother was a wonderful quilter, and my grandmother passed on her knowledge of the love of sewing to me when I was a small child. There are many styles of quilts which have been made over the centuries. If you were to examine your life, it could be compared to a quilt. What kind of quilt are you sewing with your life?

The Victorian Crazy Quilt is a design that was created in the colonial days of our country. It came about because of the frugality, a necessary frugality, which the early pioneer women of our country possessed. In order to keep their families warm at night, it was vital that they had many blankets to withstand the New England winter. As blankets fell apart, they were patched with new fabric over the old to preserve the use of the quilt. All scraps were saved and sewn together to form new blankets with no particular pattern—just an eye for speed and the warmth it would bring. The design of the original quilt was lost in the practicality of keeping the family warm. Therefore, it earned the name ‘crazy quilt’ and became part of our country’s history.¹

On the other hand the ‘Double Wedding Ring’ quilt was a pattern that was first created in the 1920’s and is still prized today as one of the most favored patterns to create. The idea for this pattern originated from gimmel rings of the 15th and 16th century in Europe. German pilgrims brought them to colonial America:

They consisted of rings that could be interlocked. During the engagement one was worn by the man and the other by the women. When they married the two rings were fitted together to be worn by the wife.²

Many of you will be familiar with the pattern of a double wedding ring quilt. It has intricate details and much thought goes into creating the rings. This is a difficult quilt to make and is not one for a novice. Each color and each stitch is carefully designed to craft a specific pattern—interlocking rings which symbolize the love of two in marital bliss.

When you think about your life, what kind of pattern are you creating? To be honest I would have to admit I have sewn too many ‘Crazy Quilts’ in my lifetime! I have sewn some at such a dizzy speed that the stitches could not possibly meet to form a solid, strong line! Our lives are moving at warp speed. Many women are holding down jobs in order to help provide the necessities in life, while at the same time trying to care for children, husband, home, church work, friendships, aging parents, illnesses, and a myriad of other acts that keep us constantly performing a balancing routine. James Dobson stated in an interview on March 2, 2002 on the Larry King Live show:

I think the biggest problem facing the family is nothing more complex than fatigue and time pressure. We are working ourselves to death, literally. We don’t have time for each other. We don’t have time to talk together and be together.

We don't even have time to have sex together. We don't even know each other and we frequently don't know our kids. Then what happens is you begin to drift.³

It is clear that stress affects our homes, our daily lives, and even our own marriages. To have a healthy marriage it is essential to examine what is causing stress in our lives and to eradicate it as much as possible.

How Is Stress Defined?

What exactly is stress? We tend to think that stress is when you are worried about getting laid off from your job, or worried about having enough money to pay your bills, or worried about your mother when the doctor says she may need an operation. In fact, to most of us, stress is synonymous with worry. If it is something that makes you worry, then it is stress.

Psychologists tell us that, to our bodies, stress has a much broader definition. Steven L. Burns, M.D. defines stress as following:

STRESS IS SYNONYMOUS WITH CHANGE. Anything that causes a change in your life causes stress. It doesn't matter if it is a "good" change, or a "bad" change, they are both stress. When you find your dream apartment and get ready to move, that is stress. If you break your leg, that is stress. Good or bad, if it is a **CHANGE** in your life, it is stress as far as your body is concerned. Even **IMAGINED CHANGE** is stress. If you fear that you will not have enough money to pay your rent, that is stress. If you worry that you may get fired, that is stress. If you think that you may receive a promotion at work, that is also stress (even though this would be a good change). Whether the event is good or bad, imagining changes in your life is stressful. Anything that causes **CHANGE IN YOUR DAILY ROUTINE** is stressful. Anything that

causes CHANGE IN YOUR BODY HEALTH is stressful. IMAGINED CHANGES are just as stressful as real changes.⁴

As women, we are all familiar with the need to put ten more hours in our day...hours that would be wonderfully spent in a bubble bath or sleeping! If you are breathing in our busy world today, chances are you are wondering (on a daily basis) how in the world I am going to get all this done! Many times you have gone to bed in the wee hours of the morning, only to wake up late from sleep deprivation to find yourself already behind.

If you are blessed with children, you will undoubtedly find yourself in the midst of an unpleasant, bickering and grumpy morning in which you will be called upon to play many roles in the space of 30 minutes: arbitrator, judge, maid, laundress, cook, clothing locator, and school paraphernalia finder (band instruments, homework, tennis shoes, lunch box, back packs—all those things that miraculously disappear when the child enters the door at 4:00 PM the day before!). By the time the little darlings have caught the bus, or you have dragged them to school—you are not sure what day of the week it is anymore! Then you find yourself either starting a fun-filled, busy day at home, or rushing to the office hoping to beat the hands of the clock as 8:00 AM approaches. We have not even begun to talk about the responsibility of being a wife through all of this havoc.

Is Stress New To Our Modern World?

The question is **how** do we manage to derail the train that is threatening our very peace and happiness and still manage to complete our many tasks that we must get done? First of all, we need to realize that this type of life is not new to the modern day world. Our grandmothers and their ancestors led very full lives without all the modern day conveniences that we have today.

Picture in your mind a Victorian woman with a beautiful flowing gown seated in a serene mansion. In the background a violin played, she had perfectly coifed hair, and her home was stunning, paid for, and more than that—white-glove clean! We know she must have had numerous servants who took care of her every whim, kept the mansion white-glove spotless, and tea time occurred every afternoon promptly at 4:00 PM. Women did not need Oil of Olay, they never furrowed their brows from stress...everything was a magical state of existence. Of course, this is dream land!

This is not an accurate picture of most of the women in the past, and I suspect the ancestral line that I came from. It is far from reality. Many women worked their fingers to the bone, only to have to do the same chores the very next day! If you think that was not tedious and wearisome, I think you would be surprised if you could talk to them today.

There is a major distinction in the attitude of many women of the past to the women of today. Years ago women were happy to be homemakers and content to do the work that needed to be done. They felt a sense of pride and fulfillment in the role that they played. Today, due to financial pressures, many women find themselves working outside of the home and resenting the role that still needs to be fulfilled when they walk through the door at night.

Our attitudes go a long way in determining how we are going to view the world that in many cases we have created for ourselves. Many of us (not everyone who works, but many) slave away at a job which could be changed for fewer hours or less pay, if we lowered our 'wants' type of spending. No one forced us to sign our children up for the various sports activities that claim our evenings or the commitments to different clubs. What about our entertainment? We live in a society that plans its entire existence around a black box. Disorganization has become

a way of life. It seems as though once this chaos has begun, it cannot be changed. However, our lives do not have to be this way. We are free, moral agents who have the power to control what we do each day.

Did Women In The Bible Lead Stress Filled Lives?

From the beginning of time, women have experienced stress in one fashion or another. The Bible, the greatest inspired history book of all time, details many wonderful, and not so wonderful women, of history. From its first book, Genesis, it is clear that women lived stressfully. Often this heartache and trouble came about from poor decisions in their lives. However, sometimes an event introduced stress in a character's life. If the woman depended on her faith and prayer life to see her through the tough times, she was triumphant throughout the problems she faced. On the other hand, if her actions were guided by her own thoughts and not God's wisdom, we read of a woman drowning in her problems. Consider a few of the women of the Bible:

1. Eve. In Genesis 3:17-19 we read:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Talk about change! Eve was banned from the garden, the paradise God had created for her in which she could walk and talk with God. Her life went from a garden of work (they were commanded to dress the garden, Gen. 2:15), to a

life of sorrow in conception (Gen. 2:16), and one in which their world would be very difficult (Gen. 2:17-18).

How different her world would have been if she had heeded God's command concerning the Tree of Knowledge. Obedience to God's Law always brings peace in the end. Deuteronomy 11:1-9 is a clear example of this. In verse 1 He commands the Israelites: "Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always." God then gives an illustration the people could actually visualize for they had lived through it! Deuteronomy 11: 2-7 details why they could trust in Him:

And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, And his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD hath destroyed them unto this day; And what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel: But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the LORD which he did.

He details the many blessings reserved for those who keep His commandments in Deuteronomy 11:8-10:

Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it; And that ye may prolong your

days in the land, which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey. For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs.

Obedience to God's Law will bring about strength and blessings from God, no matter what the original problems were. Remember Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." If Eve had been obedient to God, her time in the Garden of Eden would not have ended so abruptly.

2. Sarah. Genesis 18:11-14 reveals:

Now Abraham and Sarah **were old and well stricken in age**; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? **Is any thing too hard for the LORD?** At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son (Emp. mine throughout, TC).

Imagine having a child at the age of 90; we worry about children after the age of 40! Sarah certainly knew stress. Do we make mountains out of mole hills like Sarah? Remember God's admonishment to Sarah: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah needed to increase her faith in God. Sarah was married to a very faithful man, Abraham. Romans 4:18-21 details the amazing faith Abraham exhibited in his God:

Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own

body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: **He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.**

Likewise, we also need to add to our faith in order to get through the trials of this world. When you are facing an obstacle that seems too difficult to surpass remember the following verses:

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isa. 40:31).

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isa. 41:10).

The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles (Psm. 34:17).

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof (Psm. 46:1-3).

3. Abigail. We read in 1 Samuel 25:14-18:

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: They were a wall

unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him. Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses.

Abigail knew stress. She lived with the evil, foolish, godless man, Nabal. 1 Samuel 25 details the story of her husband's folly against David and how he planned to destroy Nabal and his house. The very lives of her entire household depended upon her quick thinking and actions. Next time you want to complain about cooking for your family, remember Abigail and read 1 Samuel 25:18 and feel blessed! Abigail did not procrastinate about what needed to be done to solve the problem. She immediately went to work on a solution. Also, she had the wisdom from God to respectfully meet David and speak to him in words couched with humility. Her words could only have been born out of a heart that trusted in God. Abigail turned David's heart from a murderous revenge to appreciation for her godly, wise advice as he proclaimed to her in 1 Sam. 25:32: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me."

4. Esther. In Esther 4:13-14, we are told:

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who **knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**

The fate of the entire Jewish nation depended upon her courage to face possible death and enter the throne room without an invitation from the King. The very thing that Mordecai told her applies to each one of us today: “who knows whether God has plans to use you in this situation for a specific purpose.” Whatever the problems in your life are at this time, God will help you through them, and use them and you in His plan. No matter the problem, God can work it out for good, if you remain steadfast in Him and trust in His power and His plan. Esther’s trust in her God led her to action and ultimately saved an entire nation. We should never forget the teaching of Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

There are many other women we could talk about who had great stress in their lives: **Deborah**, who led an army; **Mary**, who would bear the Son of God as a virgin and watch His ministry and His cruel death; the **Christian women** of the first century, who faced persecution and death for their beliefs. Women of our century are not alone with stress. Truth be told, we do not face the degree of stress these women faced. It is all about perspective. How do you view your problems? Are they a source for God to work in your life; or, are they bringing your faith down?

Jeremiah 29:11 gives a clear indication of what God desires for our lives: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” In the Hebrew this gives a vivid picture of God as a weaver of our lives in which He wants us to have “*shalom*” an Hebrew word that carries a meaning of prosperity, health, success, well-being, peace, salvation. Jeremiah is showing us a picture of God as a weaver in our lives, in which He is creating a tapestry (a

quilt, if you will) detailing the ultimate happiness and peace we can have—if we follow after Him! The above mentioned women of the Bible either already had tremendous obedience, faith, a willingness to look for godly solutions, and trust in God; or their lives were difficult, due to their lack of the aforementioned attributes. We also need to increase these qualities to find the peace God intended in our life.

Did Christ Have Obstacles To Overcome In His Life?

Christ gave us many examples from His time on earth about how to deal with stress. In His life we find many busy days and nights in which the people thronged about Him, begged to be taught, and to have miracles performed. He also had the many debates and traps that the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day were trying to set for Him. His short life on earth was full of constant demands on His time. How did He manage to stay focused on His goal and live a life we should want to emulate?

Christ was well versed in the Scriptures. The phrase “Have ye not read” is recorded eight times in the Gospel. You can read it for yourself (Matt. 19:4; Matt. 22:31; Matt. 12:3; Mark 12:10; Matt. 12:5; Mark 12:26; Luke 6:3). He answered the temptations of Satan with Scripture in Luke 4:1-13. He quoted many Scriptures from the Old Testament when He taught the people. He also did not let the religious leaders of the day twist the Scripture...He was ready with an answer. Visualize the kind of wife you would be if you could fill your thoughts with Scripture. Your speech, your mind, your daily walk—all would be tempered by the Word.

In the Gospel the word “pray” is found forty times. Prayer was an integral part of Christ’s life. He wanted it to be in ours also. Luke 18:1 states “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that **men ought always to pray, and not to faint.**” In Luke 22:39-46 we have a beautiful

example of how Christ handled a tremendous stress in His own life—He went to the Father in a soul-wrenching prayer. His pending torture and death on the cross was eminent. Not only did He face tremendous physical pain, but He would shoulder all the sins of the world for all time. In so doing He would be separated from fellowship with the Father. This would be a spiritual and emotional pain for Him to bear. The only way Christ knew to deal with it was through prayer. Christ teaches us that we are never too busy to pray. Someone has wisely said “He who cannot pray when the sun shines does not know how to pray when the clouds come.”

Finally, Christ shows us by example the need to get away from your busy schedule and rest. In Mark 6:30 we find the apostles returning from being sent out two by two. They began to tell Jesus all the things that they had done and what they had taught. He responded:

Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat (Mark 6:31).

In our modern world of fast food and frozen pizza, in which we often eat on the run, we have lost the benefit of a good old fashioned family dinner, a time in which we come together and forget the pressures of the day and enjoy each other. It is in the church family, and our physical family that we should be able to find solace and peace. Sometimes it is necessary to get away and meditate and relax by ourselves. We need to rejuvenate and recharge our batteries. Christ taught this in His own life and we should follow His example. Prov. 21:19 wisely states: “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.” If you can adjust your life, center it in Christ, and find the blessing of your day—you will

annihilate the contentious woman from your home and your husband will rejoice!

Can We Achieve Balance In Our Life?

How do we find the balance in our life and truly have the inner peace and joy that God has designed for each of us to experience? Christ taught in Matthew 22:37-39:

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. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

God is not **one** of our priorities—**He is The Priority!** After God, and **before our children**, our husband should be our second priority. Many women have this backwards in their lives and children are placed in front of their husband. These same children grow up with a false sense of a godly marriage and husbands are left unfulfilled. The empty nest occurs, and we are left wondering who this man in our home is?

We must battle against the outside pressures and worldly ideas of a good marriage. If children are not placed first or second in many women's lives, it is often because of their own self-centered desires. I have known many women who are so bent on fulfilling their own dreams it is to the detriment of their family's happiness. It is possible to follow your dreams and have them coincide with that of your husband's dreams. It is sometimes necessary to set aside a dream that would harm your marriage and find one which would fulfill you and bring harmony to your relationship. It takes effort on your part to blend your "wants" with your husbands, but it is well worth it in the end.

It is often that four letter word, **time**, that steals so much of our happiness and peace of mind. We reason

within ourselves: “If I only had just one more hour in the day, it would all be possible.” Is this not the same line of thinking that says: “If I only had a little bit more money each month—then I would have enough to be happy?” We need to be careful what our thoughts dwell upon. God gave each of us 24 hours a day and then He gave us the choice as to how to spend it. We each have the wisdom that God gave us to determine how to best use our time. Negativity is not an option for a fulfilling home. Unfortunately, you and I waste this precious time and then we spend many more hours stressed-out trying to “get it all done.”

Sometimes the best plan of action is to accept the fact that our lives have spiraled out of control—so what are we going to do about it? Be decisive; be determined to gain control over your own life. Do not spend another day in the stress filled atmosphere that drains your emotional and physical well being. In order to be **in balance** as Christian women we need to be **centered in Christ**. Remember, it is our desire and goal to have the most fulfilled marriage possible. Therefore, in taking stock of our lives we need to determine who or what is controlling our life—is it Christ, or is it every little (and big) demand that is made upon us?

Become God-Centered

The book of Colossians teaches that our lives should be a beautiful, harmonious spirit of love and peace:

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 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. 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. 3:15-17).

God is to be at the very center of our being, ruling in our heart (mind). The attitude of the Christian is one of peace, harmony, and singing. Imagine this in your home. Picture a star with its center being God. Spread out from the center are the points in our life which demand attention:

1. Self. Colossians 2:12 teaches us that we are to be concerned with our own salvation. We cannot neglect our own soul. When we think of our self, our soul should be first and foremost in our minds. Matthew 16:26 teaches this concept: "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?" Also, Christ taught His disciples that it was okay to set themselves apart and rest awhile. He understood the need to recharge and was teaching them the necessity to rejuvenate their energy in order to stay in the battle. It was vital that the apostles believed and practiced what they taught (concern for their own soul) in order to reach those around them (concern for the lost). Likewise, it is essential we take the time to secure our soul's salvation and revive spiritually to be the right influence in our husband's and our children's lives.

2. World. Our responsibility to the world is to bring salvation to as many as we can reach. Remember the key thoughts in each of the following verses: (1) Mark 16:15-16; go and teach the Gospel to all, (2) Romans 12:2; we are not to be conformed to the world, (3) James 1:27; we should remain unspotted from it, (4) Titus 2:12; we should deny the desires of the world, and (5) 1 John 5:4; we should be overcomers of the world. Is the world pulling us in ways that it shouldn't? Are we unbalanced in our actions to the world? Are we concerned with the lost and dying in sin?

3. Family. Psalm 127:3 declares our children are our heritage. Genesis 33:5 explains that they are a gift from God. Deuteronomy 32:46-47 commands us to teach our children the commandments of the Lord. Is the stress in

our life so great, and are we so out of balance, that we have forgotten the importance of keeping our family centered in God? Our families should be thought of as a gift and a blessing. It should be our goal and our desire to give the gift of a godly mother and wife. A little later in the lesson, we will spend a great deal of time on our responsibilities to our husbands as godly wives.

4. Work. Many of us work outside of the home to provide insurance and the important things of life: food, shelter, basic clothing. We need to examine our lives though, and make sure that if we are working, we have not become embroiled in what the paycheck can provide. If it is possible for you to quit working, and be home with your husband and families, then a life working in the home is the best way. We need to be careful not to drain ourselves at work with so many pressure-packed hours, that when we get home there is nothing left for our families. Work should not get the best that we have to offer. It is only a means to an end. Your family deserves the pleasant attitude, smiles, and patience that we always manage to give out at work!

5. Church. The church should never be neglected in our life. Christ died for her. What do we say to Him when we put it last in our life? Simply put, if every worker were just like me in the visitation program, the teaching program, attendance, and card sending—what would the church be like? Would there be any work being done in the church? What example do you set before your children? Do you always find time for band concerts, PTA meetings, and ball games, yet cannot quite squeeze in that door knocking or help in the church building clean-up?

What are we spending our precious time doing in this short life? We must keep God in the middle of all that we do. The decisions and commitments we make must be based in godly choices and not just happenstance. This is

a broad statement; we are all going to fall and make off-the-cuff decisions. However, as a whole keep your decisions God-centered and things will fall into a spiritual pattern more rapidly than if you rely on your wisdom. So many times our attitude can break us or make us. How do you view the world in which you live? Are you blessed to have the home you have, the husband, the children—or, do you only see what you don't have?

What Are Some Guidelines To Aid Us In Our Search For Balance?

1. It is okay to say no! Josh Billings wisely stated: “One-half the trouble of this life can be traced to saying yes too quick, and not saying no soon enough.”⁵ Even Christ had to say “No” in His busy life. Mark 1:1-20 introduces us to Christ and the calling of the apostles. Mark 1:21 details a very busy day in the life of Christ as He taught in Capernaum in the synagogue and healed Simon’s mother-in-law in Andrew’s home. He continued to heal the sick and a demon possessed man. Many heard and were gathered at the door to be healed. Mark 1:35 explains how Jesus was able to continue in His stress filled life: “He arose a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” Christ knew the value of keeping, through prayer, God, the Father, at the center of His being. Mark 1:38 explains that even when more people were seeking after Christ, He went on to another city to preach and proclaim His Deity through miracles. He had to say “No” to some to be effective to the masses. In the same manner we cannot say “Yes” to every activity and do it effectively and maintain our sanity. We must take time to refresh our batteries spiritually, and this necessitates our ability to say “No.”

2. Work a plan. James 4:13-17 does not teach against planning. It teaches against boasting of our accomplishments.

Christ tells us that we must all count the cost before following Him. Luke 14:28-33 is a lesson of a warring king and a tower builder who both had to count the cost of what they were doing before they could commit themselves. Remember to keep God's will at the center of your plans. If you do not, an old Hebrew proverb will come true: "Man plans and God laughs."⁶ We can all take a lesson from Charlie Brown:

Charlie Brown is at bat. STRIKE THREE. He has struck out again and slumps over to the bench. "Rats! I'll never be a big-league player. I just don't have it! All my life I've dreamed of playing in the big leagues, but I know I'll never make it."

Lucy turns to console him. "Charlie Brown, you're thinking too far ahead. What you need to do is set yourself more immediate goals."

He looks up. "Immediate goals?"

Lucy says, "Yes. Start with this next inning when you go out to pitch. See if you can walk out on the mound without falling down!"⁷

3. Reach for the Goal. Proverbs 16:3 wisely advises: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." Write your goals down on paper, dream a little and plan some lifetime goals. Two wise questions to ask are: (1) at the end of my life, what do I want to have accomplished? And, (2) in each of my different roles, what do I want to do? If we will live out Ephesians 5:15-17, we will sew beautifully patterned quilts:

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

Procrastination is not a word for a Christian to have in his vocabulary or life. The following quotes illustrate this thought well:

Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today (Benjamin Franklin).

Do you know what happens when you give a procrastinator a good idea? Nothing! (Donald Gardner)

Delay is the deadliest form of denial (C. Northcote Parkinson).

Don't lay any certain plans for the future; it is like planting toads and expecting to raise toadstools (John Billings).

Time is the most valuable thing a man can spend (Laertius Diogenes).⁸

4. Now is the Time. God has given each of us precious days to fill our lives with much activity. Ecclesiastes 3:11 states:

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put **eternity** in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

We should never lose sight of the fact that we have eternity in our heart. Our soul's eternal state should always be a concern to us as to how we spend our time. What activities fill our day? Psalm 118:24 tells us: "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Let us begin now to unravel our stress-filled lives and make them God-filled lives. Remember Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Do you really believe this verse? If you do, it must be seen in practice in your life!

What Kind Of Wife Does God Want Us To Be?

Do You Remember The Romance?

Now that the tone has been set on how to relieve our lives of daily pressure, we need to look at how to be the

kind of wife God intends and our husband needs. We should be the heart of the home. Think back to your wedding day; the planning, flowers, refreshments, choosing the color, your hopes and dreams for your marriage. As a little girl, you had specific dreams of what your wedding would be like. Sometimes we need to remember the joy of what it was like when we were first married, or actually before the wedding—when we were first in love! Do you remember feeling the way Lee Tran does as he expresses his love in the following poem:

Take A Picture

Just a picture, could mean a couple words,
But the one I hold dearly close to my heart,
Means more to me than anything else,
This photograph, you I love in black and white.

There are so many things I could say,
Though one word stands out amongst the rest,
It starts with love and ends with you,
The one I want to share with every single moment.

To be with you, at your side, and experience the joys,
Or you in my arms, holding you close to me, as you cry,
We're a team together, we work things out,
So we can both remember these dreams.

I've held your picture as I dream of us,
One day, we'll be holding our picture,
Wedding bells or birthday wishes,
Whichever comes first, I'll always be there.

Be there, when we say our wedding vows,
Or holding your hand as we welcome our new child,
Cheering you on when you go to your new job,
Seeing you smile as life passes us by.

I don't know what else to write or say,
As I look at the picture in my hands,
Putting my pen down and wishing you goodnight,
This photo of you, in black and white.⁹

We all dreamt of the perfect home we would want to live in; mine always had a white picket fence with roses. So many times as a child we thought in terms of the building, not the feeling that the word “home” evokes. After the beautiful day arrives, often the newness of the dream being lived becomes routine and we grow bored with the idea of “wife.” It seems like a lot of drudgery and our attitude shifts from the Disney-type fairy tale dream of marriage to a Grimm’s Brothers-type dream of marriage. If this has happened in your marriage, you need to incorporate God’s original design for marriage into your home, and you will see your attitude shift back to the joy you once had in your marriage.

God intended us to keep the happiness and bliss of marriage throughout our life. Proverbs 31 is about a happy wife and mother, a woman that considered this her God-given role. Also, she was honored by her family and considered to be more precious than rubies. Shakespeare even wrote of a beloved wife with these words:

Why man, she is mine own; and I as rich in
having such a jewel, as twenty seas if all the
sands were pearl, the water nectar, and the rocks
of pure gold.¹⁰

It is true that some times a husband may take us for granted and we don’t feel like a treasure but a troll! However, remember this talk is not about what **he needs to do**—it is about what **we need to do**. So even if you feel like he is not all he should be—concentrate on yourself. The first step is to consider being a wife the most important job you will have, outside of your Christian walk. Oftentimes it is the type of wife that you are that your children grow up to imitate/marry—so your example can ultimately affect the whole household.

Remember the days of your courtship? The endless hours over deciding what you were going to wear for that

special date, the way you were going to fix your hair, what shade of eye shadow would look best with that carefully chosen dress. Should I dress up, or should I wear something casual? I wonder what he will be wearing when he shows up at my door? When was the last time we really thought about our appearance, to the extent we did when we were first dating? Is it feasible to spend that much time, considering the above things in our marriages today?? Of course not! Nevertheless, we can think about a few things that will let him know that we still want to be courted by him.

Let Him Know You Still Want To Be Courted

1. Dress to be attractive. I remember when I first went back to work, B. J. said something to this effect “Now that I was wearing makeup again and doing my hair every day he wished he could see more of me!” I knew that he loved me and he wasn’t being derogatory. The truth of the matter was that I had allowed keeping kids in my home to dictate how I dressed: sweats, no makeup, and sometimes I had not even brushed my hair! I had really changed from the girl he fell in love with all those years ago. In college I used to wash my hair in the morning and in the afternoon before I ate dinner with him! I wanted to look my best! There is a sense in which our love has matured and it is not all about physical attraction only. However, physical attraction should still be a desired aspect of a marriage!

2. Encourage his wooing. Don’t make your husband feel childish or foolish when he makes advances toward you. There will be times that you will be too tired and not in the mood, however this should always be the exception and not the rule. Remember the Shulamite woman welcomed Solomon’s advances and it wasn’t because he was rich! Read the entire book, Song of

Solomon, for a clear understanding of the depth of their love. A few of the following verses below detail the joy she felt for Solomon:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth:
for thy love is better than wine...A bundle of
myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie
all night betwixt my breasts (Song of Solomon
1:2; Song of Solomon 1:13).

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so
is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under
his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was
sweet to my taste (Song of Solomon 2:3).

I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.
Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field;
let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to
the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish,
whether the tender grape appear, and the
pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee
my loves (Song of Solomon 7:10-12).

This is a small sampling of the love they shared. Never forget that the sexual intimacies in your marriage are God ordained and sanctioned. It is perfectly natural for your husband to desire you. You would not want him to have these feelings for anyone else! Welcome his advances and enjoy this side of your marriage.

Keep in mind, rejection can cause him to become depressed, lose interest in you as a wife, possibly turn to another woman, or lose self-respect. Obviously, our lives are filled with so many important things that it might become easy to set him aside. We may think that after all, he is the big, strong man, he should be alright! It is essential that we keep our priorities correct. After God, is your husband next? He needs to know that he is the next most important thing to God in your life and it needs to be verbalized often to him.

We wives also need to learn to say no to him in a kind way. He may want to hug and hold you with some

lingering kisses right in the middle of your busiest time in the kitchen while cooking a meal. There are two ways to handle this—one promotes love and one can destroy it. One is a hard “**NO**”—conveying the idea that he is an idiot for even thinking along those lines, and the other is a soft “no”—with a promise to return to his line of thinking in the very near future....then don’t forget!

3. Plan a date. My kids understand that mom and dad need some “alone-time.” Even though they complain, they give in. They understand we love each other and need time together for the marriage side of our relationship. They know this, because they see our love for each other on a daily basis. We go out to eat together, watch a show together, and often request that we be given some space to talk amongst ourselves. They know that we love them, but they also know that we dearly love each other. Obviously, this did not happen much when our kids were small since we couldn’t afford dates or a sitter! So the dating took place on a much smaller scale, in the house—when the kids were around. You have to learn to adapt during those times! However, we also had wonderful parents who kept the kids during spring break and a week in the summer so that we could have some time alone. Take advantage of your loved ones that want to help preserve your marriage.

We need to be interested in our husband’s activities. I hated sports when B. J. and I got married. I could not believe that anyone would be interested in watching a variety of balls being kicked, hit, and thrown around. For years I did not watch any games with B. J.—then one day I tried it. I had lots of questions, and he probably thought “What is she doing in here?” I gradually grew to be able to understand the game enough to enjoy watching it a few times with him. By the same token, he has learned to be interested in a few of my hobbies. He has gone shopping

with me, which to him is considered a slow, tortuous death! It is similar to the golden rule: the more you make him feel accepted, the more he will accept you.

Do You Criticize Him Or Build Him Up?

It is very important to not be critical of your husband. Instead, be an encouragement. There is a way to positively inform him of his faults.

Imagine his life: he gets up in the morning and is told that the striped pants do not go with the checkered shirt he has so diligently picked out; he goes to work and is ridiculed by his boss about the idea he had in the meeting yesterday that is not going to work; he then heads home to be criticized about the fact that the house is too small; his children have misbehaved all day, and his wife is in a bad mood and certainly not too excited to see him. In fact, she thinks he has had a fantastically creative day—much more enjoyable than her day could ever be...ha ha! This is supposed to be heaven on earth, remember.

Of course, the husband does have faults, so should the wife blindly close her eyes to them, or is there a way to be a suitable helpmeet to him and encourage his improvements? Just as you and I have faults, and we need our friends and loved ones to help improve us to be all that we can be, there is a way to accomplish this without harmful criticism. James Dobson stated:

A good marriage is not one where perfection reigns: it is a relationship where a healthy perspective overlooks a multitude of “unresolvables.”¹¹

What is the best way to approach a healthy criticism of our husbands? In many ways it is about our attitudes when we admonish him. We should show respect, kindness, common sense, and love.

Our Husbands Need And Deserve The Following...

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:3-5).

Why is it necessary for Paul to command the older women to teach the younger women characteristics which would seemingly be a natural occurrence in marriage? The obvious answer is God's wisdom is higher than ours (Isa. 55:9). He was well aware of the fact some of the above mentioned attributes would not occur naturally! Marriage is a serious commitment and it is to be entered into "soberly" or serious minded. Paul, inspired of God, knew that women would need to be told to love our husbands. It is not always easy to like a man you are angry with, however you are always "to love him." This entails how you treat him, how you speak to him, how you care for him, how you respect him, and how you diligently increase in your love and wisdom as a mate.

We are commanded to **respect his headship**. God placed him as the head of the home. We are all familiar with the verses in Ephesians 5:23: "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," and 1 Corinthians 11:3: "...the head of every man is Christ; and **the head of the woman is the man**; and the head of Christ is God."

The husband's role of "headship" is God ordained. This is not to be taken lightly. It is essential that we wives remember who authorized his leadership. These verses compare the husband's headship to that of Christ as the head of the church. Would the church ever dare to criticize

the Christ? Even though our husbands are not perfect, they are still due respect in the manner in which we treat them. I would not dare speak to a boss in the tone I have sometimes taken with my husband for fear of losing my job. Should we not also have a fear of damaging our marital relationship?

If we are blessed to have godly men, then following them will lead us to an eternity in heaven. It is a fact that he bears the responsibility of the leadership of the home. Does that mean that we are brainless, china dolls whose only purpose is to sit around and look pretty? No, we have a meek, pleasant voice and can certainly use it to make our opinion known. A godly man should be ready to listen to our thoughts and consider our opinions and then make a decision. At which time, we are **commanded by God** to acquiesce to our husbands' wishes, even if they do not coincide with our own desires. He is the God ordained leader of the home and we are to be obedient to him. Obedience is not a dirty word.

This chain of command is designed by God for our lives to flow smoothly. If we find it difficult to be obedient and submissive to our husbands, will we find it equally hard to be obedient and submissive to our God? Our children need to see this submissiveness in our own life—it is a selfless attitude they must possess in many aspects of their own lives. They will need to show submissiveness to employers, government; and, our daughters to their own husbands one day.

We were created to be a **helpmeet for our husband**. Genesis 2:18 clearly states woman was created to be a helper to her husband. We need to set aside our selfish natures and spend our days assisting our mate. This involves finding out what his specific needs are and cheerfully lifting a hand to help him. Our husbands' bear some formidable responsibilities: concern with the

finances, leadership in the home and the church, and protectors of their home—just to name a few.

I once heard a marriage compared to a great tree growing right up through the center of one's living room. The tree affects all those in contact with it. It is huge, and everything has been built around it. Wherever one happens to be going: to the fridge, to bed, to the bathroom, or out the front door—the tree has to be taken into account. To be married is to be confronted intimately day after day with life outside of oneself.

As wives, we should be as involved in our husbands' needs and his daily life as the tree is to all those in the household. The main area we should help our husband is on his journey to heaven. We should ask ourselves often if we are a hindrance to him on his path or do we pray for him, study with him, encourage him spiritually, and work side by side as Priscilla did with Aquila.

We should always **approach him with kindness**. Ephesians 4:32 should be our verses to live by as wives: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Try kindness—he'll like it! Remember the virtuous woman: "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26). Read 1 Corinthians 13 and determine if you exemplify the verbs in this great chapter on love in your home.

Look to Colossians 3:12 as a guide:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

A very big way to show him kindness is to show him respect. Look at him when he speaks and make him feel

important to you. Never talk disparagingly about him, let your friends hear you praise him.

Ask him for advice before you make a decision that he needs to be aware of. When we had been married a couple of years and did not have children, we had a twin bed in a spare bedroom. There was a couple in the church who had a three year old and she wanted to trade me the twin bed for her baby bed. Without asking B. J., I made the trade. I still remember him telling me that he would have liked to have been in on the decision! His dad came frequently for visits and now he did not have a bed to sleep in...I had not thought of that! Our first child was still to be two years away! We could have used that twin bed a little longer! Respect your husband's opinion; two heads are better than one.

We must **ignore trivial matters**. Benjamin Franklin once said: "Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards."¹² Solomon warned about the nagging, contentious wife in Proverbs 21:9 and repeated his warning again in Proverbs 21:19: "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife," and "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife." Maybe it would be beneficial to heed his advice? How do you do this? Let love abound. Remember, if he is the husband God would have him to be, he is also ignoring those trivial things in your life! It is often stated that women have many more words to speak than men. With this in mind, the following quotes may help qualify when and how we speak those words:

Speak clearly, if you speak at all; carve every word before you let it fall (Oliver Wendell Holmes).

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug (Mark Twain).

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret (Ambrose Bierce).

By swallowing evil words unsaid, no one has ever harmed his stomach (Winston Churchill).

Women speak because they wish to speak, whereas a man speaks only when driven to speech by something outside himself-like, for instance, he can't find any clean socks (Jean Kerr).

Be careful of your thoughts; they may become words at any moment (Ira Gassen).

Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs (Pearl Strachan).¹³

Finally, let **love be your guide**. He deserves genuine love not a superficial love. What do you think of as genuine? Would you appreciate a diamond engagement ring that was made out of zirconium? Or, how about leaving the hospital with a plastic baby instead of the live, breathing child you had given birth to? You want the real thing, and our husbands want to feel the real thing from us directed to them. I do not know where I heard this illustration, however it does teach this point:

One evening a mother heard her 4 year old son crying. She went running into his room and he was very upset with his 2 year old sister. She had pulled his hair. His mother explained that she did not know any better and tried to soothe his hurt feelings. No sooner had she left than she heard crying again. She turned around to go back, and her son came running out of the room declaring "She does now!"

Many times we may be having an argument with our husband and he just doesn't see it our way. No matter

how hard we try we cannot get through to him. It is possible that he might not act in the proper way (of course we **always** maintain our cool!). Instead of continuing on in love, the way Christ would have us, sometimes we respond in kind...just like the 4 year old. Instead of truly teaching his sister, he had stooped to her level. When we disagree with our husbands, we should never criticize him—it lowers his self esteem. We must remember how we want to be treated by him.

Our home should be heaven on earth. We should be busy nurturing and giving our husband lavish attention. He is your best friend, or **he should be**. Give your husband a listening ear, don't let someone else be the person who hears your husband's fears and problems. Unfortunately there are too many women in the office who are eager and more than willing to listen to him. God made men with a need to be admired for their minds, their abilities in work, and sexually. If you are not admiring him, chances are someone else is showing your husband how fabulous he is and temptation can become too great for him.

Also, God made our husbands to desire us sexually, and we should welcome his attentions and reciprocate them. Catherine, a character in the book **Wuthering Heights**, speaks of her love for Edgar in the following way: "I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says. I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely and altogether."¹⁴ Our husbands should feel this depth of love from us. The same love and deep admiration the Shulamite woman gave to Solomon is deserved by our own husbands (Song of Solomon 5:10-16).

Above all, we should hope to have the kind of memories this poem talks about as we look back over our married lives:

Anniversary

It seems like only yesterday
That our wedding date was set;
Although it's been so many years,
The memories linger yet.

I guess that we've experienced life,
In almost every form.
We've enjoyed the greatest pleasures
And weathered every storm.

We've walked together side by side,
As we traveled on through life;
And I have always felt so proud,
That you chose me for your wife.

I wouldn't change my life with you,
For any other way.
We've reached another milestone, dear
It's our "Golden Wedding Day!"

*Maxine Taylor*¹⁵

Finally, Some Godly Wives Of The Bible...

It would be wrong to end this chapter without a listing of some remarkable wives of the Bible and their qualities that make them stand out. Proverbs 18:22 wisely declares: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." Many men in the Bible were blessed by the women they chose to marry. Elizabeth and Priscilla are two wonderful women of the New Testament. Notice why they stand out in our minds as exemplary wives in the following paragraphs.

Elizabeth—Luke 1:5-7 states that Zacharias, a priest, was married to one of the daughters of Aaron, Elizabeth. Verse 6 clearly gives us insight into why she is

considered a worthy wife: “And they were **both righteous** before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord **blameless.**” This righteous couple was chosen by God to bear, in their old age, the baby who would become John the baptizer, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord” (Luke 3:4). Elizabeth was joyful and responded to confirmation of her conception in Luke 3:25: “Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.” She considered herself to be most blessed of God. When Gabriel was explaining to Mary that she would bear the child through a miraculous conception, he also told her about her cousin, Elizabeth. He then makes a statement that was also said to Sarah of the Old Testament in Luke 1:37: “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” The remainder of this first chapter in Luke details the tremendous faith which Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary possessed as they praised their God. Elizabeth truly was a blessing to Zacharias; her faith in God was tremendous.

Priscilla—Acts 18:2 introduces the godly couple, Aquila and Priscilla, as having recently moved to Corinth from Rome due to a decree from Claudius. Not much detail goes into their life; however, a few things can be ascertained. First, Priscilla certainly was a helpmeet to her husband, Aquila, as she helped him in his occupation as a tentmaker. Second, we also learn she was a hospitable woman, as she housed Paul when he came to Corinth. He stayed with them long enough to partake in their occupation as tentmakers. Third, she was knowledgeable in the Word as she and her husband taught the Scriptures more clearly to a mighty man of the Word, Apollos. When they realized he was teaching error on baptism, “they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). She

truly was a helpmeet to her husband in his profession, she was hospitable to the traveling apostle, Paul, and she worked side-by-side with her husband in his work for the Lord. If all men could be so blessed!

Conclusion

We have spent a great deal of time talking about stress and finding godly balance in our lives. What does God want for our lives? Psalm 16:11 states: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” God does not want us to live stress-filled lives. His plan is for us to have peace in this life. Isaiah 26:3-4 states:

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind
is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.
Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD
JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.

Philippians 4:9 teaches God is a God of peace: “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” Philippians 4:7 teaches us to be careful for nothing, but to be prayerful “and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Jesus said He was the giver of peace in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”

Do you find God’s hand in your life? All of us are burdened with daily stresses—where do you go to find the peace God has promised? Jesus said in Matthew 23:37:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the
prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto
thee, how often would I have gathered thy children
together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens
under her wings, and ye would not!

Christ wants to hold you in His tender care. Will you let Him be in control of your life? As one of the “older wives” in the church, I have striven in this lesson to follow Titus 2:4-5:

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

This command stands today even in our modern, so-called “liberated” world. God wants the best for all His people. Serving as a wife in the manner Paul is teaching (obedience, submission) is intended to bring about balance and harmony in the home. When it is followed as God intended, the home is a peaceful place in which a little bit of heaven on earth is found. Again, Paul emphasizes respect and honor to the husband as he admonishes the wives of Ephesus in Ephesians 5:33 to “see that she reverence her husband.”

Wives, remember the wise words of Proverbs 12:4: “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.” Consider the following as you strive to be a godly mate in your marriage: (1) Be forever appreciative of your husband. They need to hear verbally what we think of them; and (2) Always see the man that you fell in love with. Overlook his unpleasant qualities and accentuate the positive! The poet, Thomas Moore, wrote of the following about the beauty of marriage:

There’s a bliss beyond all that the minstrel has told,
When two, that are link’d in one heavenly tie,
With heart never changing, and brow never cold,
Love on through all ills, and love on till they die.
One hour of a passion so sacred is worth
Whole ages of heartless and wandering bliss;
And oh! if there be an Elysium on earth
It is this – it is this!¹⁶

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.caron-net.com/featurefiles/featmay.html>
- 2 http://www.womenfolk.com/quilt_pattern_history/wedring.htm
- 3 <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0203/07/lkl.00.html>
- 4 <http://www.teachhealth.com/#recogstress>
- 5 <http://www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/wordsquotes.htm>
- 6 <http://www.inquest.org/ss/ta/l11-12.htm>
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 <http://www.inquest.org/ss/ta/l11-12.htm>
- 9 <http://www.poemhunter.com/p/m/poem.asp?poem=1880896>
- 10 http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/quotable_quotes.html
- 11 <http://www.family.org/married/youngcouples/a0019162.cfm>
- 12 <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/benjaminfr123487.html>
- 13 <http://www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/wordsquotes.htm>
- 14 <http://www.literature.org/authors/bronte-emily/wuthering-heights/chapter-09.html>
- 15 <http://www.poemhunter.com/p/m/poem.asp?poet=5387&poem=23504>
- 16 http://library.timelesstruths.org/texts/Foundation_Truth_8/A_Womans_Place/

CHAPTER 35

The Role Of A Woman In The Work And Worship Of The Church

Kathy Jones

Commendation

I AM THANKFUL FOR this congregation for so many reasons. We grew spiritually at this place because it gave us a place to work and serve God. David decided to become a Gospel preacher because of this congregation's encouragement, love and support. You have taken Wayne, Shana Kaye, Hannah, Ashlyn, and Bailey in and loved them like they were your own. You have even spoiled my beautiful granddaughters. You have taken them in not just as a preacher family, but as your family. A special thanks is offered to Con and Larry for looking out for my children's souls. Also, I am thankful to B. J. for asking me to speak. It is truly an honor.

Introduction

There is a great deal of confusion today as to role of women in the work and worship of the church. I can't understand why, because God's Word is so plain on the subject. If every woman would do what God intended for her to do in the beginning she would not have time to worry about what she "could not do." At times it seems that there are not enough hours in the day to do what God

has given me to do. Ladies, if we would just go to work and do what God has given us to do, we would not have time to sit and wonder what we could not do. The saying goes: “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Eccl. 9:10a). Let’s get busy doing what God has given us to do! Whenever we try to alter God’s plan in any way we are giving place to the devil. Let’s look at God’s plan for women.

God’s Creations Of Man And Woman

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). From the beginning God had a plan for man and woman and He also had roles for each one. When God created Adam (man) He brought to Adam every beast of the field and every fowl of the air but Adam found no suitable companion.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him (Gen. 2:18-20).

I think God wanted Adam to realize that he needed a woman to be complete. Adam needed someone with whom he could talk, someone who would listen, one he could trust, a help meet. No animal could fill that role. Eve was also designed with a purpose: to help her husband, to be his friend, his lover, to be by his side. She was created to be his companion till death would part them. God in His infinite wisdom indeed knew that man needed a help meet.

This should show us how important our roles are as a woman. God gave us the a role that nothing else on earth could fill. After God created the world and gave man all that He had created, God knew it was not enough.

God took a rib out of Adam's side to make woman. I know we have all heard, that God did not take the bone out of his foot so he could walk on her, or out of his head so she could rule over him, but from his side, to be by his side. This was the bone closest to Adam's heart. God made woman because a monkey, a dog, a cat, or no other animal would fit His plan for man. God gave Adam a woman because a man did not fit His plan for man.

A Help Meet

A help meet is one who will submit to her husband, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). A help meet is one who knows that her husband is the head of the wife and she is subject to him:

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. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:23-24).

Why? Because that is her God-given role.

Think about Sarai's submission to Abram. In Genesis 12:1, God told Abram to leave his home:

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

How many of us today would pick up and go to a land that we knew nothing about because our husbands came home

and said, “we are moving”? Sarai did because she was a woman of submission:

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

Sarai gave up the luxuries of life in Ur of the Chaldees to live in tents. Sarai also gave up her family and friends:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee (Gen. 12:1).

We also see from this that Abram was the head of his wife and she was subject to him. We never read one time that Sarai put up a fight, argued or even questioned Abram. “Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Pet. 3:6).

How can we be this kind of help meet, the kind God wants us to be? We can love God enough to obey what He tells us to do in His Word. We can love our husband and respect him for the role God has given him. We can pray daily for our husbands. We can encourage them daily to do what is right for you and your family, trusting that they will.

Role Of Women In The Worship

Every Christian man and woman has the privilege and obligation to worship God. God has always desired His people to worship him:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him (John 4:23).

Also God has desired our worship but to do that we must worship the way He has instructed us in His Word. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). A Christian woman is to participate in all five acts of worship: pray, sing, give, partake of the Lord’s supper, teach. God has set forth His design for worship in His Word and this worship is expected from man, woman, boy or girl that have been added to His Church in baptism:

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

And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

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 (Acts 20:7).

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 (1 Cor. 16:2).

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (1 Tim. 2:8).

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

We will not read in these verses that women are to lead in any way nor will we read anywhere else in God’s Word that women are to lead in worship. It was not God’s plan for women to lead in worship or to lead in any other area in His Church. God’s plan was for man to take the lead in the Church. “I will therefore that men pray every

where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim. 2:8). God’s will is that faithful men pray, not just men but “holy men.”

Therefore, we can see that God’s plan for those leading in worship were to be “holy men.” We hear from time to time that this is a male chauvinist’s teachings, but we see here it is not just about women but about what God commanded. God command was to “holy men” not just to men and not to women. “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). God’s plan was put into motion the day he created Adam. This is the way God wanted it and that is all that matters. God has not changed His mind and this is the way it will ever be: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8).

Women have always been an important part of God’s plan. However, they must fulfill the role that God has given if God is to be glorified. “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). God’s plan for leadership roles in worship are for men to lead but not just men, but faithful men.

Our roles as women are to encourage the men as they do God’s will. Our role is to respect and honor our elders and follow them as they follow Christ. Elderships must be sure that the congregations over which they rule stays true to God’s Word on the role of men and women. As members of the church we must be informed and have the courage to demand and practice all concerning the role of men and women in the church.

Role Of Women In The Work Of The Church

Women have always been a very important part of God’s work. God knew Adam needed a help meet. God knew man needed someone compatible—not animals and

not another man—but a woman. God knew through the seed of woman Christ would come into this world and from the beginning of time women have been a part of God’s work to bring this about.

Think about the women in the Old Testament and the roles they played in God’s plan. **Sarah**, was the woman God used to keep His promise He made to Abraham. We also see from Sarah what happens when we try to alter God’s plan and do things the way we want to do them or the way we think is best. In Genesis 16, Sarah takes things into her own hands and thinks she can help God by doing things her way! Sarah decided she would not be able to give Abraham the son that God had promised her, so Sarah gave Hagar her handmaid to Abraham. From that point on there were always problems between Sarah and Hagar. Why? Because Sarah tried to alter God’s plan.

Don’t be so hard on Sarah. What are we doing when we change God’s plan for the work of the Church? Have you ever heard a woman say, “The men are too slow, they can never make a decision, and when they do it will not be the right one”? “I think we should just go ahead and do what needs to be done.” Ladies, let’s be careful that we don’t overstep our roles like Sarah.

What about **Rebekah**, the wife of Isaac and the mother of Esau and Jacob? God had a role for her in His plan and this role was also very important. Her son was to be the start of all the children of Israel. The line of Christ would come from Isaac and Rebekah. But, Rebekah stepped out of the role God gave her and did things her way. We read in Genesis 27, how Rebekah helped Jacob trick his father to steal the birthright from his brother Esau. “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee” (Gen. 27:8). Rebekah told Jacob exactly what to do! She told him what meat to get and she cooked it the way Isaac liked it (Gen. 27:9). She

told him to put Esau's clothes on and she put skins of the kids and of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck (Gen. 27:16).

Rebekah started a war between brothers (and heartache for all) because she stepped into a role that was not hers. God's plan is always best and right.

Then what about **Esther**? She did what she could to please God. She took her role seriously. Mordecai asked her "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esth. 4:14b)? Esther did all she could to save her people. In Esther's life, she fulfilled the role given her and the Jews were able to fight for their lives. Do you think it was just an accident that Esther was just in the right place at the right time? No, God had a role for her and she obeyed Him.

We are women in Christ's kingdom, the most important Kingdom that has ever been, the Church. No, it is not a earthly kingdom, but the only Kingdom that will save us today. "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36a). Who knows if we are come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?

When Christ was on earth women were a part of His life and work. Of course, there was His mother, Mary, who loved Him, taught Him and watched Him die on that cruel cross. There was also Mary and Martha who took Him into their house (Luke 10:36-42). And there were the women, which came with Him from Galilee, Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them went to the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared (Luke 24). And who can forget the woman with the alabaster box? Jesus said about her, "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me" (Matt. 26:10).

In the New Testament church, from the start, women were needed and important. There were women, like Dorcas, a faithful and loving servant:

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did (Acts 9:36).

As soon as Lydia became a Christian she started to work:

When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us (Acts 16:15).

Paul met up with fellow tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla, in Corinth and stayed with them. Priscilla traveled with her husband, spreading the Gospel. She and her husband were fellow workers with Paul, who risked their own necks for his life, and who hosted a church in their home. (Acts 18; Rom. 16:3-5). In 1 Timothy 2:10 it tells a woman to be clothed in “good works.” So you can see from these women there are many different areas of work that a woman in the Lord’s church could and should do.

We see from all the examples that there is plenty of work for women to do in the Lord’s Church. In the work of benevolence a woman could work all day and never finish all that could be done for the Lord in this area. So many things can be done for our widows, sick, shut-ins and the needy. “Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” (Matt. 25:36). This passage is written to Christians and it tells us that Jesus will judge us on our works.

In the work of edification a woman can do many things. Cards can be sent, meals cooked, phone calls made, houses cleaned, and shopping done. Women offer a loving and listening heart. We can be there for people when they are down in the valley and when they are up on the mountain top! “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15).

Then there is the work of evangelism, which is the main work of the Church—the work that every other work should be centered around. God’s role for women in the work of evangelism is as important as man’s role in this work. Christ mission for coming to this earth was to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). If we are to fulfill our role God has given we must seek and save the lost. If we are going to be Christ-like, a Christian, we must be about our Father’s business as Christ was. “And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49)? The way we do that is through evangelism.

Women are commanded to teach. We are to teach the lost and we are to teach children. We are not to teach or usurp authority over a man. “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). Women can be involved in teaching a man that is lost, like the example we have of Aquila and Priscilla. The older women are to teach the younger women: “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children” (Tit. 2:4).

In the book of Hebrews all Christians are commanded to teach:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (Heb. 5:12).

Also in the book of Mark, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). As Christian women, we are commanded to teach but only to the lost, women, and children as God tells us in His Word. We should never go beyond the role God has given us but we should do all He has given us to do.

Teaching or preaching is the way God chose to save man: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18). It is not just the preaching and teaching that is important but it is also important **what** we teach. In this verse God says our teaching should be about “the cross.” So we need to teach in the role God gave us and teach what He tells us to teach. The church grew in the first century because the people taught, men and women, and the only way it will grow today is by my teaching God’s Word or what we call evangelism. “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

I have heard so many women in the church say, “I can’t teach.” Ladies, there comes a time when we should all be able to teach someone. Let’s think about where we are right now in August of 2006. We may be a new Christian or a Christian that has never taught a Bible Class but today is the day to start filling your role as a Bible teacher. I want you to think about some ways you can help teach. Start where you are and get to work.

In every Bible class program there is a need for more than just the teacher, the person who gets up in front of the class and teaches the lesson. Start with something you can do. We need: helpers in the class rooms, ladies who will color visuals, cut out visuals, make copies, laminate the visuals, we need those who are willing to help clean and organize the workroom, and many, many more jobs. We can set up Bible studies with neighbors, friends, and family and go with the person who does the teaching and learn. There is much to do in the work of evangelism for a woman, we just need to get busy and do it.

As I said in the beginning of this lesson God gave women so many great and important roles to perform. Just look at all we can be for God: a wife, mother, teacher, giver, helper, motivator, comforter, visitor, cleaner, organizer and I could go on and on. What we need to do is be about our Father's business. Don't you think this should be enough to keep us from worrying about all the things we can't do.

I know if we fill our lives with the roles that God gave us and our hearts with love for His church we will be very busy women. So **Wife** Wilma, **Daughter** Debbie, **Mother** Maggie, **Home Keeper** Helen, **Teacher** Tammy, **Student** Sara, **Hospitable** Hannah, **Giver** Gwen, be all you can be for the Lord in the roles He gave us and He will be pleased. One day we will be able to hear those great words from our Saviour:

Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord (Matt. 25:23).

CHAPTER 36

The Role Of Older Women In The Church

Irene Taylor

Introduction

SO YOU HAVE REACHED “retirement” age! Your hair has changed color and you experience new aches every day. There are some things you no longer do as easily as in years gone by. Your energy level is lower now. You may be slower in accomplishing a given task but life goes on. There is still much you can do and, most importantly, there is still much you can do in the work of the church. If you are able to read this, be assured the Lord is not ready for you to retire from His vineyard yet! In fact, He has left instructions for some specific work assigned especially for us “aged” women.

The Importance Of Woman’s Role

Through Divine Inspiration, Paul records instructions for various segments of society. Included in those instructions are the special ones for aged or older women. Beginning in Titus 2:1, we are instructed to “speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.”¹ That does not mean that what we speak will become sound doctrine as one speaker suggested. Rather, it means that we should exercise extreme care to speak only those things that enhance or befit (become) pure or healthy (sound) doctrine.

This is a command which, if faithfully obeyed, will eliminate much of the religious error which is so confusing to the world about us. At the time of my writing this manuscript, several ladies from the Ripley, Tennessee, congregation are engaged in teaching a class of women at the local Justice Center each Tuesday evening. These ladies come from all walks of life and each has been instilled with a false concept of Christianity. They need to be taught sound doctrine and it is our privilege to do our best to fulfill the command of Titus 2:1.

When encouraged to do the Lord's work, many women seem at a loss to know just what they can do. Beginning in verse three of our text, we are introduced to some specifics designed especially for women. More specifically, they are designed especially for "aged" women. Though none of these will make the morning's headlines or even place us in a public role in the church, these areas are of primary importance in our service to God. The woman whose goal is to please God must first empty her mind of the world's view of Christian service for woman. That the worldly concept of Christian service has infiltrated the thinking of many in the church is without question. Thus, our assignment is made more crucial.

It seems of keen interest that much of the work designed for woman centers around home and family. Would not our Heavenly Father be pleased if woman today would understand that her role, properly fulfilled, will strengthen not only the family circle but the church and community as well? It is through her work in the home that the very foundational characteristics for a pure, upright life are taught or neglected. And it is from the home that the church is fed. Members of God's family come from the physical members of the home who have been taught God's plan for salvation. The Christian woman must not take her privileged responsibility lightly. God's

wisdom gave us a role with power. We are given the opportunity, through careful training of our children, to raise the standards of society and eliminate many problems now vexing the Lord's body. We have within our hands the opportunity to guide those precious souls toward that Heavenly Home. Our failure to accomplish this could send their souls to eternal torment and possibly our own as well. What command could God have given woman that would be more critical to His Cause?

Qualifications For Aged Women

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things (Tit. 2:3).

Aged women are reminded that their conduct must be such as becometh holiness. This simply means that her conduct must reflect the fact that she is a servant of God. The American Standard Version (ASV) renders this "be reverent in demeanor." If we are to be effective in our role, it matters, and matters greatly, how we conduct ourselves day by day. Not only must we have a good reputation, but also our character must be above reproach as well. This demands constant attention to what we say and do. We can never know who may be watching! We can know for a surety that God is.

We are reminded that there are specific things we can do to enhance this building of a good reputation and character. It is not something we can achieve overnight. Keep in mind that reputation is what others think of us and character is what God knows us to be. That should be a sobering thought to each of us as we prepare to be of service to God. The earlier in life that we seriously attend to character building the more successful will be our work in those "golden" years of life. The traits developed through

life will largely determine how we are viewed in later life. There is much truth to that old adage, “You cannot teach an old dog new tricks.” While not impossible, it is not easy to convert a lifetime of bad traits into good ones.

We are not to be “false accusers” or, as the ASV renders it, “not slanderers.” The problem of slander and gossip is not exclusive to woman. Many a church problem has been exacerbated by the loose, sometimes mean-spirited, speech of both men and women. One who refuses to be a false accuser will obtain all available facts in a given situation instead of rushing to smear another’s good name. Under no circumstances will a godly woman (or man) make an effort to dig up dirt to further the slander. We aged women need to stress how wrong this is and thus help to eliminate the problem.

Aged women are further commanded not to be given to much wine. The question is often asked, “Why does it read ‘much wine’? Why not ‘no wine’? Perhaps it is because wine is often a legitimate part of medicine. Recall that Paul advised Timothy “... use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine only infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). We can be certain it is not justification for imbibing alcoholic beverages. The words of wisdom still read:

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise ... Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder...Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also,... (Prov. 20:1; Prov. 23:31-32; Hab. 2:15).

This is certainly a lesson which needs to be instilled in the minds of our young people. This is one of the “good things” which the world needs to learn.

We should recognize easily the need for us to be “teachers of good things.” There is so much being taught that is not good, even in the church. To be a teacher of these good things one must prepare. And one must concentrate on the good. Paul tells us to guard against letting evil or worldly thoughts monopolize our mind. Such thoughts may enter but we do not need to make them welcome! Note the good things with which we can fill our minds:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things** (Phil. 4:8, Emp. mine, IT).

The Link Between Home And Church

Next we have Inspiration’s command to teach concepts which will strengthen the home. No right-thinking person will deny that today’s homes need strengthening. Such strength can come only by adhering to the Bible’s standard for the home. As this manuscript is being prepared, guests on Oprah’s show (5-9-06) are pontificating about how marriage costs woman her self image. The former wife of Lance Armstrong declared she had to divorce to be true to herself. A Dr. Robin L. Smith discussed her own divorce, this from one who gives advice to women regarding their relationships in life. She has written a book, **Lies At The Altar**, which, according to the ensuing discussion, declares that promises made at the altar are impossible to keep.

With such propaganda being spewed by the “enlightened,” is it little wonder that Deity looked down the path of time and recorded the very areas which aged women should pass on to the next generation regarding the beauty and sanctity of marriage?

We are to teach (train-ASV) the young women to love their husbands. Prior to this admonition is the statement that we teach young women to be sober. With today's flippant attitude toward the sanctity of marriage, it is vital that we instill the truth that life is not all fun and games. It is basically a serious journey from earth toward eternity and must be viewed with the respect to which it is entitled. Love is more than that romantic flutter felt with that first kiss or when holding hands. It is a commitment. It is unselfishness. No longer is it only what "I" want; it now considers what is best for "us." It is willingness to give of oneself. It is willing to give in to the needs of the other, to take turns.

Marriage forever demands casting aside the concept of "I want what I want when I want it." The current philosophy of society seems to be that love lasts as long as I get my way. When that ends the commitment ends and so does the marriage. This is why it is so important to take time for wholesome courtship. Even then there will be surprises and adjustments when trying to mold two lives into one.

Young women need to be taught that marriage is more than keeping house and sex. It is a bonding of goals and a melding of family. Two people from different backgrounds must work together to build a lifetime together. And they need to understand that they marry into the mate's family in a very real sense. To our shame, we aged women do not always teach the important preparation whereby young women know how to love their husbands. Too often the training for marriage ends with lessons in cooking and cleaning!

The divorce rate could be much lower if older men taught younger men the finer points of being a husband beyond being the main breadwinner. We older women need to teach both our sons and daughters the real preparation for marriage both by word of mouth and by example.

To be discreet is to be “careful about what one says or does; prudent; esp. keeping silent or preserving confidences when necessary.”² The ASV renders this as sober-minded. This trait is fundamental. Many an upset could have been avoided if discretion had been practiced. There are many areas of marriage which should remain private between the husband and wife. Such things as the physical relationship, finances, childrearing, etc. should remain private. No amount of questioning by the couple’s parents or friends should bring revelation of such personal matters. This comes under the NOYB (none of your business) category. Teach the value of being discreet.

Further, we are to teach younger women to be chaste. Chaste is defined as “not indulging in unlawful sexual activity; virtuous...pure, decent or modest in nature, behavior, etc.”³ In this era of free love and unmarried sex, lessons in being chaste are urgently needed. We need to instill the fact that free sex is both sinful and dangerous physically. Interestingly, expanded illustrations for **modest** and **decent** “are both applied to propriety in behavior, dress, bearing or speech as exhibiting morality or purity.”⁴ In discussing this particular character trait, I have often pointed out that the word is **chaste** not **chased**!

Even a quick glance around us confirms the need for more teaching on this theme. The yearly summer **undress** used to be a practice of the world. Today it is practiced by many in the church. At other seasons we are “treated” to the low-cut top which reveals much cleavage along with hip-hugger jeans (or lower) and long skirts slit above the thigh. To her credit, a recent business fashion adviser decried the sloppy, sleazy dress which has invaded the business office. Casual Friday has opened the lid to Pandora’s box!

The Christian woman will not be guilty of wearing such. She does not let the fashion world determine her

wardrobe. We need to stress more firmly the need for our young women to be chaste in all that the term implies. And such teaching must be predicated by practicing chastity before them.

We are commanded to teach the younger women the beauty of being keepers (workers-ASV) at home. The Greek word for keeper means “a stayer at home; domestically inclined.”⁵ Webster defines it as “caring for the house, household affairs, watchful of the home; homemaker.” The ideal arrangement, of course, is for the wife and mother to be at home to give full attention to the care and needs of the home—not merely the house. **There is a vast difference in keeping house and making a home!**

How wonderful it would be if we could instill once again a love for being a real homemaker. From the time that stay-at-home moms got a taste of that independent income (remember Rosie the Riveter?) through the years of listening to feminism, the beauty of the role of homemaker has dimmed. Add to that the high cost of living because we have become accustomed to a higher standard of life, and we find few young mothers content to be a stay-at-home mom.

It seems significant that, prior to being obedient to our own husband, we are commanded to teach the younger women how to be good and kind. The principle of Matthew 7:12 applies to the home relationships as well as relationships in general. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them...” Those company manners would go a long, long way toward keeping home life peaceful and enjoyable. Why are we so often rude and thoughtless toward those we say we love the most? It would seem that older women should have learned the art of being good and kind in the home as well as in society. We need to pass it on!

“Obedient to their own husbands.” How that goes against the grain of the feminist philosophy! They decry

the need for a husband in the first place. And the idea of having to be obedient to one is beyond their comprehension. Few wedding ceremonies now include the charge to obey in the bride's vow. Truly, we need to renew our efforts to instill God's way into the thinking of future generations.

There are examples of wives and mothers in Holy Writ whom we would do well to emulate. Others should be avoided for their example is not good, but we can learn valuable lessons from their mistakes as well. Sara obeyed Abraham even calling him lord to show respect for him as the head of the family (1 Pet. 3:6). When we refuse to honor the headship of our husband, we are also disrespecting the God of Heaven who placed him in that role. Other than helping to keep peace in the home, why is it important for woman to honor this command? Paul answers the question for us: "That the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit. 2:5).

The worthy woman was one who did "good for her husband and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:12). Her husband trusted her; obviously, she was worthy of that trust (Prov. 31:11). He was at home among the elders of the land being known in the gates (Prov. 31:23). It is likely that he was in the forefront of the affairs of the land yet we find no hint of jealousy on her part of the attention likely bestowed upon him. Envy and jealousy are not pleasing to God above and should be avoided. She was selfless. The needs of her household took first place and she worked willingly to provide for them, even in the hours before daylight (Prov. 31:13; Prov. 31:15; Prov. 31:19). She was involved in business, perhaps to insure ample means of support for her household as well as for the poor. Hers is an example of industry at its best.

Too many today are content to live on the handout from the efforts of another rather than work themselves. Paul records the fact that God expects us to work for our

sustenance. “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat...For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands...” (2 Thess. 3:10; Psm. 128:2).

These are things which we older women must instill in the minds of the younger women to restore God’s plan for the home and family.

Her Work In The Church

It is difficult to separate the work of woman in the home from the work she does for the church. It has long been my contention that the work done by woman in the home training her children to obey and respect God’s pattern is the greatest arena of her service to the church. If she is successful in the home training, it will carry over into the church. Her children who love and respect the Lord will more likely become Christians when reaching the age of accountability. If she has instilled a love of God’s Word, the children will be more apt to obey willingly the Lord’s commandments throughout life. Those grounded in truth at home will be more active in promoting the works of the church in adulthood.

Through her teaching God’s truths she has opportunity to train future elders, deacons, preachers and qualified wives of these men. The wife either enhances or hinders the work of such men and the home training largely determines which it will be. Her work teaching in the home is vital to strengthening the church, thus the lengthy discussion of the specifics the older woman is to pass along.

Though she is restricted from publicly teaching men, even in a mixed class setting, she is to teach. And be assured that no man, be he elder or preacher, has authority to place her in position to teach a class where men are in attendance. The Bible plainly says:

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence...Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34).

Christians are commanded to teach others “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). There is no indication that man only may fulfill this command. Woman may teach as well, within the framework God has designed for her. Many a missionary wife has done a tremendous work for God by teaching other women and children.

But woman does not have to go to a foreign country to teach. She performs a valuable service by teaching women and children at her home congregation. She may teach neighborhood children and/or their mothers. She may teach women co-workers. She may teach the women inmates at the local jail as the Ripley women are doing so diligently. This is a rewarding work not often undertaken.

There are many behind-the-scenes tasks which women may do which assure the success of a given program. Though we may wish for a list of tasks for women, we really need to have the attitude of being willing to do any task which needs to be done. Remember that preparing the Lord’s Supper and washing the baptismal clothes are important tasks, too.

The Older Woman’s Relationship To The Younger Woman

Not every young wife and mother lives within easy access to her mother. This is a fact that elders and church members need to realize, especially regarding the preacher’s wife. Many congregations plan a myriad of activities expecting the bulk of the planning and organization to be done by her.

When small children are involved it can be expensive to hire a sitter four to five days out of seven! More important than that, it is not fair to her or the children to expect her to leave them so much. God gave them to her care. Let her be mother to them. This is true of any mother with small children.

This is where the older woman can be of invaluable service. We older women would do well to remember how difficult it was when our own children were young, especially when they were ill. Rather than being critical when the young mother cannot fulfill unrealistic expectations, why not become a special friend and mentor to her? Especially when she lives miles from family, she may feel isolated and alone and in need of someone who can help her through those difficult times which are inevitable.

When I was a young preacher's wife we lived hundreds of miles from any family. When our first child was born, my mother was recovering from her first cancer surgery. The day we came home from the hospital an older lady came to our home and announced that she would like to be our surrogate grandmother. Though she is now deceased, words cannot adequately describe the love and deep appreciation our family felt for her. She indeed became a member of the family and I felt I could go to her for sage advice at any time. Other ladies stepped forward as physical sisters, helping whenever needed. Life was made much easier because of their loving assistance. You, too, can make life easier for a young wife and/or mother.

Many is the time that the younger woman feels the need to seek advice from one who has already been there. Questions arise from time to time which need an answer from one who respects God's order for home and family. Such mentoring can be invaluable. Ideally, by the time we reach those "golden" years we have learned how to maneuver through the bumps and valleys of life and you can assure those younger that these, too, shall pass.

Just because the years have added a few gray hairs, and those new aches and pains, does not mean our work for the Lord is over. God is not through with us yet! So, leave that rocking chair and get back into life. There is much work yet for you to do. "The aged women...that they may teach the young women...that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit. 2:3-5).

God's Seasons

Winter, Summer, Spring and Fall,
The Lord our God has made them all.

Spring brings things so fresh and new,
The grass so green, the sky so blue.

Summer comes when spring is o'er,
When things can grow for us to store.

Fall brings beauty all its own,
A gift from God to us on loan.

Winter comes to end the year,
A time to strengthen bonds so dear.

In life there are the seasons four,
Each one sweeter than that before.

So live each one that He has given
To step-by-step go toward God's heaven.

Don't waste a one, know no regret,
until He calls, we're not through yet!

Yes, Winter's here and we can see
It's all God's plan for you and me.

So stay involved in His great work.
Do all you can and never shirk.

When that call comes be ready to go,
That the joys of heaven we can know.

Irene C. Taylor May 9, 2001

Endnotes

1 All Scripture is taken from the King James Version.

2 Victoria Neufeldt, Webster's New World College Dictionary, Third Edition, (New York, MacMillan), p. 392.

3 Ibid., p. 237.

4 Ibid., p. 237.

5 James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D, **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible, Greek Dictionary**, (Nashville, New York, Abingdon Press), p. 51.

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