

Answering The Error



Hosted by the
Southaven Church of Christ
Southaven, Mississippi

Don Blackwell
Lectureship Director

Copyright © 2020
ISBN 1-000000-00-0

Southaven Church of Christ
POWER Publications

This book was printed in the United States of America
by

Sain Publications
Pulaski, TN 38478
(931) 363-6905

Preface

XXXX

Table Of Contents

Answering The Error

1. The Sinner's Prayer	9
Robert Jefferies	
2. The Thief On The Cross	27
Don Blackwell	
3. Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage Errors	43
B. J. Clarke	
4. Lord's Supper Errors	63
Mike Hixson	
5. Women As Elders/Preachers/Teachers	79
Bobby Liddell	
6. Hell Is Not Eternal	91
Greg Dismuke	
7. The 7 th Day Adventist: Worshipping On Saturday..	133
Gary Hampton	
8. Mormonism	147
Bruce Hatcher	
9. Church Discipline Errors	161
Eric Owens	
10. Theistic Evolution: God Created The Earth's Creatures Over Millions Of Years	175
Caleb Colley	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

11. Musical Confusion: Instruments, Praise Teams, Beat Boxing, Etc.....	195
Wayne Rodgers	
12. Born A Sinner	209
Chris Perry	
13. The Masonic Lodge	241
Jack Honeycutt	
14. The Jehovah's Witnesses	289
Trent Key	
15. The Bible Is Incomplete, Missing Books, The Apocrypha	305
Cliff Goodwin	
16. Baptism Is Not For The Remission Of Sins.....	329
Westley Hazel	
17. Non-Institutionalism: Binding Where God Has Not Bound	341
Steve Higginbotham	
18. Premillennialism: Mark Of The Beast, Anti-Christ, 1,000 Year Reign.....	361
Billy Bland	
19. The Deity Of Christ	397
Clifton Angel	
20. The Baptist.....	407
Scott Cain	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

21. Miracles Occur Every Day.....	427
John DeBerry	
22. Once Saved, Always Saved.....	455
Mark Reynolds	
23. Saved By Faith Alone.....	467
Brian Giselbach	
24. The Bible Forbids Drunkenness, Not Drinking.....	475
Bill Irby	
25. Catholicism.....	515
Adam Evans	
26. Pentecostalism.....	521
Philip Davis	
27. There Are Sincere, Devout Christians In Denominations.....	533
Robert R. Taylor, Jr.	
 WOMEN'S CLASSES	
28. Women Need Deep Bible Study Too	549
Sheila Butt	
29. Ways A Young Woman Can Help Grow The Church.....	567
Cindy Rodgers	
30. Being Married To A Non-Christian Husband	585
Melissa Cain	
31. The Viruous Woman Of 2020	599
Rebecca Davis	

The Sinner's Prayer

Robert Jefferies



Robert Jefferies is a native of Memphis, Tennessee. He is married to the former Blair McCall, also of Memphis. They have three children: Aylin, Hilton and Weston. Robert served as minister for the Smyrna congregation in McMinnville, Tennessee from 2002-2007. He also taught Bible and coached high school basketball and baseball for Boyd Christian School. Since 2007 he has served as one of the ministers for the Southaven Church of Christ.

Year in and year out, my love and affection for the Southaven congregation grows stronger. We have shared many laughs and shed many tears together through the years (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26). It is truly an honor and privilege to serve as one of her ministers. This congregation continues to bless not only me, but my family, on a daily basis. It is my prayer that our work together will continue to be fruitful in the eyes of the Lord.

Have you ever been to a restaurant, hospital waiting room, or even visited a public restroom and you saw a religious tract that had been left behind? Have you ever picked it up and perused it? If so, one will probably read things about sin, a Savior, the cross, and salvation. Inevitably, at the close of many of these tracts, there is a call for the reader to say "The Sinner's Prayer."

Or, what if you were to ask someone in the religious world today, “What Must I Do To Be Saved?” you may hear something like, “Just say, ‘The Sinner’s Prayer.’” Through the years there have been numerous versions of the prayer. Perhaps one of the most popular versions is as follows, “Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior, Amen” (Wikipedia).

A few years ago, there was a very interesting picture that was floating around social media. On this picture there was a quote from David Platt, the President of the Southern Baptist International Missions Board. Here is the quote, “Should it concern us that the Bible never calls us to ask Jesus into our hearts? Should it concern us that the Bible never mentions a superstitious sinner’s prayer and yet that is exactly what we have sold to so many as salvation” (*azquotes*). Mr. Platt began publicly teaching this in 2012. Unfortunately, he does not preach the Biblical plan of salvation.

For this lecture, we are going to explore the teaching of the Sinner’s Prayer in light of what the Scriptures teach. The following questions will be examined. 1) What Is The History Of The Sinner’s Prayer? 2) Where Can I Find The Sinner’s Prayer In The Bible And What Bible Passages Are Used To Support It? 3) What Is Wrong With The Sinner’s Prayer?

What Is The History Of The Sinner's Prayer?

It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact date in history when this teaching started. Some have suggested that it began in some form or another during the early days of the Protestant Reformation (Jackson). This movement started with Martin Luther and his 95 Theses in 1517 and lasted until 1648. This movement was a reaction to the teaching of Roman Catholicism that one could be justified by works of merit. As a reaction, many Protestants would swing to the other end of the pendulum and contend that one was simply justified by faith. It is believed that during this period a form of the prayer began to be practiced. Then there are others that contend that it started during the 1700s (*Wikipedia*). One article said, "it was invented as a quick and easy way to save people" (*Biblestudy.org*).

When considering the history of the sinner's prayer, an article entitled "The Sinner's Prayer: A Brief History Of A Novel Practice," mentioned three names that made the teaching very prominent. 1) D.L. Moody. By the late 1800s it was a standard technique that was used at the close of his sermons requesting that his listeners "accept Christ as one's personal Savior" by saying the Sinner's Prayer. 2) Billy Sunday. Mr. Sunday was a prominent denominational preacher that followed D.L. Moody in the early 1900s. At the end of his sermons, he would extend a salvation call this way. Sometimes it would be by prayer. At other times, he would instruct his listeners to walk down the aisle to where he was standing and one would be saved. Then there would be times that he

would request his listeners to publicly shake his hand saying they would follow Christ. 3) Billy Graham. This is perhaps the individual that made this teaching the most popular with his crusades, especially in the 20th century. In the 1950s, crusade counselors were using the Sinner's Prayer to save people and accept Jesus to those who would call in to the program. The hope was for those calling in to be able to have the crusade experience from their home (www.disciplestoday.org).

Where Can One Find The Sinner's Prayer In The Bible And What Bible Passages Are Used To Support It?

In short, **nowhere**. One can search the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and will not find one single Scripture of a sinner praying and being forgiven of sin or saved from sin. Consider the quote from David Platt once again, "Should it concern us that the Bible never calls us to ask Jesus into our hearts? Should it concern us that the Bible never mentions a superstitious sinner's prayer and yet that is exactly what we have sold to so many as salvation." Another interesting notation, Wikipedia in their online encyclopedia even says that the sinner's prayer cannot be found in the Scriptures and has troubled many.

Those that defend the use of the Sinner's Prayer, generally refer to Acts 2:21 where Luke records the words Peter spoke at Pentecost, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). The Apostle Paul recorded those same words in writing to the Romans,

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). Peter is quoting from Joel (Acts 2:16), and Paul is quoting Peter’s sermon from Acts 2. The phrase “whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” should be combined with the previous two verses that Paul wrote to the Romans and look at the whole big picture. “For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Rom. 10:11-12). The Apostle Paul wanted the Jews to understand that God wanted all men to be saved. Salvation would be offered to all based upon the same terms. From what were they being saved? They were be delivered or rescued from the power, pollutions, and presence of sin in their lives. There is no questioning that one is to call on the Lord to be saved. The misunderstanding is around “how”? What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? How does one do this? Some would immediately suggest the Sinner’s Prayer. It is important to understand that confession is more than mental ascent or acknowledging verbally that Jesus is Lord and Christ. Jesus spoke the following words, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records these words from Jesus, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21) (Roberts 749-additional Scripture references). If it is not a simple confession or prayer acknowledging Christ, what does

it mean to call on the name of the Lord? At the end of Peter's sermon when he references calling on the name of the Lord, a very important question was asked. "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). Now, this would have been a golden opportunity to tell his listeners to pray the "Sinner's Prayer." However, he tells them something different. Notice very carefully Peter's inspired answer. "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). The call was fulfilled when those listeners submitted to the terms of redemption that was announced at the conclusion of the sermon. In addition to those thoughts, one should also connect Acts 22:16 with Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13. "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 doer, not the sayer is accepted of God. Luke is recording for us the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. If ever there was an individual who would have been told to pray for salvation, surely it would have been him. After all that is what Saul was doing before he was told to go into the city (Acts 9:9-11). Here was another golden opportunity for prayer.

Another passage that defenders of the Sinner's Prayer like to use is 1 John 1:9 where John records these words, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Here John is writing

to those who are Christians. They were not told to be baptized again. No, this time they were told to confess their sins and they would be cleansed as part of God's second law of pardon.

In addition to these thoughts, may I suggest two other pieces of information for your consideration. 1) Doug Burleson (director of the Freed Hardeman University Bible Lectureship and Bible Professor) stated on one occasion that while he was going to school to get his doctoral degree at New Orleans Seminary, he sat in a Greek class and heard his teachers say, "the church of Christ have Acts 2:38 correct." Doug asked the professor if he could quote him on that, his reply, "not until you graduate!" 2) Billy Graham authored a book in 1977 entitled, *How To Be Born Again*. Throughout this book, he uses a number of Scriptures, however, he completely omits Acts 2. The chapter that records the history of the birth of the church. The history of three thousand souls converted to Christ, yet not a single reference to it. He contends the Sinner's Prayer is what a person is to do to be saved.

What Is Wrong With Saying The Sinner's Prayer?

1) It is foreign to the Scriptures. 2) There is no Bible authority for it. 3) The Hebrews writer did not say to pray, but to obey. "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). 4) It violates the form of doctrine that had been delivered by the Apostles. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey,

his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness... 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. 6:16-18; 3-4). 5) It is not found in the Great Commission given by Jesus. Consider Matthew's account, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mat. 28:19). Consider Mark's account, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

For the remainder of the manuscript, this writer would like to share with you several Bible passages and syllogisms that are used to refute the sinner's prayer. A syllogism is a form of reasoning from which a conclusion is drawn from two given or assumed propositions. Several years ago, Jason Roberts, delivered some of the best material on this subject. The following material is taken from his manuscript (Roberts 741-745).

"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:16-17).

Major Premise: The words which our Lord spoke during His earthly ministry were divine in origin.

Minor Premise: The Lord never spoke about the Sinner's Prayer during His earthly ministry.

Conclusion: The Sinner's Prayer is not divine in origin.

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

Major Premise: Jesus came to earth to do the will of His Father in Heaven.

Minor Premise: Jesus never mentioned the Sinner's Prayer while on earth.

Conclusion: The Sinner's Prayer is not part of the will of the Father.

“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” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Major Premise: All Scripture is inspired of God.

Minor Premise: The Bible does not mention the Sinner's Prayer.

Conclusion: The Sinner's Prayer is not part of inspiration.

“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 Peter 1:3).

Major Premise: God has given us through His Word all things needed for life and godliness.

Minor Premise: The Sinner's Prayer is not found in the Word of God.

Conclusion: The Sinner's Prayer does not pertain to life and godliness.

"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 Peter 4:11).

Major Premise: Men are commanded to speak as the oracles of God.

Minor Premise: The Sinner's Prayer never spoken of in the Scriptures.

Conclusion: The Sinner's Prayer is not part of the oracles of God.

"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" (Rev. 22:18).

Major Premise: The condemnation of God rests upon those that add to the Word.

Minor Premise: The Sinner's Prayer is an addition to the Word of God.

Conclusion: The condemnation of God rests upon those who advocate and pray the Sinner's Prayer.

Conclusion

A person can search the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and never once will they find the Sinner's Prayer. An individual can explore cover to cover and they will not find one example of an individual praying to God for salvation from sin. Therefore, an honest Bible student must conclude that the Sinner's Prayer is a product of man and not a product of Heaven.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinner%27s_prayer
[https://www.azquotes.com/author/19111-David_Platt/
tag/prayer](https://www.azquotes.com/author/19111-David_Platt/tag/prayer)
[https://www.disciplestoday.org/bible-study/teacher-s-
corner/item-8589-teacher-s-corner-the-sinner-s-
prayer-a-brief-history-of-a-novel-practice](https://www.disciplestoday.org/bible-study/teacher-s-corner/item-8589-teacher-s-corner-the-sinner-s-prayer-a-brief-history-of-a-novel-practice)
Roberts. Jason R. *Sin and Salvation, Vol. 2*. Pulaski:
Sain Publications, 2004. Print
[https://www.biblestudyguide.org/articles/prayer-
sinners-prayer/sinners-prayer.htm](https://www.biblestudyguide.org/articles/prayer-sinners-prayer/sinners-prayer.htm)

THE SINNER'S PRAYER

The Thief On The Cross

Don Blackwell



Don Blackwell was born in Charleston, South Carolina. He grew up attending the North Charleston church of Christ where he obeyed the gospel in 1983. In 1991, he married Sheri Shepard. Don and Sheri have three children, Macy (married to Lee Roland), Lauren (married to Casey Cella) and Brandon. Don is a veteran of the United Air Force

where he worked in AF Intelligence as an Imagery Interpreter. In 1994, he separated from active duty military service and moved to Memphis, Tennessee to attend the Memphis School of Preaching. Since his graduation in 1996, he has done local work in Bankston, Alabama, Statesville, North Carolina and North Charleston, SC. Don holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from Southern Christian University and a Master of Arts from Liberty University. He has made overseas mission trips to Australia, Germany, Africa and India. Don has worked with the Gospel Broadcasting Network since its inception and has served as the executive director since 2010. In addition to his work with GBN, Don preaches for the Southaven church of Christ and serves on the board of directors for World Video Bible School. He is the host of the video series *The Truth About* and the author of the book, *The Truth About Moral Issues*.

I recently received a phone call from a woman who had watched a video on the necessity of baptism for salvation. It was obvious within the first thirty seconds of the call that she was angry. She almost instantly went on the attack, saying, “You stated in your video that a person must be baptized in order to be saved, but you obviously forgot about the thief who hung next to Jesus on the cross. He was saved, and he wasn’t baptized.”

A few weeks later, I was involved in a Bible study with a man who was a member of a denomination. As we discussed what a person must do to be saved, the conversation naturally came to Mark 16:16 - “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” I asked the gentleman, “In light of what Jesus said, do you believe that a person must believe and be baptized in order to be saved?” (*Holy Bible*). After a long pause he responded, “Well, baptism obviously is not necessary because the thief on the cross was not baptized, and yet Jesus said he would be in Paradise.”

Those in the religious world who hold to the faith-only doctrine have used the account of the thief on the cross to shoot down the idea that obedience is necessary to be saved. After all, if the thief could be saved without being baptized, then why couldn't anyone be saved without baptism? Are those who hold to the faith-only doctrine correct when they argue that this account proves that baptism is not necessary for salvation? Or is the thief somehow an exception to the rule? Before we answer these questions, let's study the biblical account of the thief on the cross.

The Biblical Account Of The Thief

Luke 23 tells us that according to Pilate's order, Christ was led away to be crucified. Verse 32 says, “And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.” The word malefactor refers to an evil-doer; Matthew and Mark call them robbers and thieves. Some have speculated that these were comrades

of Barabbas, but the Bible doesn't specify. Though their names are not even given, they have been the subject of much discussion and controversy. One of these men distinguished himself to the point that he is commonly referred to as "the thief" on the cross.

The Original Attitude Of The Thieves

Matthew 27:38 begins, "Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left." This verse is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12, which prophesied that Christ would be numbered with the transgressors. Verse 39 continues,

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said He saved other; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

These mockers took the fact that Jesus didn't come down from the cross as proof that He was an imposter."

Verse 44, however, is particularly shocking: "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." The wording of the King James here is peculiar to the modern reader. The New King James reads, "Even the robbers who were crucified with Him

reviled Him with the same thing.” As shocking as it may sound, the thieves who were being put to death next to Jesus were also mocking Him and hurling the same insults as the wicked Jews who stood watching. It is astounding that someone hanging on a cross hours from death could engage in such wickedness! Pay special attention to the fact that the text says that the “thieves” engaged in this. Both of these criminals mocked and ridiculed Jesus.

The Change In The Thief

Luke 23:33 says, “And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left...And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar.” Verse 39 continues, “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” The hardness of some people is truly amazing. Several years ago, there was a court trial for a racial hate crime. A couple of white men dragged a black man behind their truck until he died. At the sentencing, the men hissed at the family of the man they killed. Hearts so hard are difficult to fathom. The thieves who hung beside the Lord were literally hours from death, but we don’t find them sorrowing for the lives that they had led that brought them to this point. We don’t find them praying or looking for hope. Instead we find them bad-mouthing

the innocent and railing against the Son of God.

A change occurs in verse 40. Apparently at some point during the day, one of the thieves had a change of heart. When facing death, many people look at their lives with a soberness that they have never had before. The reality of death can bring a proud man to his knees. Notice the words of the penitent thief to the other: “But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” One wonders what the other thief said that was so over-the-top that it caused this one to turn and rebuke him. With indignation he says, “Don’t you have any fear of God? We are about to die and look what you’re saying!” In verse 41 he adds, “We received the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.” In essence—we’re getting what we deserve, but this man is innocent.

Verse 42 says, “And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” In this man’s request, we can see both his faith and his repentance. In the Lord’s response, we can see both his love and his mercy: “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” And so there stood on Calvary’s hill three crosses: the cross of rebellion, the cross of repentance, and the cross of redemption. Imagine the peace of mind that must have come from the words of Jesus. Facing death is terrifying. Facing death as a thief would have to be even more so, as a man ponders the afterlife and the choices that brought him to be hanging on a cross, condemned to die as a criminal of the state. Within hours, the thief would have his legs broken and slip from

this world to open his eyes to see angels carrying him to Abraham's bosom. Before the day was over, he'd join Lazarus of Luke 16 and all of the faithful of Hebrews 11. Jesus promised him that He'd be there also. It's difficult to imagine the transition from the cross, to immediately seeing the glory of angels, to being in the comforts of the Lord. The other thief would also breathe his last before the day was over, but he'd open his eyes in torment and fire. Imagine the shock for a man who, minutes before, was mocking the Son of God. The realization that he just rejected his only hope of redemption and will now spend all eternity burning in fire is breathtaking to even consider.

The Misuse Of The Story

The account of the thief on the cross is a beautiful story of redemption, but it is also one of the most misused stories in all of the Bible. It is commonly taught in the denominational world that men today can be saved just like the thief on the cross. Sometimes while teaching someone the gospel plan of salvation, a man will be taught that he must hear the gospel in order to be saved, and he'll agree. Then he'll be taught that he must then believe the gospel. He will say, "Oh yes, a person must believe." Third, the teacher will state that a person must repent in order to be saved. The response will be "Absolutely, a man must repent!" Fourth, it is pointed out that a person must confess Christ," which is done without hesitation. But when reaching the fifth and final step, baptism—the step which actually places a man into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27), and washes

him from his sins (Acts 2:38, Rom. 6:3-4), the person being taught will begin to make objections. It is at this point that the question is often raised, “What about the thief on the cross?” The teacher will hear statements such as, “I want to be saved like the thief on the cross.” “He wasn’t baptized, and so I don’t need to be either.” “If he can be saved without baptism, so can I.” These are legitimate questions that are often voiced by honest individuals. Well, what about the thief on the cross? Does he discredit the necessity of baptism to salvation?

Answering The Error

In 2020, we live in a world of political correctness where it is considered offensive to suggest that the belief of another individual is wrong. It is certainly not our objective to offend. Quite to the contrary, our goal is to enlighten and share information that is able to make one wise unto salvation. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). This passage very clearly teaches that in order to be saved, a person must do two things—believe and be baptized. Romans 6:23 teaches us that “the wages of sin is death.” Sin causes a man to be lost, but Acts 2:38 states that baptism brings “remission of sin.” The Apostle Peter clearly says that baptism saves us (I Pet. 3:21). In light of these and many other passages that teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, what about the objection that the thief on the cross was not baptized and yet he was saved? Please give honest consideration to the following:

#1 – There is No Proof that the Thief was Not Baptized

To the one who insists that the thief was not baptized, we ask the following questions: What did the thief steal? The answer is no one knows. Was the thief married? We have no idea. Did the thief have any children? Your guess is as good a mine. Why don't we know the answer to these questions? Obviously, we don't know because the Bible does not tell us. Now, to the question at hand. Was the thief baptized? Again, we are completely devoid of any information with which to answer this question. At that point in time, Christ had not yet instituted new testament baptism, but the baptism of John the Baptist was in effect. Matthew 3 indicates that masses of people were going out to hear John preach: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:1-2). It is particularly interesting that Matthew says that John was preaching about the kingdom. Connect that to Luke 23:42 which tells us that the thief asks Jesus about the kingdom. His exact words were, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." How did the thief know about the kingdom? If the thief knew about the kingdom that John preached, isn't it entirely possible that he also knew of the baptism that John preached? Matthew further states, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mat. 3:5-6). People from Jerusalem, Judea, and all the regions around the Jordan River were being baptized of John. Who's to say that the thief wasn't among that number? To the

person who argues that the thief was not baptized, it is incumbent upon him to prove it, which cannot be done (Blackwell).

#2 – The Thief Lived and Died Under the Old Testament System

Of the utmost importance when studying the thief on the cross is to consider under which law he lived, and the fact is that he lived and died under the Mosaic system. At the point when the thief turned to Christ in repentance, Christ had not yet even given the Great Commission. It was not until after his resurrection that Christ gathered His apostles together and commanded, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15-16). Since the incident with the thief on the cross took place prior to the Great Commission, the baptism commanded there (Mark 16:16) could not possibly have applied to the thief.

Consider that the New Testament teaches us that when an individual is baptized into Christ, he is baptized into his death (Rom. 6:3). The next verse, Romans 6:4, tells us that we are buried with Christ by baptism into death. With those facts established, how could Christ’s baptism have any application to the thief? He could not have been baptized into Christ’s death, as Christ had not yet died. He could not have been buried with Christ in baptism since Christ had not yet been buried.

Our point is that the thief lived and died before the New Testament gospel came into effect, therefore how the thief was saved has no application to us today. What

Jesus said to the thief on the cross with regards to salvation is no more relevant to us than what he said to anyone else prior to the implementation of the gospel system.

It is interesting, however, that people always want to be saved like the thief on the cross. Why not someone else? Why not the rich young ruler? Jesus told him that in order to inherit eternal life, he needed to go sell all that he had and give to the poor. I've never heard anyone say, "I want to be saved the way Christ told the rich young ruler to be saved." In reality, however, one is just as relevant as the other. Perhaps this illustration will help us to understand the thief's situation. Suppose someone today said, "I've decided that I'm not going to pay my federal income taxes because I've learned that George Washington did not pay income taxes, and if George Washington, the father of our country, lived and died without paying federal income taxes, I'm not going to pay them either." While it is true that George Washington did not pay federal income taxes, the reason for that is he lived and died many years before the income tax laws even existed. President Washington's situation has no bearing on me because I live under different laws. The same thing is true with regard to the thief on the cross. The plan of salvation that applies to us today had not yet gone into effect when the thief lived.

#3 – Christ had the Power to Speak Men's Sins Forgiven While He Was on the Earth

In Mark chapter 2, while Jesus was in the city of Capernaum, four men came to him carrying their

friend who was paralyzed. When they arrived at the house where Jesus was, there was such a crowd of people around Him that they couldn't get near. Mark says, "And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:4-7). Now, pay special attention to verse 10. Jesus said, "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house."

Why did Jesus heal the paralyzed man? He did so in order to prove that He had the power to forgive sins. Jesus could say the words and the man's sins would be forgiven! In Luke 7:48, Jesus does it again. He said to the woman who washed His feet with her tears, "Thy sins are forgiven." In Luke 23, He told the thief, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." It is important for us to notice that Jesus said that He had this power upon the earth. Again, Mark 2:10 states, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on the earth to forgive sins." When Jesus was on this earth, He sometimes chose to speak men's sins forgiven. He doesn't work this way today. Why not? Hebrews 9:16-17 explains, "For where a testament is, there must also be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men

are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” This passage teaches us that prior to Christ’s death, His will or testament was not in effect, for a testament is of no strength while the testator lives, but after Christ’s death, His will (His new testament) went into effect, for a testament is of force after men are dead.

The simple application of these principles is that before Christ’s death, He could say to the woman who washed His feet, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” or to the thief, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” But after Jesus’ death, (after his testament went into effect), the only way for a man to be saved is according to the terms of His testament. Consider this illustration. Let’s say that Sam’s dad has a lot of money. While Sam’s dad is living, he decides to give Sam some of his money. He has every right to do that. What if he wants to give some of his money to Sam’s brother? He also has the right to do that. What if he wants to give money to a stranger on the street? It’s his money. He can give it to whomever he chooses. But what about after Sam’s dad dies? How could anyone have access to his money after his death? After his death, the only way to get his money would be according to the terms of his will. Why? Because a testament is of force after men are dead.

What About Us Today?

If I want to be saved today, what do I need to do? The answer is not going to be found in the example of Moses, Elijah, the rich young ruler, or even the thief on the cross. Today, what I must do to be saved

is found in the new testament of Christ. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” If a person today wants an example of how to be saved, the Bible has given us plenty of them. The New Testament has many examples of men and women who obeyed the gospel under the same dispensation in which we live. Today you can be saved the same way the Jews at Pentecost were, the same way the Ethiopian Eunuch was, the same the Philippian jailer, Lydia, and Paul the Apostle were—and that is through obedience to the gospel of Christ. It teaches that a person must hear the gospel (Rom. 10:14). He must believe it (Mark 16:16, John 8:24, Acts 16:31). He must repent of his sins (Acts 17:30, Acts 2:38). He must confess his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and finally he must be baptized for the remission of his sins (Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38, I Pet. 3:20-21).

Works Cited

- Blackwell, Don. *The Thief on the Cross*. Maxwell, TX: World Video Bible School, 2016.
- “Holy Bible.” *King James Version with Strong’s Numbers* (KJVS). OakTree Software, Inc., n.d.

Marriage, Divorce And Remarriage Errors

B. J. Clarke



Bradley Joseph (B.J.) Clarke was born in Canton, Illinois, the son of Ted and Sherrie Clarke. His father is also a Gospel preacher and educator of preachers. B. J. married the former Tamela (Tish) Hall. He earned a BS and an MA in New Testament Text from Freed-Hardeman University. He is also an honorary alumnus of the Memphis School of Preaching. B. J. delivered his first sermon at age 9. He began full-time preaching in 1983 and has preached in numerous youth rallies, gospel meetings, and lectureships. He has done local work in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas. For 16 ½ years, he served as a preacher for the Southaven congregation in Southaven, MS. During that time, he edited the *POWER* Magazine, directed the annual *POWER* lectureship, and edited the annual lectureship book. He was a member of the adjunct faculty of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions from 1989-1990. Currently, he serves as the Director of the Memphis School of Preaching. He is also the Director of FOUNDATIONS.

Introduction

It is impossible to know what the errors are in the realm of marriage, divorce, and remarriage unless we first know what the truth is about marriage, divorce and remarriage. So, what is the simple truth about marriage, divorce and remarriage? This raises the crucial issue of authority. Who has the authority to answer this question? Who gets to decide what truth is when

it comes to this subject, or any subject, for that matter? There are many different views about marriage, divorce and remarriage. Are all of these views equally valid? If not, why not? Furthermore, if not all views are equally valid, how may we determine which view is valid?

If atheistic evolution is true, then there is no definitive explanation for the origin of marriage, much less any rules concerning it, or controlling it. But if there is a universal Creator, and marriage belongs to Him, then, because He made it, He has right to control it, does He not? The views of this author, or “brother so and so,” do not determine the truth on these subjects. There is a God in Heaven, (Dan. 2:28) and He has spoken from heaven to man through the Bible. Psalm 33:4 affirms, “For the word of the Lord is right and all of his works are done in truth.” Also, the psalmist exclaims to God, “Thy law is the truth...All thy commandments are truth” (Psa. 119:142, 151). Likewise, in John 17:17, Jesus said, “Thy word is truth.” Accordingly, when it comes to the truth about marriage, divorce and remarriage, God’s Word has to be our one, and only, standard. The truth on this subject cannot be determined by the latest poll, or what the congregation wants, or what someone thinks the congregation wants.

Declaring The Truth

1. What is the simple truth about marriage?

The truth about marriage is clearly shown to us in the Book of Genesis. God had made everything, and everything He had made was good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), even very good (Gen. 1:31). The first thing

God declared not to be good was that man should be alone (Gen. 2:18). However, God took care of that by making Eve from Adam, and presenting her to Adam (Gen. 2:21-22). Adam received God's gift by saying, "this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23). The very next verse decrees that a man shall "leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). God's original design for marriage involved one male and one female. God did not bring two females to Adam and say, "Here are your wives." He did not bring a man to Adam and say, "Here is your help meet." The God of this universe, Who has every right to control it, made one woman, and brought her to one man. That is His design.

One does not have to read very far in the Bible before finding people willing to corrupt God's simple design for marriage. In Genesis 4:19, Lamech took to himself two wives, and thus the departures from God's design for marriage began. In Genesis chapter 6, the sons of God were looking at the daughters of men, saw that they were fair, and chose to them any wife they wanted; it was all about physical beauty and not about anything spiritual. The next thing you know the world became so corrupt that every imagination of the thought of man's heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Consequently, God had to destroy the world with the flood. It is not going too far to say that the downfall of society, which led to the world being destroyed by a flood, was accelerated by the human race not paying

attention to God's rules for marriage.

Even after the flood, there were departures from God's original design for marriage. When Esau was 40 years old, he took a couple of wives that were Hittites. How did that work for him and his family? The Bible records that these women were "a grief of mind" to Isaac and Rebecca, (Gen. 26:34-35). Consider also Deuteronomy 7, wherein God regulates the pool of eligible marriage partners for His people. It is interesting to observe that, upon receiving this revelation, the people did not argue that God had no right to tell them whom to marry and not to marry. They recognized that God had every right to regulate the marriage relationship. It belongs to Him, and thus He told His covenant people, regarding the nations round about them: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them: Thy daughter thou shalt not give to his son. Nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly" (Deut. 7:3-4). Note carefully that God not only regulated marriage, but also warned of serious consequences for those who chose to ignore His instructions.

What about our Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Did He change the truth on marriage because He lived in more modern times? Centuries had elapsed since the days of Adam and Eve; so, did Jesus modify the original design for marriage in order to adapt to the culture of His day? A conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees provides the answer. The Pharisees came to Jesus, and

“tempting Him” they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” (Matt. 19:3). Their question was specifically about divorce. They did not ask about remarriage. Jesus introduces the subject of remarriage later on in the discussion because those who divorce often choose to remarry. In response to the question about whether it was lawful to put away a wife for just any reason, Jesus asked a question of His own: “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 cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?’” (Mat. 19:4-5). The reference to “the beginning,” and the quotation from Genesis 2:24, proves that, centuries after creation, God’s original design for marriage was still authoritative. Jesus did not cite current cultural trends of His day and elevate them above Scripture. God’s law for marriage had not changed! Jesus said decisively, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mat. 19:6). The Pharisees replied, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” (Mat. 19:7). Jesus explained, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Mat. 19:8). The marriage law, that was given at the beginning, was just as true in Matthew 19 as it was in Genesis 2. Thus, the simple truth about marriage has been trans-generational. It has covered different covenants and ages of Bible history. It is not peculiar to one age of Bible history. It is a universal ordinance.

2. What is the simple truth about divorce? The simple truth is that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). He does not want it to occur. In fact, Mark's account records that, in the house, His disciples asked him again about what the Pharisees had asked him about earlier in the chapter. Jesus said unto them, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery against her" (Mark 10:11). There is something noticeably missing from Mark 10:11 that is present in Matthew 19:9. The exception clause, "except it be for fornication," is not included in Mark 10:11. Similarly, Luke's account reveals that Jesus told the Pharisees, "Whosoever puts away his wife and marries another committeth adultery and whoso marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18). Thus, conspicuously absent, from Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18, is the exception clause recorded in Matthew 19:9. What is going on here? Is Jesus contradicting himself? Not at all! Mark and Luke record the general rule, which is, namely, "The one who puts away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery against her." In other words, God's general rule is, "If you divorce and get remarried, you commit adultery." Are there any exceptions to this rule? There is one recorded exception: "except it be for fornication" (Mat. 19:9). When I was a student at Freed Hardeman, in the early 1980's, I loved to attend basketball games in Bader Gymnasium. There were little placards over the doors, entering the gym, that read "No Food or Drink in the Gym." However, one of the doors had another little placard, hanging right next to the one forbidding food

and drink in the gymnasium. That placard read, “Except During Ballgames.” The general rule was, “No Food or Drink in the Gymnasium.” Were there any exceptions to that rule? Yes, there was one stated exception: “Except During Ballgames.” Similarly, with reference to marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the general rule was, “Don’t divorce your mate, and then get then married again, and commit adultery on top of it.” Was there any exception to this general rule? There was one exception, and, actually, the exception to this rule was stated by our Lord much earlier in the Book of Matthew than in Matthew 19:9. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed a number of hearsay errors of His day. In fact, Jesus said six times, essentially, “Here is what you have heard people say, but here is what I am going to say to you.” On three of those six occasions, Jesus observed that, what they had heard, they had heard “of old time,” meaning, “This is something you’ve been hearing for a long, long time. But I’m going to tell you something else.” Now what had they been hearing about divorce? Jesus said, “It hath been said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement” (Mat. 5:31). Jesus quickly countered, “But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife”—now note the next phrase—“saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Mat. 5:32). How is it that one, who puts away his wife for a reason other than fornication, causes her to commit adultery? How could that possibly be? Well, if I put away my wife for a reason other than fornication, that

is not a scriptural reason, and, furthermore, she does not have an available husband anymore. She is going to be tempted to contract another relationship, which she has no scriptural right to do. If she does pursue another relationship, she will be committing adultery; however, by putting her away for a reason other than fornication, I put her in the position to seek another relationship, and thereby “causeth” her to become an adulterer if she does seek such. That is what the Bible teaches in this passage. God says, essentially, the simple truth about divorce is, “I don’t want you to do it. I don’t want you to do it except—and here is the only time you are permitted to do it—except it be for the cause of fornication.”

Some argue that such an interpretation cannot be what Jesus meant, on the grounds that it is too restrictive. However, the reaction of the disciples to what Jesus said is quite telling, is it not? His disciples say unto him, “if the case of the man be so with his wife, then it’s not good to marry” (Mat. 19:10). Essentially, the initial reaction of the apostles appears to have been, “If fornication is the only reason for which you could divorce, and subsequently remarry with divine approval, then it would be better not to get married than to be trapped in a marriage with only one way out.” It is also noteworthy that Jesus did not correct the disciples and say, “You obviously misunderstood me. Your strict interpretation of what I said is not at all what I meant to convey.” On the contrary, Jesus replied, “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their

mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Mat. 19:11–12).

Jesus knew that not everyone would accept His teaching on this matter. Some would refuse to receive it, but this did not cause Jesus to dilute the force of what He said. Jesus knew that it was not impossible to live a celibate life on earth. He spoke of eunuchs who were born that way, and some who were made that way by the force of men. Yet, He also mentioned the reality of some who "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." It is so important to emphasize that Jesus did not view the decision to remain celibate as an overreaction to His teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Rather, He concluded, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." In other words, "God's marriage law is fixed and firm on this matter, and some may not be willing to receive it, but for those who wish to get married, you must be willing to receive these Divine rules, and live thereby."

In my very first local work, an older brother in Christ came to my office, not long after I began working with the congregation. He explained to me that, while he was in his early twenties, he had made a tragic decision to cheat on his wife. His wife exercised her divine right to put him away for his fornication (Mat. 19:9). He said to me, "I lost my wife and I'm now in a position where I cannot scripturally remarry as long as I live." He had lived a single life for decades. He had essentially

made himself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake because he realized that to do otherwise would violate divine teaching. Some years later he died. From all that I knew about him, he appeared to die as a faithful child of God. If indeed he remained faithful till the day of his death, in the ways that God required of him in His Word, did He go to a place that is far better? Would he say today that living by God's marriage laws was surely worth it all? Indeed, the pleasure he has now far exceeds any earthly pleasure that an unscriptural marriage might have afforded him. Dear reader, would you rather have twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or perhaps even sixty or seventy years of unscriptural marital companionship, and lose your soul forever, or would you rather live faithfully to God, as a single individual, and enjoy the everlasting bliss of being with Jesus? The apostle Paul was capable of enjoying life, and serving God, without getting married. Indeed, it is possible to live faithfully for God and not get married. It is possible to choose not to get remarried unscripturally. Would it not be better to follow God's divine plan than to lose your soul forever in torment?

3. What is the simple truth about remarriage? The simple truth about remarriage is this: "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" (Mat. 19:9). The meaning of this passage is not complicated. The only thing that makes it appear to be complicated are the choices people make in violation of God's clear teaching, not the teaching itself. Guy N. Woods was a

favorite preacher of yesteryear. His words certainly are not the standard of authority, but his way with words often provided clear, concise, and simple explanations of the Word! In a sermon, that brother Woods preached near the end of his life, he told of how a couple came up to him and said, “Brother Woods, we have such respect for your years of study and scholarship and we have been in a real controversy about Matthew 19:9 and what it teaches about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Would you please give us your critical analysis of Matthew 19:9? After all your years of study, what do you think is the best and simplest explanation of that passage?” Brother Woods responded, “I will give you my analysis of the passage. The passage means, ‘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.’” The couple responded, “Brother Woods, I don’t think you understand what we are asking you to do. We know the words of the verse, but we want you to give us an exegesis of it. Can you please delve into the original language, and give us your exegesis, your commentary on Matthew 19:9?” Brother Woods answered, “Alright, here is my commentary on Matthew 19:9: ‘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.’” Frustrated by his approach, they tried once more to get him to explain the meaning of Matthew 19:9. Brother Woods wisely quoted it again, phrase by phrase, and then said, “The passage doesn’t need explaining as much

as it needs believing.” This is still true today!

Some view this rigid adherence to the words of the text as synonymous with being cold hearted and calloused. It is nothing of the kind. It is possible to adhere to the truth and still be compassionate. A desire to be compassionate is not a bad thing in and of itself. However, there is a danger that lurks in the vicinity of compassion, and that is the temptation to allow our emotions to override our reason. This possibility hit me with brute force years ago when I was working as a local preacher. A young couple began visiting our services. As I got to know them, we began to study the Bible. He was already a Christian, but she had never obeyed the gospel. After some studies together, he was restored, and she was baptized. They were on fire for the Lord. They never missed a service. The young woman actually quit her job at the fitness club where she worked because, as she put it, “The clothes they require me to wear there are so tight that I do not feel like Christian modesty would allow me to work there anymore under those circumstances.” During our Bible studies I became aware that she had been married before, but her current “husband” had not. When I asked her the circumstances about her divorce from her first husband, she explained that he traveled quite a bit and cheated on her. Ultimately, she said she divorced him because of his fornication.

Some months after I had baptized her, I preached a sermon one Sunday morning, in which I quoted Matthew 19:9. I did not comment on the passage because it was not the main subject of that particular sermon. I merely quoted it, and moved on to the next

main point. After services, the husband came up to me and said, “If what I just heard you preach in your sermon is true, I’m afraid I might be living in adultery.” I was taken aback by his comment, especially in view of what they had told me about her first husband cheating on her. I replied, “Well, I hope that’s not the case. Let’s sit down and talk about it.” I met with them that very afternoon. It was true that her husband had been unfaithful, but there was more to the story. While she was still married, and her husband was away on business, she, in her loneliness, began going to the public pool. It was there that she met the man who would become her 2nd husband. As they began to gaze at one another at the public pool, they both were attracted to one another. Although she was a married woman, and unaware at this point of any infidelity on the part of her husband, she and her newfound friend at the pool began to engage in intimate relations. She later discovered that her husband was also committing adultery. Ultimately, she and her first husband divorced. I gently, but firmly, explained that the Lord never envisioned Matthew 19:9 being used as a license by a guilty party to put away another equally guilty party. It is often argued that divorce dissolves the connection or the bond between the two parties, but gospel preachers in the past have wisely noted that some other handcuffs are involved in this relationship; the marriage relationship does not just tie us to one another—it also binds us to God, and to the rules God gave to govern the marriage relationship. Furthermore, to say that the guilty party can remarry, on the grounds that the marriage relationship has been dissolved, leads

to the preposterous position that the Lord rewards the guilty fornicator with the same exact status of eligibility as is granted to the innocent party. Who can believe it?

As I continued to study with this couple, they realized more and more the implications of the Scriptures concerning their right to be together. They seemed so perfect for each other. On my way home, a thought flashed through my mind: “This couple seems to be so in love, and so perfect for each other; there has got to be a way that they can stay together.” A moment later, the clear teaching of the Scriptures flashed through my mind: “For them to stay together on earth would separate them from God for eternity! If you really love them, you will not make them feel comfortable in their sins!”

When I got home that night, I walked in my house and my wife met me at the door. I just started crying. She said, “What is wrong?” I remember saying to her, “This must be how it starts for some preachers—please pray it doesn’t happen to me.” She asked, “What are you talking about?” Through my tears, I said, “I found out they don’t have a right to be married. I like them so much, and I want so much for them to be able to be together, but that would mean I have to ignore what the Bible plainly teaches. My emotions are competing with my reason. Please pray with me right now that I will never waver from the truth no matter how much I like the couple involved.” And so, we prayed!

After my outpouring of emotion, I went back to the Bible and studied it again, reminding myself that I am not authorized to make decisions about who has the right to stay together, and who does not. I am obligated

to follow the wisdom of one greater than I, smarter than I, more loving than I am. The words that Christ spoke will judge men in the last day (John 12:48). The judgment of God is according to truth (Rom. 2:2), and God's Word is truth (John 17:17). Hence, whatever it teaches about marriage, divorce and remarriage is the truth, and anything, or anyone, that disagrees with this Bible teaching is in error. Does this include my children? Absolutely so! If my children ever make a decision to get married and then violate these rules, I will love my children still. Yes, I will love my children still, but I will never, as God is my witness, allow myself to decide that suddenly the Bible is not as clear as I thought it once was on marriage, divorce and remarriage. It has oft been said that no man turns against reason until reason turns against him. This is certainly so regarding this subject. So many, who have reasoned so clearly about the Bible teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage in the past, suddenly pronounce the subject murky and confusing. What precipitated their dramatic shift in thinking on the subject? In case after case, it begins when a loved one has violated the clear teaching of the Scriptures and has thus become ineligible for remarriage. This, among other reasons, has led to a whole host of errors, which we shall now examine.

Defeating The Errors

The following is not exhaustive, but addresses some of the most popular departures from God's truth on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Entire volumes have been written to address these errors, but due to

limited space, we shall zero in on one or two arguments to answer these errors.

Error #1: There are so many different views on the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage, that we cannot know definitively what the truth is on these matters. This agnostic position claims that, because the truth is so elusive, we should not make these different views a matter of fellowship. We are told that we cannot really know the truth on this subject. At a congregation, in the Midwest, the eldership stood before the membership and said the following: “We have just returned from a seminar on the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage. After attending this seminar, and hearing all the different views presented by so many good brethren, we have decided, as an eldership, that we don’t have a firm position on the subject. And so, we will not ask any questions about your marriage, or your divorce, or your remarriage. If this subject is so murky that even good brethren cannot agree on it, then it must not be something that God expects us to really settle.”

Error #1 Answered: Let us reason together about this for a moment. Is it true or false that 1 Corinthians 6:9 teaches that adulterers shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Does the Bible say that or not? If adulterers shall not inherit the kingdom of God, then that makes this a salvation issue, and not merely a matter of opinion. Do you believe for one moment that Almighty God would make something a salvation issue and then fail to give us enough information to be able to figure out whether we are guilty of a sin that would damn our souls? The

God who wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), would never say, “Those of you who commit adultery are not going to make it to heaven. However, I didn’t give you enough information in the Bible to show you clearly whether you are an adulterer, so, you just have to hope for the best. Good luck to you!” What a blasphemous concept! Be assured that, if God said adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God, He gave us enough information in the Scriptures to determine whether we are an “adulterer.” The Bible is not muddy or murky on this subject; it is absolutely clear, and we must not back down from teaching the truth on it merely because some individuals have determined it to be too narrow a doctrine. We must be loving, but firm.

Error #2: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not a part of the New Testament and therefore the marriage laws that are taught in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John do not apply to New Testament Christians.

The argument is that anything Jesus said before He died on the cross cannot be a part of the New Testament, since a testament is not in force until after men are dead (Heb. 9:15-17). Thus, whatever Jesus said about marriage, divorce and remarriage before He died has to be a part of the Old Testament. Since we live after Jesus died, we live under the New Testament, and thus are not amenable to those things Jesus said before He died. Consequently, since Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:1-10; Mark 10:1-12, and Luke 16:18, all contain teaching that was given before Jesus died, these passages are Old Testament legislation, and thus do not govern those of us who live in the New Testament age.

Error #2 Answered: It is true that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, do record some events and teachings that took place prior to Jesus' death on the cross. However, forgotten is the fact that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were all written after the death of Christ on the cross, and after the establishment of His church/kingdom. Therefore, these books were authored in the New Testament age, and they were written to and for New Testament Christians. It is also interesting to observe the glaring inconsistency of some who take this position. They gladly dispense with Matthew 19:9, but advocate the teaching in Matthew 18:15-18, wherein Jesus gave legislation for what to do if your brother trespasses against you. Step one is that you go to him and him alone. If that does not work it out, you take two or three others to go with you, and if that does not settle it, you tell it to the church? Wait a minute! The church was not yet established in Matthew 18! So, does this mean we are not bound to follow the instructions of Matthew 18:15-18? We are told that Matthew is an Old Testament document, and thus, according to this argument, it does not govern us today. Yet, some of the very same advocates of this idea teach that the church ought to follow the pattern of Matthew 18:15-18. It is completely inconsistent to accept Matthew 18:15-18 as applicable to the New Testament church while at the same time rejecting everything as relevant today that Jesus taught about marriage, divorce and remarriage just a few paragraphs later! Matthew was written in the New Testament age, and although it records many events in the life of Jesus, which preceded the establishment of the

New Testament church, it also records some anticipatory legislation, given by Jesus, that would be binding in the New covenant age. For instance, John records that Jesus said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Can we bind John 3:5 on people today, yes or no? If you say no, then we cannot bind the necessity of being born again on men and women today. If you say yes, then how can you discard Matthew 19:9 and say it is not binding?

Error #3: Non-Christians are not amenable to the law of Christ anyway and thus they’re not accountable to his marriage laws. This argument allows for Matthew 19:9, and other passages, to be a part of the New Testament, but argues that only New Testament Christians are amenable to these New Testament laws. Non-Christians are said to be exempt from New Testament laws on marriage, divorce and remarriage until they become New Testament Christians, at which time they become accountable to these laws.

Error #3 Answered: If non-Christians are not amenable to the law of Christ, how do they become sinners? The Bible says that sin is a transgression of what? Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). If I am not amenable to the law of Christ then how, pray tell, would I become a sinner and violate a law to which I am not even amenable? On the other hand, if I have violated that law then I am accountable to it. How could the Corinthians could have been guilty of the sins Paul indicts them for in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (idolaters, effeminate, drunkards, revilers, extortioners,

etc.) if they were not accountable to the law of Christ? In truth, they were accountable to the law of Christ and they needed the forgiveness that only comes through Christ. The plan of salvation for the alien sinner is found in the law of Christ, and thus the alien sinner is amenable to the law of Christ.

Error #4: Baptism washes away sins; therefore, the sin of adultery I committed in the past is a sin that has been washed away, and, therefore, I am no longer an adulterer because that sin was washed away.

Error #4 Answered: First of all, the question should be asked: is baptism the only requirement for remission of sins, yes or no? According to Acts 2:38, baptism is not the only requirement to wash away sins. Rather, Peter said in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.” In order to receive remission of sins, I must repent. The word repent requires a turning from sin. Thus, if I am guilty of the sin of adultery, I cannot be saved unless I am willing to quit committing adultery. If I refuse to quit committing adultery, then I have not truly repented. If I have not truly repented, I cannot receive remission of sins (Acts 2:38)!

Some act as if baptism is the only command that matters in washing away one’s sins. However, there are other equally binding requirements. Jesus said, “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). If someone comes forward and says, “I do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but I would like to be baptized to wash away my sins,” should we baptize them? Can we jettison the requirement for believing as

long as they desire to be immersed for the remission of sins? Absolutely not! Likewise, Acts 2:38 does not say merely, “Be baptized for the remission of sins.” It says, “Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.” Consequently, if someone comes forward and says, “I’m living in an adulterous marriage. I don’t plan to leave this sinful relationship, but I would like to be baptized and have my sins washed away,” would it be right to baptize them under such circumstances? While it is true that all sins can be washed away, it is not true that baptism is the only requirement for washing sins away.

Consider a thief who has embezzled \$25,000 from his company. If someone studies the Bible with him and teaches him the plan of salvation, will baptism be the only step he needs to learn? Will he need to be taught the first part of Acts 2:38 also, the part that requires repentance? Suppose, after learning that baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16), he says, “According to the Bible, baptism washes away all sins; so, if I am baptized it will wash away my sin of being a thief. Furthermore, since I stole that money before I was baptized, and the sin of stealing that money has been washed away, therefore I can keep the money.” Is this sound reasoning? If Farmer John steals Farmer Joe’s cow, and is later baptized, may he keep the cow on the technicality that he stole it before he became a Christian, or would repentance require giving Farmer Joe his cow back? Virtually everyone sees the logical need for Farmer John to give Farmer Joe his cow back. However, it is amazing to see some argue that, if Farmer John had stolen Farmer Joe’s wife away from him, he could be baptized and still

keep her after his baptism! How inconsistent can one be? Any doctrine that teaches that Farmer John cannot steal Farmer Joe's cow, or tractor, etc., and keep it after baptism, but can steal Farmer Joe's wife and keep her, as long as he is baptized, surely cannot be the doctrine of Almighty God! Baptism washes away sins only when it is accompanied by faith, repentance and confession. Furthermore, even scriptural baptism does not wash away consequences. The alcoholic, drug addict, or sexually promiscuous person, may have their sins washed away by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized, but this will not magically erase the physical consequences of their past behaviors.

Error #5: The Apostle Paul gave an additional reason for divorce and remarriage in first Corinthians 7:15. If I'm deserted by my mate then I'm not under the marriage bond anymore, and thus I am free to remarry. Some refer to this as the Pauline privilege.

Error #5 Answered: One of the fatal flaws of this argument is the assumption that the word "bondage" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 refers to the marriage bond. However, the Greek word for bondage here (a form of the word *douloo*) is not the same one used elsewhere in the chapter, where the word clearly refers to the marriage bond. Consider 1 Corinthians 7:27: "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife." The Greek word for "bound" in this verse is not the same one Paul employed in 1 Corinthians 7:15. Instead, the word for bound, used in 1 Corinthians 7:27, is a form of the Greek word *deo*. The same is true in 1 Corinthians 7:39,

“The wife is bound (from the Greek word *deo*) 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.”

It is apparent that Paul knew very well the Greek word for the marriage bond, for he used it in 1 Corinthians 7:27, 39. Yet, He did not employ the same word in 1 Corinthians 7:15. If Paul was referring to the marriage bond in verse 15, why wouldn't he use the word that he used elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 7 to refer to the marriage bond? The answer is because Paul is not referring to the marriage bond in 1 Corinthians 7:15! He used a different word (*douloo*) for bondage there. Moreover, a search of the Greek New Testament reveals 133 occurrences of forms of the word *douloo*, and it does not refer to the marriage bond even one time!

Further proof that the marriage bond is not in view in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is evidenced by the Greek tense Paul employed in this passage. The phrase “not under bondage” translates a Greek phrase written in the negative perfect tense. In Greek, the perfect tense points to a condition that exists in the present because of an action performed in the past. Brother Owen D. Olbricht did an intensive study of the use of the negative perfect Greek tense in the New Testament. He authored a paper on the subject and sent it to my father in January of 1996. I am not aware that the material was ever published, but it definitely should be. Brother Olbricht found at least 94 instances where perfect tense verbs were used with the negative. An investigation of these passages led to this conclusion: “the meaning of a

perfect with a negative is always, the condition does not exist because it never did exist, that is, no action took place in the past to cause the condition to exist. **The condition does not now exist in the present because it never existed in the past** (emp. Mine, BJC).” How does this impact the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:15? Brother Olbricht concluded:

Paul must be saying that the Christian partner is not now in bondage because the Christian was never in such bondage. This being true, the “bondage” referred to in this passage cannot refer to the marriage bond. Paul indicated that the marriage bond of the Christian and non-Christian is respected by God, “otherwise your children would be unclean,” i.e., illegitimate (1 Cor. 7:14). If the non-Christian wants to depart because he wants out of the marriage, the Christian was never under bondage to seek to prevent his departure. What Paul is saying is that the Christian never was enslaved to force himself or herself on a non-Christian who wants to depart. That option has always been open to the Christian to let the non-Christian depart. Christians are not enslaved to the situation; they can let them leave without trying to force themselves on the non-Christians (Unpublished Paper authored by Owen Olbricht on 1-20-96).

In other words, Paul wanted his readers to know, “You’ve never been under such bondage to your partner that you would be required to give up your faith in

Christ to keep them from leaving you. You have never been under such bondage, and you are not now under such bondage, and you never will be!

Error #6: A loving God would never expect an unscripturally married couple to rectify their situation by ending the marriage, especially if children are involved.

Error #6 Answered: The apostle Paul told the Christians at Rome that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4). Ezra Chapter 10 is a part of that which was written for our learning. Therein we find a principle that certainly needs to be remembered. It addresses head-on the matter of whether a loving God would ever require couples, who are unscripturally married, who have children, to separate. We noted earlier, from Deuteronomy 7, that God said, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deut. 7:3). His instructions could not have been plainer. Nevertheless, in Ezra 10, Shechaniah says to Ezra, “We trespassed against our God and have taken strange wives of the people of the land, but now there’s hope concerning this thing” (Ezra 10:2). What was the hope concerning this thing? They were not told, “Just admit that you sinned, promise never to do it again, and then you can keep the wives you never should have married in the first place.” On the contrary, the proposed solution to Ezra was, “Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my Lord, and of

those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law” (Ezra 10:3). Ezra did not recoil at this and say, “That is an extreme way to handle this problem. As long as the people say they are sorry they can continue in these unscriptural marriages, especially in view of the fact that children are involved.” Instead, “Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word” (Ezra 10:5).

Ezra was so anguished over this matter that he did not eat bread, nor drink water. In fact, he “mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away” (Ezra 10:6). A proclamation was sent to all the residents of Judah, Jerusalem, and all the children of the captivity, summoning them to an assembly in Jerusalem within three days (Ezra 10:7-8). Anyone who did not come to this assembly within three days would forfeit all of his substance, and be separated from the congregation (Ezra 10:8). When all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered unto Jerusalem within three days, “Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives” (Ezra 10:10-11).

What was the reaction of the congregation to such a difficult command? “Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do” (Ezra 10:12). They did not accuse Ezra of being legalistic about God’s marriage laws. They

did not argue that their children exempted them from obeying this difficult command. They consented to do what God's law said to do—no matter how emotional—no matter how hard! There were plenty of tears (Ezra 10:1) and courage was needed to see this through (Ezra 10:4); but it had to be done. Even some of the sons of the priesthood had “taken strange wives” and “they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass” (Ezra 10:18-19). It is quite telling that they did not argue, “Because we have offered a sacrifice for our trespass, that forgives our past transgression and allows us to keep the wives we took unlawfully.” Beginning in Ezra 10:20, and continuing for 24 verses, name, after name, after name, of those who had married unscripturally are identified. Ezra 10:44 explains, “All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.” We are not under the same covenant as those in Ezra's day, but it was written for our learning. And what do we learn from it? We learn that, if a marriage is unscriptural to begin with, it is not sanctified by having children. An unscriptural marriage does not magically become a scriptural marriage because of the passage of time, or the presence of children. God's Word does not sanction the maintenance of an unlawful union.

Conclusion

God's Word is clear on the subjects of marriage, divorce and remarriage. We must declare the truth on these matters, no matter how unpopular that truth may be. We must defeat the erroneous views on these

matters because adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). We cannot afford to stand on the day of judgment and have someone say to us, “You knew the simple truth about marriage, divorce and remarriage; why didn’t you tell it to me?” Let us all dedicate ourselves to the proclamation of the simple truth about marriage, divorce and remarriage. Let us teach it with compassion, but let us do so with conviction and clarity! May we never back away from what God’s Word says about marriage, divorce and remarriage!

Abuses Of The Lord's Supper

Mike Hixson



Mike is married to Nancy, and they have one son, Braden. Mike has preached in TN and MS. For the past twenty nine years he has been preaching in the Memphis area. Currently, he is the Pulpit Minister for the Olive Branch Church of Christ. He is a weekly speaker of the radio program "*Anchor of the Soul*." He has a television show on The Gospel Broadcasting Network called "*Counterpoint*" that he co-hosts with B. J. Clarke. He also hosts *GBN Live*.

The last two millennia have been marked by New Testament Christians gathering on the first day of the week to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). At the heart of every Lord's day meeting is the privilege of partaking of the memorial feast Jesus instituted prior to His death on Calvary (Mat. 26:26-29). The weekly observance of the Lord's Supper is a vivid reminder of the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God for sin and unrighteousness (I Pet. 1:18-21). In this lesson, we want to examine what the Bible teaches about the Lord's Supper and common misconceptions and errors of this sacred memorial.

What The Bible Teaches About The Lord's Supper

The Scriptures teach there are five acts of worship Christians are to engage in every first day of the week.

Each act of worship is vitally important to the life of the church. The apostolic church prayed (Acts 2:42; I Tim. 2:8), sang praises to God (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16-17), observed the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), contributed of their financial resources into the church treasury (I Co. 16:1-2), and listened to gospel preaching (II Tim. 4:1-2; Acts 20:7). Today, those of us who belong to the body of Christ use this as a pattern for our worship to God. Two of the five acts of worship are exclusive to the first day of the week, the Lord's Supper and the giving of our means (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1-2).

The Lord's Supper affords us the opportunity to reflect on the cross and recall the horrific ordeal of Golgotha. The bread is symbolic of the fact that "Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (I Pet. 2:24). The fruit of the vine is a reminder of the precious blood Jesus shed for our sins (I Pet. 1:18-21). The Lord Jesus said on the night of His betrayal, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat. 26:28).

Another aspect of the Lord's Supper is the internal examination that is to take place each Sunday. The apostle Paul wrote, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (I Cor. 11:28). As a child of God, we ought to be eternally grateful for the tremendous sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. The weekly observance of this memorial keeps the sacrificial death of Jesus fresh in our minds. Furthermore, there is an admonition to saints of every generation to come to the Lord's table with the heart and mind attuned to what

is taking place. Paul warned, “Therefore whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.... For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:27, 29). According to the apostle Paul, we are treading on dangerous ground if our minds are preoccupied with worldly thoughts while partaking of the Lord’s Supper. It might be helpful to focus on key Scriptures that deal with the death of God’s beloved Son for our sins (Isa. 53; I Pet. 2:21-25; 1:18-21; Eph. 1:7).

A third thought about the Lord’s Supper is that our weekly observance of this feast is a solemn proclamation of “the Lord’s death till He comes” (I Cor. 11:26). We live in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus and a home with Him in heaven. Peter said we have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven” (I Pet. 1:4). When we partake of the Supper of the Lord we are saying to the world we believe in the efficacy of the death of Jesus for our sins and that the risen Lord will one day return to take us home to be with Him forevermore. The hope and anticipation of the Lord’s return is thrilling to the soul. What a blessing to know that when Jesus comes at the sound of the trumpet and the voice of the archangel, we will live forever in the eternal abiding place He has prepared for us (I Thes. 4:13-18; John 14:1-3).

What The Bible Does NOT Teach About The Lord’s Supper

The Catholic Church teaches that the elements used in the Lord’s Supper, the bread and fruit of the

vine, by the express will of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and so-called Catholic priesthood of the Lord Jesus, become the literal body and blood of Jesus. They refer to this process as transubstantiation, which denotes a “change of substance.” Catholics used the term “transubstantiation” at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 A.D. Nowhere in Scripture can the dogma of transubstantiation be validated. The Lord used the bread and fruit of the vine symbolically to remind His disciples of His vicarious suffering and death on Calvary. Jesus often used figurative language to teach divine truths. For example, when Jesus said, “I am the door” (John 10:7), He was not saying that He was a literal door. Rather, the point was that He was the door or portal through which people must pass to enjoy salvation from sin. Earlier in His ministry, the Lord said, “I am the bread of life...I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:48, 51). Again, Jesus is using figurative language to convey the fact that only those who embrace Him as the Savior along with His divine teaching have spiritual life.

The dogma of transubstantiation was never taught by the Lord Jesus Christ nor practiced by the apostles or apostolic church (John 17:17; Acts 2:42). The apostle Paul wrote, “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (I Thes. 5:22). The standard by which we test or prove anything spiritual in nature is the Bible. A careful examination of Scripture reveals the doctrine of transubstantiation originated with man and not God

(Mat. 15:8-9). We would do well to demonstrate the attitude of the Bereans, who “searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17). Think about it, Paul was an inspired apostle and the noble Berean people verified what he said with divine truth. The importance of truth is reflected in the fact that it will serve as the standard or rule by which we will be judged. Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The apostle Paul corroborated what the Lord said in his letter to the Romans stating, “we know that the judgment of God is according to truth” (Rom. 2:2). In the book of Revelation, John pictures the last day with the Lord sitting on His throne judging the human family. He writes, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged by according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Rev. 20:12). Note the standard used to judge the hearts and lives of people is that which is “written in the books.” For those of us living today it would equate to the “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2), or the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25). No wonder James warned, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (Jas. 2:12).

A second misnomer concerning the Lord’s Supper has to do with Christians who teach and practice the essentiality of only one cup being used in partaking of the fruit of the vine. In their minds, to use multiple cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine is a violation of

divine law. When the Lord Jesus instituted His memorial feast, Matthew writes, "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you" (Mat. 26:27). The emphasis in this context is not the container, but the contents. Observe now what Jesus said regarding the contents in the cup, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat. 26:29). In this context Jesus used a figure of speech called metonymy, which means "a change in name." The figure of the cup was used to denote the contents in the container. An example of this figure of speech is found in John 3:16, the "Golden Text of the Bible." Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He gave that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Is Jesus saying here that God loved the global sphere upon which we live? The answer ought to be obvious. He simply substituted world for the people who inhabit planet earth. The objects of God's divine love and redemptive plan are human beings, not the material globe.

In Luke's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus instructed the disciples by taking the cup and giving thanks, and stating, "Take this and divide it among yourselves: for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17-18). The word "divide" used by Jesus means "to divide through, i.e., completely, to divide up" (Vine, p. 327), "to cut in pieces" (Thayer). Did Jesus mean for the disciples to divide the container or the contents? It would only stand to reason the Lord

meant for the disciples to divide the contents from the container among themselves. The fruit of the vine is what Jesus made emblematic of His precious blood, not the cup or container.

A third common misconception related to the Lord's Supper has to do with when and how often it should be observed. There are many in the religious world who rarely partake of the Lord's Supper unless there is some special tradition attached to it, namely Christmas and Easter, neither of which are Biblical holy days to be commemorated. Luke, the inspired historian, provides us with a blueprint for the apostolic church observing the Lord's Supper. In Acts 2:42, following the events of Pentecost, the Scriptures state, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers." The "breaking of bread" is synonymous with partaking of the Lord's Supper. One writer states the expression "breaking of bread" is employed "to designate the celebration of the Lord's Supper" (Boles, p. 50).

The ancient church celebrated the Lord's Supper on "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:9). In Acts 20, Luke records the missionary endeavors of Paul as he and his traveling companions left Philippi and made their way to the city of Troas, where they remained for a period of "seven days" (Acts 20:6). Why did Paul and his fellow laborers remain in Troas? Luke tells us, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7a). McGarvey noted, "This passage indicates both the day of the week in which the disciples broke the loaf, and the prime object of their

meeting on that day. It shows that the loaf was broken on the first day of the week; and we have no apostolic precedent for breaking it on any other day” (p. 246). Another writer states, “If it could properly have been eaten earlier, presumably he (Paul) would have done so and been on his way to his destination. But, it seems quite clear, he waited because it was not proper to do so until the Lord’s Day—the first day of the week” (Baxter, p. 116).

A fourth prevailing misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper centers around the idea that when the memorial is observed each week the worshipper is forgiven of all sins committed during the previous week. In His institution of this memorial feast, Jesus did not say the Lord’s Supper is for the forgiveness of sins, but that the blood of the new covenant was being shed “for the remission of sins” (Mat. 26:28). When we are baptized into Christ, the Bible teaches we contact the cleansing blood of Jesus and have the promise all of our sins are washed away or forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). The assurance we have in Christ is that as long as we “walk in the light” or in harmony with His divine word, His blood constantly “cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7). Our goal as a New Testament Christian is to rise above a life of sin (I John 2:1). In other words, we are no longer in “the sinning business” (I John 3:6-10). However, if we sin, the apostle John said, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2:1). It is as if the Lord Jesus is pleading our case before the bar of heaven, and the basis upon which we enjoy forgiveness is His blood. Therefore, John provides

these words of comfort and assurance, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

As we partake of the Lord’s Supper each Sunday, we are reminded that our forgiveness and hope beyond this life is because of the sacrificial death of Jesus. Jesus said as we partake of the Lord’s Supper, “do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). His death on our behalf is the focal point of the Lord’s Supper and our faith in the efficacy of His sacrifice is strengthened as we partake each week. The apostle Peter said, “For Christ also suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (I Peter 3:18).

ENDNOTES

- Baxter, Batsell Barrett (1980), *Family of God* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company).
- Boles, H. Leo (1980), *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN; Gospel Advocate Company).
- McGarvey, J. W. (n.d), *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation).
- Thayer, Joseph Henry (n.d), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House).
- Vine, W. E. (n.d), *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Flemming H. Revell Company).

Women As Elders, Teachers And Preachers

Bobby Liddell



Bobby is married to Joan and together they have 3 children and 7 grandchildren. He was educated at Walker College and the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He is a 1979 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He has a BA & MA from Alabama Christian school of Religion. He has done local work in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee. He has directed lectureships in Florida and at Memphis School of Preaching. He has done mission work in Singapore, the Philippines, Latvia, and Canada. For several years he directed the Memphis School of Preaching, since 2012, he has served as the Administrative Dean.

INTRODUCTION

God's Word teaches women are to be greatly respected, highly exalted, genuinely appreciated, and lovingly praised (cf. Pro. 31). Jesus Christ's apostle, Paul, clearly expressed the undeniable truth that God makes no distinction between male and female regarding their value in God's eyes, or equality of opportunities for, and blessings of, salvation: "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. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28).

We must not allow the voices of error to lead us to think we must correct the perceived failings of the

Bible, and of the the Lord's church, concerning the rights and role of women. No sensible person argues, from Scripture, that women are to be second-class citizens in the kingdom of God, or to be deprived of what rightfully should be theirs. Even a quick glimpse, reveals the high place to which Truth elevates women, and the commendations given them.

Reception of the "Good News" will correct the sinful world's false ideas, about women, that often relegate females to the position of chattel, to be used and abused, according to the wicked whims of worldly men. God never intended such ungodly treatment. Jesus, Himself, signified her worth, when He spoke with the Samaritan woman—to his disciples' amazement—for she was both a Samaritan and a woman (John 4:27)! Therefore, none may correctly accuse God, His Word, or His faithful followers of teaching hatred toward, disrespect for, or abuse of women. When the Word enters, such unholy attitudes and actions exit (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7).

The way that is the good way, the right way, God's way, the way that cannot be wrong, and that elevates women to their God-intended place of honor, is to preach, believe, and follow God's Word. Such a course is always the best way, and the way to better lives now and eternally (John 10:10). Man, no matter how educated, or impassioned, cannot improve upon God's plan.

DID GOD REVEAL THE ROLE OF WOMEN?

Should we conclude that the God of Heaven and Earth, Creator of man, who made woman, from Adam's rib, to walk by Adam's side, had no forethought about

her role in life? Did He leave to man the formulation of a plan for the place of woman? Absolutely, not! God gave to Eve, and to all women, a lofty position and a beautiful purpose in life. He gave woman the abilities and attributes needed that she might fulfill His intended role for her. Neither man, nor woman, may change what God intended without losing the blessings that could have been, and bringing upon themselves the curse attendant with such departure.

To charge God, or His children, with robbing women of their rights, pushing them into degradation, and suppressing them from reaching the heights they should, with the false assertion that women are equal to men in every way, plays to ignorance (often willful: cf. 2 Pet. 3:5), misleads the gullible, and results in the awful destruction of the home, church, and society. It is not true, regardless of who champions the thought, or how much media presentation it receives, that women can do anything men can do. **We must stop telling our daughters this lie!** Before lighting the torches, and grabbing the pitchforks, please hear this: neither are men equal to women in every way, and neither can men do every thing that women can do! Men and women are different, just as God designed them to be. We should rejoice, and thank God, that His plan was for man and woman to complement each other, each beautifully supplying what the other lacks (Gen. 1-3). This is still God's plan, and it works perfectly, even today.

Our study is not about basic, human rights, or freedoms; such as, the ability to vote, to hold public office, to choose careers, to receive equal pay, or to be

treated fairly. We are not focusing upon the fundamental fact, that no woman should be subjected to abuse because of her comparative physical weakness, cultural acceptance of such abuse, or for any other reason. Our study centers upon authority in leadership roles in the church. God is the ultimate source of authority, and His revealed Word is His final statement concerning such authority. When we seek the authoritative answer concerning the role of women, we know where to go.

WHY IS THERE A PROBLEM?

Why are we even considering answering error about women in positions of leadership as elders, teachers, and preachers? First, is it because God has not revealed His will, leaving us to devise our own plan, as we see fit? No, for He has communicated His Will, and plainly so, providing “all” we need, in every area of life, including leadership in the church (2 Pet. 1:3).

Second, is it because the Word of God is subject to change based upon the time, situation, circumstance, place, or culture? No. God’s will applies to all men, everywhere, in every circumstance, and in every culture (Mat. 28:18-20; John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31). Third, is it because God allows men to “understand” His Word in different ways, and to come to different conclusions, all of which are equally acceptable to Him? No, for if we understand what the Bible teaches, at all, we will understand it alike (Eph. 3:2-4; 5:17). Fourth, is it because men have purposely departed from what God’s will teaches? Yes, this is the problem.

Now, the last question is, “How does this happen?”

It is not difficult, in this case, to understand the reasoning behind unscriptural, anti-scriptural doctrines and practices. Here is the process I have observed, over the years, as men have “reasoned,” when they have accepted new doctrines of men, and have given up the old truths from God (Mat. 15:9).

FUNDAMENTAL REASONS FOR THIS ERROR

First, the problem begins with the anticipatory, imploring statement: “We want it.” The pressing desire for change, bolstered by the unfounded conviction that “change is always better,” motivates the sure progress of error, emboldens the hasty pursuit of it, and stands behind the process in furthering unsound doctrines, and the erroneous practices men want. Each time someone presents Biblical opposition to the change, the sentiment echoes, “But, we want it,” as if their desire, like that of spoiled children, is the overriding factor to which all must bow.

Second, having decided what they want, and having abandoned truth and reason to obtain it, the next step is the declaration: “We are going to have it.” This conviction, coupled with the desire for change, moves to the determination of having that desired thing. With hearts set on that course, no amount of Scripture, or pleading from concerned brethren, seems to have any impact.

Third, men state: “We are going to find a way that will ‘validate’ the change we desire and that we have determined to have.” This building of the

substructure, in order to facilitate the changes wanted, by willfully wresting the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16), salves the consciences of those who were reticent, soothes the anxieties of those who were, initially, honest questioners, and makes palatable (to them) the changes made, so that those whose Bible knowledge is deficient, but who still want some “scriptural assurance,” come to the intended, and remarkably convenient, conclusion that this change they want is, after all, “acceptable to God.”

Men cunningly fabricate deceptive statements, and formulate surprisingly creative arguments, in order to eliminate, or silence, opposition, and to build support for their actions—even though contrary to God’s Word (2 Pet. 1:16). This determination is not based upon God’s Word, biblical faith, or the studied conclusions of scholarly, faithful brethren over the years, but upon worldly wisdom and carnal lusts (1 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:15-17). Often, these departures follow the lead of some school, to whom brethren blindly pledge allegiance, or of some person whom they deem a “scholar,” and whose charisma and claim to superior knowledge blind them to the Truth. An eldership, in Oklahoma, confidently assured me, as they let me know they did not agree with, and summarily dismissed, what I had just preached, that they were satisfied to follow whatever the “doctors and professors” of a nearby “brotherhood” school taught. I assured them they must listen to, and follow, Jesus, rather than men. Blind leaders of the blind carefully construct a scenario, in order to persuade men, that presents themselves as merely humble, pious, scholarly,

honest searchers for truth (Mat. 15:14; 2 Cor. 11:14).

“RESTDYING THE QUESTION”

Interestingly, this newfound “truth,” concerning women in leadership roles in the church, contradicts the teaching and practice of all the faithful for the last two thousand years. Where was this “truth” all these years? Did **everybody** miss it? Why are some, just now, discovering what we should have known all along? Is it because of some neo-Gnostic special, superior knowledge? We must not overlook the arrogance of such a position. Again, it has been my observation that when brethren decide to forsake Truth for error, they quickly rid themselves of the works and influence of godly men of the past, and mock these good brethren, accusing them of being ignorant, irrelevant, or deluded by some ungodly prejudice. Not surprisingly, they wait until that great soldier of the cross lays down his armor, and passes into eternity, before they begin their bold attacks upon him. We wonder where their “courage” was while he lived.

False teachers are happy and quick to tell all, who are concerned about the new course they are taking, there is no need to be alarmed: “We are just restudying the question.” This sounds innocent, even commendable, to most people, who mistakenly equate this with their own honest inquiries into Scripture (Acts 17:11). In all my years, I do not know of one instance where brethren were supposedly “restudying” a position, or practice, where they did not, amazingly, **every time**, come to the very conclusion that what they wanted, and

what they already had determined to have, was, indeed, approved by Scripture!

Their determination to proceed in the course they had already decided they would take, is why they were “restudying” this question in the first place. The outcome of their “restudying” was set before they began. Their explanations indicate the underlying factors of their keen interest, not in pleasing God and faithfully following His Way, but in making changes to the church of Christ, in order to please themselves and others. Their stated reasons for making such changes invariably include: becoming relevant (according to their definition) to a modern culture, being appealing to a new generation, and being “progressive,” instead of following the hated way they disdainfully identify as “conservative,” or, “traditional” (cf. Gal. 1:6-10).

Let us not forget the triad of strong motivations that engenders desire, empowers determination, and influences some to engineer departures from the Truth. (1) They want to be like the world. (2) They want to be pleasing to the world. (3) They want to be able to do what the world does. While such men offer resistance to this charge, their actions reveal their true goals. Thus, as we consider the error into which so many have gone, concerning the role of women, and leadership in the church, let us not overlook the powerful pull of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

Seriously, if the world were not: (1) accusing males as **the** reason behind **every** problem, condemning all males as having proved themselves unworthy

of leadership positions; thereby, justifying their replacement with females, (2) clamoring for what they mislabel “women’s rights,” as if God had not considered, or addressed, such, (3) diligently lobbying for more women in every leadership role, replacing men in every aspect of life, from the family’s little white house, to the White House, to the house of God, (4) loudly applauding, as a “great victory for women everywhere,” when this happens, even when the victor’s only real qualification was her gender; that is, that she is **not** male, (5) strenuously, incessantly demanding that these changes come, and threatening retribution and ruin if they do not, and (6) immediately, and viciously, castigating anyone who dares to raise a sincere inquiry of propriety—seriously, would there be such interest, among some in the church, for putting women into leadership roles not given them by God?

Honestly, if the religious world were not putting women into more roles of leadership, formerly reserved to men only, praising themselves for their great virtue in doing so, and lamenting it took so long to get to this enlightened state, would some brethren be as excited about “restudying” this question? The impact of the world upon the church is glaringly obvious (1 Cor. 5:10). To those who left religious error in order to embrace the pure, saving Truth from God, it is simply amazing that some brethren, who have known the Truth, are falling all over themselves in a headlong rush, to embrace the errors of men (2 Pet. 2:20-22; 2 John 9-11).

BUILDING A STRAW MAN BY FALSE ACCUSATIONS

The false accusation that all, who do not agree to these manmade parameters, **do not** respect women, want the best for them, or believe there is a role for women, in the church, threatens—but not because of truthfulness (1 John 3:7). Anyone can accuse anyone of anything, and find those who agree, but accusation, alone, does not make the charge true (Mat. 11:19). We naturally recoil, and question ourselves, as conscientious people, wanting to be sure we are not wrong in our actions, or attitudes. We do not want anyone to think of us in a negative way. So, false accusations raise concerns that we not be perceived as against women, or God's Truth.

I was asked, by a congregation, to speak on the subject: "The Christian Woman As A Godly Mother," and was hatefully charged, by multiple sources, writing from their "safe place" on the Internet, for doing so, even **before** I spoke; that is, before anyone knew what I was going to preach, or how I would preach it. All they had seen was an advertisement giving the topic and identifying me as the speaker. The general consensus of the vicious attackers, some of whom were brethren, was, how dare I speak on such a subject, on a "seminar for women," since I was not a woman, or a mother. Their untempered outrage, exposing their own gender bias, and seething hatred at some assumed misogyny, was without any factual basis. First, I was not speaking on a "women's seminar." I was delivering a sermon to an assembly of the church, for the benefit of all, young and old, male and female. Second, one does not have

to be a woman, or mother, in order to preach what the Bible teaches about either. In that sermon, I stated:

Contrary to what some believe, and have broadly proclaimed, being a white male (with facial hair) does not disqualify me from accurately addressing what God said on this, or any, biblical subject. 1). I do not have to be an elder, to preach the truth about elders (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). 2). I do not have to be a widow, to preach the truth about widows (1 Tim. 5). 3). I do not have to be the Devil, to preach the truth about Hell! 4). So, I do not have to be a woman and mother, to preach the truth on this subject.

GOD’S WORD ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN (1 TIMOTHY 2)

Paul wrote to Timothy, instructing him concerning the conduct of the church (1 Tim. 2:8-15). If we approach this passage with a genuine desire to hear God, we can learn the Truth, and put it into practice (cf. Eph. 3:2-4). Paul gave Timothy a charge to obey, and an exhortation to share, concerning Timothy’s instruction of the church (1 Tim. 1:18; 2:1; 3:15). He began with directions concerning prayer, a vital part of Christian life and worship.

Paul wrote, in his apostolic authority, of “every where,” a specific reference to the public assembly of the church (2 Tim. 1:8; cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). He wrote to regulate activity in the worship assembly. “Indeed, its express object is to show how its members should

conduct themselves in the church assemblies, worship, and services” (Cranfill 33). Roberts quoted Zahn as arguing, “that Paul is referring to the assembly... public prayer...(and that) ‘how one ought to behave in the church’ refers to the word ‘church’ in its literal sense of assembly” (19). Frank D. Young stated: “From I Timothy 2:8, when none but the male is allowed to pray, it is the leading of public prayer” (61). Jim Franks affirmed: “Thus, the force of this passage is to limit public prayer, in a general assembly (i.e. where men and women are present) to men only! This was the practice ‘in every place.’ In first century usage, *todo* (place) referred to a ‘meeting place’” (52).

The word, “men” (1 Tim. 2:8), selected by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 The. 2:13), means males. It is not the Greek word for mankind, but specifies males, not females, and with the definite article, the males. These instructions for leading prayer, in the assembly, are given to “the males.” Men, not women, are to lead prayer in the assembly, and when both are present. Opposition, to this command, cites the cultural atmosphere of the day, and accuses Paul of being a bachelor, male chauvinist, writing in an attempt to impose his personal prejudice (cf. 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 3:8) upon the church (Roberts 21). Note Robert R. Taylor, Jr.’s answer.

The Greek text makes it crystal clear that Paul uses men here as opposed to women. This is the permanent will of God set forth; it is a deceitful handling of the Scriptures to suggest that Paul in this verse and subsequent context is speaking from a temporary cultural framework.

This is God's law; it is not Pauline prejudice in literary action. When there is prayer and men are present, they (not women) are to lead or direct the prayers. This includes our assemblies for combined worship. It includes Bible classes where both men and women are present. It includes ALL devotionals where both sexes are present. We had better listen to Paul and heed his prayer directions rather than listening to the voices of liberalism and of the modern women's lib movement who desire to restructure the church in this area and all other areas as well (36).

Some declare God's command is too restrictive. Women are to pray, but not "every where." This is not in harmony with the wills of many, but God's Word is still the standard of authority, and by it we will be judged (John 12:48). However, the will of God is even more restrictive. God does not allow just any male to lead in prayer, but declares he must lift up "holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (cf. Mat. 5:23-24). Men of moral and spiritual purity, who trust God to answer their prayers, are those who should lead the church in prayer (Jam. 1:6).

"Lifting up holy hands" is not to be taken literally. The emphasis is upon the holiness of the one who prays. God, through Paul, does not denote a prescribed physical posture in prayer. Rather, he emphasizes a spiritual condition of purity in approaching His exalted throne. These directions are not cultural or circumstantial, but scriptural, and are the true expression of God's

continuing will. Women are to pray in worship, but God does not allow them to lead prayer.

Next, Paul, by inspiration, addressed how women should “adorn” themselves (1 Tim. 2:9). Adorn means to beautify, or make attractive, and the intent is spiritual beauty, not physical. The attire of a godly woman is modest (proper, orderly, decent), avoiding extremes. How incongruous it is that “holiness” sects have taken this instruction of Paul as literally forbidding any type of cosmetics, or jewelry, yet allow women to lead in prayer, to lead singing, and even occupy the pulpit, in direct contradiction to Paul’s plain instructions (Roberts 22). Godly women wear clothing becoming one professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:10). The true adorning, of a “beautiful” woman, is not the dressing up of the outward person, but the beautifying of the inner person (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-4). A Christian woman will look and act like a follower of Christ, with affections set on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:1-2).

In keeping with inward adorning, Paul wrote: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.” God requires women to be in submission and silence, which is not (here) absolute silence, but quietness (a quiet spirit). Why should this requirement be a thing to be disdained as if God were mistreating women? Should not we all rejoice in accepting the roles God has given, and seek to fulfill His will in our lives? The woman is different, but not inferior (1 Cor. 11:3). She has abilities and opportunities that are different from the man, and which man will never have. In the assembly, the woman is to learn in silence with all subjection—according to

our Creator. God does not permit (suffer) her to teach over the man, or to exercise dominion over him. In the assembly, where men are present, God does not allow her to take the lead.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35, in the context of the use and abuse of spiritual gifts, shows that female church members (seemingly, uninspired wives of the prophets), were not permitted to disrupt the meeting, by speaking in that particular assembly of the church (while inspired women were allowed to speak when only women were present (1 Cor. 11). Was Paul wrong in this inspired instruction to these sisters in Christ? Was there reason to limit women from speaking, on that occasion, from being teachers (even if doing so by asking questions), and from addressing such an assembly? The answer: “It is not permitted unto them to speak.” God **did not** give women that authority, in that assembly, and man **could not** give her that authority. Even males, who had the ability to speak in tongues, were to be silent if there was no interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27-28), and prophets were to observe proper order (1 Cor. 14:29-33).

This instruction, for a special assembly (unlike any assembly we have today), wherein God regulated spiritual gifts, does not mean that women are to keep absolute silence in all congregational assemblies. If so, they could not speak one word after entering, could not participate in the worship act of singing, and could not make the good confession (cf. Col. 3:16). Obviously, when we consider 1 Timothy 2 (which was written by the same apostle who penned 1 Corinthians), sisters in Christ must not violate what God has commanded

concerning teaching, or speaking. Women must not usurp the authority of the men, teaching over them, by delivering a “didactic discourse” (1 Tim. 2:12). To assume she may go beyond what God has authorized her to do, is to abandon the teaching of Scripture. To limit her from what God has allowed is equally wrong. May women teach? Yes, in certain circumstances, but not over the man.

Therefore, women cannot, with God’s approval, preach, teach, lead prayer, or have authority over men, as in the office of elder, serving as a deacon, or leading in the worship as song leader, or serving at the Lord’s Table, in an assembly with men present, or in a mixed class with men present. Until such time as a woman may be the husband (married adult male) of one wife (female), she will not be qualified to be an elder (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6).

The cry of “Unfair!” holds no sway with God (cf. Gal. 5:1). Changes of culture do not change His plan for the church’s work and worship, nor for the relationship, or roles, of man and woman. As long as this world stands, women are not, “to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” Even if “elders,” or others, attempt to “delegate authority” to her in order to allow her to do so, God does not. “No woman can step into the place of a man without violating the very Word she would try to teach” (Franks 53). This does not mean women are less important, intelligent, or able, than are men. Nor, should it mean women refuse the role God has given them because it is “not some great thing” (cf. 2 Kin. 5:13).

Does this mean a woman can never teach another? No, for God commands women to teach in some situations (cf. Tit. 2:3-4), and women may teach as long as they do not violate the limitations God imposes. Even in the assembly, women teach when they obey the command to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Obviously, Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice taught him when he was a child, and they were praised for doing so (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Aquila and Priscilla (husband and wife) taught Apollos, "the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). Just as women are to pray, but they may not pray "every where," so women are to teach, but they may not teach "every where." So, there are situations in which God allows, or requires, women to teach, but they may not exercise dominion over the man, by doing so in any unscriptural way.

Women may ask, and may answer, questions, or read a Scripture in Bible classes, or in private gatherings, where both men and women are present, but they are not permitted to do that which in any way exercises dominion over the man. Women may teach other women, such as in women's classes in a Bible lectureship, or a Ladies' Day. In such instances women may pray, lead singing, and teach when only women are present.

WHY DOES GOD PROHIBIT WOMEN FROM LEADERSHIP ROLES?

God's Word gives the answer. *First, because of the creation of man before woman* (1 Tim. 2:13). Woman came out of man, thus man is before woman, and he is her head (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-25). Second, because

of the succumbing of Eve to deception when she took upon herself a position of leadership which was not hers (1 Tim. 2:14; Gen. 3:16). Was Eve's sin more grievous than Adam's? No, but it was of a different nature. Eve put herself into a leadership role that was not hers, was deceived, and led Adam to sin, and both transgressed. These God-given reasons for woman's subjection are not cultural, nor are they bounded by time, or dispensation. If we attempt to argue against God, we are declaring our supposed, superior knowledge to the omniscient God. "And whether or not we see a proper connection here between cause and effect, the Holy Spirit saw it and urged it as sufficient reason for woman not to exercise dominion over man, and with that we ought to be satisfied" (Teacher's Commentary. 1946, 195).

"Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (1 Tim. 2:15). Sometimes it is easier to see the meaning of a passage by noting what it cannot mean. This cannot mean the salvation of Eve alone, from sin, by her having children. It cannot mean the physical safety of the woman while giving birth, for many women, even godly women, have died giving birth. It cannot mean the individual salvation of women by their bearing children, for that would eliminate all barren and single women from salvation, and would mean the salvation of multitudes without obedience to Christ—just by bearing a child. It cannot mean the birth of the Savior, though woman bore Him and many consider this to be the meaning of the passage. "A woman is saved from the error of exercising authority over the man by

accepting her God-given role of subordination....The obvious implication of verse 15 is that woman should remain in the role for which she was created, and not take the role of dominance over the man” (Franks 54).

Many have denounced what they call a male dominated society and have cast off the “shackles” of being wives and mothers, “keepers at home” (Tit. 2:5). While one may be saved without marrying and having children, neither woman, or man, will be saved in rebellion to God. Women who deny their God-given roles, and who would usurp the authority given to man are in rebellion to God. Nothing in the world will change this truth.

THAT WHICH DOES NOT CHANGE GOD’S WILL

Some things do not change, in any way, God’s commands. First, what people want does not change God’s will. God has authorized **what He wants**, what is acceptable to Him, according to His divine plan, not according to man’s desires. Second, what people think does not change God’s will. We ought to think correctly, and obey God rather than men (Phi. 4:8; Acts 5:29). Third, what men and women do does not change God’s command. We must do what is right. If society, the entire religious world, and most of our brethren decide to put women in leadership roles, contrary to God’s plan, the faithful must still follow His way. Nothing else matters.

Some have, after “restudying the question,” determined it is “scriptural and appropriate” for women

to “minister as God calls them” (thus, cleverly putting the responsibility upon God). They may begin by affirming women may take part in limited leadership roles (leading singing, prayer, waiting at the Lord’s Table, etc.), but as time passes, they decide women may teach and preach, and be elders, without restriction. Still, God’s Word remains unchanged.

CONCLUSION

Men are given certain leadership roles by God. Likewise, women are prohibited from taking that authority which God has given to man alone. Yet, what is more worthy of praise or more beautiful than a Christian woman professing godliness in harmony with the will of God?

It will be better for all of us, both men and women, to accept God’s arrangement as a matter of the highest wisdom and be pleased to do his will in all these matters and leave the results and the rewards with him (Teacher’s Commentary. 1951, 33).

WORKS CITED

- Cranfill, J. B. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Baker, 1978.
- Franks, Jim. “The Question of Women Teachers and Leaders in the Church,” *The Epistles of I and II Timothy, Titus*. Firm Foundation, 1986.
- Roberts, J. W. *Letters to Timothy*. Sweet, 1964.
- Taylor, Robert R. Jr. *Studies in First and Second Timothy*. Lambert Book House.

Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary on Bible School Lessons. Gospel Advocate, 1946.

Teacher's Annual Commentary on Bible School Lessons. Gospel Advocate, 1951.

Young, Frank D. "Men and Women in Public Worship," *Studies in Timothy and Titus*. East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1986.

Hell Is Eternal

Greg Dismuke



Greg is married to Lawanda and together they have 4 children and 5 grandchildren. He is a 1998 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. His son, Howard is an MSOP graduate, and his youngest son Anthony will be graduating from MSOP in 2021. Greg has been preaching full time for over 20 years and has done local work in Ohio, Georgia, Tennessee, and Illinois. Currently, he serves as the Pulpit Minister for the Newport News congregation in Newport News, VA.

INTRODUCTION

When the Apostle Paul met with the elders of the church of Ephesus for the last time, he made this statement:

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:25-27).

Paul tells those elders that he had not held back, he had not been deterred by fear of consequences for preaching the gospel. He did not hold anything that was profitable

from public view. He did not disguise any truth for fear of any effect it may have had on their minds. There is a great need for preachers today like Paul. Ministers of the gospel who will preach all the counsel of God because God commands it and it is needful for their salvation. Hell is becoming one of those forgotten subjects because it is so rarely preached. When I have preached on this subject in gospel meetings, many older people would come up and recall how they used to hear those kinds of sermons when they were young, but not anymore.

If God did not want people to know about Hell, the Holy Spirit would not have inspired men to write so much on the subject. Let us notice three points relative to our subject. First, we will note the **definition** of hell. Second, we will notice the **duration** of hell. Third, we will notice the **description** of hell.

The DEFINITION Of Hell

Four words in the King James Version of the Bible are translated hell. They are Sheol, Tartarus, Hades and Gehenna. The Hebrew word *Sheol* represents the place of departed spirits of men and is the equivalent to the Hades of the New Testament, it is sometimes translated grave. Five hundred years ago, when the King James Version was translated, the old English word hell was generally understood as the final abode of the wicked. It is still used that way today and is the way we will use it for this discussion. The word hell in Scripture is translated from *Gehenna*, a word that arose from the valley of Hinnon, south of Jerusalem, where the Canaanites burned human sacrifices to Molech. After

the Jews returned from captivity, they made it a place of defilement, where the refuse of the city was thrown and burned. This name began to be applied to the place of future punishment by the Jews. This word is found 12 times in the New Testament, and 11 of those times were used by Jesus. The only other time is found in James in his description of the tongue (Jam. 3:6). The Bible reveals that Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). Therefore, He came to suffer and die for our sins so that we would not have to go to this awful place.

The DURATION Of Hell

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 Thes. 1:7-9).

Some believe that since it is described here as everlasting destruction it refers to the annihilation of the soul. The word translated destruction is the Greek word *olethros*, which means “to destroy (a prolonged form); ruin, that is, death, punishment: - destruction.” This word is rendered destruction in 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:3, and 1 Timothy 6:9; in none of these places does the word denote annihilation. Everlasting destruction describes the condition of existing in a state

of total ruin. If I were to say that one has destroyed his life I mean, although his life will continue, he has ruined his life to such a degree that it will never reach its potential. If one's soul is destroyed in hell, in the same manner, one does not cease to exist however, the great purpose and potential of that soul is ruined. Man's soul came from God as we were made in His image (Gen. 1:26-27); think of all that God has provided for man's happiness through fellowship with His creator. If he is goes to hell, all the soul's dignity, honor, happiness, holiness for which he was intended are ruined.

Jesus said the wicked will go into everlasting punishment which indicates that annihilation was not intended. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mat. 25:46). Punishment means "the affliction of pain on someone or something for retribution for wrongs they have done." When you place the adjective everlasting in front of it, it means a conscious unending state of affliction and pain. It is a conscious state of being afflicted.

Jesus' statement will not allow us to limit the duration of hell and say that the wicked are consumed; yet some believe and teach the false view that hell will have an end. However, the same Greek word (*aiionios*) is used to express both the duration of the punishment for the wicked and the duration of life for the righteous. That means that if the duration of those in hell have an end, so does the duration of those in heaven. The duration of hell in everlasting punishment means "without end, never to cease, everlasting." Also, the same

word is used to describe the eternal nature of God. Paul wrote, “But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). Those who are on the left hand are told to depart into everlasting fire (Matt. 25:41). John reveals in the Revelation that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever (Rev. 14:11).

The DESCRIPTION Of Hell

Hell Is A Place Of Darkness

“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:30).

We go places in the daytime, and we are at ease and relaxed. But we would not feel that way if we went at night. People go to grave sites at cemeteries and feel fine, but they would not feel as comfortable there in the middle of the night. Darkness can be frightening, especially if you have ever been in the darkness where you cannot see your hand in front of your face. That is an unsettling darkness that makes you afraid to take your next step.

Darkness can make you feel alone in a crowded place. It is a darkness so thick it can be felt. God brought a plague of darkness over Egypt—the kind of darkness that could be felt. Hell is that kind of place where you are there in the dark and though many people are there with you, you feel alone.

Jude said that darkness encompasses the disobedient

angels as chains and will keep them there until the judgment of the great day. The darkness is pictured as chains or prisons of confinement. “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). Peter describes it in a similar fashion when he says, “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment (2 Pet. 2:4).

Imagine the frightening aspect of this darkness. It is described as chains because chains are intended to keep one confined to a certain space. In this context it is an imprisonment. God made a darkness that is so terrifying, that it will imprison and paralyze all who are condemned. When God plagued Egypt during the days of Moses and the Israelite’s captivity, one of those plagues was darkness. Consider the description of this plague of darkness.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings (Exod.10:21-23).

Notice that this plague of darkness was described as that which could be felt; that indicates the thickness

and substance of that darkness. But it also had the character of paralysis. The record revealed to us that no one moved from his place for three days. Imagine a place that has been made for the devil and his angels and described as chains of darkness. If God made a darkness here in this world that imprisoned man for as long as it lasted, how much greater will it be for those angelic hosts who became dissatisfied with their position and sinned against God.

Hell Is A Place Of Fire

“Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared fore the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). Originally this place was prepared for the devil and angels that rebelled against God, but it is also for those men and women who rather follow unrighteousness. Death by fire is one of the most horrific that can be conceived. Some believe that those who are condemned to hell will be burned with literal fire such as was known in this life.

However, the main truth to be taught by the image of fire is not necessarily to point out the how of it, but the intensity and fierceness of it because the wicked will be under the wrath of God. The design, therefore, was to present an image of terrific and appalling suffering—an image well represented by fire. These descriptions are just spoken in terminology that we can understand, to give us some indication of how awful the place will be. Likely, it will be worse than anything we can really grasp.

“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer

darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:30). “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” is indicative of great pain and duress. Imagine the pain of shedding a flood of tears to no avail. Imagine the pain associated with the realization that the feeling of happiness you once knew will never be felt again.

During the days of the Civil War, archaeologists dug up in battle cities bullets that were fired from Northern and Southern armies. The bullets and pieces of wood were used in hospital beds when doctors would amputate limbs. They did not use anesthesia: they would give patients a bullet, piece of wood, or steel so they could bear down and gnash their teeth, to keep from tearing their lips or tongues or crushing their teeth. Imagine being in the dark and the only thing you can hear is the screams and gnashing of the teeth of those in agony.

Jesus revealed in Mark’s account that the fires would be unquenchable, and the worm will never die:

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not

quenched (Mark 9:43-48).

Some believe that “unquenchable fire” conveys the idea of being burned up before the fires go out unless God intervenes. The thing we must remember is that Jesus is not dealing with physical materials, but eternity and resurrected bodies. God showed His power to accomplish it in this life. Moses witnessed a bush that was inflamed but not consumed (Exod. 3:2). Jesus told the story of a rich man who was tormented in flaming fire but not burned up (Luke 16:23-24). Three Hebrew boys were able to walk around in flames of fire that consumed those who threw them in the furnace.

Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king

was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire (Dan. 3:19-26).

This can only be explained by the power of God. All those who were there saw that the fire had no power over their bodies.

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. (Dan. 3:27).

The God of heaven Who can manifest His power over the laws of nature surely can prepare bodies to be punished in the flames of unquenchable fire so that the wicked can burn in pain and agony while continuing to exist. Again, it is very difficult to comprehend how one can be said to weep and gnash his teeth and be

unconscious. This is what the Lord has spoken; shall He not make it good?

Hell Is A Place Of No Rest

“And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:11). Rest is a wonderful word, especially after hard labor, tireless hours, travel, etc. There is nothing like being able to come home and put up your feet, relax, and rejuvenate. The idea presented here is one of perpetuity; the inhabitants of hell will not have any rest or interval of pain for which to look forward. Imagine a place where one can never rest nor get any relief for ever and ever. Here, rest comes to the sufferer. One can be in prison and sleep at night getting a good night’s rest. The overworked servant or slave will have intervals of rest from weary labor. The sicknesses and maladies that people can get into on earth causes some to believe they are already in hell. However, even the terminally ill can receive sedatives to allow them to rest from constant pain. Nothing you can go through on earth can compare to the horrors of hell because the fires of divine wrath which tortures them shall never be extinguished. This is a place where its inhabitants will never know rest again. There will be no rest from the consequences of the sins in which one died. There will be no rest from Satan whom one chose to serve seeing this place was made for the Devil and his angels. There will be no rest from remorse; one will have an eternity to regret the

decision to live in rebellion to God. There will be no rest from terror as this place will be terrifying to all its inhabitants. There will be no rest from torment because the torture will never cease. John writes that the devil and the false prophets would find no relief in this place.

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

The fact that these terms are being used should help us to appreciate how disgusted God is with sin, and far He is going to go to punish it. This should bring to light the importance of what James wrote regarding an erring brother.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19- 20).

Truly, hell is a place where rest will never be known again.

Hell Is A Place Of No Hope

Dante, wrote this quote in reference to one who was approaching the gates of hell: "Abandon all hope ye who enter here." If you go to hell, you can leave all hope behind. Hope keeps you going. God gave us hope so if I had a bad day, I could hope for a better one tomorrow. He gives us hope looking forward to being with Him

in heaven one day. Even if things did not go that well for me in this life, I can look forward to when things will surely be better in the next life.

Paul wrote that we are saved by hope.

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it (Rom. 8:24- 25).

We are saved by our strong and confident trust in the future God has promised to us. The hope that we have saves us through trials enabling us to be patient because of the anticipation of an inheritance to be realized at a future date.

We have hope as an anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:19). Hope does for the soul what an anchor does for a ship. It keeps it steady and steadfast against the winds of trouble. To be without hope is to be unsteady, unsure, and susceptible to being tossed to and fro in the dangerous winds which can bring one to despair. People sometimes commit suicide because they account their lives as nothing due to depression; they live in a state of misery and hopelessness.

If it can get that bad here, can one imagine an eternal depression called hell. A place far worse than any depression that can be experienced in this life. A place where it truly can be said, there will never be any light at the end of the tunnel.

Hell Is A Place Of Perfect Memory

We forget many things in this life and as we get

older, it becomes more difficult to remember because of the frailties of our physical bodies. But in the resurrection God is going to give us new bodies that cannot get old or be destroyed. It is a terrible thing in life to not be able to remember. Many have succumbed to diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia, which in advanced cases will not permit a parent to remember or recognize their own children. This is a horrifying thought indeed. But, in hell, one will wish he could forget because it will be more horrifying to remember. Consider the thought of a memory that will no longer be hindered by aging and frailties of the flesh. Imagine being able to remember in crystal detail what you have said, what you have done, opportunities you had, lies you told about how you were going to change for the better, but like Felix, never found a convenient season.

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee (Acts 24:24-25).

Imagine grudges you held against others and wrongs you could have made right. Imagine all the things you could have done, you should have done, but you failed to do. The words of Abraham must have ranged loud and clear to the rich man when he said two words, "Son, remember." He called on him to remember his plenty and Lazarus' penury. Jesus' story of this account proves

that although this man was suffering the torment of hell fire, his mind was intact so that he could remember. He could remember the man with whom he was a contemporary while on earth. He could remember the circumstances under which they both lived. He could remember his responsibility to provide assistance to the man who would have been satisfied with just the crumbs that fell from his table. The rich man finds himself in torment and was seeking the assistance of Lazarus for just a fingertip of water and was told to remember that when he had the opportunity, he provided no such help. He is in a place where he will never forget what he was told to remember. If one goes to this awful place one of the horrifying aspects of it is what one will remember.

Hell Is A Place Of Divided Families

People refuse to obey the gospel because they have family members who did not obey, and they feel if they obey it would be condemning them. We must remember that we are all accountable to God. Jesus has all power in heaven and in earth (Mat. 28:18). Everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for self (2 Cor. 5:10). We must realize that we do not control who goes to hell, and nothing we do or fail to do will change the fate of those who end up there.

People are fond of saying at funerals that their family member who have died are in a better place. If such a statement is true, it is not because someone simply spoke it into existence or because they strongly desired it, but rather that they heard and obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ as did the early saints on Pentecost

(Acts 2:36-47).

If our loved ones will be in a better place, it will because they obeyed the gospel and remained faithful to Him throughout their lifetime.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

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).

People have said they do not want to be without their parents and siblings even if that means going to hell with them. It is not like you will be there comforting one another. You will all be in the dark, you will not be seeing them; you will be alone hearing the screams and gnashing of teeth. The Bible describes this place as a lake of fire. Try to imagine being thrown into a dark lake of lava without being able to disintegrate; in that state one would not be worried about family. I have witnessed people dying from cancer. As the cancer spreads and the pain becomes intense, it is not uncommon for the patient to desire to die due to the suffering while the family is crying and wanting the person to hang on because they do not want to let go. This was the case

with a relative of mine. He was tired of the suffering and he said, “I hope the Lord hurries so I can go.” His family was bedside crying for him to hold on because they did not want to see him go. Maybe, many can relate to such a story, and if so, can you imagine then the kind of pain, agony, and suffering associated with this place? Ask yourself, do you really think in this awful place will be a comfort to others?

Jesus said we need to hate father and mother if we will come to him (Luke 14:26). Some ridicule the Bible because of terms such as these. This is used in a comparative sense. We need to love Christ more, and the hate is used to emphasize the extent we should love Christ. But why should I put Christ before my family? I should put him before my family for my family. If you want the opportunity to save your family, put Christ first. You’ll have a better family—a happier family—and you may save them in the end.

The future is bleak when you are hell bound for failure to obey the gospel (2 Thes. 1:7-9).

Seventh Day Adventists

Gary C. Hampton



Gary is married to Teresa, and together they have two children, Nathan and Tabitha. He has preached in 30 states, 6 foreign countries and directed the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies for six years. He has published 19 books and writes for *The Spiritual Sword* and *The Voice of Truth International*.

Gary has done local work in Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee, and currently serves as the Pulpit Minister at the Siwell Road congregation in Jackson, MS.

Seventh Day Adventist Teaching On Ceremonial Law

Adventists believe God gave a ceremonial law at Sinai in addition to the moral law, which they say is found in the ten commandments. “It was on Mount Sinai that God gave Moses a large portion of the ceremonial law dealing with the building of the sanctuary, where God would dwell with His people and meet with them to share His blessings and forgive their sins (Exod. 24:9-31:18)” (Ministerial Association 242). They expanded on their teaching, saying, “While the Decalogue was placed inside the ark, the ceremonial laws, together with the civil regulations God gave were written down in the “Book of the Law” and placed beside the ark of the covenant as ‘a witness against’ the people (Deut. 31:26)” (Ibid).

They declare the ceremonial law came to an end with the death of Christ. “When Christ died, He fulfilled the prophetic symbolism of the sacrificial system. Type met antitype, and the ceremonial law came to an end.... At the death of Christ the jurisdiction of ceremonial law came to an end” (Ibid 243). Thus, they state that there were no longer any “more worries about the ceremonial laws, with their complex requirements regarding food and drink offerings, celebrations of various festivals (Passover, Pentecost, etc.), new moons, or ceremonial sabbaths (Col. 2:17; cf. Heb. 9:10), which were only a ‘shadow of things to come’ (Col. 2:17)” (Ibid).

Seventh Day Adventists, then, teach that there is a distinction between the ten commandments, which they sometimes call the law of God, and the ceremonial law, which they sometimes call the law of Moses. They say the latter was taken away at the cross, but the former remains in force today.

Seventh Day Adventists’ Teaching On The Ten Commandments

“While Christ’s death ended the authority of the ceremonial law, it established that of the Ten Commandments” (Ibid 244). Their thinking is, “Christ’s death magnified the law, upholding its universal authority. If the Decalogue could have been changed, He would not have had to die. But because this law is absolute and immutable, a death was required to pay the penalty it imposed” (Ibid). They further believe, “His gospel produced a faith that firmly upheld the validity of the Decalogue.” They also teach that, “Christ Himself

fulfilled the law, not by destroying it but through a life of obedience....Christ strongly emphasized that the grand object of God's law must always be kept in mind: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Mat. 22:37, 38)" (Ibid 245).

Seventh Day Adventists Teaching On The Sabbath

Adventists summarize the opening verses of Genesis 2 by saying God finished the work of creation in six days, rested on the seventh "and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath" (Ibid 248). They consider the Sabbath to be "central to our worship of God" (Ibid 249).

They believe the change from Saturday to Sunday worship occurred gradually, attributing it to the pagan Roman government, especially Constantine (Ibid 259-260). "In Isaiah 56 and 58 God calls Israel to a Sabbath reform. Revealing the glories of the future gathering of the Gentiles into His fold (Isa. 56:8), He associates the success of this mission of salvation with keeping the Sabbath holy (Isa. 56:1, 2, 6, 7)" (Ibid 262). Adventist's believe that spiritual Israel has the same mission. "Just as the downtrodden Sabbath is to be restored in Israel, so in modern times the divine institution of the Sabbath is to be restored and the breach in the wall of God's law

repaired” (Ibid).

“The Bible specifies that on the Sabbath we should cease our secular work (Exod. 20:10), avoiding all work to earn a living and all business transactions (Neh. 13:15-22). The Sabbath, according to Adventists, runs from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday and state, “Scripture calls the day before the Sabbath (Friday)—the preparation day—(Mark 15:42)—a day to prepare for the Sabbath so that nothing will spoil its sacredness” (Ibid 263). It is further declared that “those who make the family’s meals should prepare food for the Sabbath so that during its sacred hours they also can rest from their labors (see Exod. 16:23; Num. 11:8)” (Ibid).

The Bible Makes No Distinction

The teaching of Seventh Day Adventists is inconsistent with the word of God. There is no distinction between ceremonial and moral law in God’s word. Ezra went up from Babylon to Jerusalem. He is described as, “a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given” (Ezra 7:6). [All quotations are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] It is clear that the “Law of Moses” was given by the Lord God of Israel. Moses, on the other hand is said to have given the “Book of the Law of the Lord” (2 Chr. 34:14). “So God gave the law of Moses and Moses gave the law of the Lord. (See Neh. 10:29 where God’s law was given by Moses)” (Camp 39).

Notice king Hezekiah “contributed from his own possessions for the morning and evening burnt offerings and for the burnt offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New

Moons and at the appointed festivals as written in the Law of the Lord” (2 Chr. 31:3). These offerings are described by those adhering to sabbath day worship as part of the ceremonial law, but are described as being in the “Law of the Lord” that had been given through Moses,” which they say is the moral, and lasting, law.

Seventh Day Adventists divide the law of Moses into the ceremonial law and the moral law. This position is diametrically opposed to the inspired writings of an apostle “and ultimately deters us from speaking of the ten precepts as he did. Paul, according to the wisdom given unto him, denominated the ten precepts the ‘ministration of condemnation and of death’—2 Cor. iii.7, 14.” Paul goes on to say “that it was to be done away—and that it was done away” (Campbell). Dividing the law “tends very much to perplex any person who wishes to understand the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews; insomuch, that while the hearer keeps this distinction in mind, he is continually at a loss to know whether the moral, ceremonial, or judicial law is intended” (Ibid).

The Law Of Moses Is The Law Of God

Nehemiah shows “the Book of the Law of Moses” is equal to “the Law” (Neh. 8:1, 2). Those two are also called “the Book of the Law,” which is, in turn, called “the Law of God” (Neh 8:3, 8). We have already observed that God gave the “Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). Nehemiah 10:29 says, “God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God.” A number of New Testament passages are easier to understand when we realize the law

of Moses and the law of God are used interchangeably.

Mary finished her days of purification and took Jesus “to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’” (Luke 2:22-24). This is not in the ten commandments (see Exodus 13:11-15). Our Lord cited the sixth commandment (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17) and said it had been given by Moses (John 7:19).

“Two of the greatest commandments are not found in the ten at all. On the two hang all the law and the prophets. (a) Mat. 22:37 and Deut. 6:5; (b) Mat. 22:39 and Lev. 19:18. (See Mat. 19:18-19 and Rom. 13:9)” (Camp 39).

Two Covenants

“The ten commandments are called ‘the covenant’ which God gave to Israel” (Camp 41). The Lord told Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Exod. 34:27-28). Moses’ final task as the leader of God’s people was to recite their history so the generation entering the promised land would know what God expected of them. Looking back to Sinai, he said, “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments;

and He wrote them on two tablets of stone” (Deu. 4:13).

Those same ten commandments were placed in the ark of the covenant. “Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets 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” (1 Kings 8:9, 21).

God revealed through His prophet, Jeremiah, that He would make a new covenant unlike the one He made with the fathers of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” There would be a major change in the teaching of this new covenant. Those born under the covenant made with Israel at Sinai had to be taught the will of the Lord so they could come into an intimate relationship with Him. Those born into the new covenant would already “know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

The inspired penman wrote to Hebrew Christians who were apparently tempted to go back under Moses’ law. He noted priests under Moses’ law had to offer “repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.” He further explained that the Holy Spirit had foreseen that day and quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb. 10:11-17).

Delivered from the Law

We have seen that Jeremiah foretold the day God would establish a new covenant with His people. No wonder Paul told the Christians at Rome that they were dead to the law. He explained this by first noting a wife is bound to her husband as long as he is alive and marrying another man during his lifetime would make her an adulteress (Rom. 7:1-3). He then stated, “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Rom. 7:4). “Just as death freed a first century wife from the marriage bond, so God’s people are freed from the Law of Moses as well as a religious system based upon law” (Price 146). Paul described their release from that covenant as them dying to it. “The “body of Christ” (i.e. His death on the cross) has completely detached us from this system. In the Greek text a preposition (*dia*) makes the point too plain to miss: our death to the Old Testament system has come “by, through, via, by means” of Jesus death” (Ibid 147).

The apostle went on to say, “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6). The word translated “delivered” has the primary meaning of destroy or abolish. “In Rom. 7:6, however, the term is used passively—affirming that believers ‘have been released’ (i.e. delivered) from the law as a consequence of the redemptive work of Christ” (Renn

262). Paul removes all doubt in reference to the law of which he speaks when he says it includes, “You shall not covet” (Rom. 7:7), which was the last of the ten commandments given at Sinai (Exod. 20:17).

The blessing promised to Abraham was given 430 years before the law of Moses. That blessing comes by faith and not through law. The purpose of the law was to show man as a sinner. It only served until the promised Seed, or Christ, came to fulfill the promise. The law was not a rival to the gospel of promise, instead, it showed all men as the prisoners of sin. “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:19-25). The word “tutor” refers to an instructor. “This role was performed by trusted slaves whose job it was to teach and supervise the moral development of young boys....In Gal. 3:24, 25, *paidagōgos* is used metaphorically of the law, depicted as a harsh ‘tutor’ for God’s people, until true freedom came along in the person of Christ” (Renn 524).

Christians’ Day of Worship

The word most frequently translated “church” is *ekklēsia*. The noun “occurs over one hundred times, meaning ‘church,’ with the sense of a gathered community of God’s people assembled for worship (Renn 75). “To be a church, it must meet....In the experience of reconciliation with God, the people know reconciliation also with one another and express this by being together in unity....The assembly is the community’s celebration of its life, faith and its

fellowship” (Ferguson 235). We have already seen that Seventh Day Adventists believe that day of worship is the sabbath. “The sabbath day is mentioned six times in the book of Acts in a historical sense, but never in a sense where a Christian was observing the sabbath day. Furthermore, there is not a single penalty for sabbath violation” (Wallace 127). The Lord’s day is the day of worship for Christians. G. K. Wallace, speaking on a Sunday, said, “We meet today to partake of a memorial. This is a time we meet to honor Christ, not to observe a day” (134).

The first day of the week plays a prominent role in the New Testament. Jesus was raised from the dead on Sunday (Mat. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1-2). The church was established on the Lord’s day (Acts 2:1-41; Lev. 23:15-16). A collection for the saints was given into the church treasury on “the first day of every week” (1 Cor. 16:1-2 NASB, ESV, NIV). As we shall see, the early church also met on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s supper. It is not surprising to find Justin Martyr, writing in 155, explained, “Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly...Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead” (Martyr LXVII). It should be noted that Constantine did not become undisputed ruler until winning the Battle of Milvian Bridge on October 28, 312, following which he “ordered church lands returned to their owners, public relief distributed through the hands of the Bishop of Carthage, and clergy exempted from various public services” (North 78-80). He was, then, more than 150

years too late to make the first day of the week the day on which Christians worship.

Christians Met On The Lord's Day To Eat The Lord's Supper

Jesus, on the night of His betrayal, “took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (Mat. 26:26-28). It was to be eaten often, as Paul explained. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

The Corinthian saints assembled for the wrong purpose. “Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.” The words “come together” are used twice in these two verses, letting us know he is speaking of their assembling. Paul continued, “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:17-18, 20). The word “Lord’s” (*kuriakos*) is found only here and in Revelation 1:10. It means, “belonging to the Lord” (Rienecker 425) and ties the supper and the day together. The apostle clearly believed they should have come together to eat the Lord’s supper as a great memorial feast, but they did not, instead making it into

a common meal (1 Cor. 11:23-26, 33-34). These few verses contain the words “come together” five times. Luke, Paul’s traveling companion uses the past tense of the same words when he describes Paul’s week long stay at Troas. He reports, “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” (Acts 20:7).

Approaching Our Seventh Day Adventist Friends

The teachings set forth in the early parts of this lesson came directly from a work written and published by the ministerial association of the Seventh-day Adventists. However, our Sabbatarian friends may not believe or teach some of those things we discussed. Teaching anyone first requires asking honest questions and listening to the answers. If I want someone to listen to what I believe God’s word teaches, I should demonstrate a willingness to hear what they believe it teaches.

If they see the law being divided into two or three parts like moral, ceremonial and civil, I should ask them to read with me from some of the verses we have examined which demonstrate the “Law of Moses” and the “Book of the Law of the Lord” refer to the same law. Have them read aloud from Nehemiah 8 and ask if all those different descriptions refer to the same law. Kindly ask them to explain why they think the Lord thought the two greatest commandments are not a part of the ten commandments. Study with them from Jeremiah 31. Ask them what they see God was planning to do.

Turn to the New Testament and ask what they think Paul meant in Romans 7 when he spoke of being delivered from the law which contains the tenth commandment. Discuss the meaning of the word translated “church.” Ask if they can cite a passage from Acts that shows the early church worshiped on any day other than the Lord’s day. Finally, discuss the powerful imagery found in the Lord’s supper. Help them to note the Christians in Troas “came together” on the first day of the week to break bread.

Do not expect anyone to change after one study. Pray God will open doors for you to teach. Ask Him to use you to set forth the truth as revealed in His word.

REFERENCES

- Camp, Franklin. “Covenants: Old and New.” *Everyday Christianity*, edited by Winford Claiborne, Freed-Hardeman College, 1984, pp. 35-47. Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship.
- Campbell, Alexander. “Sermon on the Law.” *Millennial Harbinger*, III, no. IX, Sept. 1846. III, <https://community.logos.com/forums/t/38283.aspx>.
- Ferguson, Everett. *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Martyr, Justin. *First Apology*. <http://www.philipharland.com/Courses/Readings/5025/Justin%20Martyr,%20First%20Apology%20and%20Second%20Apology.Pdf>.
- North, James. *A History of the Church: From Pentecost to Present*. College Press Pub. Co., 2003.

- Price, Brad. *Living by Faith: A Commentary on the Book of Romans*. www.abiblecommentary.com, 2005.
- Renn, Stephen D. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2012.
- Rienecker, Fritz. *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*. Translated by Cleon L Rogers, Zondervan Publ. House, 1980.
- Seventh-Day Adventists Believe ...27: *A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*. Ministerial Association, 1989.
- Wallace, G K. *G. K. Wallace's Lectures on Denominational Dogmas*. Gospel Advocate Co., 1956.

Mormonism

Bruce P. Hatcher



Bruce is married to Christy and they are originally from Jackson, TN and they have been married for 20 years and together they have a son named Nathan. He is a 2011 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He has done local work in Louisiana (2011-2017). Currently, he preaches for the Cordova congregation in Cordova, Tennessee, where he has served since 2017.

INTRODUCTION

Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religions in the last two centuries. The membership reported by their own *Newsroom* as of September 2018 was 16,313,735 (Facts & Statistics). The Mormon Church strives to be seen as family oriented, and they are very diligent in both their advertising campaigns and in evangelism. Mormons have played an important role in the history of our country, particularly in the colonization of the western state of Utah due to the timing of their migration and their hard work ethic and industriousness. Undoubtedly, there are many sincere believers and good moral people among them. The task before us is not to judge the hearts and motives of this entire body of people but rather to examine the religion itself. In doing so, we must by necessity, examine the heart and motives of its founder and some of his early successors. The history of the movement will greatly aid us in this task.

HISTORY OF MORMONISM

The Second Great Awakening

In the early 1800's, many changes were taking place in America and the mood was right for a spiritual awakening. Missionaries on horseback were sent out across the frontier, emotionally charged revivals were drawing large crowds, new denominations were growing quickly, and several new religious movements began to emerge. This period of time came to be known as the Second Great Awakening and is important to us, for out of it came the Restoration Movement of the churches of Christ. But it was also a period that saw the birth of several other spiritual movements that were wholly opposed to the church and New Testament Christianity. In central and western New York State, there were an exceptional number of radical revivals that were well publicized. They gained great followings despite many of their strange beliefs and practices. There were the Shakers founded by Ann Lee who were practicing celibacy. The sect called the Universal Friends founded by Jemima Wilkinson, who was claiming to be the reincarnate Christ in female form. The Oneida Community, founded by John Humphry Noyes, was practicing communal marriage. A Baptist preacher named Charles Miller was preaching the end of time was at hand (by which he founded what was then called Millerism, now Adventism). Two young sisters, Maggie and Kate Fox were claiming they could communicate with the dead by séances (founded Spiritualism). This entire region became known as the Burned-over District

“because of the frequency and intensity of the religious revivals there during the Second Great Awakening” (Mead, Hill, Atwood 346). It was from this backdrop that Joseph Smith Jr. founded Mormonism or as they prefer to be called The Latter-Day Saints.

Joseph Visited by Heavenly Figures

The following account of Joseph Smith’s vision is that which is found in the Mormon scriptures. However, it is important for us to note that his account went through several changes from 1827-1838 before settling with the official account. Thankfully, these various accounts were documented and preserved. Franson has compiled a list of them in his book *Breaking the Chains* (3-9). According to the official version:

Sometime in the second year after our removal to Manchester [New York; BPH], there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among the sects in that region of the country. Indeed, the whole district of the country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division among the people... I was at this time in my fifteenth year. During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness... so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was... to

come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong... I often said to myself, what is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they wrong altogether? (History of the Church. Vol. 1; 58,59).

Smith continues,

While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine...I at length came to the determination to "ask of God." (*History of the Church. Vol. 1; 59*).

Smith goes on to deliver a miraculous tale of how he was visited by God and appointed to restore Christianity. He allegedly went alone into a place in the woods on a beautiful day and, as he did so, he was engulfed in darkness. He thought he was about to die then, suddenly, a pillar of light rested upon him and he saw two personages, one saying of the other "This is my Beloved Son, hear Him." He was told that his sins were forgiven (*McClintock & Strong* 619). He asked which denomination was right and which he should join, to which he received the answer that all of them were wrong, to join none of them. Other things were spoken to him that he could not write about, then he awoke to

find himself lying on his back in the woods.

For three years, Smith allegedly suffered persecution because of his claims of receiving a vision, then on the night of September 21, 1823, he received his second vision. This time he was in his bed one night when his entire room lit up like the noonday sun. A messenger of God, an angel named Moroni appeared and informed him that God had work for him to do. He told Joseph of the location of some golden plates that had been hidden by an ancient prophet named Mormon. “The plates contained sacred records of the ancient inhabitants of North America, righteous Jews who had fled from Jerusalem in 600 B.C. and sailed to America in a divinely designed ark” (Mead, Hill, Atwood 347). The angel also informed him that with the plates he would find two transparent stones fastened to a breastplate (allegedly the Urim and Thummin used by priests; Exo. 28:30 et. al.) and that he should use them to translate the golden plates which were written in a form of hieroglyphics that Smith called “reformed Egyptian” (Mormon 9:32). He was told not to show these things to anyone unless he was directed to do so, by penalty of death. His room then returned to its darkened state but then immediately the messenger appeared again with the same message, this taking place three times and was followed by the cock crowing.

The next day Joseph went to the location he was instructed and found the angelic messenger awaiting him there. He found the items but was forbidden to take them until four more years should pass and was told that he should come back to that exact spot once

a year. Then on September 21, 1827, the messenger allowed Joseph to take the items and to be custodian of them until his work was done.

The Translating Work

Soon thereafter, due to claimed persecution, Joseph left Palmyra, New York, and moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania. Over the following years, Joseph translated the tablets and as people heard of his ongoing work, some were interested and desired to help. Smith records that he would look through the stones at the characters, which miraculously turned into English and enabled him to translate what became the Book of Mormon. David Whitmer, a witness to the translating procedure of Smith and signer of the *Book of Mormon* wrote,

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus, the Book

of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man (qtd. by Nelson)

During the three years of translation, when individuals would come to visit Joseph or to inquire of his work, he would often receive revelations from God concerning his visitors. He would tell them of God's will for them in helping his efforts. He would receive revelations conferring honorable roles to his followers, making them elders, priests, prophets and apostles. On one occasion, he and one of his associates were visited by John the Baptist who anointed them into the Aaronic Priesthood. They afterward baptized one another, were filled with the Holy Spirit, began to prophesy, and their minds were enlightened so that they could suddenly understand the mysteries of Scriptures. They were later visited by Peter, James, and John who anointed them into the priesthood of Melchizedek, gave them the keys to apostleship, and conferred the gift to them that by the laying on of their hands they could bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit. Even later, "on April 3, 1836, the Old Testament prophet Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple and restored the priesthood keys necessary to perform ordinances for the living and the dead, including sealing families together" (Plural Marriage in Kirtland & Nauvoo).

As more people began to support and desire to be part of Joseph's work, his closest associates gave testimony that they had viewed the golden plates (though some later clarified that they saw them through the eye of faith). In 1829, the translation work was done,

and Smith moved back to Palmyra, New York, where the copywrite was secured and the work was sent to be printed.

Meetings Begin

On April 6th, 1830, six men, including Smith, met in the house of Mr. Peter Whitmer, Sr., and by unanimous vote of the six, the Mormon Church was organized. However, in just a few short months, lack of public reception paired with persecution, caused them to move. This became an increasingly familiar pattern that grew in intensity.

Kirtland, Ohio

From Palmyra, New York, they traveled to Kirtland, Ohio, where Joseph prophesied was their eternal inheritance. A printing press was acquired by which weekly and monthly periodicals were produced propagating Mormon doctrine. Here he met Sidney Rigdon who at one time had been a close associate of Alexander Campbell and a follower of his restoration teachings. However, Rigdon was raised under the influence that God operates through present day miracles, a view that Campbell opposed. Rigdon also began to teach communal living and was rebuked by Campbell on the issue. He began to question Campbell's authority in the absence of divine approval (a miraculous showing). Thus, history records,

In 1830, four Mormon "missionaries" stopped by to see Rigdon. Skeptical of their message at first, he "received a sign" from

God, left the Mentor Church, and journeyed to meet Joseph Smith. Soon becoming Smith's most influential advocate from 1830 to 1844, Rigdon influenced many from the Kirtland congregation, and some others, to join the Mormons. (Knowles 653)

As concerning Rigdon's influence upon Smith, McClintock and Strong state, "Joseph Smith seems at first to have had vague and confused ideas as to the nature and design of the Church he was about to establish until he found a convert in Sidney Rigdon, an able Campbellite preacher, then residing in Ohio" (624). The defection of Rigdon and those he brought with him nearly doubled the Mormon numbers to between 1500-2000.

During this time, Smith received revelation that a temple should be built but it was halted due to financial trouble. He started his own bank in order to produce his own banknotes to finance the work, but the government denied him a charter. So, he created a joint stock company issuing bank notes which he was not redeeming. He was under pressure from debt collectors and had a warrant issued for his arrest for the charge of bank fraud. Here, Smith began his practice of polygamy, taking a second wife, Fannie Alger, though at this point, his teaching on plural marriages was only shared with a few confidants. By the end of his time in this location, some of his closest advisors defected (David Witmer and Oliver Cowdery who gave testimony to the golden plates). The defectors left in part due to Smith's second marriage, but some also claimed that

Smith had propositioned their own wives. They were excommunicated from the church. Smith then received a new “revelation” that he must immediately depart for Missouri. He and his entourage fled again the on night of January 12, 1838.

Jackson County, Missouri

Smith then received a new revelation, that the west would be their home. It was to be their inheritance, a New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the Saints of the Most High God. The glory of the Lord was to be there and the terror of the Lord so that no wickedness could come into it and it would be called Zion (*Doctrines and Covenants* 45:64-67). However, this prophecy proved to be false. Concerned members of the Mormon hierarchy gave sworn statements to the authorities about a company Smith created called the Danites. The members of this group had taken an oath to support and protect the heads of the Mormon Church as plans were being made by Smith to take over the state and eventually the United States (McClintock & Strong 625). In response, “secret societies were formed...to expel the Mormons from the region; their periodicals were stopped, their printing press confiscated, their ministers tarred and feathered, and numberless other outrages were committed” (*McClintock & Strong* 624). Smith and his associates determined they would no longer tolerate persecution. Eventually, violence broke out and lives were lost in the famed Battle of Crooked River and Huan’s Mill Massacre. The governor of Missouri issued Missouri

Executive Order 44 forcing them out of the state. Approximately fifty church leaders were arrested, and Joseph and his brother, Hyrum, were indicted by grand jury on charges of treason. They were sentenced to be shot, but the sentence was not carried out, eventually they escaped while being transferred to Boone County.

Commerce “Nauvoo,” Illinois

From Missouri they headed to a little town called Commerce, Illinois. By this time, their numbers were no less than 15,000. The people of Illinois kindly gave them a grant of land along the Mississippi. Smith claimed to receive a revelation from God instructing him to name their new home Nauvoo (Hebrew “city of beauty”).

The city grew fast, a temple was built, a militia was formed, and revelation was received to build the prophet a mansion. This was a time of great doctrinal innovation. Smith began openly teaching baptism for the dead, the doctrine of many gods, and plural marriages. He organized the secret Council of Fifty which he authorized to decide which national or state laws Mormons should obey. Smith also announced his intention to run for the U.S. presidency. Sixteen women, renounced Mormonism, acquired a printing press, and established an opposition paper, in which they alleged that Smith, Rigdon, Young and others had invited them to enter into a secret and illicit relationship under the title of “spiritual marriage.” Smith responded with force burning the printing shop to the ground and sending the proprietors running for their lives. When they reached safety, they filed a legal suit against Smith and

his brother, Hyrum (McClintock & Strong 626). These things were too much and the public was outraged. Governor Ford ordered Joseph to turn himself in. He and Hyrum were taken to jail, where a mob of about 200 broke in and shot them both to death June 27, 1844. Consequentially, the Mormons were forced out of Illinois.

The Split

After the death of Joseph Smith, several leaders made claims for presidency of the church. In 1847, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles of the Mormon church voted one of the twelve, Brigham Young, as successor to Smith and president of the church. Some objected to the Quorum's decision and others objected to new teachings that had been introduced into the church. These disputes led to the Mormons splitting into several factions. At least twelve factions still exist as of this printing, however, the majority of Mormons are represented by two (Denominations in LDS).

One group, believing that leadership belonged to the descendants of Smith, followed Joseph Smith III and started the Reorganized Church of Latter-Day Saints located in Independence, Missouri. This group now goes by the name Community of Christ and is the second largest faction. The majority of Mormons followed Brigham Young who led them 1,300 miles from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City, Utah, a historic journey called the Mormon Trail. This faction called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is by far the largest today.

Utah Territory

Being the colonizer and founder of the territory of Salt Lake City, Brigham Young appealed to the Federal Government and was granted Governorship over the territory and appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Claiming also to be a prophet of God, Young became a dictator in all things religious, political, and commercial.

Non-Mormons were not allowed anywhere near the settlement. Their intolerance of outsiders grew until it culminated in the Mountain Meadow Massacre, Sept. 9, 1857, where 120 emigrants (men, women, and children) bound for California were killed because the Mormons were afraid that they would try to settle there. In 1877, John D. Lee was convicted and executed for his part in leading the massacre. He wrote a book confessing to his part of the massacre published posthumously by his attorney. He admitted the crime, but stated it was done under orders of church leadership. Lee wrote,

I knew I had to obey or die. I had no wish to disobey, for I then thought that my superiors in the church were mouthpieces of Heaven, and that it was an act of godliness for me to obey any and all orders given by them to me, without asking any questions (Lee 220).

He further indicated that he was picked to take the fall in order to protect the church and its leadership. Young, other leaders, and other participants in the massacre bore false testimony against him in court. He remarked,

I do not believe everything that is now being taught and practiced by Brigham Young. I do not care who hears it. It is my last word – it is so. I believe he is leading the people astray, downward to destruction. But I believe in the gospel that was taught in its purity by Joseph Smith, in former days. I have my reasons for it. I studied to make this man's [Brigham Young] will my pleasure for thirty years. See, now, what I have come to this day! I have been sacrificed in a cowardly, dastardly manner... Evidence has been brought against me which is as false as the hinges of hell, and this evidence was wanted to sacrifice me. Sacrifice a man that has waited upon them, that has wandered and endured with them in the days of adversity, true from the beginnings of the Church! (Lee 388).

In 1858, the United States Government dispatched Colonel Johnston and 2,500 troops to replace Young as Governor and to restore peace. The Mormon's doctrines, particularly the practice of polygamy, continued to violate Federal laws.

Finally, in 1881, the government confiscated all of the Mormon's \$400 million dollars worth of property and set it aside for the benefit of the school fund of the country. This got their attention and caused the then president of the Mormon church, Wilford Woodruff, to submit to the law of the land. He issued a "*Manifesto*" promising to cease the practice of polygamy and promising that if their land and assets were returned, they would use them for education and church, and

that they would never pursue political or commercial purposes again.

Core Beliefs of Mormonism

The Mormons have four main bodies of scripture. The *King James Version* of The Bible, *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrines and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. The creed of the Mormons can be found in *The Pearl of Great Price* and is referenced there as “The Articles of Faith” (*The Pearl of Great Price* 60-61). Due to space we will not reprint them here but rather notice some of their core beliefs. Most, if not all, religions teach some truths. This is true of Mormonism. Let us first notice the truths that the Mormons teach, then we will note the errors.

Truths Taught by the Mormons

1. *Apostasy and the Need for Restoration*. As a young man growing up in the Burned-over District, Joseph Smith recognized the confusion and divisiveness of the creeds of men. Thus, he reasoned correctly in reaching the conclusion that none of the denominations of his day were correct, but that Christianity needed to be restored. Sadly, his definition of “restoration” was radically different than what we see in the Bible or what was followed by his contemporaries of the Restoration Movement. The biblical examples of restoration (eg. Hezekiah, Uzziah, Josiah) sought to remove anything unauthorized and restore things back to the ancient order with specificity. The biblical prophets such as Jeremiah urged fidelity to God by seeking “the old paths,

wherein is the good way” (Jer. 6:16).

The Mormons, rather than seeking to restore the teachings and practices of the New Testament Church, instead seek to restore the time of God’s working directly in the lives of believers by means of the Holy Spirit and the Golden Age of Israel. Their desire to restore such is not in line with the will of God, for He never intended for those things to be the end goal, but rather a temporary means by which to attain His perfect plan (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-13). We need no new revelation from God because we have the Word of God which will endure forever (1 Pet. 1:23, 25), and the Word of God is the seed to restore Christianity (Luke 8:11).

The Mormon’s misunderstanding of restoration is in part due to their misunderstanding of apostasy. Since the early days of the Gospel, there has always been apostasy to some degree. The New Testament clearly provides warnings of a greater future apostasy (2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). However, Mormon scholars have inferred much from this that was not implied. The Mormon Newsroom states:

The Apostles were killed, and **priesthood authority—including the keys to direct and receive revelation for the Church—was taken from the earth**. Because the Church was no longer led by priesthood authority, error crept into Church teachings. Good people and much truth remained, but **the gospel as established by Jesus Christ was lost**. This period is called the Great Apostasy. This apostasy resulted in the formation of

many churches with conflicting teachings. During this time, many men and women sought the truth, but they were unable to find it. Many good people believed in God and Jesus Christ and tried to understand and teach truth, but they **did not have the full gospel or priesthood authority**. As a result, each generation inherited a state of apostasy as people were influenced by what previous generations passed on, including changes to Christ's gospel (*The Great Apostasy*; Emp. mine).

Consistent with their belief that “the gospel established by Jesus Christ was lost,” the Latter-day Saints claim that the Bible is flawed. “It is asserted by the Mormons that the Authorized Version of the Bible has been fraudulently corrupted, and that this translation [Smith's own] alone represents the original and true form” (*McClintock & Strong* 634). The Eighth Article of Faith reads, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.” As Franson pointed out, “It is important to realize then the burden of proof is placed on the shoulders of those making such an accusation” (36-37). No effort has yet been given to indicate to the world just which parts of the Bible are supposedly corrupt and which ones correct. Instead, this just seems to be the answer employed when any of the many contradictions of Mormon doctrine are questioned. The truth is that the Bible has been scrutinized for centuries to the dismay of all its critics, and there is more evidence that the Bible has been faithfully preserved than for any other ancient document in history.

What Smith and his successors desire to restore, are things that were never intended to be permanent. The Aaronic priesthood was part of a covenant that was taken away from the earth because a better covenant based on better promises was given. There is a royal priesthood in existence now, and every member of the church is part of it (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Direct revelation was taken from the earth because it was never God's will for it to remain, but that the time would come that men would come to God through the apostle's words (John 17:20). The Gospel has never been lost to the world, only lost to those who have not studied and applied it (2 Cor. 4:3). The church has never been completely destroyed: the scriptures promise the kingdom will never be shaken or destroyed (Heb. 12:28; Dan. 2:44; Mat. 16:18). Sure, there have been dark times but there has always been a righteous remnant of faithful followers. As Franson stated, "though Paul was mindful that there would be some apostasy, he never stated there would be total apostasy. That is an assumption added by Joseph Smith." (15-16).

How can we be expected to believe that the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6) was not everlasting, and that our Lord's mission to finish the plan of God was thwarted by the devices of men, and that the faith that was once-and-for-all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) needed resending? How are we to believe the Word of the Lord that the Holy Spirit said would live, abide, and endure forever (1 Pet. 1:23-25) failed to do so? How are we expected to believe the kingdom the Hebrew writer said, "shall not be moved" (Heb. 12:28), and that the

Lord said, “the gates of hades would not prevail against” (Mat. 16:18) was prevailed against by men and moved into obscurity?

2. *Baptism for Remission of Sins.* Mormons have correctly reasoned that the only true mode of baptism is full immersion and that when penitent believer is baptized, he or she comes in contact with the blood of Christ, and their sins are washed away. They affirm that, through baptism, believers are also added to the church (of Latter-day Saints they suppose) and enter into a covenant with God—a covenant to which they must remain faithful to receive eternal salvation. They deny the Calvinistic theologies “perseverance of the saints” (once-saved-always-saved) and “total hereditary depravity” as they reject infant baptism on the grounds that children are born innocent and are not accountable until they reach a certain age. Unfortunately, they leave the truth in other matters pertaining to baptism such as: (1) that the age of accountability is eight years old at which time a child must be baptized (*Doctrines and Covenants* 68:27), (2) that only those who have been ordained to the Aaronic priesthood are authorized to perform baptisms (Fifth Article of Faith), and (3) that one must be rebaptized in certain situations such as rejoining the church after excommunication. They also err in their teaching of baptism for the dead which will be discussed later.

Erroneous Doctrines of the Mormons

1. *Continuing Revelation & Miraculous Age.* This is the most consequential error of the Mormons for

it has opened the door for all the other errors they espouse. Joseph Smith claimed to be a prophet of God and to receive continuing revelation from Him. Every president that has followed him, as well as those in other positions in the Mormon organization, have also made this claim. The Book of Mormon, along with the Doctrines and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price are all the alleged products of latter-day or modern revelation. However, the Bible itself claims that the gifts of prophecy would cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10). It claims that the canon was closed and that God's message to man was complete (Jude 3, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:3; et. al.) at the close of the first century. Christ affirmed that the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, would guide His apostles into **all truth** (John 16:13; emphasis mine). The Holy Spirit guided those men as they dictated and wrote, and God has preserved their writings for all ages. In those writings, the apostles of Christ stated, in no uncertain terms, that men should "hold fast unto the faithful and sound words that have been taught" (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:13) and that men should "hold fast to the traditions which ye have been taught whether by word or epistle" (2 Thes. 2:15) and reject any message that differs regardless of the source (Gal. 1:7-9).

The New Testament of Jesus Christ was given to us by those who knew Jesus personally, who gave their lives for their testimony, and who performed many public miracles confirming they were from God. The New Testament claims to be complete, all sufficient, and the final word we will be judged by. It has been scrutinized by many with no success and has withstood

every attempt to destroy it. It warns its readers against receiving any other teaching not found in its pages regardless of the source.

One must forgive us if we are skeptical of the claims of Smith. Pardon us if we question the scholarship of any who would follow him. A faithful student of the Bible should not be expecting any new revelation. Instead his knowledge of the scriptures should have him poised and ready to reject it. We've been commanded to put those who make such claims to the test (1 John 4:1), and we are and will continue to try the spirit of Smith and his associates.

2. *The Nature of God.* The Mormon doctrine of the godhead is perhaps the strangest patchwork of ideas about deity ever put together. Doctor Frankenstein would be envious of this monstrosity. Smith claimed the truth revealed unto him was that God the Father is one of many gods in a line stretching back infinitely. He was once just as human as we are, but he grew and reached the status of God. We too can reach the status of godhood by degrees of progress; we will know as much as God knows then. Elohim is the God of this world; however other worlds have other gods. He lives on a planet called Kolob where he observes us on earth. He has many wives with which he has sired many spirit children. His two eldest sons are Jesus and Lucifer. Jesus was created by the father having sexual relations with Mary. Jesus became a god through continuous effort and obedience to all the gospel truths and universal laws. Both God and Jesus have physical bodies of flesh and bones just like we do. The Father and Son, being

restricted by such bodies, cannot be in more than one place at one time. In contrast, the Holy Spirit differs from the Father and Son, in that He does not have a body like ours. He has parts spreading throughout the universe.

Brigham Young taught that it was revealed to him, what is referred to as the “Adam-God Theory,” that God, the archangel Michael, and Adam were one and the same and that Eve was one of his wives He brought with Him to populate this world. This theory is now rejected by the Mormon Church which begs the question: “How can the Mormon Church choose to reject certain prophetic revelations if they are from God?”

Volumes could be written refuting the aforementioned beliefs. Yet, for those who look to the Bible as the inspired and final Word of God, these things are easily dismissed. Numerous times throughout scripture, God made statements like this one in Isaiah, “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and **there is none else**; I am God, and **there is none like me**” (Isa. 46:9; emphasis mine). Jesus, who was in better position to explain God’s existence than any other, said, “**God is a Spirit**: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24; emphasis mine). If that were not enough, Jesus further stated “**...for a spirit hath not flesh and bones**, as you behold me having [i.e. before His glorification; BPH]” (Luke 24:39; emphasis mine). The Mormon scholars fail to recognize the figure of speech called anthropomorphism: “attributing human characteristics to deity, animals, or objects.” This figure is used often in the Bible to aid in human understanding,

but the Bible is clear, God is a Spirit. These Mormon teachings on the nature of the godhead are not only false, they are blasphemous and a sure-fire way to secure one's place on the side of God's wrath (Lev. 24:16).

3. *Organization.* The Mormon Church has a hierarchy like none other. It seems that every office ever mentioned in the Bible has been reinstated, regardless of the testament or original purpose. It is apparent that Smith and company had no understanding of the difference between the covenants and no respect for the qualifications given by God for offices. They have reinstated the Old Testament Aaronic Priesthood (though none of their priests are descendants of Aaron or from the tribe of Levi). They have instated a priesthood of Melchizedek (an office never occupied by anyone but Melchizedek and Christ). They have instated a Quorum of Twelve Apostles (though none have been eyewitnesses to the life and death of Christ per New Testament requirement; Acts 1:21-26; 1 John 1:1-4; Heb. 2:4). They have instated deacons and elders (though they do not meet the Biblical qualifications for these offices; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). They have instated a Quorum of Seventy (with reference to the Lord sending forth seventy, in the limited commission; Luke 10:1). Finally, they have supposed prophets (although they fail the test of a prophet; Deu. 18:22).

It is apparent that Mormons do not look to the Bible for authority concerning organization otherwise they would see their blatant misuses. But the Mormons do not seek to restore the New Testament church. They profess to restore the Eternal Gospel, but they deny its

eternality by saying it has been lost, and they deny the Gospel by their attempt to restore things the Gospel has taken away. The Mormon hierarchy, in reality, is not a restoration of anything, it is simply a means of consolidating power and the dividing of responsibilities.

4. *Baptism for the Dead.* Mormon doctrine teaches that a living person who has already been baptized for their own benefit may be baptized again under the presumption that the benefits of baptism (remission of sins) will be transferred to a named deceased person. They believe those who are already dead will have occasions to hear and believe the Gospel in their post-mortem state. They suggest that “Those in Paradise will have the opportunity to go down to Spirit Prison and minister the LDS gospel to them” (Franson 121). They further believe that if one hears and believes in the afterlife, and one still living is baptized for them, they will be saved, and their eternal destination will be changed. At Mormon temples, men and women are repeatedly immersed in water as the names of dead people are read. The Mormon Newsroom published the following explanation:

Jesus Christ taught that “except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). For those who have passed on without the ordinance of baptism, proxy baptism for the deceased is a free will offering. According to Church doctrine, a departed soul in the afterlife is completely free to accept or reject such a baptism — the offering is freely given

and must be freely received. The ordinance does not force deceased persons to become members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or “Mormons,” nor does the Church list deceased persons as members of the Church. In short, there is no change in the religion or heritage of the recipient or of the recipient’s descendants — the notion of coerced conversion is utterly contrary to Church doctrine. Of course, proxy baptism for the deceased is nothing new. It was mentioned by Paul in the New Testament (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:29) and was practiced by groups of early Christians. As part of a restoration of New Testament Christianity, Latter-day Saints continue this practice. All Church members are instructed to submit names for proxy baptism only for their own deceased relatives as an offering of familial love (Baptism for the Dead).

The text cited as authority and example of this practice is 1 Corinthians 15:29 which reads, “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?” This is admittedly a difficult passage, but there are several plausible explanations that do not fall in disharmony with the remainder of scripture. We lack the space needed to fully address these but of this we can be assured, the Mormon interpretation cannot be what was intended because it is in conflict with numerous biblical teachings and plain passages. The Bible plainly teaches that men are individually accountable for their

sins (Eze. 18:20; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). Jesus taught that, once a person dies, their soul goes to hades where there is a great gulf fixed and that souls may not pass from one side to the other (Luke 16:26). In this passage, we can be sure that Paul is not speaking of a form of baptism that is nowhere explained in “the faith that was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Another text used by the Mormons in connection with their baptism for the dead doctrine is, “For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet. 4:6; emphasis mine). The key to the proper understanding is in the tenses of the verbs. Notice the gospel “was” (past tense) preached to them that “are” (present tense) dead.

The theory espoused by Mormonism generates far more problems than it professes to solve. For example, how does the Mormon practitioner of “proxy baptism” know who has accepted the gospel in the spirit world, and thus for whom he may, or may not, assign a “proxy immersion”? And what if someone of the spirit realm accepts the gospel, but no one is ever immersed for him (or her)? What is that person’s ultimate fate? If he (or she) is to be saved anyhow, what is the purpose of the proxy baptism? On the other hand, if the person who accepts the gospel message in the spirit world remains lost, because no one is immersed for him/her, would not that mean that such a one would be condemned on the basis of another’s failure to obey? And would not this contradict the clear biblical teaching that one is accountable for his own conduct?

Previous Teachings Now Abandoned

As we consider whether a religion was instituted by God by means of inspired men of God, teachings that are no longer practiced are important because they were once advocated by men who claimed to be speaking by inspiration and authority of God. These teachings, and those who advocated them, should be put to the test to see if they measure up to the standard of Biblical truth.

1. *Blood Atonement.* Though sources say the doctrine of “blood atonement” originated with Smith, it was Brigham Young who popularized it by his preaching. He taught that some sins committed after one’s baptism, were so grievous that they were beyond the reach of the atoning blood of Christ. Therefore, he instructed, the sinner was to have their own blood shed.

The Mormon church attempts to downplay and deny this teaching. Notice the following statement from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, “...the practical effect of the idea [blood atonement; BPH] was its use as a rhetorical device to heighten the awareness of Latter-day Saints of the seriousness of murder and other major sins. This view is not a doctrine of the Church and has never been practiced by the Church at any time” (Snow).

This is hardly an accurate statement. In sermon excerpts by Brigham Young, September 21, 1856, he preached:

There are sins that men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come, and if they had their eyes open to see their true condition, they would be perfectly willing to have their

blood spilt upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascend to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins... “It is true that the blood of the Son of God was shed for sins through the fall and those committed by men, yet men can commit sins which it can never remit... There are sins that can be atoned for by an offering upon an altar, as in ancient days; and there are sins that the blood of a lamb, or a calf, or of turtle dove, cannot remit, but they must be atoned for by the blood of the man. (*Journal of Discourses Vol. 4. 53-54*).

In another sermon delivered February 8, 1857, he preached:

Will you love that man or woman well enough to shed their blood?... I have known a great many men who have left this Church for whom there is no chance whatever for exaltation, but if their blood had been spilled, it would have been better for them... This is loving our neighbor as ourselves; if he needs help, help him; and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be saved, spill it...” (*Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4. 219-220*).

The effect this had upon his hearers may be understood by details given in the confession of John D. Lee. He told how the priesthood was to know every secret and crime committed by the church’s members. It was preached in their assembly “that to keep back any fact from the

knowledge of the priesthood was an unpardonable sin” (Lee 281). People would be called upon in the assembly to give a confession of anything they knew. If anyone present had additional information that was not divulged that person must repent or be “slain for the remission of his sins” (281). This was to be done in love, in order to save their soul. Those who confessed were re-baptized and were added back to the Church. Lee then gives a chilling account of a man named Rasmus Anderson who had his throat cut from ear to ear for a blood atonement for committing adultery (Lee 282-283).

John Taylor, Young’s successor, backs-off of Young’s fiery oration in *North American Review* “all culprits worthy of death – and we believe some crimes can only be atoned for by the life of the guilty party– should be executed by the proper civil officer, not by any exercise of the *lex talionis* [that is “the law of retaliation” cf. Lev. 24:20; BPH] or the intervention of ecclesiastical authority. (Taylor, 10-11)

The most recent public statement from the Mormon Church released June 2010 states, “In the mid-19th century, when rhetorical, emotional oratory was common, some church members and leaders used strong language that included notions of people making restitution for their sins by giving up their own lives. However, so-called “blood atonement,” by which individuals would be required to shed their own blood to pay for their sins, is not a doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We believe in and teach the infinite and all-encompassing atonement of Jesus

Christ, which makes forgiveness of sin and salvation possible for all people (Mormon Statement on Blood Atonement).

2. *Polygamy*. The Mormon Church today renounces polygamy and claims to excommunicate any among them found to be practicing it. However, it was plainly taught and openly practiced by those in the early LDS movement. Furthermore, the practices and teachings of their founders on this topic are defended by the Mormon Church today. They suggest: “The Bible and the Book of Mormon teach that the marriage of one man to one woman is God’s standard, except at specific periods when He has declared otherwise” (*Plural Marriage & Families in Early Utah*). They claim that God has at times commanded some of His people to practice plural marriages (they cite *Doctrines & Covenants* 132:34–39; Jacob 2:30; Gen. 16). They believe the same command was given to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other leaders and members of the Mormon Church from 1840 to 1890 in order that they might “raise up seed unto the Lord” (Jacob 2:30). Then, because there was so much public objection and increasing pressure against the Mormons because of polygamy, the Lord gave their President a new revelation. One of their scholars writes:

In 1890, the Lord inspired Church President Wilford Woodruff to issue a statement that led to the end of the practice of plural marriage in the Church. In this statement, known as the Manifesto, President Woodruff declared his intention to abide by U.S. law forbidding plural marriage and to use his

influence to convince members of the Church to do likewise. (*Plural Marriage & Families in Early Utah*)

There are records that Smith would at times propose to prospective wives by telling them they were commanded of God to marry him and if they refused “heaven would be closed to them forever” (Elkins 87). Garland Elkins has listed forty-nine of the known wives of Joseph Smith ranging from ages 14 to 59. Some had never been married, some were widows, some were divorced, some were even married to other members of the Mormon Church while married to Smith. Elkins observed:

It is very apparent that Joseph Smith, Jr., experienced great difficulty in an attempt to convince his wife, Emma, that it was proper for him to marry additional wives. It is revolting and disgusting to the extreme degree to read this so-called “revelation” from his pen to his wife on this matter: “And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph, and who are virtuous and pure before me” (Elkins 83-84).

The same can be said for Brigham Young. He had 55 wives, sixteen of which bore him 59 children. In 1902, 25 years after Young’s death, the *New York Times* established that Young’s direct descendants numbered more than 1000 (Brigham Young).

“Participants in these early plural marriages pledged to keep their involvement confidential” (*Plural Marriage and Families in Kirtland & Nauvoo*) because

of the lack of acceptance by the non-Mormon world. One naturally wonders if the same mindset might be possessed by Mormons today.

The Bible in no place records God commanding any of his servants to partake in polygamy. The Bible records the good and the bad deeds of men, sometimes in passing without an explicit approval or rejection. But the fact that it was never in God's heart for such to be so is clear, as is the will of God on this matter. The teachings of Smith and his successors are in direct contradiction to the Bible. "And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife [singular]: and they twain [two] shall be one flesh" (Mat. 19:5; emphasis mine). Jesus declared this was decreed from the beginning. Paul taught that if a woman "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" (Rom. 7:2-3). Smith even contradicts his earlier writings on this subject (Jacob 3:5 cf. Doc. & Cov. 132:38-39).

3. *Eschatology*. Smith was persuaded by Rigdon to adhere to the popular teachings of Charles Miller (founder of Adventism) who taught the millennium was close at hand (McClintock & Strong 624). Combining it with their own theology, it was taught that the Indians were part of the lost tribes of Israel and would soon be converted and that the New Jerusalem would be on the American continent. The tenth article of faith reads: "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and

in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.” Franson states, “The Mormon Church holds a Postmillennial view. This means they believe there will be an age of peace and prosperity on the earth, after which the coming of Christ will occur at the end of the millennium.”

Millennialists make the mistake in believing that the promises made to Israel (Exod. 6:4-8) have not been fulfilled. They suggest God still owes them land, prosperity, and peace from their enemies. The Bible clearly refutes this theory.

And the Lord gave to Israel **all** the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it and dwelt therein. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to **all** that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. **There failed not ought of any** good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; **all** came to pass (Jos. 21:43-45 emphasis mine cf. 1 Kings 8:56; Neh. 9:7-8).

Millennialists also fail to take note that the promises of God are conditional. Israel was repeatedly warned that if they should transgress the covenant of the Lord they would “perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you” (Jos. 3:16 cf. Deu.

8:19-20; 30:15-20). Furthermore, Israel was restored again to the land the Lord had given them after seventy years of Babylonian captivity by the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-3). Those in Babylonian captivity included all the tribes of Israel, as those of the north who had been taken into Assyrian captivity became subjects of Babylon when the Assyrians were conquered. There are no lost tribes of Israel.

CONCLUSION

When we consider this religion that claims to be from God, through the prophetic revelation of a chosen man of God, any God-fearing person must rely upon what God has said previously in order to evaluate such claims. To do otherwise is to suggest all have been lost from the first century until Smith's translation was done and the meetings of the "Saints" began. We must put the prophetic claims of Smith to the test (Deu. 18:22). We must put the so-called sacred writings to the test (Gal. 1:7-9). When we do so, Mormonism falls like a house of cards.

The character of Joseph Smith is not becoming of a prophet of God: a man who throughout his life violated the law of the land, escaped from prison, incited rebellion, indulged his sensual desires by taking multiple wives, and made numerous prophecies that did not come true. Consider his attitude in the following statement:

I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole

have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet. (*History of the Church Vol. 6; 408-409*)

Smith grew up in a family known for taking part in occultic practices. His father was a drifter who practiced water-dowsing (Jennings 75). This was during a time the Fox sisters were making headlines with their ability to communicate with the dead in the same area where Smith grew up. It seems logical to assume that Smith lived as he was raised, finding ways to exploit others for personal gain. Many close to him have testified to the excitement he had when he was able to fool someone. Franson also acknowledged, “Smith in various articles has been recorded as being a money digger (treasure hunter) and a troublemaker, he had pending lawsuits and warrants for his arrest because of swindling, and he was arrested and tried for his disorderly conduct by the state of New York” (Franson 58). Does this sound like the type of man that God would use to build His church?

Concerning the accounts of his translating work and the tales of his finding the golden plates, there are inconsistent accounts given by Joseph and his associates, as if the story was being fabricated over time (see Franson 6-9). When pressed, those who gave testimony backed down and said, “they saw the plate through the eye of faith,” then later they left Mormonism all together. The apostles kept their testimony all the way to their graves,

as we would expect these to do, if they saw what they claimed.

The Book of Mormon is full of plagiarism. It quotes *The Holy Bible* in the King's English (when such was no longer spoken) even though Smith claims to have translated it from another language. And this was supposedly deposited on a hill in New York 1600 years before the King James Version was written. There are no examples of the language from which Smith supposedly translated it ever found, no linguist can testify to its existence. There is unquestionable evidence that a man by the name of Solomon Spaulding wrote a book about ancient inhabitants of America and died while the manuscript was entrusted to a printer. And that Sidney Rigdon, who was employed by the printer, acquired a copy of the manuscript (*McClintock & Strong* 632). Spaulding's friends and relatives have testified that what they read in *The Book of Mormon* is Spaulding's work with additions of Smith. How does one explain that *The Book of Mormon* has been through thousands of revisions, but it was translated, letter-by-letter by inspiration of God? A portion of *The Pearl of Great Price*, that Smith claims was written by Abraham during his stay in Egypt, he translated from a scroll he acquired from a travelling showman. Linguists who have seen the scroll have identified it as a funerary scroll representing the resurrection of Osiris.

Consider the accounts and testimonies of those who left Mormonism: those who defected in Kirtland, Ohio, the sixteen women who left them in Missouri and filed suits against them, and the confession of John D.

Lee. Indeed, the majority of persecution the Mormon Church faced was due to the testimony of those who had renounced Mormonism.

This movement bears all the marks of what Peter warned concerning false teachers who would bring “damnable heresies” and through “covetousness” and “feigned words make merchandise” of those seeking God (2 Pet. 2:1-3). We should urge those who might be sincerely misled by Mormonism to carefully consider, as we do, the words of Paul to the Galatians, “But though we, or **an angel from heaven** [including Moroni], preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8 emphasis mine).

WORKS CITED

- “Baptism for the Dead.” *Newsroom* (Press Release), LDS Church. Retrieved 2020-3-20. <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/baptism-for-the-dead>
- “Brigham Young.” *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigham_Young
- Elkins, Garland. “Some Absurdities of Mormonism.” *Some Modern Cults, Sects, Movements, and World Religions: The Sixth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship*. Ed. Elkins Garland & Warren, Thomas B. 1981.
- “Facts & Statistics” *Newsroom* (Press Release), LDS Church. Retrieved 2020-6-6.
- Franson, Nathan. *Breaking the Chains: One Christian’s Account of Why He Left the Mormon Church*. Azimuth Media: Cleburne, TX. 2017.
- Jennings, Alvin; *Traditions of Men Verses the Word of God*. Fort Worth, Texas: Star Bible Publications, 1996.

- Knowles, Lloyd A. "Sidney Rigdon." *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. 2004. Eerdmans's: Grand Rapids, MI.
- Lee, John D. *Mormonism Unveiled: The Life and Confession of John D. Lee, Including the Life of Brigham Young*. W.H. Steele Co.: Albany, NY. 1877.
- "List of Denominations in the Latter-Day Saint Movement." *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_denominations_in_the_Latter_Day_Saint_movement
- Mead, Frank S. Hill, Samuel S. & Atwood, Craig D. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* 12th Edition. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2005.
- McClintock, John and Strong, James. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature Vol. 6*. Grand Rapids: MI. Baker Book House. 1969.
- "Mormon Statement on Blood Atonement." *Deseret News*. <https://www.deseret.com/2010/6/18/20122138/mormon-church-statement-on-blood-atonement>
- Nelson, Russell M. "A Treasured Testament" *Ensign* (July 1993) <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1993/07/a-treasured-testament?lang=eng>
- "Plural Marriage and Families in Early Utah" *Newsroom* (Press Release), LDS Church. Retrieved 2020-6-2.
- "Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo." *Newsroom* (Press Release), LDS Church. Retrieved 2020-6-2.
- Smith, Joseph. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. Volume 1. Deseret Book Co. Salt Lake City, Utah. 1948.
- Smith, Joseph. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. Volume 6. Deseret Book Co. Salt Lake City, Utah. 1950.
- Taylor, John. "Ecclesiastical Control in Utah" *North American Review*. Vol. 138. No.326. January 1884. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25118345?seq=10#metadata_info_

tab_contents

“The Book of Jacob” in *The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.

“The Book of Mormon” in *The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.

The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.

“The Great Apostasy.” *Newsroom* (Press Release). LDS Church. Retrieved 2020-4-6 <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-restoration/the-great-apostasy?lang=eng>

The Holy Bible, King James Version. All scripture references are to this version.

The Pearl of Great Price. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981

Snow, Lowell M. “Blood Atonement.” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Macmillan: New York, NY. Ed. Ludlow, Daniel H. 1992. Online edition. https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Blood_Atonement

Young, Brigham. *Journal of Discourses Vol. 4*. Digital Collections BYU Library. <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/9596/rec/4>

Church Discipline Errors

Eric L. Owens



Eric Owens is married to Vanessa and they have three daughters. He is the Pulpit Minister at the Avondale Church of Christ, where he has been since 1997. Eric graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1994. He was also appointed as an elder at Avondale in 2009. He has written a book entitled *“So You Want To Be Happy.”* Eric is a frequent speaker in Gospel Meetings, Lectureships, and Marriage Seminars all over the country.

It is an honor to be a part of the Power Lectureship. Through this effort, the Southaven congregation has done much good in exhorting and instructing the people of God. Church discipline is a Bible doctrine which we must preach and practice. Hopefully, we won't as some suggest we do, ignore this portion of God's word. However, there are errors we must avoid in striving to live what God teaches. We will note some errors concerning church discipline and exhort the church to practice the truth of God's word on a very important topic.

Error Number 1

The Church Can't Punish Members

Church discipline is not about kicking members out of the church. The church doesn't add members and we can subtract them. The Lord adds members to his body

(Acts 2:47).¹ (Holy Bible King James Version). Church discipline is not about “punishment” at all. This is the case because discipline is not simply about punishing someone when he or she does wrong. Consider Proverbs 3:11, “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction.” The definition of the word chastening in this verse is discipline, chastening, correction (Brown-Driver-Briggs)². Strong explains how the discipline takes place. He writes: properly chastisement; figuratively reproof, warning or instruction; also restraint. (Strongs e-sword.com)³.

This passage is quoted in the book of Hebrews. One interpretation is that God punishes his children or allows or brings adversity into the lives of his children. Like a father punishing his children so our Father allows our suffering because he believes we can handle it and by it be made stronger. This is the prevailing thought of the passage and it may be correct. The thought may also prevail because when we hear the word discipline we think punishment. There is another thought concerning the chastening of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews is quoting a Proverb. The book of wisdom is instructive in nature. Therefore the writer could be referring to God’s discipline by instructing his children, not punishing them.

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 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 no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed (Heb. 12:5-13).

Notice first the words, “and ye have forgotten the exhortation.” The exhortation was with words spoken. Second, note the words, “nor faint when thou art **rebuked** of him” (emp. added ELO). Consider the next phrase, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” From the opening of the Bible until the end God “disciplines” his children through instruction. God exhorts, reproves and rebukes his children. The book of Hebrews is filled with instructive correction.

The author ends the book with a description of his epistle. “And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto

you in few words” (Heb. 13:22). The book is a “word of exhortation” and the saints were urged to suffer (endure) this exhortation. The brethren were suffering; but the hardship they endured was Jewish and Roman persecution not punishment from God. The letter received was a form of discipline. God rebuked, warned and instructed them to remain faithful. The instruction began in chapter one of Hebrews about the supremacy of Christ. While God had spoken to his people in various ways, his final proclamation was Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2). The message is Christ is superior to angels (Heb. 1:2b-14). Christ is the express image of God. Christ is God (Heb. 1:8). Maybe the saints had forgotten but the instruction is given to remind them.

From the instruction in chapter one the writer moves to warning in chapter two of Hebrews. “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb. 2:1). The warnings intensify. Consider the words of Hebrews chapter three.

Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of

unbelief, in departing from the living God
(Heb. 3:7-12).

If they continued on the road of unfaithfulness they were going to miss heaven just like Old Testament Israel missed out on the Promised Land of Rest (see Hebrews four). The instruction, exhortations, warnings and rebukes we read in the book of Hebrews show God disciplining his children. Some saints were being lured away from Christ. Others were losing their faith in God; still others were weak and wandering. The threat to their eternal destiny was real and God did not want them to miss heaven. A simple reading of the book will manifest how much God longs for his people and is striving to keep them saved. The end of chapter 10 is another exhortation to faithfulness.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10:35-39).

When we are corrected some grow weary. This is why these words occur in chapter 12. “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction.” There was no need to become weary of his correction; it was for their good. Church discipline is

not the church “punishing” someone. It is the last effort being made to turn an erring brother or sister back to Christ.

Error Number 2
Church Discipline Is Not
In Keeping With God’s Character

This error is obvious when we consider that God is a disciplinarian. The material of the 66 books of the Bible unfolds the nature, character and actions of God. He reveals himself to us as he unfolds his mystery to redeem mankind back to himself through Jesus Christ.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

The most frequent form of discipline recorded in Scripture is instruction. Discipline through instruction is essential to a successful parent child relationship for two reasons. One reason is the expectation of parents and the second reason is the ignorance of children. God knows what he desires from us but we can’t know until he reveals his mind to us (1 Cor. 2:8-13). God would be unjust if he never told Adam and Eve which tree was forbidden, and then confronted them for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because God expects his children to obey him, he revealed his will to his children.

Instruction is also how the ignorance of the child is solved. Since children don't know but are expected to obey. They must receive instruction (discipline) to learn the expectations of their parents. By its nature instruction is often restrictive or corrective; it goes against the desires and knowledge of the child. Thus discipline is difficult for children. Parents instruct and children bristle against the instruction. "I know," has been heard by many parents. After the child rejects the instruction and does wrong, then the parent corrects the error. This is the reason discipline is viewed negatively by the recipients.

From God's perspective discipline is for the child's good. The Law of Moses is considered restrictive, maybe even oppressive. Some would sum up the Old Law with the phrase "thou shalt not." While the Law was full of instruction, God gave The Law Of Moses to help his children not hurt them.

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deut. 10:12-13).

The Law revealed God's expectation and eliminated Israel's ignorance. When disciplined, is administered it is not to hurt but to help. The instruction is borne out of love. Knowledge of the dangers that lie ahead prompt the loving parent to instruct their child, and

the loving congregation to discipline its members. Also the certainty of the law of sowing and reaping should move us all to practice discipline (Gal. 6:7-8). The apostle Paul gave yet another reason for the necessity of corrective instruction.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

If and when the instruction fails, the second form of discipline is corrective. This form of discipline is designed to prevent bad or harmful behavior, while encouraging right or holy behavior. According to dictionary.com discipline means, “The practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience” (4). Both forms of discipline are designed for the good of those receiving it. The instruction explains and details how to succeed. The punishment seeks to restrict and urge the person to turn back to the right way, after they refuse the instruction.

Cain and Abel are good examples of both forms of discipline. God instructed Cain and Able about the offering he would accept. We learn this from passages like 1 Corinthians 2:8-13, which teach us that we can't read the mind of God. He must reveal his mind by his Spirit so we can know his will. Revelation produces

faith, “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). We also learn from Hebrews 11, that Able gave his offering to God by faith (Heb. 11:4). John adds to our understanding by telling us that Cain was of that wicked one and his deeds were evil (1 John 3:11-13).

The sum of God’s word is true and taken together the picture is clear. God told Cain and Able what to sacrifice. Cain did not obey God’s instruction. The result was God’s rejection of Cain and his offering (Gen. 4:5). Instead of repenting, Cain was moved with anger and murdered his brother (Gen. 4:8). The infinite God of heaven saw all that Cain did and therefore God visited and punished Cain for his sin.

And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth (Gen. 4:9-12).

The punishment was intended to turn Cain around. Unfortunately, there is no record of it being successful. There must be punitive discipline otherwise people will have no regard for God’s law or the safety and well being of their fellow man (Gen. 20:11).

God is the most perfect disciplinarian of all time.

He instructs man of his will and teaches us how to follow him. First God's instructs us. If that fails, then God punishes. All of this is done to keep us from sinning. But if we sin the punishment is designed to turn us back to God.

Error Number 3

The Scriptures Do Not Teach Church Discipline

This error is seen by the Scripture themselves. God's word is given by God to instruct, warn and correct us so that we do not continue in behavior that will lead us to hell. When we learn and live God's teaching our lives are always blessed. But, every time we reject God's word we hurt ourselves.

Consider Paul's great words to Timothy in view of church discipline.

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. 3:15-17).

The Scriptures do not simply teach church discipline; scripture disciplines us. Several words in the passages teach that God's word disciplines us. Scripture is profitable for correction. Strong says the word is a

compound word meaning; a straightening up again, that is, (figuratively) rectification (reformation): - correction, (Strong's 5). Thayer writes of the word correction, 1) restoration to an upright or right state 2) correction, improvement of life or character. (Thayer) (6).

The word instruction in the text also speaks of discipline. Strong's says, *tutorage*, that is, education or training; by implication disciplinary correction: - chastening, chastisement, instruction, nurture. (Strong's 7). While Thayer says, 1) the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment). It also includes the training and care of the body 2) whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing passions (Thayer) 8.

The church should practice church discipline because God breathed out the Scripture for our discipline. Note the words of the writer of Hebrews.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful,
and sharper than any twoedged sword,
piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul
and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and
is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of
the heart (Heb. 4:12).

This passage powerfully teaches that the word of God is designed to discipline His children. The word of God is described in several terms with its accompanying purposes. The first description is that the word of God

is “quick” Strong’s says, a primary verb; to live (9). While Thayer says, 1) to live, breathe, be among the living (not lifeless, not dead) (10). The New King James says, “living” (New King James) (11). God’s word is alive. The second description is “powerful” Strong’s, active, operative; another word is effectual (12). It is descriptive of ability. God’s word is alive and able to accomplish God’s desires.

Still another description is found in the phrase, “sharper than any two-edged sword.” The word sharper, Strong’s says, (to cut; as if by a single stroke) (13). Interestingly the idea is not of chopping or hacking as of many blows. But of a sword so sharp it cuts through with one stroke. Those are the descriptions. Now what does the verse say this living, active, sharp word is to accomplish?

The first word that follows the description is “piercing.” Thayer says it is, 1) to go through, penetrate, pierce (14). Second, a graphic picture of a sharp sword’s ability. It cuts, pierces through even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow. Third, it is a “discerner” from the original word we get the word critic. The definition is, decisive (“critical”), that is, discriminative (Strong’s) (15). Or 1) relating to judging, fit for judging, skilled in judging (Thayer) (16).

The final two words tell us what Scripture criticizes. They are the “thoughts” and “intents” of our hearts. The word thoughts is defined as, 1) a thinking, consideration (Thayer) (17). Intents is defined as, 1) the act of thinking, consideration, meditation (Thayer)

(18). Another definition is, thoughtfulness, that is, moral understanding: - intent, mind (Strong's) (19). Putting the two together the text tells us that God's word is a sharp, piercing critic of our thoughts and intentions. We are to stand in the mirror of God's word and have our thoughts and intentions critiqued. Such will spur us on to think and behave correctly. The Scripture doesn't just teach church discipline the Scripture is designed to discipline.

Error Number 4

Church Discipline Is Ineffective

There are those who suggest that church discipline does not accomplish anything. They say it serves no good purpose; but this is simply not true. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth he expressed the need for the church to discipline the brother who was in sin. As he wrote to them he explained the good that could be accomplished by practicing church discipline.

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and

my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:1-9).

The first thing church discipline would accomplish was to restore the influence of the church. The brother's fornication was commonly known among the world (v 1-2). The behavior was not even practiced by the world. How would the Corinthian church evangelize a world who was living morally better than those redeemed by Christ? They should have mourned and made sure the world knew the brother was not in fellowship with the church.

The second thing that would be accomplished is the saints would be restored to God. The brother was disobedient and the church was complicit in disobeying God (v 3-4). Paul had already judged, and if he had, certainly God had. The church needed to discipline this brother by the authority of Jesus Christ. God can't fellowship sin, and neither can his people if we hope to remain in fellowship with Him.

The third good that would be accomplished is in the end of verse four. Paul said, ...and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. The point is unity.

Paul's spirit should have been the same with the spirit of the church and the power of the Lord. In chapter one of Corinthians Paul had addressed the need to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). The church needed to be unified about the discipline needed for this brother.

The fourth good that would be accomplished is seen in verse five. Church discipline is for the good of the person being disciplined. The discipline has the power to save the person's spirit in the day of Judgment. Proper discipline is the most loving act the church can do for a member living in sin. The greatest harm would be to say nothing or even encourage a person in sin to live in sin and enter judgment in a sinful state. If we love each other we must discipline each other.

The fifth thing is the good of keeping the church holy as noted in verses 6-9. God's people must be holy because he is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). If sin is allowed to live among God's people it will grow and like leaven permeate the entire loaf. The church is a body and sin left undisciplined would spread like a virus and harm the entire body. Paul's words demonstrate this truth, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Pay close attention to the phrases, "a little leaven" and "the whole lump." It doesn't take much leaven to leaven a whole loaf of bread. And it won't take much sin to spread and ruin an entire congregation. The leaven won't stop and neither will the spread of sin in the church.

This brother's discipline is discussed in 2 Corinthians 2 and 7. To answer if any good came out of the church practicing discipline note Paul's words.

But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

The brother was forgiven and Satan did not gain advantage of the church.

Paul also wrote:

Now I rejoyce, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye

have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you (2 Cor. 7:9-12).

His godly sorrow led him to repent and the church was cleared in this matter and found approved by God. If church discipline had not taken place this brother would likely be lost. The church would've been overrun with sin, taken advantage of by Satan and found as useless salt to the world. Anyone who does not believe church discipline does not agree with the Holy Spirit's revelation and the church's example.

Error Number 5

No One Is Perfect So

No One Can Practice Church Discipline

The Holy Spirit must have anticipated this error by telling the church at Corinth to practice church discipline. If perfection was needed to practice church discipline the church at Corinth had disqualified herself. There are so many problems in Corinth that it would be harder to find chapters without problems mentioned than are. The brethren are divided chapter (1:10-17). Some even claimed to be baptized into the name of others rather than Christ. The brethren struggled with human wisdom and the import of the cross of Christ in chapter two. Paul told them plainly that they were babes and carnal in chapter three. He couldn't even speak to them as if they were spiritual because they were

not. Chapter five revealed a brother living openly in fornication; the brother had his father's wife. It is the very chapter where church discipline is demanded.

In chapter six they were taking one another to court before the world over the smallest matters. The problems continued throughout the remainder of the book. Being inconsiderate to others with their liberty is corrected in chapters eight and 10. They questioned Paul's rights and authority as an apostle in chapter nine. They abused the Lord's Supper, it is recorded in chapter 10 and 11. They fought over their Miraculous gifts this is recorded in chapters 12 and 14 and it was due to a lack of love which is discussed in chapter 13. There were even some in Corinth who didn't believe the resurrection of Jesus (chapter 15).

If ever a church was not "perfect," it was Corinth. But it was the very church that was told to and did practiced church discipline.

Error Number 6

The Church Can Not Discipline Except For Specific Sins

Of course those making this suggestion would have to tell the rest of us what the sins are that warrant church discipline. The truth is the areas covered in Scripture include immorality, doctrine and the way we walk. We would have to wonder what isn't covered when our morals, teaching, and living are included.

It is true that there are three areas where we find the church being told to practice church discipline. We've noticed one in 1 Corinthians 5.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Immorality is cause for the church practicing church discipline.

Another reason for the church to practice discipline is for those who cause division and do not walk according to God's doctrine.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

The church should practice church discipline when we cause division and do not walk in harmony with God's doctrine.

A third area may be summarized as one who refuses

to live as a Christian should.

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. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.(1 Thess. 3:6-15).

These verses are referring to Christian living. It is noteworthy that the church is commanded to withdraw from the brother who walks out of step. He is not ordering his life according to the teaching of the apostles. He is also refusing to work and follow the example of the apostles. Those who will not work shouldn't eat, and cannot provide for their own and have

denied the faith (1 Tim. 5:8). Being idle leads him to walk disorderly and he has become a busybody. What we teach and what we practice are causes for church discipline. If we cause divisions, if we refuse to work, if we walk disorderly, if we refuse to obey the word of the apostle, if any man that is called a brother lives an immoral life we must practice church discipline.

Error Number 7
Church Discipline Is Done
By The Elders Only

It is true that the elders must lead in the area of church discipline as they should lead the church in all things. But it is not true that the elders are the only members of the church who are to practice church discipline. The name alone would show this belief to be erroneous. The phrase is “church discipline” not elder discipline.

Paul words to the church of God at Corinth show the error of the elder only teaching.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:4).

The Lord also told us that if we could not gain our brother after two admonitions we were to tell it to the church (Mat. 18:15-17). If he refuses to hear the church he is to be regarded as a heathen. Those who

will continue to fellowship a brother who has been withdrawn from violate God's inspired word (1 Cor. 5:9-11). The church practices church discipline or the effort is undermined and the brother or sister is encouraged to remain in sin by the few who will not obey God. Such action is not loving it is sinful and destructive to the person. Paul said that through discipline the soul could be saved. The implication is that a lack of discipline would cause one to lose his soul.

Error Number 8

We Can Not Withdraw From Them They Have Already Withdrawn From Us

Every congregation struggles with delinquency. This highlights a situation that we must address before a person becomes delinquent. The closeness and love of the congregation must be such that we are aware of each other. Elders must know the sheep and be known by them. Even so, Luke 15 records a sheep that wandered away. Sheep have an awesome responsibility to God, to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). God's sheep must also bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

To avoid this error when we try to practice church discipline. We shouldn't wait until situations are so far gone that the effort is ineffective. To avoid doing nothing or practicing this error we should identify those who are gone and ascertain why they are no longer with us. Some have moved away, some have gone to another congregation. Others are weak and in need of help. Then some have gone back into the world and are walking

disorderly. By reaching out to those who have left, we can find out about their condition. Such action would demonstrate that we care about them. Once we reengage we can ascertain the cause of their departure and strive to win them back. The process of church discipline can begin if necessary after reengaging those who have strayed. If we need to repent for our part then leaders and members should do that as well.

Error Number 9
Since We Did Not Discipline Anyone
In The Past We Can Not Discipline Anyone
In The Present

Those who espouse this error are saying there is never an time to repent and turn back to God. It's true that many congregations have not practiced church discipline. Some likely cannot remember the last time they did. This shouldn't be thought strange. Discipline is first instructive and only corrective if necessary. Throughout Scripture even God does not use punitive discipline often. Some read the Bible and believe that God is judgmental and harsh but that is simply not true.

God is merciful and long-suffering, abundant in goodness. Our Father is gracious, loving and forgiving. The reason the judgments of God stand out is because they are the exception and not the rule. How many world wide floods were there? While there are instances of judgment and even death from God. However, there is far more instruction and pleading from God to his people. The wilderness wanderings are one example of

God's loving long-suffering nature. The period of the judges stand out as another example of mercy and love from God. The same could be said of both the United and Divided Kingdom periods. God sent the prophets to Israel and Judah pleading for them to repent.

Sometimes church discipline is not practiced because we are negligent toward God and each other. But sometimes church discipline is not practiced because we understand how serious a matter it is, and we are humbled by the process and proposition of withdrawing from our brothers and sisters.

If a congregation has not practiced church discipline as they ought the answer is not to accept the error of we never have so we never can. The answer is to repent if we have not obeyed God and teach and preach on creating an atmosphere where discipline is unnecessary. Next we should teach and preach about church discipline. Finally, if necessary we must begin to practice the doctrine of church discipline with humility and love as we do all of God's doctrines.

Error Number 10

If You Miss Three Services In A Row We Start The Process Of Church Discipline

When we seek to obey God's will, we must make sure it is God's will we are seeking to obey. No passage in Scripture shows any arbitrary man made standard being the reason for the church to practice discipline. Romans 16:17-18 refers to those in Judaism, "causing division and offenses contrary to the doctrine." 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, a brother has his father's wife. He is openly

living in fornication and the church is puffed up. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 a litany of things are listed: they are walking disorderly, they will not work, they do not walk according the apostles traditions, they have become idle and busybodies.

It is possible that I missed something but I have never read anything in the New Testament that leads to the conclusion that the church is to set up it's own criteria and enforce that upon God's people as a cause for church discipline. This is one problem with the church establishing its own reasons for practicing church discipline but there are others.

First, who will keep track of such a situation for every member for all time? Secondly, what are the exceptions to the rules? Some will miss services because of work. Others will miss services because of sickness. Some will miss services because of vacation. Who will count and reset every time each member misses? Suppose I miss one service because of vacation; then I miss one service because I became ill. Still I might miss another because I had to work. I've missed three services in a row. Would that make me a candidate for church discipline?

Another problem with our arbitrary rules is that the system can always be gamed. Once I know that missing three services in a row will lead to discipline, if my heart is not right then I will just miss two and reset. Such is the nature of approaching law without a heart of faith. The Judaisers were living this life and trying to force it on the church, (see Paul's epistles particularly Romans and Galatians). He refutes them and explains

why such an approach to God's law will fail. The answer is not to set up our rules, but to strive to live by God's rules. The Lord told the apostles they would always have the poor with them. He could just as well have said you will always have the weak and immature with you. Growth is accomplished by the desire of the one in need of growing and the equipping of those who are charged with helping. The word of God is the means of growth (1 Pet. 2:1-2). We can't build human walls high enough to keep the spiritual immature from behaving like children, and we shouldn't try.

Error Number 11
We Just Have To Let God Deal With It
In The Judgment

If we refuse to practice church discipline and wait until the judgment, it will be too late for us. Church discipline, like every doctrine of God is a matter of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). God has given his word and the Spirit has revealed the mind of God on the subject. Church discipline is an act of love from Christians for a fellow Christian. After teaching, exhorting, and warning the church mournfully reaches the point of church discipline. Since the things that were written in Scripture were written for our learning we would do well to learn from Joshua and Akin. The event is recorded in Joshua chapter six and seven. After the children of Israel lost the battle at Ai, Joshua mourned and prayed to God. What God said to Joshua should be learned by every member of the church.

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel... And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you (Josh. 7:1-13).

There are several key takeaways from these passages. The first is that sin among God's people causes defeat for God's people. Sin was a problem for ancient Israel and will be for the church today. Secondly, sin is known by God and will not be tolerated by God. Next, prayer is always appropriate but not for the resolution of sin; repentance is! Lastly, God warned Joshua and us that our failure to deal with sin among God's people will not allow God to remain with us. God's word to Joshua are a somber warning, "neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you." If we wait till the judgment, it will be too late for the Christian who is need of discipline as well as for those who should have practiced church discipline.

Conclusion

The aim of church discipline is for the well being of the person being disciplined. The goal of discipline is to prevent bad or wrong behavior. Prevention can be

achieved through instruction or teaching. If the teaching and instruction are not heeded correction becomes necessary. The corrective or punitive form of discipline is designed to stop the detrimental behavior that will lead to the harm or destruction of the person.

God's corrective discipline follows man's refusal to follow His instruction. The church is a Divine institution and God has designed that the church behave toward one another as he would toward us. When a member teaches error, walks disorderly or lives sinfully and refuses to repent. The church must love the persons soul enough to warn, exhort and if necessary practice church discipline. Paul summed up the goal of church discipline when he wrote, "that the soul may be saved in the day of the Lord." May God help us and strengthen us to obey him in this challenging command.

Works Cited

- Holy Bible King James Version*, e-sword.com.
Brown-Driver-Briggs, e-sword.com.
Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, e-sword.com.
www.dictionary.com
Strong's, e-sword.com.
Henry, Thayer, e-sword.com
Strong's, e-sword.com
Henry, Thayer, e-sword.com
Strong's, e-sword.com.
Thayer e-sword.com.
Holy Bible, The New King James, e-sword.com
Strong's, e-sword.com.
Ibid

CHURCH DISCIPLINE ERRORS

Thayer, e-sword.com.

Strong's, e-sword.com

Thayer, e-sword.com

Thayer, e-sword.com.

Ibid.

Strong's, e-sword.com

Theistic Evolution: God Created The Earth's Creatures Over Millions Of Years

Caleb Glenn Colley



Caleb is married to Rebekah and together they have a daughter named Maggie. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University (B.A., B.S), Faulkner University (M.L.A.), and the University of South Carolina (Ph.D.). Caleb serves as an adjunct instructor in the Graduate School of Theology at Freed-Hardeman, writes for *The Gospel Advocate* and Apologetics Press publications, and produces programming for the Gospel Broadcasting Network. He has done local work in South Carolina and Georgia, and is currently the Pulpit Minister of the Lakeside congregation in Orange Park, FL.

The Darwinian theory of evolution is, briefly stated, the theory that all organisms descended from a single common ancestor by means of natural selection, with no direction from outside the process (see Darwin; cf. Meyer 43). After the widespread recognition that natural selection alone provides no positive force for the origin of new kinds of animals, the “neo-Darwinian” theory now holds that that all organisms descended from a single, common ancestor by means of natural selection and mutations. The theory requires a great deal of time (millions of years) to account for the gradual accumulation of small changes, resulting in the macro-evolution of one kind of organism into another. When I use the word “evolution,” I will be referring to the neo-Darwinian theory of origins.

The question before us is not whether evolution as such is a true account of origins. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that evolution is not true (see Bird; Johnson). In fact, many biologists, even those who believe in evolution, have recognized that random mutations do not provide natural selection with the means to generate new genetic information and thus higher life forms (see Morris 131-315; Sanford). Pierre-Paul Grassé, who was the chair of evolution at the Sorbonne in Paris for over 30 years, said, “No matter how numerous they may be, mutations do not produce any kind of evolution. . . . [M]utations do not coincide with evolution” (103). Grassé had his own evolutionary theory and so do other biologists, but none has found a natural force that can explain the development of increasingly complex types of animals.

The question before us is more specific. The question is whether “theistic evolution” (also called “evolutionary creationism”) is a true account of origins. As this paper’s title suggests, theistic evolution is the theory that “God created the Earth’s creatures over millions of years.” In other words, evolution occurred, but it was caused supernaturally—at least initially and perhaps with subsequent direction. Theistic evolutionists differ on how much God was involved in evolution. Some have suggested that God directed specific mutations, whereas others deny that God had any role beyond initiating the process of evolution (see Meyer 43). Theistic evolutionists may even argue that God’s design is given in evolution itself (e.g., Ratzsch).

If we have strong reasons to believe that evolution

did not occur, then we obviously have strong reasons to think theistic evolution did not occur. Still, there are those who cling to evolutionary presuppositions while also advocating for the thesis that God played some role in origins. The basic outlook of the theistic evolutionist was stated by James Woodrow, Chair of Religion and Science at Columbia Seminary, in 1883: “The Bible teaches nothing as to God’s method of creation, and therefore it is not teaching anything contradicting God’s word to say that he may have formed the higher beings from the lower by successive differentiations; and as several series of acts” (quoted in Kling 196). A famous contemporary exponent of theistic evolution is the American physicist and geneticist Francis Collins, who led the Human Genome Project and is the current director of the National Institutes of Health. Collins founded BioLogos, a nonprofit foundation that promotes theistic evolution as it seeks to invite “the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as we present an evolutionary understanding of God’s creation” (“About Us”). BioLogos is said to be “at the forefront” of the theistic evolution movement today (Currid 878). In his book, *The Language of God*, Collins wrote:

God, who is not limited in space or time, created the universe and established natural laws that govern it. Seeking to populate this otherwise sterile universe with living creatures, God chose the elegant mechanism of evolution to create microbes, plants, and animals of all sorts. Most remarkably, God intentionally chose the same mechanism to

give rise to special creatures who would have intelligence, a knowledge of right and wrong, free will, and a desire to seek fellowship with Him. . . . This view is entirely compatible with everything that science teaches us about the natural world. It is also entirely compatible with the great monotheistic religions of the world (200-201).

As Stephen C. Meyer has observed, there is an obvious tension between theistic accounts of origins and evolution: Whereas evolution is supposed to be an unguided process, theistic evolution holds that God guided the process (“Theistic Evolution”). This conflict is implied by the words of Ernst Mayr: “For the devout of past centuries . . . perfection of adaptation [among various creatures—CC] seemed to provide irrefutable proof of the wisdom of the Creator. For the modern biologist it is evidence for the remarkable effectiveness of natural selection” (650). Theistic evolutionists would like to have it both ways.

We should reject theistic evolution not only because scientific evidence precludes it, but also (and more important) because the biblical account of Creationism proscribes it. There is abundant evidence for the inspiration and reliability of the Scriptures (see Clarke), although these are taken for granted for purposes of the present study. We take it as a datum that whatever the Bible teaches about the origin of the various kinds of plants and animals is true. While God could bring about whatever kinds of living things He desired in whatever way He desired (without involving Himself in logical absurdity or opposing His own

will), the Bible does not teach evolution. In fact, the Bible directly states in various passages and implies in various ways that God specially created the world and the various kinds of animals in six literal days.

Many theistic evolutionists seek to “fit” millions of years of evolutionary time and change into the biblical account of creation. The significance of this issue goes well beyond historical curiosity, or an “intramural” debate among people who all equally affirm what the Bible teaches (cf. Allison 949). As will become evident, the origin of the kinds of creatures on Earth is at the foundation not only of history, but also that of Christianity. So, in the following discussion, I will demonstrate the failure of prominent attempts to fit evolution into Genesis 1-3. First, I will discuss the Gap Theory; Second, I will discuss the Day-Age Theory; Third, I will discuss the view that the literary style or genre in Genesis 1-3 provides evidence for evolution; Finally, I will discuss areas in which theistic evolution contradicts plain Bible teaching in various passages outside of the creation account.

The Gap Theory

One attempt to harmonize evolution and the Bible is the Gap Theory, which seeks to fit millions of years of evolutionary history into an alleged gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. (Thompson [1994a] and Fields have provided a helpful catalogue of those who have advocated the Gap Theory.) During this period there were generations of proto-humans, and the gradual development of hominids, who eventually suffered

a cataclysm the result of which is portrayed by the “without form and void” state of Genesis 1:2 (Fields 7; King James Version; all Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted). The formless and void state would include the geological record that we observe today, and according to some theorists, the devil’s ejection from heaven precipitated the ruin of the Earth (Pember 34-36).

It has been alleged that the Hebrew language of Genesis 1 supports the Gap Theory in two major ways: First, gap theorists suggest that there is a sharp difference between the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “created” (*bara*) in Genesis 1:1 (the initial stage of creation, prior to the gap) and the meaning of the Hebrew word “made” (*asah*) in the restorative, six-day stage of creation (after the gap, e.g., 1:7; 1:16; Exod. 20:11). And yet, notice the following:

- The word *bara* is used in Genesis 1:21, after the alleged gap.
- Justin Rogers, a Hebraic scholar, has observed that the Bible uses no fewer than 13 different terms to refer to creation (words translated “formed,” “made,” “fixed,” “appointed,” “brought forth,” etc.).
- Both *bara* and *asah* are used in parallel, in the same verse, to refer to the creation of the heavens and the Earth (Genesis 2:4). Rogers also points out that there various other verses in which the two words are used in parallel (Genesis 5:1; Genesis 6:7; Isaiah 41:20; Isaiah 43:7; Isaiah 45:12, 18; Amos 4:13).

While the words *bara* and *hayetah* have different shades of meaning, these differences do not prohibit the biblical writers from using them synonymously.

The second argument in support of the Gap Theory is that the language of Genesis 1:2 implies that there is a gap just prior to the verse. According to this interpretation, the Hebrew word translated “was” (*hayetah*) means “became,” and the phrase translated “without form and void” in the King James Version (*tohu wabohu*) indicates the result of destruction. And yet, as Reyburn and Fry observe in their comments on the language of this passage, “[T]he Hebrew verb translated was refers to the time when God began his work of creation. Was does not mean that the earth remained in this shapeless state for a long time; nor does it mean that it became such after being something else earlier” (30). And, the phrase “without form and void” does not refer to the result of destruction or depreciation, but rather the state of things before God finished His creation. It was “uninhabited and uninhabitable,” but not “a land of ominous ‘chaos’ as often assumed” (Arnold 37; cf. Tsumara).

Having seen the lack of textual evidence for the alleged gap between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2, consider another significant problem facing the Gap Theory: It implies that human death (and sin) occurred prior to Adam, but Paul explicitly teaches that human sin and death began with Adam (Rom. 5:12-19). Similarly, the Gap Theory implies that the Earth was in turmoil prior to Adam’s sin; the environment of “thorns and thistles” was present at the very beginning. Paul, however teaches that the travail post-dated Adam’s sin

(Rom. 8:19-22; cf. Grudem 819-20). Those whose allegiance is to affirming what the words of Scripture teach, rather than what some contemporary scientists assert, will reject the Gap Theory.

The Day-Age Theory

The Day-Age Theory suggests that the word translated “day” in Genesis 1 may denote long ages of time rather than what we experience as literal, “24-hour” days (Thompson [1994b] has provided a helpful catalog of writers who have advocated for the Day-Age Theory). This theory is based on the fact that the Hebrew word translated “day” (*yom*) has a variety of meanings in Scripture, just as it does in English. Obviously, when we speak of “Caesar’s day,” or when an older person uses the phrase “back in my day,” we refer to something other than a 24-hour period. Similarly, “day” does not refer to a 24-hour period in Genesis 1:5a (“God called the light day”), as well as in Genesis 2:4; Genesis 26:18; Genesis 39:11; Joshua 24:31; and Isaiah 6:16. From observations such as this, some have concluded that “[w]hether the seven days were days of 24 hours, or long, successive periods, we do not know” (Halley 60). Others are more definitive and argue that the days were long periods of time (e.g., Ross).

The context in which any word occurs limits the word’s range of meaning. Whenever the word *yom* is modified by a number in Scripture (as in Gen. 1), it always refers to 24-hour days. Consider the following instances: “And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace-offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his oblation... but that which remaineth of the flesh of

the sacrifice on the third day shall be burnt with fire” (Lev. 7:15-17). “[H]e shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tent of meeting” (Num. 6:9-10). “And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that Jehovah had given him in commandment unto them” (Deut. 1:3).

Furthermore, God clarified what He meant by referring to the sequence of six days in Genesis 1 by saying that each was composed of “evening” and “morning,” a period of light and a period of darkness (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). God clarified further by mentioning days alongside “seasons” and “years” (Gen. 1:14). If a day is an eon, then what is the significance of seasons and years? Finally, there is the problem of the plants created on the third day with only the prospect of a millions-year-long darkness until the dawn of the fourth day, awaiting the distant occasion when they could access the vital symbiotic relationships with birds (two days or eons away) and insects (three days or eons away; Huse 77).

It is not surprising, then, that when Moses presented the Israelites with the Ten Commandments, they contained the following: “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God.... for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (Exod. 20:8-11; cf. Exod. 31:17). Clearly, God intended for the Israelites to work for six

literal days and rest for one literal day in each literal week, based upon His activity in Genesis.

Some have suggested that literal days could not be in view prior to the fourth day, because the sun was uncreated until then (see Davis 52). Light, however, was present, and thus days existed. “[I]t is the function of the heavenly bodies to mark the days, not to make them! It is night when no moon appears; and the day is the same whether the sun is seen or not” (17).

Those whose allegiance is to affirming what the words of Scripture teach, rather than what some contemporary scientists teach, will reject the Day-Age Theory. Having discussed briefly the alleged evidence for theistic evolution in the Hebrew grammar of Genesis, we may conclude with the words of the late James Barr, an Oxford professor of Bible interpretation and expert on the vocabulary and structure of the Hebrew language:

So far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) [sic] of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience; (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provide by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to the later stages of the Biblical story, and (c) Noah’s flood was understood to be worldwide, and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark. (quoted in Plantinga 217, parenthetical items in orig.)

The Literary Style or Genre of Genesis 1-3

It has been suggested that the literary style of genre of the entire section of Scripture that reports the creation is of a type that allows a variety of non-literal interpretations (e.g., Craig). [Notice that I am using the phrases “non-literal” and “literal” in a way that is conducive to a broad assessment of Genesis 1-3, acknowledging that an accurate historical report could contain such non-literal statements as “the sun rose this morning,” or “God made the two great lights,” where “light” refers to a source of light.] If such were the case, then there would be no tension between Genesis and evolution.

The Old Testament scholar and archaeologist John D. Currid has critiqued persuasively five major interpretations of Genesis 1-3 that are used commonly to support the claim that the entire section of Scripture is intended to be read non-literally. Space limitations prohibit an in-depth discussion of these issues, so here I will provide a brief summary of Currid’s findings and arguments, referring the reader to his article and bibliography for further study.

The Functional Model of Genesis 1-3

This model suggests that the purpose of Genesis 1-3, like other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts concerning origins, is to describe the functions of each aspect of creation rather than to provide an account of historical origins. And yet, a survey of the various ANE texts shows a distinct concern with material origins in addition to the concern for functionality. The Egyptians wrote not only about the detailed material origins

of the universe and of mankind in particular, but of the creation of the gods themselves (an origins issue detached from the function of items on Earth). The Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation epic, is concerned with both function and material origins: Deities come into being through the gods' sexual procreation, and there is a cosmic battle amongst the gods that results in the order of the Universe. While the Genesis account of origins is different from these in many ways, it is similar to these accounts in that it provides discussion of both material origins and the functions of creatures.

The Mythological Model of Genesis 1-3

This model suggests that Genesis 1-3 is a legendary story, so there is no way to determine a connection between the words of the text and historical events or empirical claims about the world. Allegedly, the author of Genesis borrowed from available myths and then removed the mythological elements to make the text appear to be literally historical. And yet, the Genesis account is strikingly unique and opposed to the ANE myths in at least the following ways: (1) Genesis teaches that God created man in His image with the honor of ruling the Earth, but when man failed to live up to the character of God, he was punished. The Mesopotamian myth, on the other hand, taught that the gods created humans as slaves, but then when man did not serve the gods effectively, they decided that man was a thorn in their side and attempted (but failed) to destroy them. (2) In ANE creation myths, the gods are associated closely with (even personified by) particular aspects of nature, especially the heavenly

bodies. In Genesis, on the other hand, God creates the Universe but is not identified with any particular aspect of it. (3) ANE creation myths are polytheistic, but the Genesis account is strikingly monotheistic.

The Figurative and Theological Literature Model of Genesis 1-3

This model suggests that Genesis 1-3 is intended to be figurative (or even allegorical, where we find ourselves represented in the story), and that the author had no intention to convey literal history. The text teaches theology but not history, and we risk missing the theology if we insist on searching for history. For example, the account of the creation of Adam from dust teaches not that there was an actual man named Adam who literally was formed from the dust of the ground, but that we all are mortal. The account of Eve being formed from Adam's rib teaches nothing about the history of an actual man, rib, and woman, but that every man's wife is to be closely connected to him. And yet, the literary style of the language of Genesis 1-3 is historical narrative, and stands at the fount of the other historical narratives of the Old Testament. There is no text in Scripture that even hints at the idea that Genesis 1-3 is figurative. The account of the creation of various aspects of the natural world (not just man) indicates that the purpose is historical and not merely theological, although the account teaches us powerful theological truth.

The Sequential Scheme Model of Genesis 1-3

According to this model, Genesis 1:1-2:3 and

Genesis 2:4-3:24 are from different sources and are competing narratives. It also has been suggested that the second text is a record of events that happened much later. Adam and Eve thus would not be the first human couple, but rather those chosen by God (from among many) for specific purposes. Obviously this approach requires interpreting various features of Genesis 2 figuratively. And yet, a careful study of the text of Genesis 2 will show that it too is historical narrative, and that it provides a more detailed, localized record of some events that have been reported already in Genesis 1. A variety of textual indicators (beginning the discussion with the Earth rather than the heavens; the mention of the “Lord God” rather than simply “God”; the structured repetition in chapter 2) are indicators that the author intended to provide more information about what had been discussed in chapter 1.

Those skeptical of the Bible have taken Genesis 2:5 to teach that there were not yet any plants at the beginning of the sixth day of creation. This would conflict with Genesis 1:11-12, where plants are created on the third day. Genesis 2:5 says, “And no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth: and there was not a man to till the ground.” There is no real contradiction here. Genesis 2:5 refers only to two types plants (not to all vegetation). And, the verse does not say that these plants did not yet exist at all, but rather that the plants had not yet sprouted. Finally, Genesis 1:11-12 does not use the verb for “sprouted” in Genesis 2:5. So, the two passages are harmonized.

The Etiology as Methodology Model of Genesis 1-3

“Etiology” is the study of causes, and a passage of Scripture is etiological if it explains the existence of some feature of the world. For example, it has been suggested that the account of Sodom’s and Gomorrah’s destruction was invented to explain the features of the Dead Sea, or that the conquest of Ai was invented as an explanation for a mysterious mound of rubble. Some have interpreted any etiological purpose in Genesis 1-3 as an indication that it is unhistorical. On this view, Adam and Eve represent Israel, and the author invented their story of sin and ejection from Eden as a way of explaining the Babylonian exile to sixth-century Jews. Satan’s temptation of Eve represents the Israelites’ temptation to follow Canaanite religion. As we might expect, the creation narrative is taken as an etiological portrait of God’s making Israel into a nation.

There are several problems with the methodologically etiological approach. (1) It requires that Genesis was written after the exile, but the Bible teaches the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and critical scholarship is divided on the issue of the Pentateuch’s date. (2) An historical event could be used for etiological purposes. For example, the phrase “the Valley of Achor” (meaning “trouble”) was attached to the place where Achan was killed, and a heap of stones put there, because of the historical events that took place there (Josh. 7:26). (3) The Hebrews resisted mythology. After all, scholars have long argued that Genesis 1 is an adaptation of ANE myth that has been stripped of the mythological elements. So, it would be anachronistic for their desire

to mythologize the Babylonian exile to have precipitated the creation narrative. (4) The most natural way to read the text is to see Adam as a real example of sin and punishment from whom lessons can be learned. These lessons are brought out clearly in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Job 31:33; Hosea 6:7; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:12-15).

Theistic Evolution's Conflict with Other Passages of Scripture

Let us say for the sake of argument that there is a significant amount of metaphorical or figurative language within Genesis 1-3. Given this, we could concur with Arnold's proposal that the Genesis creation account serves to answer the "Who" and "Why" questions about origins rather than the "What" and "How" questions (51-52). And yet, there is much more biblical information about creation than what we find in Genesis 1-3. When the rest of Scripture is taken into account, theistic evolution is found to be in hopeless conflict with historical statements in the Bible that obviously are not intended as non-literal.

Wayne Grudem has listed a number of implications of theistic evolution that conflict with biblical history and doctrine (783-838). I am listing some of these implications here (with slight contextual modifications). In each case, I will also mention some biblical passages outside Genesis 1-3 that are contradicted by the implication.

- Adam and Eve were not the first human beings (and perhaps they never existed). Adam and Eve, if they existed, were born from human

parents. This contradicts Genesis 5:1-5 and 1 Chronicles 1:1, which initiate genealogies connecting Adam in a line of descendants to Noah and beyond, to figures such as David and Solomon. Luke's Gospel traces the genealogy of Christ Himself back to Adam (3:38). Paul treated Genesis as being literal history, and Adam to be the first man (Rom. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 11:6, 12; 15:45, 47).

- God did not act directly or specially to create Adam out of dust from the ground, and God did not directly create Eve from a rib taken from Adam's side. This contradicts 1 Corinthians 15:47, where Paul says that Adam was "earthy" (ASV), literally "made of dust." Paul also makes clear that the woman was made from man (1 Cor. 11:12).
- If Adam and Eve existed, not all human beings have descended from them, for there were thousands of other human beings on Earth at the time that God chose two of them as the biblical Adam and Eve. This contradicts Paul's statement: "[God] made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).
- There is no sense in which God rested from his work after creating the various kinds of organisms. Either God started evolution and then rested before the organisms developed, or God still is creating through evolution. This contradicts not only Genesis 2:1-3, but also

the statements about God's rest in Exodus 20:11 and Hebrews 4:4-10.

Notice that, in the case of each of these points, we must decide whether we will abandon what is taught literally (and plainly) by the New Testament in order to take non-literally what is taught in the Genesis creation narrative.

Even if it were impossible to know from the text of Genesis whether millions of years of evolution could fit there, the New Testament authors still provide remarkable attestation to the literal history of the Genesis creation account, as well as the literal history recorded in the rest of the book. In Mark 10:6, Jesus said, in referencing the first human couple: "But from the beginning of the creation, Male and female made he them." In Luke 11:50-51, Jesus referenced Abel, the son of Adam and Eve: "[T]he blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary: yea, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation." Jesus discussed Noah as being a historical figure (Matthew 24:37-39). Peter treated Genesis as being literal history (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:5). The Hebrews author treated Genesis as being literal history (1:10; 4:3-4, 10; 11:1-22; 12:24). In short, there is no hint anywhere in the Bible that Genesis 1-3 should be read non-literally.

Conclusion

If we believe in theistic evolution, it will not be because the Bible teaches it or because fidelity to Christ's

word allows it (Rom.10:17). If we adopt a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3, our decision about the point in the text at which we begin to interpret literally will be arbitrary and will produce more confusion. Let us affirm the psalmist's simple, strong summary of the creation: "For he spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (33:9).

Works Cited

- Allison, Gregg R. "Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with Historical Christian Doctrine." *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*. Edited by J. P. Moreland, et al. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017. pp. 927-952.
- "About Us." *BioLogos*, 2019. <https://biologos.org/about-us#our-mission>. Accessed 10 April 2020.
- Arnold, Bill T. *Genesis*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Bird, W. R. *The Origin of Species Revisited*. 2 vols. Nashville: Regency, 1991.
- Clarke, B. J., ed. *Why Should I Believe the Bible? The 2005 POWER Lectures*. Southaven: Power, 2005.
- Collins, Frances. *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- Craig, William Lane. "The Doctrine of Creation (part 5)." *Reasonable Faith*, 29 September 2008. <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-1/s1-the-doctrine-of-creation/the-doctrine-of-creation-part-5>. Accessed 14 April 2020.

- Currid, John D. "Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament." *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*. Edited by J. P. Moreland, et al. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017. pp. 839-878.
- Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1869.
- Davis, John J. *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis*. Salem: Sheffield, 1975.
- Fields, Weston W. *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory*. Collinsville: Bergener, 1976.
- Grassé, Pierre-Paul. *The Evolution of Living Organisms*. New York: Academic, 1977.
- Grudem, Wayne. "Theistic Evolution Undermines Twelve Creation Events and Several Crucial Christian Doctrines." *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*. Edited by J. P. Moreland, et al. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017. pp. 783-838.
- Halley, Homer. *Halley's Bible Handbook*. 24th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965.
- Huse, Scott M. *The Collapse of Evolution*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.
- Johnson, Phillip E. *Darwin on Trial*. Washington, D. C.: Regnery, 1991.
- Kling, David W. "Presbyterians and Congregationalists in North America." *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions. Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*. Edited by Timothy Larsen and Michael

-
- Ledger-Looms. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. pp. 177-210.
- Mayr, Ernst. "Behavior Programs and Evolutionary Strategies." *American Scientist* vol. 62, no. 6, 1974, pp. 650-659.
- Meyer, Stephen C. "Scientific and Philosophical Introduction: Defining Theistic Evolution." *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*. Edited by J. P. Moreland, et al. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017. pp. 33-60.
- . "Theistic Evolution." *Biola University*, 9 July 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mN41M732I_I. Accessed 14 April 2020.
- Morris, Henry M. *That Their Words May Be Used Against Them*. El Cajon: Institute for Creation Research, 1997.
- Plantinga, Alvin. "Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to McMullin and Van Til." *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*. Edited by Robert T. Pennock. Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001. pp. 197-236.
- Ratzsch, Del. *Nature, Design, and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Reyburn, William and Euan McG. Fry. *A Handbook on Genesis*. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1997.
- Rogers, Justin. "Is the Gap Theory Linguistically Viable?" *Apologetics Press*, 2015. <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=9&article=5262>.
-

Accessed 10 April 2020.

Ross, Hugh. *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1994.

Sanford, J. C. *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome*. Waterloo, NY: FMS Publications, 2008.

Shimron, Yonat. "NIH Director Francis Collins on Why Christians Must Reconcile with Science." *Religion News Service*, 1 April 2019. <https://religionnews.com/2019/04/01/nih-director-francis-collins-on-why-christians-must-reconcile-with-science/>. Accessed 10 April 2020.

Thompson, Bert. "Popular Compromises of Creation—The Gap Theory." *Apologetics Press*, 1994. <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=9&article=575>. Accessed 14 April 2020.

—. "Popular Compromises of Creation—The Day-Age Theory." *Apologetics Press*, 1994. <http://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=434>. Accessed 14 April 2020.

Tsumara, David Toshio. *Creation and Destruction: Reappraisal of the Chaokampf Theory in the Old Testament*. University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

Woods, Guy N. *Questions and Answers: Open Forum*. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman University, 1976.

Musical Confusion: Instruments, Praise Teams, Beat Boxing, Etc

Wayne Rodgers



Wayne has been preaching the Gospel since 1996, working with congregations in Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi, and now Tennessee. He is currently working with the Eastside congregation in Maryville, TN. He is also a part-time instructor of the Fishers of Men ministry teaching person-to-person evangelism. Wayne is married to Cindy and together they have two sons, Kris and Matthew.

There is nothing more sacred than prostrating oneself before the Almighty Creator and offering adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. The prophet Isaiah wrote: “I am the LORD, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King” (Isa. 43:15, NKJV). The Psalmist wrote:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations (Psalm 100:1-5, KJV).

In the preface of Tom Holland's wonderful treatise on worship, he wrote:

Worship to God is an art. By art we mean skill in performance. When one pauses to consider that frail, feeble, sinful man can do something on earth that touches Heaven in a positive and pleasing way, the possibility is exciting to contemplate. However, something as significant as man's worship to God should not be taken lightly. While worship to God offers such great blessings it also is demanding of the very best within us and the best that can be developed within us (Holland 11).

In a world of DIY (Do-It-Yourself) projects and ideas, there are those within the Lord's beautiful Bride which have assumed that it would be okay to do-it-your own way. How unfortunate is it when we see congregations of the Lord's people who for so many years have stood for truth, have fought the good fight of faith, and have stood in the gap bend to the pressures of the modern era to add mechanical instruments of music into the worship service. Some have not gone as far as the use of the mechanical instrument but have rather instituted a precedent where handclapping and beat-boxing are recognized as something different. Or, have they? Well, are they really different? What about praise teams, surely that is just a preference in congregations, aren't they?

There is great confusion over these issues within and outside the church. The world sees an entertainment business brought about by what is supposed to be sacred and holy. Some intriguing statistics about what is referred

to as the “Christian Music Industry” that may shock and surprise the member of the church who is not likely into that sort of thing:

In 2012, under the Christian Music genre, there were 1.66 billion albums, singles, music videos, digital tracks sold. Between albums (physical and digital downloads) there were 62.6 million albums sold. This includes Pop/Adult Contemporary, Black Gospel, and Rock Gospel. Christian/Gospel music is considered one of the fastest growing areas in recorded music history. There are more than 1,400 radio stations and 80 million listeners of Christian/Gospel music. Listeners age 12 and up spend an average of 9 hours per week with Christian/Gospel radio programming formats. 73% of Christian/Gospel listeners are 25-54 years old and account for more than half of all record sales. Women are defined as the core Christian/Gospel consumer. Major mainstream brands such as Pepsi, Cracker Barrel, Allstate, NASCAR and McDonald’s, among others, have aligned with Christian/Gospel artists, releases and music festivals to promote their brands (Gaille).

This helps us to realize that part of what we are standing against is a culturally driven issue where people see two things: entertainment and numbers. Some will argue that this is an over-simplification, but it always seems to come back here. While things like beatboxing in the background of singing is fairly new in the church, praise teams, handclapping, and certainly mechanical

instruments of music are not new to the religious debate. Yet, entertainment drives the conversation of what each individual's tastes are and numbers are what drives many elders and preachers to make the decisions to allow such in the worship of the Almighty. Each of these find their deep-rooted problem with the authority of Christ. What is amazing is when there are those outside the Lord's church who clearly recognize the authority of Christ and His Word, but others within the church try to find every slippery way around the Scriptures to do it their own way whatever the motivation for it.

The foreword of John Price's *Old Light On New Worship* written by a Reformed Presbyterian church preacher named Edward Donnelly addresses the lack of reverence and heed to the principle of sola scriptura. He writes about the weaknesses in modern evangelicalism:

...a failure to apply the principle of sola scriptura, the conviction that the Bible is our supreme and sufficient guide and that, specifically, we are to worship God only in the way appointed in His Word. This perspective, once the common property of Reformed churches, is now overlooked as to seem bizarre or fanatical to many, while others choose to exempt worship from its scope, as if God has little or nothing to say about that which most intimately concerns His glory (Price ⁶).

Does It Even Matter?

The question often posed with any of these topics is, "does it even matter?" Does God really care if the

instrument is used if one so talented chooses to worship with a piano or guitar or full ensemble of instruments? While some make an effort to justify from a Scriptural basis, it is rare. Most often justification is sought after on basis of preference and opinion.

However, it does matter. Alan Highers wrote:

In a day when the world has grown incredibly more complicated, and when simple issues may seem trivial, there can actually be a superficial attraction to minimizing those areas where we stand apart from the world in general. The craving for acceptance by sacrificing our convictions and tolerating those things that would otherwise divide us – especially if someone should convince us these things really do not matter. The Psalmist long ago said, “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). It is important for us to treasure God’s Word in our hearts, to study it diligently, and to manifest its teaching in our practice. The words of the slogan are appropriate: “God said it—I believe it—that settles it!” (Highers ³)

In another editorial of *The Spiritual Sword*, Highers quoted David Lipscomb concerning this issue of instrumental music being accepted by the church of Christ. He says of Lipscomb that he “took a firm stand against the instrument” and “left no doubt as to his position” (Highers 1-2).

It seems there cannot be a doubt but that the use of instrumental music in connection

with the worship of God, whether used as a part of the worship or as an attractive accompaniment, is unauthorized by God and violates the oft repeated prohibition to add nothing to, take nothing from, the commandments of the Lord. It destroys the difference between the clean and the unclean, the Holy and the unholy, counts the blood of the Son of God unclean and tramples under foot the authority of the Son of God. They have not been authorized by God or sanctified with the blood of His Son. A Christian loyal and true to the Lord Jesus Christ cannot use them, nor in any way countenance the setting aside the order of God by adding to or taking from His appointments, even in the smallest matters, as washing of hands. While forbearance and love should be exercised in showing the sinfulness of their use, when the church determines to introduce a service not required by God, he who believes it wrong is compelled to refuse in any way to countenance or affiliate with the wrong. To do so is to sin against God and his own conscience and to encourage by example others to violate their consciences and the law of God; it is to lower the standard of regard for the authority of God (Ibid).

In order to for us to understand these issues of old and new and some resurgence of the same, may we be reminded of what the Bible says. For it is the authority of Scripture from which we will make our final decisions.

The Authority of Scripture

There is no doubt that throughout the history of man, we have seen the decline in a respect for Bible authority. Let us observe a few lessons from our Bible about how important following the authority of Scripture truly is.

Genesis 4 records Cain and Abel who both offered worship unto God and we read that “the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect” (Gen. 4:4-5). The Hebrews author gives us more details as to why this was the case: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4). The context clue is the phrase “by faith,” which tells us that God had expressed to both of these men what He expected of them. The apostle Paul wrote, “faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). What Abel offered was “by faith,” or in other words, what God had told him to offer.

God’s Word teaches us of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the High Priest, who were struck dead by God for their offering of “strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not” (Lev. 10:1-2). The question for us to consider is: “Was God serious about what He wanted from man in worship?” The answer is “yes! Of course, He was.” He had given commandment of what He wanted and how He wanted it to be done, and they chose to do otherwise, adding literally that which was unauthorized.

Another example of commands given, and faithful obedience rewarded is seen in Genesis 6-9. It is recorded that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” in the midst of a world whose thoughts “were only evil continually” and God’s decision to “destroy man from the face of the earth” (Gen. 6:5-8). God commands Noah concerning the “what” and “how to” build the ark and “how” many animals to take on it. Again the Hebrews author gives more details: “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7). As with each example in Hebrews, “by faith” is key to understanding each individual’s obedient response to what God had commanded or required of them.

When the Bible student moves to the New Testament, the same kind of reverence is to be expected concerning the authority of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote: “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). Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well taught her that the “Father is seeking such [true worshippers, W.R.] to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

Doing Bible things in Bible ways is not just a restoration slogan of a bygone era, but rather an all-time, every day marching order for the faithful child of God to abide in the authority given in the New Testament.

Answering the question *Must Worship Be Authorized,*

Dave Miller wrote: “Perhaps more to the point in this discussion, the real issue is: are we free to do anything we want to do in worship? From Genesis to Revelation, God has insisted that all of our actions must be authorized, approved, and sanctioned by Him” (Miller “Handclapping...”). Authority is a principle which many would overlook when it comes to religious issues but see no difficulty in understanding and submitting to it when it comes to every other realm of life. Alan Highers wrote on *The Authority Principle* in an editorial in *The Spiritual Sword*:

There is a precept involving authority which is sometimes stated in different ways by different writers or speakers. One says that specific authority to “sing” necessarily excludes “play” since these are two coordinate kinds of music. The specification of one is the exclusion of the other.

Another says, however, that authorizing statements do not exclude at all; they merely include whatever the statement or command embraces. Thus, the command to “sing” does not exclude “play,” but it simply does not include it and if there is any authority to “play,” it must be sought elsewhere.

These expressions are the same in principle, although there is a difference in the terminology used to express the idea. G.C. Brewer said it best many years ago when he distinguished between the following terms:

INCLUDE – to hold, contain; to confine within, to comprehend.

EXCLUDE – to shut out, to except or reject.

PRECLUDE – to close, stop up, prevent access to, to prevent by anticipative action.

INTERDICT – to declare authoritatively against, as the use or doing of something; debar by forbidding; prohibit peremptorily.

Brother Brewer commented: “Now, it must be clear that we are authorized or commanded to do only that which is included in – held by, contained in, or comprehended by – the word or words used ... A word authorizes us to do only that which it includes in its meaning ... That being true, then we see that a word exclude – shuts out – everything that it does not include ... But a word may not – and in the music controversy the words used do not – preclude or interdict things that they do not include.”

Simply stated, the command to “sing” includes only what it states – singing. Consequently, it excludes instrumental music – i.e., it is not included and, therefore, it is left out. But the word “sing” does not preclude or interdict (that is, expressly forbid or debar) instrumental music. If any other command or authority could be found to use the instrument, it would not contradict the command to “sing.” In the absence of such other authority, however, the instrument is excluded, left out, and unauthorized (Highers 3).

The Bible student will quickly recognize that authority is given in both testaments, yet to a different people and in a different time. The Hebrews writers 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” (Heb. 1:1-2). With the Old Covenant ending at the death of Christ and His blood ushering in a New Covenant, we learn to “rightly divide the Word of God” (cf. Eph. 2:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:15). Therefore, we find our authority in the New Testament for salvation, worship, and manner of life.

Instrumental Music

There have been those who attempted to stop the spreading of the use of the instrument within the denominational realm. Allen Webster wrote the following in a tract on the same subject:

More than five hundred years passed before instruments were used. Chambers Encyclopedia notes, “The organ is said to have been introduced into church music by Pope Vitalian in 666 ad.”

At first, the organ was played only before and after the “liturgy” (worship service). Years later, it was moved into the service proper. Then it caused such controversy that in ad 1054 it led to a split between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. (Orthodox Churches, with few exceptions, continue to use vocal music only to this day.)

Most Protestant churches did not use instruments until the 1800s. In the time of the Reformation, churches opposed instruments in stronger language than we would likely use today. Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church, called the instrument “an ensign of Baal” (*McClintock and Strong’s Cyclopadia*, from Luther, Martin, *Realencyklopadie Fur Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*). John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian Church, wrote, “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” (Comments on Psalm 33). John Wesley (1703–1791), founder of the Methodist Church, said: “I have no objection to instruments of music, in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen” (quoted by his personal friend, Adam Clark in Clark’s Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 686). Adam Clarke (1762–1832), prominent Methodist scholar, wrote: “Music as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor” (Comments on Amos 6). Charles Spurgeon, widely recognized as the greatest Baptist preacher, wrote in his comments on Psalm 42: “We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it” (*Treasury of David*, Volume 1, 272). He never allowed instruments in his ten-thousand-seat Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

These quotations are not given as authority, and certainly not to offend, but simply to show that church history is firmly on the side of a cappella singing (Webster “Why Do churches...”).

The verses of Scripture found in our New Testaments dealing with music are as follows:

And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives (Mat. 26:30).

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them (Acts 16:25).

And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name (Rom. 15:9).

What is it them? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also (1 Cor. 14:15).

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).

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms (Jms. 5:13).

Saying, I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee (Heb. 2:12).

By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15).

And when he had taken the book, the four beast and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 5:8-9).

And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth (Rev. 14:2-3).

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory

over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints (Rev. 15:2-3).

Each of these verses clearly teach the music used by Jesus, His apostles, and the early church was vocal music.

Some Effort Used To Justify Instrumental Music

Some claim the Greek word *psallo* as used in Ephesians 5:19 means to pluck or play; therefore one has the authority to play an instrument. Consider brother Wallace's scholarly conclusion on the word *psallo*:

The word *psallo* in itself does not include any particular instrument. It is not the instrument that makes the "psalting." It is the thing you do on the instrument. Some seem to think it takes an organ to make "psalting." The organ itself is not "psalting." It is the act that you perform on the instrument. Hence, if the same act is performed on something else, it is "psalting." That being true, it is not the mechanical musical instrument that makes the meaning of *psallo*. It may be applied to any object or instrument, or spiritually it may be applied to singing the praises of God.

When any particular instrument was intended with psallo, it was always named in addition to the word. In the Old Testament the instrument used was always named in addition to the word. David said “psallo with the harp” (Psa. 89:5). In the New Testament Paul said “psallo with the heart” (Eph. 5:19). One was mechanical, the other spiritual. But in either case, it shows that the instrument was named in addition to the word, therefore, was not in or part of, the word.

If the word psallo in the New Testament includes the mechanical instrument, the only one who performs the act of “psalloing” is the one who plays the instrument. The organist is the only one who obeys the command. Paul tells us all to psallo. All can do it, but none by proxy.

If mechanical instrumental music is in the word psallo, Paul did not know it, for in the New Testament he used the word psallo and named the heart as the instrument—psallontes with the heart (Eph. 5:19).

If the mechanical instrument is in psallo, the forty-seven ancient scholars who translated the King James Bible in 1611 did not know it, and the one hundred and one modern scholars who translated the American Standard Bible in 1901 did not know it, for they all said the word means to SING and so translated it. Hence, when these preachers tell us that the word psallo includes mechanical

instruments of music they are professing to know more about the word than David, Paul, and the one hundred forty-eight translators of our English Bible (Wallace 37).

As noted by Wallace in the previous quote, Paul clearly indicates the instrument to be played or plucked, which is the “heart.” We do so with the authority of Christ as per 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.”

Some claim that the Bible does not say “not” to use an instrument. Yet, already noted is Highers quote of G. C. Brewer’s excellent breakdown of the terms inclusion and exclusion concerning the word “singing.” But, also consider the authority of silence illustrated in God’s command to Noah to build an ark of “gopher wood.” Clearly, the expectation was for Noah to use only gopher wood and not oak, pine, etc. God did not have to list every tree that He did not command Noah, but simply what He required Noah to use.

Some claim the instruments mentioned in the Old Testament justify the use of such in Christian worship, today. The simple truth is that we are not under the Old Law. It was clearly “nailed to the cross” (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:14-16). If it were binding upon us, we would certainly be obligated to keep all of the Old Covenant (Jas. 2:10).

Some claim they see nothing wrong with it and that it sounds good to them. This is simply a blatant disregard for the Holiness and Supremacy of God. We are not God, and do not get to decide what is pleasing

to God. Simply pleasing ourselves in such should never be our intent to worship the Almighty Creator. Paul wrote to the Romans who had that kind of mentality:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools (Rom. 1:18-22).

The verses mentioned previously make clear in the commands to sing, that we are to with our words vocally:

Speak to one another – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Eph. 5:19).

Teach and admonish one another – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Col. 3:16).

Sing with the spirit and understanding – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (1 Cor. 14:15)

Praise God – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Heb. 2:12).

Make melody in the heart – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Eph. 5:19).

Sing with grace in the heart – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Col. 3:16).

Thank God – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Col. 3:15-17; Eph. 5:19-20).

Declare God’s name – the voice can do this; the instrument cannot (Heb. 2:12).

These same verses and principles also teach us that the use of humming and whistling and clapping would fall short of these commands, and that the modern trend of acapella groups beatboxing to add rhythm and percussion by simulating instruments goes beyond the authority given by these verses. Beatboxing is defined as “a musical style or technique, especially in hip-hop, in which the sounds and rhythms of percussion instruments or a drum machine are simulated by using the mouth and voice” (Dictionary.com). To be clear, they are mimicking instruments by beatboxing or clapping, not using words with their voices in order to sing, praise, thank, declare, teach, admonish, and speak.

The question of solos, choirs, and praise teams comes up often in the church and outside the church. Observe how Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 both answer these situations. Brother Miller especially covered this in his chapter on The Testimony Of Scripture:

A church worship assembly is envisioned, suggested by the fact that (1) Paul is describing a “one to another” activity that implies a plurality of individuals, (2) the five masculine plural participles in Ephesians 5 (“speaking,” “singing,” “making melody,” “giving thanks,” “submitting yourselves”) and the three in Colossians 3 (“teaching,” “admonishing,” “singing”) are used as if directed to the church as a whole, and (3) Pauling usage of (“among you”) is typically a reference to the group – the whole church assembly.

If these two passages are actually referring to solo and choir singing as opposed to congregational singing, then two conclusions follow: (1) congregational singing is unauthorized and therefore sinful, and (2) every Christian must either sing a solo or be a member of the choir at every church assembly. In actuality, the plural participles function grammatically in an explicative fashion by clarifying the way in which the imperatives (“be filled” and “let dwell”) are to be achieved. How may I be “filled with the spirit”? By “speaking,” “singing,” “making melody,” etc. Invariably then, I cannot “be filled with the spirit” by you singing for me while I listen in silence. You would be “filled” by your vocal participation, but as a spectator I would not be “filled.” You cannot do my “filling” for me anymore than you can partake of the Lord’s Supper for me or do my praying for me (Miller 15-16).

Solos and choirs not only fail to meet the requirements of authorized worship, but also prevent brethren from feeling that they are good enough to worship. Many brethren lack the talent to be pitch-perfect and lack in the ability to even read music and sing perfectly the notes of each song. Thankfully, we find nowhere in Scripture a command to sing with perfect pitch, tune, tempo, or even four-part harmony, but simply that we “sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

Praise teams whether wearing a mic in the audience or on stage is ultimately the same as a choir but called differently by some who say they are the leaders of each of those harmony parts so that the singing sounds better. To whom? God? He has not asked for that, but again simply that we “sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). So, we have to ask again, to whom? Are they trying to sound good for the possible visitor to their services?

If this is the rationale, then it falls short of reverence to God and places a higher standard on the entertainment value and possible attractiveness to a group because they miked their best singers. What does that say about the other worshippers? Is there a possibility of their feeling as if they are not good enough to worship God? Again, it is not authorized, but it can not only belittle the worshipper who desires to worship God “in spirit and in truth,” but also they may feel they are not good enough because they lack the “chops” to be miked. How sad is it that our brethren be made to feel that way?

Conclusion

Let us remember that God is the audience, not us, not our visitors. We are not performing a show, but rather offering sacrifice before God. Let us approach with proper respect, reverence, and awe prostrating ourselves before the God of Heaven.

Works Cited

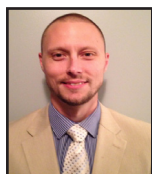
- “Beatboxing.” *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, www.dictionary.com/browse/beatboxing.
- Gaille, Brandon. “13 Christian Music Industry Statistics and Trends.” *BrandonGaille.com*, 30 May 2017, brandongaille.com/11-christian-music-industry-statistics-and-trends/.
- Highers, Alan. “What Difference Does It Make?” *The Spiritual Sword: The Music Question*, July 1990, pp. 2–3.
- . “Why Does It Matter?” *The Spiritual Sword: A Handy Guide To The Instrumental Music Question*, July 2015, pp. 1–2.
- Holland, Thomas H. *Mans Worship to God: the Minds Greatest Challenge, the Hearts Highest Conquest*. Penmann Books, 2008.
- The Holy Bible: American Standard Version*. Accordance electronic ed., OakTree Software, 2008.
- The Holy Bible. Old and New Testaments in the King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976. All references are to this version unless otherwise stated.
- The Holy Bible: New King James Version*. Thomas Nelson, 2016, *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

- Miller, Dave. *Singing and New Testament Worship: Are Solos, Choirs and Vocal Bands Scriptural?* Quality Publications, 1994.
- . "Handclapping in Worship to God." *ApologeticsPress.org*, apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=4802.
- Price, John. *Old Light on New Worship: Musical Instruments and the Worship of God, a Theological, Historical and Psychological Study*. Simpson Pub., 2007.
- Wallace, Foy E. "Instrumental Music In Christian Worship." *The Spiritual Sword: Why Churches of Christ Do Not Use Instrumental Music in Worship*, Jan. 2004.
- Webster, Allen, and Allen Webster. "Why Do Churches of Christ Not Use Instrumental Music?" *House to House Heart to Heart*, 2 May 2016, housetohouse.com/why-do-churches-of-christ-not-use-instrumental-music/.

MUSICAL CONFUSION: INSTRUMENTS, PRAISE TEAMS, BEAT BOXING

Born A Sinner?

Chris Perry



Chris Perry is married to the former Danyelle Templeton, and together they have three children, Jordan, Cydney Jane, and Bennett. Chris is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He has received his B.A. in English from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He currently serves as the minister for the Morrison congregation in McMinnville, TN. He also teaches Bible and English at Boyd Christian School.

Introduction

In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., a Chinese sage named Confucius devoted his life to teaching his philosophies. His disciples would later compile their recollections of his sayings in one volume known as the Analects (Jacobs 37). One of those disciples, largely considered the greatest, was Mencius, who lived from 372-289 B.C. (ibid 38). Upon reflection of Confucius' work—especially his belief that social reform could fully elevate mankind—Mencius was convinced that “Confucius could be so assured of the success of his schemes because, after all, human nature is essentially good” (ibid). To illustrate this point, the disciple would reference the following:

...the immediate surge of anxiety we all experience if we see a child about to fall into a well. This is the origin of “human-

heartedness”...our unreflective instinct is compassionate; this testifies to our innate goodness, which we largely need to cultivate... (ibid).

Interestingly, another of Confucius’ disciples came along several years later who would challenge Mencius’s conclusions about Confucius—and about human nature. Xún Zi (310-237 B.C.), who believed that he, too, was a faithful follower of Confucius, had this to say about human nature:

The nature of man is evil...Man’s inborn nature is to seek for gain. If this tendency is followed, strife and rapacity result and deference and compliance disappear. By inborn nature one is envious and hates others. If these tendencies are followed, injury and destruction result and loyalty and faithfulness disappear (ibid).

To Xún Zi, “if we feel a pang of compassion or anxiety for a child falling into a well, that is because the life or death of that child does not affect our interest” (ibid 39). He would even go so far as to say, “If we knew we would gain by that child’s death, then not only would we feel no anxiety; we’d give the kid a good shove” (ibid). It is worthy of note that two men who considered themselves disciples of the same philosopher came to two drastically different conclusions about human nature. To one, man was born with innate compassion; to another, man was born with innate selfishness.

It seems, then, that tucked away in an ancient and

godless culture are two dichotomous views very similar to doctrines that have fought against one another in Christendom, as well. From Augustine, to Calvin, to Luther, and in sermons, writings and thoughts today, the idea that “the nature of man is evil” has taken shape and been propagated as “original sin.” As one commentator puts it, original sin:

Is frequently used in a two-fold sense, to denote the imputation of Adam’s first sin to his posterity, and also that native depravity which we have derived by inheritance from our first parents (McClintock 442).

But this idea of “native depravity” stands at odds with some very clear Biblical teaching, and Pelagius, Julian and others stood against it through the centuries, with varying degrees of misguidance and insight. In this work, we seek to trace the development of the doctrine of original sin—along with its resistance—and then answer from the supreme source, God’s word, the important question: “Is man born a sinner?”

The History Of Original Sin

Augustine: The father of the doctrine of original sin

Original sin at its most basic is an attempt to explain why mankind commits sin, and especially why we do it **even when we know it is wrong**. For Augustine of Hippo, this was most certainly true on a personal level. He was the son of a heathen father and Christian (in the accommodative sense) mother

(Schaff 3), and he lived the young adult life of a typical heathen child. He lived with a concubine, a “common practice in late Roman culture” as a way to satisfy fleshly desires before suitable marriages could be arranged by the families (Jacobs 54). When his engagement was announced, he was forced to leave this woman, only to take another mistress during the two-year engagement period (ibid). Looking back, Augustine identified in himself “symptoms of a deeper malady, the malady of cupiditas, or the orientation of the human will toward its own gratification, as opposed to caritas, divine love, which Augustine defined as ‘the movement of the soul toward God’” (ibid). When it came to inherited sin, therefore, “he saw evidence for it everywhere, from the angry cry of a hungry baby to his own tendency to be distracted from prayer, contemplation, or the writing of sermons by the sight of a “lizard catching flies or a spider entangling them in his web” (ibid 78).

The doctrine of original sin as Augustine would codify it came into clearer focus around the time he was battling the Donatists during the first decade of the fifth century (ibid 80). Donatism, which at its root was a movement against perceived cowardice and mildness among Catholic clergy, attracted much of Augustine’s attention as he rose in recognition and power in North Africa. As one commentator describes it:

Donatism was by far the most important schism in the church of the period before us (311-590). For a whole century it divided the North African churches into two hostile camps...it arose from the conflicts of the

more rigid and the more indulgent theories of discipline in reference to the restoration of the lapsed (Schaff 360).

During an anti-Donatist conference in Carthage, Augustine heard:

...one point in particular [that] had troubled him: some people were claiming that the church does not baptize infants for the same reason that it baptizes adults. In the Gospels and the book of Acts we are told that baptism is for the “remission of sins”—but of course, said these people, that does not apply to babies, who are sinless. We baptize them simply in order to consecrate them to Christ (Jacobs 80).

One man who held this view and would argue it powerfully and publicly was Pelagius, a Briton who lived in Rome and, later, Palestine. He and his followers often cited John 14:15 and Matthew 5:48 in defense of their view that “perfect obedience to God is possible and therefore obligatory, or perhaps it would be better to say obligatory and therefore possible” (ibid 81). The basic tenets of Pelagianism are as follows:

1. “Sufficiency of human nature as created by God,” that is, man has the capacity to choose good or evil, without his nature being changed by an internal act of grace.
2. “There was no inherited inclination to evil in human nature,” meaning man did not inherit Adam’s sin, nor is there weakness

inherent in humanity.

3. “Every infant born into the world was in the same condition as Adam was before the fall,” a statement that obviously denies original sin (Harrison 399-400).

To Pelagius, God’s pronouncement of His creation—including mankind—as “very good” (Genesis 1:31) extended not only to Adam and Even before the Fall, but to all of mankind after them.

Of course, Pelagius’ views, however much might be in accordance with the Bible’s view of human nature, overstepped God’s word in a number of ways. To Pelagius, the:

good news is that at every moment you are free to obey; the (unstated, hidden) bad news is that at every moment you are equally free to sin...the clear implication of the claim that perfection is both possible and obligatory is that those who fail to obey—at any point—are in danger of eternal damnation (ibid 85).

In this, Pelagius missed “walking in the light, as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7), a reference to the path and habit of life that allows us to be cleansed by the blood of Christ, rather than live in constant fear and dread that we have committed some unknown sin. As well, Pelagianism viewed man as capable, through continued growth, of becoming *emancipatus a deo*, that is, emancipated from the fatherhood of God (Jacobs 83), essentially above the capacity to sin. Pelagius was too bold in his pronouncement of human ability, going so

far as to claim “many people have lived without sinning at all, including people before Christ” (ibid 84).

This, too, runs contrary to John’s first epistle, for he states, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8; 1 John 1:10). Sin, whether in potential or in specific acts, is still possible, even for the most experienced and faithful Christian.

Augustine attacked Pelagius and his followers with great zeal. After he essentially led the Council of Carthage in 418 that was the death blow to Pelagius’ public influence, Augustine was likely certain that he had put to rest any resistance to his views of inherited sin (Jacobs 87). However, a more bitter conflict would arise over the subject from an unlikely source: a young man whom Augustine loved “with deep paternal affection” (ibid 88). Julian, with whose parents Augustine had corresponded regularly, was Bishop of Eclanum and a leading proponent of “Pelagianism.” He spent most of his life in exile in Cilicia, writing prolifically in contempt of “the African,” as he called Augustine (ibid 89).

Julian took issue especially with Augustine’s view of sexual activity—even that within marriage—as unholy. To Augustine, “even ‘honest procreation’ will be accompanied or prompted to some degree by lust. Our sexual organs...are ‘unseemly,’ and that remains the case even in sex between devout and devoted spouses” (ibid 90). Julian denied such claims, noting that “pleasure and concupiscence were present in Paradise before the sin” (ibid 92). The younger theologian also challenged

Augustine's claims that an unbaptized infant was destined to hell. Note the following exchange, outlined by one author:

Augustine replied that these infants surely descend into "everlasting fire" with all the other sinners. To this Julian howled with outrage: "Tell me then, tell me: who is this person who inflicts punishment on innocent creatures...You answer: God. God, you say! God!" Julian cites scripture after scripture telling of God's love for us; he reminds Augustine that God loved us so much that he sent his Son to die on our behalf. Yet "he it is who sends tiny babies to eternal flames"? (ibid 94).

For his part, Augustine had no problem with a God who could condemn innocent children to hell. In fact, left on his desk at his death, along with his unfinished work against Pelagianism, *Contra Julianum* (or, Against Julian), was this quote: "This is the Catholic view: a view that can show a just God in so many pains and in such agonies of tiny babies" (ibid 95).

To Augustine, freedom from original sin came only from the power of God. The prevailing Catholic view was that infant baptism freed a person from the guilt of original sin. Certainly, Augustine was an advocate of infant baptism for remission of sins, as noted above. But note the following statement:

[God's power] which both begins a man's faith and which enables it to persevere unto the end **is not given in respect of our merits,**

but is given according to His own most secret and at the same time most righteous, wise, and beneficent will; since those whom He predestinated, them He also called, with that calling of which it is said, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Davis 213).

In the eyes of Augustinian original sin, man is innately sinful, incapable of coming to God. Therefore, God must “begin” a man’s faith and “enable it to persevere.”

Thomas Aquinas and original sin

As the history of original sin moves from Augustine to the Reformation, a necessary tangential stop is required. Thomas Aquinas, born in the early thirteenth century, is considered by many “the most conspicuous of the theological philosophers of the Middle Ages” (McClintock, vol.1 328). But it is his views on original sin that are of special note in this study. As noted in Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics:

Thomas does not share Augustine’s dark view of the destructive impact of original sin upon man’s whole nature, particularly upon his mental powers. He holds that man is left virtually intact after the Fall, though he suffers a certain blindness of reason and stubbornness of will. Weakened morally by the loss of the superadded gift of righteousness, man seeks sensuous gratification. Yet he retains a trustworthy thinking ability whose judgments, at their best, complement the truths given through

revelation (Henry 33).

Note the subtle yet important difference between Aquinas and Augustine: as one writer put it, “This doctrine had developed throughout the Middle Ages, with theologians such as Anselm and Thomas Aquinas increasingly defining original sin as a lack of something, rather than an active inclination against God, as Augustine had” (Smit). To Aquinas, man lost some safeguard against sin at the fall in the Garden, but did not gain some irresistible lust that corrupted his innate nature.

The Reformation and original sin: Luther

By the time Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door in 1517, the doctrine of original sin, in its varied strains, had entrenched itself into common religious and theological thought. But what about Luther, the soon-to-be leader of what came to be the Protestant Reformation? Would he, like Aquinas, see original sin as involving some “superadded” ability that was taken away at the Fall, or would he, like Augustine, see a completely depraved nature that could only be overcome by an act of God’s divine grace?

If Catholic sources are to be trusted (and there is obvious reason to question their objectivity), Luther was personally tortured over his sin during his time as an Augustinian monk. His confessor, Johann von Staupitz, “grew tired of listening to the litany of sins he had committed, sins so minor they were hardly worth the breath it took to confess them” (Smit). He is quoted as saying, ““Look here, if you expected Christ to forgive

you, come in with something to forgive—parricide, blasphemy, adultery—instead of all these peccadilloes” (ibid). But what was forming in Luther was a self-loathing similar to what Augustine experienced, and he was drawn to the Augustinian view of original sin.

Luther went on to defend this view against the Scholastics, who followed the tradition of Aquinas and others, and the Nominalists, who questioned absolutes including the absolute idea of original sin (newworldencyclopedia.org). As one author describes:

This conception of original sin was carried over by the Nominalist theologians that Luther reacted most strongly against. In this school of thought, God adapted his righteous requirements to mercifully accept the very best acts man could do, and that God would, in return, give grace to man if man did his very best. This has obvious implications for justification, but it affects original sin as well, as it teaches that man, after the fall, is still able to detest sin and seek God. It was asserted that man in his natural powers could achieve selfless love out of his own will, and God would graciously respond to this (Smit).

Luther was certainly opposed to such views. His own natural sensitivity to his sin, coupled with his understanding of Pauline theology, entrenched him firmly in Augustinian original sin. In his “Manual of the Book of Psalms,” Luther says of Psalm 51:

This, among all the Psalms, is a signal and golden one. It contains experiences and

feelings truly Davidical; and teaches us what sin is, what the origin of sin is, and how great and awful the fall of Adam was...For in this Psalm, we have it clearly expressed, **that sin is a great and innate evil, and an awful depravation and corruption of nature, in all the powers both of soul and body** (Luther 142).

Richard H. Bainton, a biographer of Luther, is quoted as saying, “There is, according to Luther, something much more drastically wrong with man than any particular list of offenses which can be enumerated...The very nature of man is corrupt” (Smit). Thus, woven in the fabric of Lutheran Reformation theology was Augustine’s view of original sin.

The Reformation and original sin: Calvin

As the Reformation blossomed, John Calvin took the mantle once carried by Martin Luther. Roughly a decade before Luther’s death, Calvin would publish his Institutes of the Christian Religion (in 1536). As one source notes,

As Martin Luther’s successor as the preeminent Protestant theologian, Calvin was known for an intellectual, unemotional approach to faith that provided Protestantism’s theological underpinnings, whereas Luther brought passion and populism to his religious cause (biography.com).

Calvin’s view of human nature is well known. In more modern theological history, it has been codified into the “TULIP” doctrine, with the leading letter standing

for “total hereditary depravity.” In this, historians and theologians see a direct link to Augustine, and rightly so. But Calvin and Augustine part ways in the finer points of another part of the TULIP doctrine: unconditional election. McClintock’s *Cyclopedia* summarizes the issue:

...Calvin went beyond the Augustinian theory of predestination, and held to the supralapsarian view...The Supralapsarians hold that God decreed the fall of Adam; the Sublapsarians [like Augustine], that he permitted it (vol.2 43).

Note that part and parcel to Calvin’s doctrine of predestination is a presupposition of original sin. Calvin argues:

...that the necessity of sinning is laid upon the reprobate by the ordination of God, and yet denies God to be the author of their sinful acts, since the corruption of men was derived from Adam, by his own fault, and not from God (ibid).

In Calvinism, original sin found its stronghold as part of a systematic, sweeping theology that would have a profound impact on the religious world even to this day.

Modern history and original sin

The doctrine of original sin is certainly alive and well in Christendom today. Consider the two denominations with the most direct links to the Reformers mentioned above. The Presbyterian denomination, which traces its history to the “reformed” teaching of John Calvin, has

splintered into two major factions (though more smaller ones exist): The Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church in America (wikipedia). Though these two groups disagree on many foundational moral and theological ideas, they find agreement in the doctrine of original sin. On the official website of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), it states,

Because God designed that Adam would represent the entire human race, his sin was catastrophic not only for him but for us...Our fellowship with God was broken. Instead of enjoying His holy pleasure, we instead face His righteous wrath (pcanet.org).

Likewise, on the official website of the Presbyterian Church (USA), reference is made to infant baptism, and the following is recorded: “Infant baptism expresses that it is God who chooses us for faith, discipleship, and salvation; without God, **we have no power to claim these things for ourselves**” (pcusa.org). While original sin is hidden in the careful wording of their doctrine, the heritage is certainly there in man’s complete inability to come to God.

In the Lutheran denominational theology, as well, the doctrine of original sin still holds and integral place. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod published an article on their website entitled “Original Sin” (els.org). Note the strong wording:

Original sin is the source of every other sin people commit: disrespect, hate, lust, stealing, gossip, jealousy. We can swat at

flies and spray air freshener all we want, but the real source of our problem needs to be addressed: our inner rottenness.

Certainly modern Lutheranism maintains its founder's convictions regarding original sin. As well, space will not permit to discuss the place the doctrine of original sin holds in various other denominations that borrow from Calvin and Luther. Even among those religious groups that deny an infant's sinfulness, many still hold to some form of the belief.

If we look past the denominational bodies of our world today, we can even see the heritage of the doctrine of original sin in society at large. Consider the rallying cry of many today, embodied by the infamous hit single by Lady Gaga: "Baby, I was born this way!" As the study of genetics grew into a full-fledged science, so, too, did it grow into a modern secular version of original sin. As one author states:

[With the growth of genetics as a science]... the vocabulary of genetics crept into the public mind. Of course Barry Bonds and Ken Griffey Jr., are outstanding baseball players—it's in their genes! (The fathers of both men were major-league player)...Some women claim to have a "shopping gene"; some men confess with embarrassment their failure to possess the "sports fan gene" (Jacobs 305-306).

And now, when we consider homosexuality, addiction, sexual sins, and a litany of other transgressions, the common refrain is "It's genetic." Consider, for instance,

a recent controversy in the above-mentioned Presbyterian Church of America over LGBT issues within the denomination. During a general assembly in Dallas in June of 2019, an attempt was made to come to consensus regarding the conservative Nashville Statement that denied “that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God’s holy purposes in creation and redemption” (christianitytoday.com). In the course of the debate, an interesting statement by Christ Presbyterian pastor Scott Sauls was referenced:

Most of the Christians I know who describe themselves as ‘gay’ use the word in a similar way that Paul did when he called himself a sinner. They use the word not as a banner or as an identity, but as an honest recognition of their broken state as those **affected by original sin**. (ibid).

Note the supposed connection between the sin of homosexuality and the supposed hereditary nature of original sin, made clear by the argument framed above. To many, both in and out of religious circles, many who sin are truly “born this way.”

Is Man Born A Sinner?

Biblical Passages Refuting Original Sin

Doctrinal problems are almost inevitably the result of devoting too much attention to difficult Bible passages and too little on those passages of Scripture that are plain. And such is certainly the case when it comes to the doctrine of original sin. Consider the following clear statements in Scripture:

1. “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:** the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20).
2. “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 Corinthians 5:10).
3. “But Jesus said, Suffer **little children**, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for **of such is the kingdom of heaven**” (Matthew 19:14).
4. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:13-15).
5. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).

In the above simple passages, which are just a sampling of many more in the pages of Scripture, one can clearly

see the idea of individual responsibility underscored again and again. Ezekiel reminds us that **sin is not transmitted from father to son**, or, for that matter, from the first father to every son. To Paul, who is often accused of setting forth original sin as a theological fact, our judgment is based **not on Adam's sin**, but **on the deeds done in our bodies**. Jesus invites us to come to Him as little children, implying **innocence** rather than **innate sinfulness**. And sin is described by James and John as a **willful act in response to temptation, not an inborn trait inherited from Adam and Eve**.

But even more evidence abounds to defeat the doctrine of original sin. As Julian and Pelagius mentioned in their debates with Augustine, Adam and Eve, as they were created in the Garden of Eden, committed sin (Genesis 3:1-6). They needed no inherited nature; rather, they exercised their own free will as given them by God. If Adam and Eve, who were created as "very good" (Genesis 1:31), could sin, why the insistence on an evil nature for everyone who came after?

In his book *Denominational Doctrines*, Jerry Moffitt shares a comparison he attributes to J. Harvey Dykes that is worthy of note here. It is headed, "Compare Depravity with the Bible." Note the points:

Error: Adam's iniquities have separated between you and your God.

Answer: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2).

Error: Adam's sins have hid His face from you.

Answer: "Your sins have hid His face from you" (Isaiah 59:2).

Error: You were alienated from God by inherited depravity, not by wicked works

Answer: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (Colossians 1:21).

Error: We are born unprofitable.

Answer: “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable” (Romans 3:12) (Moffitt 267-268).

Clearly, passage after passage simply and plainly states that man stands in judgment based on his own actions, not those inherited by his first parents.

As for sins like homosexuality and addiction, there is no evidence that a person is “born that way.” Instead, there is mounting evidence that environment is the largest factor, especially when it comes to sexual orientation. Consider the following from a famous study on twins in 1991:

52% of identical (monozygotic) twins of homosexual men were homosexual

22% of fraternal (dizygotic) twins were likewise homosexual

11% of adoptive brothers of homosexual men were homosexual

9.2% of non-twin biological siblings reported homosexual orientations (Bailey and Pillard, 1991, “A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation”)

48% of identical twins of homosexual women were likewise homosexual

16% of fraternal (dizygotic) twins were likewise homosexual
6% of adoptive sisters of homosexual women were likewise homosexual (Bailey and Benishay, 1993, "Familial Aggregation of Female Sexual Orientation") (all taken from Miller).

As author Dave Miller points out, "if there was, in fact, a 'gay gene,' then all of the identical twins should have reported a homosexual orientation" (ibid). Instead, evidence pointed to environmental factors; **adopted siblings** showed a higher rate of concordance than actual **blood-related siblings** (ibid). The conclusion? Though we all may have influences to overcome, we are responsible for our actions and decisions. Again, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20).

Answering passages commonly used to support original sin

Augustine's favorite passage used to promote the doctrine of original sin seems to be Romans 5:12-19. He points to Paul's statement that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin..." (Romans 5:12), and interprets the death mentioned as spiritual death. One author notes:

It seemed to Augustine that the key to Paul's argument came somewhat earlier in the letter, in the fifth chapter, where Paul conducts an extended comparison between the first man, Adam, and the new man, the second

Adam, Jesus Christ. Here is what Augustine clearly understood to be the linchpin of Paul's argument: [a quotation of Romans 5:12-19 follows] (Jacobs 58).

But what does this passage really say? Several points should be made clear. First, verse 12 is likely referencing **physical** death, a promised and, eventually, realized condition of sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:17; Genesis 5:5). And even if not, Paul only here acknowledges that sin and death “entered” the world; there is no mention made of its effect on subsequent people. Second, the same verse in Romans goes on to attribute our death—whether spiritual or physical—to **our sin**, for “all have sinned.” But Augustine misses the true import of the passage under discussion. Rather than an indictment on all men due to original sin, this passage is pointing out the shortcomings of the **law of Moses**. Note Romans 5:14: “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression...” Whatever is under discussion here evidently ended upon the completion of Moses’ work, that is, the Old Testament system. Are we to believe that original sin, if true, ended with Moses? The point is clear: Christ brought an end to the reign of death that found no satisfaction under the Old Law.

As well, some use the King James Version’s translation of Ephesians 2:3 to support their views of original sin. Paul wrote, “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and

were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” But the word “nature” is an unfortunate translation, likely revealing the bias towards original sin on the part of the translators. Timothy Kidwell quotes Wayne Jackson as saying:

It is possible that the KJV, and most subsequent translations, reflect a Calvinistic bias in the rendition, “by nature children of wrath.” The Greek word *phusei*, rendered “nature” in our common versions, can denote “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (Thayer, Greek Lexicon, p.660). Clearly, these people by habitual practice, had become worthy of divine wrath... (637).

It is of note here that the New International Version consistently translate the Greek word *sarx*, often translated “flesh,” as “sinful nature” in passages where such a translation would support original sin (Romans 7:5 and Romans 7:18 are examples). Certainly, those translations are unwarranted, as Kidwell addresses, as well (*ibid*).

Unfortunately, the NIV does not stop its mistranslation in support of original sin in Paul’s writings. One of the most often-used passages in defense of the doctrine is Psalm 51:5. In the King James Version, it reads: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” It is translated nearly the same in the ESV, ASV and NASB. But notice the NIV: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” As translated there, the

passage sets forth plainly the force of original sin. But is this what Psalm 51:5 teaches? Certainly not. Note the grammatical structure of the verse as it is almost universally translated: “iniquity” was the condition that surrounded me when I was “shapen,” and “sin” was the condition that surrounded my mother as she “conceived” me. The verse is not teaching that David was born a sinner; rather, it is describing the world into which David was brought. Moffitt mentions the following illustration:

Some have brought this [the grammatical structure of Psalm 51:5] out by using parallel language. Notice: “I was brought forth in a potato patch, and in a field of spuds did my mother conceive me.” Does that mean he was born full of potatoes? No, certainly not, and Psalm 51:5 does not teach that David was born full of sin (Moffitt 266).

Conclusion

The doctrine of original sin has a long and colorful history in the theology of Christendom. But that does not make it true. While we struggle with our own imperfection, while we grapple with the atrocities we often see around us, it might be easy for us to lean upon this view of human nature as an explanation for why people behave the way we do. However, the answer is far simpler: man, by giving in to the temptations of Satan as they appear in the world around him, commits transgression against God. In such a state, he stands condemned, but not without an opportunity

for redemption. The alien sinner can put the old man to death in baptism (Romans 6:3-4), and the wayward Christian can confess his sin and repent (1 John 1:9; James 5:17; Luke 13:3, 5). The faithful Christian, as he “walks in the light” (1 John 1:7), has the benefit of the ever-cleansing blood of Christ to wash his sins away. May we all exclaim with Paul: “Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Works Cited

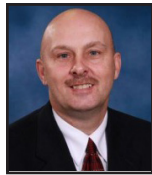
- All Scriptures References taken from the *King James Version of the Holy Bible*, 1611 edition unless noted. Copied from e-sword v.11.1.1. Copyright Rick Meyers, 2000-2017.
- Davis, John Jefferson. *The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, June 1991. (213-228). Accessed online: <http://www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/a133.htm>
- “God’s Plan of Salvation.” Presbyterian Church in America website. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://pcanet.org/about-the-pca-2/>
- Harrison, Everett F., ed. *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975.
- Henry, Carl F, ed. *Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973.
- Holy Bible, New International Version*. Biblica, Inc, 2011. Accessed on biblegateway.com April 16, 2020.
- Jacobs, Alan. *Original Sin: A Cultural History*. E-book on digital loan. New York: Harper-Collins e-books, 2008.

-
- “John Calvin.” Biography.com. Updated August 13, 2019. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/john-calvin>
- Kidwell, Timothy. “Does Man Have a Sinful Nature?” *Sin and Salvation, vol. 2*, p.629-642. Pulaski: Sain Publications, 2004.
- Luther, Martin. *A Manual of the Book of Psalms*. London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837.
- McClintock, John, and James Strong. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol.1*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970.
- McClintock, John, and James Strong. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol.2*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970.
- McClintock, John, and James Strong. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol.7*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970.
- Miller, Dave, et al. “This is the Way God Made Me”—A Scientific Examination of Homosexuality and the “Gay Gene.” Apologetics Press Website. Accessed April 16, 2020. <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=36&article=1388>
- Moffitt, Jerry. *Denominational Doctrines*. Self-Published, 1996.
- “Nominalism.” *New World Encyclopedia*. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/nominalism>
- “Ordination of Women in Protestant Denominations.” *Wikipedia.org*. Accessed April 16, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women_in_Protestant_denominations#United_States_2
-

- “Original Sin.” Evangelical Lutheran Synod Website. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://els.org/resources/evangelism/evangelism-brochures-3/original-sin/>
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*. Electronic edition, e-sword.
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church, vol.2*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968.
- Shellnut, Kate. “PCA Sides With the Nashville Statement Over Revoice’s Approach.” Christianity Today Website. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/june/pca-nashville-statement-lgbt-revoice-sbc-ecc-vote.html>
- Smit, Harma-Mae. “Original Sin: Luther’s other life-changing doctrine.” Pub. October 28, 2019. Reformed Perspective website. Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://reformedperspective.ca/original-sin-luthers-other-life-changing-doctrine/>
- “What Presbyterians believe: the sacrament of baptism.” Presbyterian Church (USA) Website. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/1/21/what-presbyterians-believe-baptism/>

Freemasonry And The Masonic Lodge

Jack Honeycutt



Jack is married to Becky and together they have 2 children and 7 grandchildren. Jack graduated from the Nashville School of Preaching in 1987 and earned his Bachelor of Ministry from Theological University of America in 1999. He was also selected in 1987 for the “Outstanding Young Men of America” award. Jack has been preaching the gospel since 1984. He is presently the full-time coordinator for the Andhra Pradesh, India Mission Work, overseen by the Willette church of Christ in Macon County, TN. Jack leads mission teams into India to conduct evangelistic campaigns and to conduct lectureships for the native preachers. He conducts 12 to 15 gospel meetings each year. Jack speaks at Polishing the Pulpit every year. He has also participated in two debates with a Baptist preacher.

Introduction

Is the Masonic Lodge a religion? Is the Masonic God the same God of the Bible? Does the Masonic Lodge believe a good Mason goes to heaven? What is a “Worshipful Master’s” role in the lodge? What is the origin of Free Masonry? Why is it so secretive? Does their temple and altar represent religious items? What oaths are involved in the initiation process? The Masons do many good works. Does this make it acceptable for Christians to be a part of this organization? Should Christians know the answers to these questions in order to be able to refute and warn?

Looking Behind Closed Doors

The information I gathered in a study of this Masonic Lodge is from men who are highly respected because of their work and writings within the Blue Lodges. I also interviewed two men who had been Master Masons and Shriners. They demitted after becoming New Testament Christians. These men did not want their identities revealed. I better understand this after my lessons on YouTube and Facebook were viewed. I have received messages and phone calls comprised of threats and hate speech.

Hirams In The Bible

There are three men with the name, "Hiram" listed in the Bible. One of these is said to have been the one where the Masonic Lodge originated.

1) Hiram, king of Tyre, who sent building materials and men for the construction of the temple (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kin. 5:1-10)

2) Hiram, the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, who was a bronze worker, and sent for by Solomon to cast the bronze furnishings and decorations for the temple (1 Kin. 7:13-14)

3) "Hiram," one of the sons of Bela (1 Chr. 8:5). Masons claim it is the second Hiram, the son of a widow that started the Masonic Lodge.

Masonic Account

Before the completion of the temple Hiram was attacked and killed for not revealing the secret word. He refused and was murdered.

Biblical Account

And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram **made an end of doing all the work that he made King Solomon** for the house of the Lord (1 Kin. 7:40).

What is Free Masonry?

Freemasonry refers to the principles, institutions, and practices of the fraternal order of Free and Accepted Masons. The largest worldwide society, Freemasonry is an organization of men based on the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, using builders' tools as symbols to teach basic moral truths generally accepted by men of good will. It is religious in that a belief in God is the prime requirement for membership, but it is nonsectarian in that no religious test is used. (American Academic Encyclopedia).

Origin Of Free Masonry

Supposedly, the chief architect Hiram Abiff of King Solomon's temple, is murdered in the temple, which he designed. The three ruffians who killed him, Jubelo, Jubela, and Jubelum took his life because he would not divulge the Master Mason's secret passwords.

Hiram Abiff In Masonic Ritual

During the Legend of the Third Degree, the candidate portrays Hiram Abiff in the ritual. He is blindfolded and led through the ritual by a conductor. In Masonic ritual, Hiram

Abiff is not a worker of brass as in Scripture, but rather the Grand Master at the building of Solomon's temple. Each day, he lays out the work for the workmen to complete. There are Fellowcrafts who work on the temple who are to be given the secrets of a Master Mason as compensation – when the temple is completed. Once they have the secrets of a Master Mason they will earn the wages of a Master. A group of fifteen Fellowcrafts decide that they do not want to wait until the work is completed. They form a plot which only three of them carry through. The three “ruffians” sequentially accost Hiram at the East gate, the South gate and the West gate. A similar dialog occurs at each temple entrance. The ruffian demands the secrets of a Master Mason. Hiram explains that this is neither the time, nor the place; the secrets can only be revealed in the presence of three, King Solomon, Hiram the King of Tyre and myself. The ruffian demands, “Your life, or the secrets.” Hiram responds, “My life you can have, my integrity – never.” When they fail to get what they want, they strike Hiram with one of the working tools and he staggers to the next gate and the next encounter. The third ruffian is also unable to extract the secrets from Hiram Abiff. He strikes Hiram on the head with a setting maul and kills him. Hiram willingly laid down his life rather than betray his trust.

The ruffians have not achieved their goal and they have a body to dispose of. They

bury the body in temple rubble and plan to return at midnight to give the body a more decent burial. At midnight, they return and carry the body to a hill west of Mt. Moriah, where Hiram Abiff is reburied. The next day, Hiram is nowhere to be found. A search is conducted. The Fellowcrafts who did not go through with the conspiracy confess the plot. A grave is found; the body of Hiram is found within it. Hiram Abiff has been in the grave for 15 days. King Solomon gives the order for the body to be raised using the grips of the Entered Apprentice and then the Fellowcraft. Those efforts are unsuccessful. King Solomon states that he fears that with the death of Hiram Abiff the word of a Master Mason has been lost. Therefore, the first word spoken after Hiram is raised from the grave will be the substitute until the lost word can be recovered. At that point, King Solomon raises Hiram Abiff from “a dead level to a living perpendicular” using the real grip of a Master Mason, also known as the Lion’s Paw. He embraces Hiram on the five points of fellowship, standing foot to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, hand to back, and mouth to ear. King Solomon, played by the Worshipful Master, then whispers the substitute for the lost word in Hiram’s ear. That word is, “Ma-Ha-Bone.” Following the Master Mason Lecture, the following words are spoken: Then, finally my brethren, let us imitate our Grand Master, Hiram Abiff, in his virtuous conduct, his unfeigned piety to God,

and his inflexible fidelity to his trust, that, like him, we may welcome the grim tyrant, Death, and receive him as a kind messenger sent before our Supreme Grand Master, to translate us from this imperfect to that all-perfect, glorious, and celestial Lodge above, where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides. (Website: Ephesians 5:11.org)

The First Lodge

In 1717 the Grand Lodge was established in Great Britain. In 1773 eighteen men gathered in Boston and organized the first Masonic Lodge in North America. In 2017 there were 35,930 Masons in the state of Tennessee. In the United States there were 1,076,626. (Masonic Service Association of North America website).

Neither Masons, or the Masonic Lodge, are mentioned in the Old or New Testaments of the Bible.

Symbolism and Symbols

The Worshipful Master plays the role of Solomon, who supposedly will raise Hiram (the candidate in consideration for a higher degree) from the dead, using a secret handshake. He will then administer to him the “five points of fellowship.” These points are: (1) We are instructed to go by foot to answer the needs of others, but more especially that of a brother Freemason. (2) We find the power of prayer, especially prayer directed for the benefit of a fallen brother (Freemason), (3) We are reminded of the responsibility of trust. Holding in our hearts the secrets of our brother Freemason is a sacred responsibility, (4) We are charged to support

the character of our brother, either before his face, or behind his back, (5) We are encouraged to give wise counsel to our brother Freemason and support him in his time of need. Thus, the five-pointed star reminds us to extend love and affection to our brother Freemasons (*The Grand Lodge of Texas*, online).

The Masonic Lodge room is usually located on an upper floor since high places are holy and peculiarly appropriate for religious purpose (*Tennessee Craftsman*, p. 19). The lodge room is supposed to represent the universe, while the covering of the lodge is symbolic of heaven, “where all good Masons hope at last to arrive (*Tennessee Craftsman*, p. 21).

The Masonic symbol containing the square, the compass, and the letter, “G” is a further example of the religious symbolism of Masonry. The compass signifies, “faith,” and the square, “reason” (Snodgrass, p. 28). The “G” stands for, “Geometry; ultimately it is a reference to the “Grand Geometrician of the Universe” (Mackey, p. 302), namely God.

The All-Seeing Eye represents the eye of God and serves as a reminder to Freemasons that God is always watching.

The Masonic Gavel represents the authority of the Freemason, yielding it to punctuate his command order like a judge in court.

The Mason Altar, like many religious entities, represents a place where communion can take place with God. It is where the “Holy Bible” is stored, as well.

The Lambskin Apron is the most iconic symbolic emblem of Freemasonry. It is the unique badge of a

Mason, and is considered a tool. The Masonic apron is literally the badge of a Mason and will be carried with him into the next existence.

Is Masonry A Religion?

Albert Pike, the noted Masonic scholar, said that, “it is the **universal, eternal, immutable religion**, such as God planted it in the heart of universal humanity.” Pike, in his book, “*Morals and Dogma*,” says this about religion and Free Masonry: “Every Masonic Lodge is a temple of religion; and its teachings are instruction in religion.” In the *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, on page 474 we read, “Freemasonry is a religious institution, and hence its regulations inculcate the use of prayer (as a proper tribute of gratitude).”

“As Masons we are taught that no man should ever enter upon any great or important undertaking without first invoking the blessing of Deity. This is because Masonry is a religious institution.” (*Kentucky Monitor*, p. 28).

“Masonry and philosophy...have the same object, and propose to themselves the same end, the worship of the Grand Architect of the Universe.” (*Kentucky Monitor*, p. 28).

“Masonry may rightfully claim to be called a religious institution.” (*Kentucky Monitor*, p. 618).

“Masonry, around whose altars the Christian, the Hebrew, the Moslem, the Brahmin, the followers of Confucius and Zoroaster, can assemble as brethren and unite in prayer to the one God who is above all Baalim.” (*Kentucky Monitor*, p. 226).

We are, therefore, inevitably driven to the conclusion that Masonry is not of human, but of divine origin...Now, my brethren, let us realize that God is the author of our great and glorious institution, that its divine truths were revealed by Him to the earliest representatives of our race – that these God-given principles have been espoused and practiced in every age of the world, and that Masonry is **infinite, eternal and spiritual** and that to be Masons in deed and in truth the spirit of Masonry must dwell within us, and dominate our lives.” (Taylor-Hamilton, pgs. 14 & 20).

Some claim that Masonry is not a religion, yet:

- They require belief in the Great Architect of the universe.
- They require prayer.
- They seek divine guidance.
- They quote the Bible, among which is Psalm 133:1 – “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”
- They sing religious songs.
- They have a Worshipful Master, Potentate, and senior and junior deacons.

Friends, Masonry is not a substitute for religion, it is a religion.

Oaths And Degrees

The word of God reveals,

Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is
God’s throne; neither by the earth, for it is

his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King, Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be: Yea, yea; and nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Mat. 5:34-37).

James adds this exhortation, “But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation” (Jam. 5:12).

In light of this teaching, how can our own brethren join such an institution? How can they take oaths not to reveal any secrets of the lodge, and to support the Grand Lodge of the U.S. and of his own state?

These men mouth the following: to solemnly and sincerely promise and swear without the least hesitation, mental reservation, or self-evasion of mind whatever, binding themselves under no less a penalty than to have their left breast torn open and their heart and vitals taken from thence and thrown over their left shoulder and carried into the valley of Jehosaphat, there to become a prey to the wild beasts of the field and the vultures of the air, if ever they should prove willfully guilty of violating any part of the solemn oath or obligation of a Fellow Craft Mason, so help them God and keep them steadfast in the due performance of the same.

The Oath Of A Shriner

Candidates for induction into the Shriners are greeted by a High Priest who says: “By the existence of Allah and the creed of Mohammed; by the legendary sanctity of our Tabernacle at Mecca, we greet you.”

The inductees then swear on the Bible and the Koran, in the name of Mohammed, and invoke Masonry’s usual gruesome penalties upon themselves: “I do hereby, upon this Bible, and on the mysterious legend of the Koran, and its dedication to the Mohammedan faith, promise and swear and vow...that I will never reveal any secret part or portion whatsoever of the ceremonies... and now upon this sacred book, by the sincerity of a Moslem’s oath here register this irrevocable vow...in willful violation whereof may I incur the fearful penalty of having my eyeballs pierced to the center with a three-edged blade, my feet flayed and I be forced to walk the hot sands upon the sterile shores of the Red Sea until the flaming sun shall strike me with livid plague, and may Allah, the god of Arab, Moslem and Mohammedan, the god of our fathers, support me to the entire fulfillment of the same.”

With this oath, Christians swear on the Koran, and declare Allah to be “the god of our fathers.” From the perspective of Christianity and Islam alike, Shriners take the name of God in vain, and mock both faiths.

Masonic Light And Darkness

Freemasons are emphatically called the Sons of Light, because they are in possession of the true meaning of the symbol; while the profane or uninitiated who have not received this knowledge are said to be in darkness. In other words, the Mason has been delivered from the darkness into the light and elevated above those who have not received the initiation into the degrees and mysteries of Freemasonry.

The “profane” individual, or the non-Mason remains in darkness and is in need of light. The Mason, after being enlightened, continues to be in need of more light. It seems that the Mason never comes to fully understand his Craft and all that it means. However, as the Mason gains more light and understanding of the various symbols representing each degree, he becomes more aware of its different meanings. Albert Pike, the Masonic scholar, speaks of this deception, “Masonry conceals its secrets from all except Adepts and Sages, or the Elect, and uses false explanations and misinterpretations of its symbols to mislead those who deserve only to be misled; to conceal the Truth, which it calls Light, from them, and to draw them away from it. Truth is not for those who are unworthy or unable to receive it, or would pervert it. So Masonry jealously conceals its secrets, and intentionally leads conceited interpreters astray.”

According to Pike, “Masonry is a search after light.” The question that one must ask is, “What is the source of this Light that contemporary Free Masonry is based on? Pike goes on to tell us that the

light of Masonry is based on the Kabalah, or Jewish mysticism. For the Christian this is indeed a difficulty, because the Christian cannot accept the occult beliefs of the mystics. The Bible tells us the “truth” or “light,” can only be found in God’s Word.

Can you imagine a man who has been a Christian for 20 years, joins the Masonic Lodge, and confesses that here he “first saw the light?” Notice what Paul said in Colossians 1:13, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.” One only finds the true Light in Jesus and His church, not the Masonic Lodge.

Masonry Fellowships All Religions

“Be assured,” says Godfrey Higgins, ‘that God is equally present with the pious Hindu in the temple, the Jew in the synagogue, the Muhammadan in the mosque, and the Christian in the church.’ (*Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, pgs. 409-410)

Masonry teaches that any good Mason can be saved. It also teaches that a good Mason who is not a member of any church can be saved. Masonry teaches one is saved regardless of what religion he is.

Funeral Of A Mason

At the funeral of a Mason the Lambskin Apron is placed upon his body. This apron represents innocence and purity. The questions will be asked, “Is this the end of man? The expiring hope of the Mason? No. Blessed be God! We pause not upon our first or second step, but true to our principles look forward for greater light

while the embers of mortality are faintly glimmering in the socket of our existence.” The following will also be worded, “He, therefore, who wears the Lambskin as a badge of Masonry is continually reminded of that purity of life and conduct which is necessary to gaining admission into the celestial Lodge above, where the Great Architect of the Universe presides.” (M.W. Grand Lodge of Tennessee, p. 195)

The Bible says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). I pray this lesson will bring about this very result, that Christians will not have fellowship with these works.

Works Cited

- American Academic Encyclopedia, online
Ephesians 5:11.org website
Pike, Albert. *Morals and Dogma of Free Masonry*, 1949
Pirtle, Henry. *Kentucky Monitor*, Thirteenth Edition
The Masonic Text Book of Tennessee, Fourth Edition
TheMasonicWorld.com
Taylor-Hamilton. *Monitor of Symbolic Masonry*, 1908

The Jehovah's Witnesses

Trent E. Key



Trent has been married to Amanda for 12 years. He is the son of a preacher and a graduate of Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies. Trent hosts a weekly radio program called, *A Key Thought From Scripture*. He is the Pulpit Minister for the Mt. Leo congregation in McMinnville, TN.

Introduction

In a world full of compromise and error, the theme of this lectureship should be much appreciated by the brethren and those seeking truth. When Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17, He declared how His followers, of any century, could be distinguished. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

As the “pillar and ground of the truth,” we must diligently search the Scriptures, so we can always stand ready to give an answer (1 Tim. 3:15; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15). Some souls may be living in error ignorantly (Acts 17:22-23; Hos. 4:6), some traditionally (Mat. 15:1-9), and some willfully (Heb. 10:26).

However, on the Day of Judgment, all souls must be prepared to stand before the Righteous Judge, who will judge according to truth (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:2). No matter the circumstance, the church must be willing and prepared to stand for God’s eternal truth because souls are at stake (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Luke 19:10). As leaders,

elderships will stand on the front lines of defense for truth and the protection of God's people (Acts 20:28-30; Heb. 13:17).

Twisting the Scriptures will indeed prove to produce eternal destruction (2 Pet. 3:16-18). That my friends, is why we must Answer the Error of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW).

Who Are They?

Their Origin

In 1870, Charles Taze Russell, at the age of eighteen, organized a Bible class in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and was elected six years later as the groups "Pastor" (Martin, 49). He formed the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in the late 1870s and was responsible for writing publications for the Society. In the 1930s, this group became known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Judge Rutherford was Russell's successor and played a very active role in helping with the formation of the Society and its publications. The publications were the shaping of the Jehovah's Witnesses teachings and doctrines that we know today (Martin, 64).

Charles Taze Russell and Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford "are the two key figures in the Society's history, and without them it is doubtful that the organization would ever have come into existence" (Martin, 59).

Their Meeting Place

Understanding that the term "church" refers to the people and not the place of worship, Jehovah's

Witnesses opt to call their buildings Kingdom Halls (Martin, 65). It is the place they gather for worship and study. Part of their gathering consists of time spent answering questions of the latest Watchtower Society publication. They also encourage their own to engage in public speaking during these assemblies. Visitors are welcome to attend their assemblies.

Evangelism

Devoted to teaching and spreading their doctrine, the Jehovah's Witnesses are one of the most evangelistic religious groups in our present world. As of 2019, it was reported that there are over 8.6 million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide and approximately 119,000 congregations (How Many of Jehovah's Witnesses Are There Worldwide?). According to Rod Rutherford, "They claim they have distributed over one billion pieces of literature in nearly two hundred languages since 1920" (98). Records back in 2001, indicate that they spent 178,831,678 hours "preaching" from door-to-door in the United States and more than 1.1 billion hours worldwide (Martin, 63).

Every witness is a minister and is required to devote 15 hours per month to Kingdom preaching. Those who have reached the status of Pioneer are required to give 100 hours per month, and special Pioneers must devote a minimum of 140 hours per month (Meadows, 32).

Although some may patronize their zeal for Jehovah, there are many things that are concerning about this group of people. Presenting oneself to be religious and zealous alone doesn't make one presentable

in the eyes of God (Acts 17:22ff; Rom. 10:1-2; Acts 22:1-5).

What Are Their Core beliefs?

There are many things that are concerning about the Jehovah's Witnesses, but we will take a moment to describe a few core beliefs.

The New World Translation

The Holy Scriptures have been under investigation for many centuries. Understanding that the Bible comes from God is essential for salvation and a great foundation for Christianity (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). However, the accuracy of a translation with the original Biblical languages is equally important. Not every translation of Scripture can be trusted as God's Word.

The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT) has been classified as a translation with religion bias (Brown, 184). The NWT was formed when the Watchtower Society decided that a better translation of the Scriptures needed to be established. Before its inception, the Jehovah's Witnesses would use the King James and American Standard Versions because of their profound use of the name "Jehovah." In the late 1940s, the Watchtower Society created "The New World Bible Translation Committee" to accomplish this task.

According to the Watchtower Online Library, the NWT is "a translation of the Holy Scriptures made directly from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into modern-day English **by a committee of anointed**

witnesses of Jehovah” (New World Translation). When the committee gifted the publishing rights, they “requested that its members remain anonymous.” Evidence proves that the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania has honored their request. It was further described that “the translators were not seeking prominence for themselves but only to honor the Divine Author of the Holy Scriptures” (New World Translation).

It has been documented that “since Rutherford’s death, all Society publications are issued without any author credit, or anonymously. The Society position is that this preserves the humility of the contributors and focuses attention on God’s Word and will rather than on the human agency used to communicate that divine truth” (Martin 64). However, are the NWT translators really hiding their names for that reason? Many feel that there is more reason behind this than what they are willing to tell.

According to *The Kingdom of the Cults*, there was an interview done by an attorney who questioned Russell, the founder of JW, on his accreditation of the Greek language and scholarship. From that interview we learn that Russell admits to only attending school for seven years of his life at public school and that he had left school when he was about fourteen years of age (Martin, 54). Under further investigation, Russell admitted that he knew nothing about Latin or Hebrew and had never taken a course in philosophy or systematic theology, much less attended schools of higher learning (Martin, 55).

Russell wasn't the only one under investigation either. Although the 'scholars' remain anonymous, Frederick W. Franz, who was then representing the translation committee and later served as the Watchtower Society's fourth president, admitted under oath that he could not translate Genesis 2:4 from the Hebrew (Martin, 93). Later, a Hebrew instructor at Biola University (Talbot Theological Seminary) was asked if the fourth verse of the second chapter of Genesis was a particularly difficult verse to translate. The professor said, "I would never pass a first-year Hebrew student who could not translate that verse" (Martin, 94). This only further illustrates the lack of scholarship behind the NWT and the leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I believe that what Tyler Young asserts about this matter is correct,

It is apparent, however, that behind their pious claims of humility lies the real reason for concealing the names of the translators: their lack of credentials. There can be no other genuine reason for keeping them anonymous. This speaks volumes of the characters of the NWT publishers and right from the start places the translator's claims of producing a trustworthy Bible in serious doubt (Brown, 186).

The lack of scholarship of the NWT committee continues to unfold when closely examining the addition, subtraction, and replacement of words in the Scriptures not found in the original languages. This presents serious issue as it pertains to violating what

God has truly communicated through the Scriptures (Deu. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Referencing the many changes, “the translators have taken it upon themselves to give – not the English translation of the Greek text – but what they perceived to be the meaning of the text.” “...In these cases they have turned the text of Scripture into their own commentary; they have not offered translation, but interpretation” (Brown, 190-191). Not to mention, their translation came at least seven centuries after most.

Although they claim to believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, they believe that one must possess the Watchtower magazine as a “key to unlock the Scriptures” (Rutherford, 99). Further evidence of these changes can be seen in our ongoing points of discussion.

The Godhead (Trinity)

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe in “the Godhead” (Col. 2:9). They believe in only one distinct personality that is God and He is to be called “Jehovah.” One of the most widespread changes in the Watchtower Bible is the insertion of the name Jehovah. It appears 237 times in the New Testament. The problem with this change is that the names “Jehovah” or “Yahweh” only appear in the Old Testament and are nowhere to be found in the Greek New Testament manuscripts (Reed, 18).

As they see it, the Scriptures teach that there is only one God (1 Tim. 2:5; Deu. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:6; Isa. 44:6). In return, they cannot agree to the Biblical instruction concerning the Deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

They argue that when these three personalities are mentioned together in the Scriptures, it does not say they are equal, co-eternal, or together.

Regarding Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, they teach that He was a created being. Take note from this excerpt published by the Watchtower Online Library:

Jesus Is Not God. Jesus is unique – he is the only person created directly by God. That is why the Bible calls him God's Son (John 1:14). After creating Jesus, Jehovah used his firstborn as 'a master worker' to create everything and everyone else. – Proverbs 8:30-31; Colossians 1:15-16 (The Truth About God and Christ).

Take note of the changes made in Colossians 1:15-17 in the NWT to support this false doctrine.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist (New World translation of the Holy Scriptures).

Despite the term "other" being completely absent from the original Greek text, the NWT committee saw fit to insert it. Why would they do that? The insertion

of “other” here communicates a completely different meaning. They sought to present their readers with the view that “all other things” were created by Christ, instead of “all things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16, NKJV).

They also assert that Jesus never claimed to be God. It is very troubling to observe their change in John 7:29 to support this view. “I know him, because I am a representative from him, and that One sent me forth” (John 7:29, NWT). The New King James Version states, “But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me” (John 7:29). Even the Jews understood Jesus’ direct and implied statements about being God, and that is why they sought to kill Him (John 8:58-59; John 10:31-33).

One of the most well-known perversions of the NWT is their translation of John 1:1 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god” (John 1:1, NWT). There is no clearer evidence for religious bias of the NWT than what we read in this verse.

As one considers the immediate context, it is easy to conclude that Jesus Christ is the Word. Verse 14 clearly states, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Further evidence is given in verse 18 when the “only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father” is described. The only way for the JW’s to continue down the road of denouncing the Deity of Christ is to pervert one of the most prominent passages that declares that truth.

Further, attempting to discredit the Eternality and Deity of Jesus, they alter His words in John 8:58. “Most

truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I have been" (John 8:58, NWT). Under normal circumstances, anyone familiar with this passage would connect it with the words in Exodus 3:14. However, "I have been" doesn't seem to be as familiar, does it? And rightful so!

Since the 1950s, the Witnesses have had great controversy over their translation of this verse. In the 50s, they rendered "I have been" as a "perfect indefinite" with a description that "it is not the same as (HO OHN' meaning 'the Being' or 'the I AM') at Exodus 3:14, LXX." Wayne Jackson says, "The truth is, there is no Greek tense known as the perfect indefinite! Further, the terms "perfect" and "indefinite" are almost opposites" (Jehovah's Witnesses and the Doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ).

In the mid 1960s, a letter was released from the Brooklyn office, revealing a switch in the grammatical position – now "a historical present." However, in 1969, the Society changed back to the "perfect" tense explanation, omitting the term "indefinite" (Jehovah's Witnesses and the Doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ).

Through proper study of the Watchtower material and examination of their translation of the Scriptures, we are left to conclude that Jesus was no more than a perfect man while living on earth. When Jesus ascended back to heaven, they teach that He became Michael, the archangel, as was His position before coming to earth (Meadows, 33).

The Witnesses also teach the Holy Spirit separate from the Godhead. In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit

is completely removed from the NWT and translated “active force.” While examining His work, they count Him as an active force, but are not willing to recognize Him as a distinct personality, and certainly not a part of the Godhead. When the Holy Spirit is used in the New World Translation, He is not revered as God, nor is His proper name capitalized (Mat. 28:19).

The Watchtower Society has and continues to teach their followers that the trinity is “a false unbiblical doctrine.” They conclude that Satan is the originator of it (Meadows, 32).

The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

The cornerstone of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:17). Without His resurrection, there is no purpose for His church, no hope now or for eternity, and no promise to overcome the grave. We’d be obligated to suffer the consequence for our sins – death (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23).

The JW teach that God raised Christ, “Not as a human son but as a mighty immortal Spirit” (Meadows, 33). In other words, they deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. First Peter 3:18 is the main passage they use to support this doctrine – “He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” Of course, we wouldn’t deny this fact. However, we know that more than Jesus’ spirit was raised. He was raised bodily (John 20:27; Luke 24:2).

The Kingdom, Christ’s Second Coming, & New Heavens and New Earth

Recognizing that the Witnesses don’t believe in the

bodily resurrection is important to understanding their belief of His second coming. They teach that Christ has already returned. In fact, they assert that His “presence” was known by a few and the power of His Kingdom was established in 1914 (Rutherford, 100). They see the events of World War I as a fulfillment of a sign Christ gave in Matthew 24 and the moment He “returned” to reign on His throne in heaven (North, 128). They also teach that Christ was at God’s right hand before 1914, but at that time changed an “ordinary” seat for a throne (Meadows, 34).

Witnesses conclude from Jesus words in the gospel of John that He would have an invisible coming. “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2-3). “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). Contextually, they have missed the point of Jesus’ words. Jesus said these words while alive and before His death, burial, and resurrection. Confirmation was given to the disciples at His final ascension that He would return again (Acts 1:11). This would be His second coming.

Another prominent teaching that we hear so much about by this group is the 144,000. They believe that God chooses 144,000 faithful witnesses to be resurrected into heaven (Rev. 7:4; Rev. 14:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:3-4). They are chosen to serve alongside of Christ as kings and priests for 1,000 years (Rev. 5:9-10; Rev. 20:6). They are called to form the “new heavens,” which Witnesses describe as “heavenly government,” that is set to rule over the “new earth,” which represents “earthly society.” The heavenly rulers will assist in restoring mankind to

the righteous conditions that God originally intended (Isa. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:13). “God’s selected” to rule with Christ in the Kingdom are referred to as a “little flock” (Rev. 17:14; Luke 12:32). They claim that Jesus’ words in John 10:16 refer to the “relative few” in comparison with His complete flock (Who Go to Heaven?).

At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan and all his forces will be cast into the lake of fire, which means their complete annihilation (North, 131). They teach that Hell is nothing more than “the grave” or “the tomb.” They’re so confident in this belief they say “that even an honest little child can understand it” (Meadows, 34). Concerning those who weren’t selected to go to heaven, the Witnesses affirm that they will reign on the “renewed earth” for the rest of eternity.

Answering Their Error

The material covered in this manuscript is not comprehensive by any means. Further investigation is encouraged, as there are many other areas the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach in error.

The New World Translation

When the NWT was being formed, the committee embarked to make a “better translation.” Its original description said it was “made directly from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.” As we’ve closely examined, they have strayed far from that purpose. To borrow from the words of the first century, their attempt is a perversion of the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7).

Making your own translation of the Bible to fit

your beliefs is like taking your current version and ripping out the verses that make you angry. There will be eternal consequences for not heeding the Word of God (John 12:48-50; Rev. 22:18-20). The danger in believing and teaching in a perverted gospel is eternal condemnation (Gal. 1:8-9). Peter reminds us, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, **but the word of the LORD endures forever**" (1 Pet. 1:25). Adding to, subtracting from, and replacing Scripture will not cause this fact to be amended.

Again, in their description of the NWT, they stress that it was made "by a committee of anointed witnesses of Jehovah." There's been no explanation of this "anointing" and there doesn't have to be. The Apostle Peter writes, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The NWT translators have clearly inserted the bias views of the Watchtower Society. They aren't promoting God's agenda, but an agenda of their own!

If any religious group claims the need to use "extra" biblical material to "understand" the Scriptures, that is a danger sign that you need not ignore! When Paul preached to the Bereans in Acts 17, they weren't searching the latest edition of the Watchtower publications to understand what Paul taught. "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were

so” (Acts 17:11, NKJV). God’s word is written in such a way that all can know and understand it (John 8:32; 1 Tim. 2:3-4). **Beware!** Faulty translations lead to faulty foundations.

The Godhead (Trinity)

To accept the “one God,” but ignore the Biblical instruction of the Trinity is a grave oversight. As we’ve examined with the JW, many other false beliefs originate from a misunderstanding of the Trinity.

To prove the idea of just one member of the Godhead, they quote Deuteronomy 6:4. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deu. 6:4)! This is indeed truth, but does it support what they teach?

They overlook an important factor. The same word, illustrating “one”, describes Adam and Eve as “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Does this mean that Adam and Eve were numerically one? Of course not! Also, the church in Jerusalem were of one heart and one soul but weren’t one person numerically (Acts 4:32).

The Bible distinctly teaches that there are three persons in the Godhead. The book of Beginnings uses the term Elohim (plural form) to declare God in Genesis 1:1 (The Biblical Doctrine of the Godhead). Later in the book, we find reference to multiple divine personalities (Gen. 1:26; Gen. 3:22; Gen. 11:7).

The New Testament also provides evidence of the Trinity of God. At the baptism of Christ, all three members of the Godhead were present (Mat. 3:16-17). In the gospel of John, Jesus, the Word, is specifically

called God (John 1:1-18). When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit about keeping back part of the price of the land, Peter said, "You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:1-4). As Jesus pronounced the Great Commission, He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of **the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**" (Mat. 28:19).

The book of Hebrews is another account that affirms the Majesty of Jesus. The very first chapter announces that Christ is more superior than the angels.

For to which of the angels did He ever say:
'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'?
And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and
He shall be to Me a Son'? But when He again
brings the firstborn into the world, He says:
'Let all the angels of God worship Him.' And
of the angels He says: 'Who makes His angels
spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.' But
to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is
forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness
is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have
loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed
You with the oil of gladness more than Your
companions (Heb. 1:5-8).

Therefore, how could He have been created or an angel if He is God and more superior to all creation (John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-8)?

The Kingdom & The Afterlife

The Jehovah's Witnesses are very wrong about their concept of the kingdom. According to the Scriptures, Jesus never intended for an earthly kingdom, but that's what the Witnesses have made of it (John 18:36).

Some of the Old Testament prophets highlight the characteristics of Christ's kingdom. Isaiah prophesied that the kingdom would begin in Jerusalem in the last days, and all nations would flow to it (Isa. 2:1-4). Under Joel's prophecy, we learn that the Spirit would be poured out in the last days in Jerusalem and salvation would be extended (Joel 2:28-32). The prophet Daniel said that the Lord's kingdom would be established in the days of the Romans kings (Dan. 2:1-45).

By the time we get to the New Testament, John the Baptizer and Jesus are preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:1-2; Mark 1:14-15). Jesus points more specific to the coming of His kingdom when He tells some of His disciples they "will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1). In Matthew 16, Jesus promised to build His church, which is His kingdom (Mat. 16:18-19). On the Day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit rested upon each of the apostles in the last days, in the city of Jerusalem, and salvation was offered to each soul that was willing to call on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:1-47). This was the beginning of the kingdom of Christ. "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

After Jesus died on the Cross and was bodily raised, He ascended to the right hand of the Father to reign on His throne (Heb. 12:1-2). God the Father had granted

Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mat. 28:18). Today, Jesus is reigning over His kingdom, the church, and will one day return for her (Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 4:4; Eph. 5:23). Those holding to the thousand-year reign and a physical reign have missed the figurative language in those sections of Scripture (Rev. 20:1ff; Rev. 21:1-4; 2 Pet. 3:13).

When He returns, every soul will know that He has returned a second time (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-58). He will not come to establish a “new heaven and new earth,” but will take the faithful back to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24; John 14:1-6). There will be no second chances (Heb. 9:27). Those who have done good will be called to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). The angels will play a vital role in the transition from earth to eternity (2 Thess. 1:6-9; Heb. 1:17).

When we make our transition into eternity, we will be very conscious of our surroundings and very much experience our current destiny (Luke 16:19-31). Those who spend an eternity in Hell will suffer eternal punishment – not annihilation (Mat. 10:28; Mat. 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; Rev. 20:14; Rev. 21:8). Those who are faithful servants of God will receive Heaven as their final resting place for all eternity (Mat. 25:46; 1 Thess. 4:17-18; Rev. 2:10; Phil. 3:20; Mat. 6:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:3-4; Heb. 12:23).

When our Lord returns, He is coming as a thief in the night and will destroy the earth completely (2 Pet. 3:10-13). His return will signify, not the beginning of

His reign, but the end (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Eternity will be the new reality for all souls (2 Cor. 5:10).

What are some keys to teaching them the gospel?

One may be tempted to start a discussion with a Jehovah's Witness about their flaws in their translation. It may even be appealing to contemplate their error of the kingdom and eternity. And these matters should be examined, but the most important place to start with any soul is to "preach Jesus" (Acts 5:42; Acts 8:35; 1 Cor. 1:23).

The Jehovah's Witnesses struggle greatly to know the True Jesus. Their gospel of Jesus Christ has been perverted (Gal. 1:6-9). As you teach the truth about Christ, the rest of the issues will open themselves up for discussion.

If by chance you get to study with a JW, ask them if you can study from your translation of the Scriptures. Most will not be opposed to this suggestion and may perceive it like you – an opportunity. The Jehovah's Witnesses are very much indoctrinated in Watchtower education and will still know how to twist the Scriptures from your translation of the Bible. Don't argue, but reason with them from the truth (Acts 17:17; Acts 26:25; John 17:17). "Speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

At one point in history, the Jehovah's Witnesses wouldn't accept any literature from those they conversed with from door-to-door. The reason behind this is that they've been taught

"that reading apostate publications is similar to reading pornographic literature. Any who

violate these commandments by reading non-JW religious material face trial before a closed-door 'judicial committee' with the possibility of being 'disfellowshipped' – expelled from the congregation and shunned by all former associates, even family” (Reed, 17).

The Jehovah's Witnesses at a glance may appear to be “another devoted religious group.” Their sincerity and zeal cannot be questioned. However, at the heart of their religion is corruption and cultism. Proceed with great caution toward these precious souls and remember to be patient as they “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:16-18).

They are taught to “proof text,” that is finding a verse to prove their theology, in their training from door-to-door. In return, they may try to quickly jump you from passage to passage before you can provide an answer. When leading a study with a JW, recognize this and invite them to slowly consider the context of Scripture with you. Context always determines meaning!

Lastly, do your homework and ask questions. Have a general knowledge of what they teach, but don't assume anything. The more you learn about them, the better equipped you'll be to “give a defense...for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Works Cited

Broadman & Holman. (1988). *The Holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments*. The New

- King James version. Nashville.
- Brown, David P., editor. *Jehovah's Witnesses*. Gospel Light Publishing Company, 2002.
- "How Many of Jehovah's Witnesses Are There Worldwide?" *JW.org*, www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-many-jw/.
- Jackson, Wayne. "Jehovah's Witnesses and the Doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ." *ChristianCourier.com*. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1604-jehovahs-witnesses-and-the-doctrine-of-the-deity-of-jesus-christ>
- Jackson, Wayne. "The Biblical Doctrine of the Godhead." *ChristianCourier.com*. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1488-biblical-doctrine-of-the-godhead-the>
- Martin, Walter Ralston. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Bethany House Publ., 2003.
- Meadows, James. *A Study of Different Religions & Religious Errors*. 21st Century Christian, 2003.
- "New World Translation." New World Translation - Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY, wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101989250.
- New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1961.
- North, Stafford. *Handbook on Church Doctrines*. 21st Century Christian, 2007.
- Reed, David A. *Jehovah's Witnesses: Answered Verse by Verse*. Baker Book House, 1986.
- Reed, David A., Steve Huntoon, and John Cornell. *Index of Watchtower Errors, 1879 to 1989*. Baker Book

House, 1990.

Rutherford, Rod. *Denominational Doctrines*.

“The Truth About God and Christ.” *The Truth About God and Christ - Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY*,
wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2020004.

“Who Go to Heaven?” *JW.org*, www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/go-to-heaven/.

The Bible Is Incomplete, (Missing Books, The Apocrypha)

Cliff Goodwin



Cliff and his wife, Beth, are native Alabamians. They have 3 children, Cade, Kinley, and Lakelyn. Cliff is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and Faulkner University. For over twenty years he has labored with the Ironaton church of Christ, located outside of Talladega, Alabama. During this time, he has done extensive television evangelism—initially in the local market and recently on *Gospel Broadcasting Network (GBN)*. As of 2012, Cliff is the host of *Searching the Scriptures* and *Preaching The Gospel*—both of which can be seen on GBN.

The apostle Peter made it clear that man has an archenemy, and he further warned his readers to be ever on the alert regarding this foe (1 Pet. 5:8). The devil’s malicious intent is clearly seen in Peter’s inspired words. Perhaps his malice is only to be matched by his methods. The apostle Paul made mention of “the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11), employing a word that is found only twice in the Greek New Testament. It is translated “wiles” in Ephesians 6:11 and “lie in wait” in Ephesians 4:14. Interestingly, this Greek term is the source of the English word “method.” Paul urged the Ephesians to put on the whole armor of God, so that they would be able to stand against the **methods** employed by the devil.

Elsewhere Paul would write by inspiration, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices,” (2 Cor. 2:11). Children of

God must ever be aware of Satan's evil purposes and the methods he employs to achieve his ends. In these matters ignorance is not bliss—it is deadly. Man must avail himself of the information revealed by God concerning his adversary. This is true regarding all forms of spiritual, religious and moral error. This is true concerning the particular error now under consideration, the allegation that the Bible is incomplete. So it is that this study begins in Eden with a brief examination of the method employed by Satan against mother Eve.

Having asked the woman about God's prohibition (Gen. 3:1), Satan proceeded to flatly contradict God's warning (Gen. 3:4). A bold move, indeed, but one that was quickly buttressed with subtlety. Before Eve had the opportunity to refute or reject such a brazen contradiction, the devil immediately advanced to sowing seeds of suspicion. This suspicion was directed toward God! "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," (Gen. 3:5). One should note carefully the method employed by the devil here. He wanted mother Eve to think suspiciously about God. He wanted her to feel that God was keeping something back from her—that she was missing out on something! This insinuation called into question God's concern for man's happiness and God's motive for His prohibition. With such seeds of suspicion planted firmly in Eve's heart, she was primed for disobedience.

As one considers the allegation that the Bible is incomplete, Satan's age-old tactics come to mind. Has God really preserved the entirety of His Word

for mankind today? Or, is modern man missing out on something? This, too, is a serious charge, indeed! What kind of God would not preserve His Word for His creation? Does He not care for man's happiness and well-being? Is it scornful disinterest that has resulted in these omissions? Perhaps there is a worse possibility. Was God **unable** to preserve His Word for modern man? Did the passing of time and the chaos of human history prove too much for the mighty hand of God?

With such questions the underlying considerations are laid bare. The devil is certainly behind the allegation that the Bible is incomplete. He seeks to undermine man's faith and confidence in God's Word, and thereby he can attack God Himself. Once man begins to view God as either unconcerned or inept, he then has no reason to serve such a God. After all, if God's Word cannot be trusted, neither can God!

The Apocrypha And The Old Testament Canon

Often when the supposed "lost books of the Bible" come up in conversation, one is referring to a group of 14 or 15 books commonly referred to as the Apocrypha. It is strange that these books are called "lost," as they are still in existence and are even included in Catholic Bibles. The real question is do they belong in all copies of the Bible? Are the books of the Apocrypha inspired of God, and if so, why are they "lost" so far as most Bibles are concerned? In actuality, they never were really lost; they were **rejected** and **refused** a place in God's Word. This rejection will be demonstrated to have been carried out with good reason.

Settled OT Canon Recognized By Jesus

Questions regarding the Apocryphal books are really questions about the Old Testament canon. When used in this technical fashion, “canon” refers to the accepted listing of Divinely-inspired (and therefore authoritative) books. The history of this term is both interesting and enlightening. The ancient Greek word *kanon* initially referred to a reed (note the derivation of the English word *cane*). The *kanon* was a measuring reed, usually a carpenter’s “level” or a scribe’s “ruler.” A metaphorical usage of *kanon* arose most likely from the row of marks found on the level or ruler (Lightfoot 42 [1979]). It is this metaphorical usage of “listing” that has been adopted into the discipline of canonicity. Using concepts brought over from the ancient *kanon*, one could summarize canonicity in the following statement. The Biblical canon is the total **listing** of books which **measure up** to the **standard** of Divine inspiration. This total list comprises the rule of faith and practice for God’s people. Thus, “canon” can be applied to both Old and New Testaments. However, the question of the Apocrypha pertains specifically to the Old Testament canon.

The Old Testament was written over a period of approximately 1000 years, yet it was fully completed and the canon settled well before the time of Christ. The Word became flesh (John 1:14) when Jesus was born a Palestinian Jew. As such, He was raised in the Jewish culture of first century Palestine. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,” (Gal. 4:4). Jesus grew up under the Mosaic Law, and He referred to the Old

Testament Scriptures as any Jew would typically do. Often He would use the common two-fold description “the law and the prophets” (Mat. 22:40; Luke 16:16). When first century Jews used this expression, they were referring to their “Bible,” the Old Testament Scriptures. This was not the only expression used by Jews to refer to their “Bible,” however. Another designation had come along later in time, but it was still in use by the time of Jesus. This second manner of referring to the Jewish Scriptures employed a three-fold description. Jesus used this expression as well. “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me,” (Luke 24:44).

Both of these descriptions included the same Old Testament writings; thus, they could be used interchangeably. This fact is established by Christ’s using a two-fold description in Luke 24:27 and then using the three-fold description in Luke 24:44. In both expressions the “law” (or “Moses”) simply referred to the Pentateuch—the five books of Moses. In the two-fold expression the “prophets” referred to the balance of the Old Testament as it is known today—Joshua through Malachi. The “prophets” in the three-fold expression, however, was limited to Joshua through Kings, along with Isaiah through Malachi (with the exception of Daniel). This left the books of Chronicles through Song of Solomon, along with Daniel, classed under the third designation, the “writings.” One will notice in Luke 24:44 that Jesus substituted “psalms” in place

of “writings.” This was obviously a synecdoche used by the Lord, in which He substituted a part for the whole.

What is most important about these ancient Jewish expressions, however, is that they encompass the very same thirty-nine books found in “Protestant” Bibles today! This is true even though the Hebrew canon consisted of twenty-two books, instead of thirty-nine. Lightfoot quotes the following from the historian Josephus, “Our books [the Jewish Scriptures, CG], those which are justly accredited, are but twenty-two, and contain the record of all time,” (154 [2003]). This discrepancy is easily accounted for when one realizes how the ancient Jews grouped, or combined, certain books. The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles were undivided, accounting for three books total instead of six. The Minor Prophets were grouped together simply as one book—the Book of the Twelve. This grouping alone would account for a reduction of eleven books in the final tally. Then the books of Judges and Ruth were combined, as were Jeremiah and Lamentations, along with Ezra and Nehemiah. These combinations again reduced the total by three, bringing the final count to twenty-two books as Josephus attested. Some writers will actually number the Hebrew canon at twenty-four books. When this occurs it is because the books of Judges-Ruth and Jeremiah-Lamentations might not have always been combined.

The order of the books in the Hebrew canon is also significant. The books of Moses were placed first, as is the case in the modern English Old Testament; thus, the Hebrew canon began with Genesis. The Hebrew canon

did not end with Malachi, however, it ended with what modern readers would recognize as Second Chronicles (though First and Second Chronicles were united in the Hebrew canon). Lightfoot provides a comment that is both insightful and helpful.

We should keep in mind that the Jewish order of the Old Testament differs from ours, and that Chronicles is placed at the end of the Hebrew Bible. Thus the Old Testament Jesus knew was a collection of writings reaching from Genesis to Chronicles, with all the other books in between, a collection which embraces the same books as in our Old Testament today (154 [2003]).

This observation causes one to appreciate in a different light the words of Christ on a particular occasion. In His scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus warned, “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar,” (Mat. 23:35). The knowledgeable Bible student will immediately recognize the names of these two martyrs and their placement in Bible history. Abel, of course, was slain because his works were righteous and his brother Cain’s were evil (1 John 3:12). Abel’s murder occurs near the beginning of Biblical history and is recorded in Genesis 4:8. Zacharias, on the other hand, was the son of the high priest, Jehoiada. He was stoned after having prophesied against king Joash and the people of Judah because of their apostasy (2

Chr. 24:20-22). Hence, when Jesus referenced “all the righteous blood” from Abel to Zacharias, He was essentially covering all of Old Testament history! “From cover to cover” would be a modern expression closely akin to what Jesus said.

Why the Apocrypha?

To many it would seem that there should be no cause for even considering the admission of the Apocrypha into the Old Testament canon. After all, it would seem that Christ’s acknowledgement of the Hebrew canon would end the discussion. It really should. The Jewish “Bible” consisting of Genesis through Chronicles contained the same exact books as modern English Bibles containing Genesis through Malachi. Yet the matter becomes a little more complicated when one considers the Septuagint (LXX).

The LXX was a pre-Christian translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek. This landmark work is recognized as having commenced in Alexandria, Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II who ruled from 285-246 BC (Geisler and Nix 503). What many Bible students do not know, however, is that this work initially intended only the Pentateuch. “It should be noted that the term Septuagint applies strictly to the Pentateuch, which was probably the only portion of the Old Testament translated during the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus” (Geisler and Nix 503). Supposedly the Pentateuch was translated by seventy-two Jewish scholars in a period of seventy-two days, according to the ancient Letter of Aristeas (Lightfoot 146 [2003]).

It is not known exactly when the balance of the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language. It would not be until the time of Origen (AD 184-254) that the term Septuagint (LXX) would be applied to the entire Old Testament (Bruce 147).

Since Aristeas refers only to the translation of the Jewish Law [the Pentateuch, CG], we have no information on how or when the remainder of the Old Testament was translated. We can only infer that as the need arose certain individuals or groups translated the various books, probably the Prophets (Former and Latter) first and the Writings later. How long this took no one knows. But we are practically certain that before the dawn of the Christian era, and perhaps well before, the entire Old Testament was accessible in Greek (Lightfoot 147 [2003]).

It is evident that the Greek translation of the Old Testament was not only finished, but also clearly entrenched in the Jewish culture of Palestine long before the birth of Christ into this world. It was so well-known, and clearly such a part of daily life, that the apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament quoted more from the LXX than they did from the Hebrew text (Lightfoot 149 [2003]). This is interesting information, but why is it pertinent to the present study? The answer is because the books of the Apocrypha were included in the later editions of the LXX.

Does the inclusion of the Apocryphal books in the LXX assure one of their Divine inspiration? Absolutely

not. It has already been shown that the Hebrew canon was settled before the time of Christ. In fact, the Old Testament canon was closed about four hundred years before Christ came into this world. “A long-established tradition associates the gathering of the canonical OT with Ezra and Nehemiah. This association naturally goes back to Ezra’s reading of the law to the people (Neh. 8-10), but there are other evidences for this tradition as well” (Lightfoot 49 [1979]). Such a tradition offers enlightenment as to why the ancient Jews would have closed their “Bible” with the book of Chronicles—Ezra was most likely the inspired chronicler! Further, the latest prophets such as Zechariah and Malachi would have been contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah. Their books would have been included in the canon (and they are), but any writings coming after this time would have been excluded.

The apocryphal books were produced in an era when no inspired documents were being given by God. Malachi concludes his narrative in the Old Testament by urging Israel: “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances.” He then projects four centuries into the future and prophesied: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come” (Mal. 4:4-5). This text pictured the coming of John the Baptist (cf. Mt. 11:14; Lk. 1:17). The implication of Malachi’s prophecy is that no prophet would arise from God until the

coming of John. This excludes the apocryphal writings (Jackson 239).

In light of the evidence, the timing is all wrong for the supposed inspiration and consequent canonicity of the Apocrypha. These books typically range in their dates of writing from 200 BC – AD 100 (Geisler and Nix 266). In fact, the evidence suggests very plausibly that none of the Apocryphal books had even been written when the work on the LXX commenced between 285-250 BC. There is no proof at all that the Apocryphal books were included in the earliest versions, and the following quote is very telling to that effect. “There is no evidence that the early [S]eptuagint versions of Jesus’ time and before, contained the Apocrypha. There is a five-hundred year chasm between the original and extant copies, and in the extant copies the Apocryphal books vary as to sequence and number” (Mosher 225). Geisler and Nix concur stating, “The earliest Greek manuscripts that include them [the Apocryphal books, CG] date from the fourth century AD,” (267).

Why not the Apocrypha?

Even though some hold the Apocrypha as an “appendix” to the Old Testament canon, it is evident from the facts of history that the ancient Jews did not view those books as canonical at all. The case could rest at this point, but the author will venture to provide additional points of evidence against the Apocrypha.

First, the Apocryphal books do not even claim to be inspired. Throughout the canonical Old Testament books one will read phrases such as “Thus saith the

Lord.” Conspicuously, however, this phrase and others akin to it are absent in the Apocrypha. In fact, there are times when one reading the Apocrypha will come across **denials** of inspiration! Jackson cites such an example from the prologue to the Apocryphal Ecclesiasticus, “Ye are entreated therefore to read with favour and attention, and to pardon us, if in any parts of what we have laboured to interpret, we may seem to fail in some of the phrases” (241). This is a frank admission of human frailty and non-inspiration, indeed! Why would worshipers of God seek to “thrust” inspiration upon a text that clearly denies it for itself? “It is most interesting to note that 1 Maccabees 4:46 – 9:27 denies that the Apocrypha are God-inspired and that 2 Maccabees 15 and the Prologue to Ecclesiasticus do the same” (Mosher 240-241).

Second, there are teachings in the Apocrypha that contradict what is taught in the inspired Scriptures. The Bible clearly teaches that one’s eternal destiny is sealed at the point of physical death (cf. Heb. 9:27). Abraham told the rich man in torments, “And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence,” (Luke 16:26). However, the Apocrypha brazenly teaches that prayer (propitiation) can be made for those who have died, in order that they might be released from their sins (2 Maccabees 12:45). Also, the New Testament teaches that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood, and further, that such requires the blood of Christ particularly (Heb. 10:4;

Col. 1:14). Yet Tobit 12:9 in the Apocrypha teaches that alms-giving will purge away all sin (Jackson 243). So much for the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-5)!

Third, there are a number of factual problems and historical inaccuracies in the Apocrypha. “These books do not evidence intrinsic qualities of inspiration. Great portions of these books are obviously legendary and fictitious. Often they contain historical, chronological, and geographical errors” (Lightfoot 168 [2003]). Lightfoot proceeds to furnish an example from Judith 1:1 in which Nebuchadnezzar is described as ruling over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh (168 [2003]). From history both Biblical and secular, the careful student will immediately recognize the error in this description—Nebuchadnezzar was king over Babylon, not Assyria (Dan. 1:1). Numerous other examples of inaccuracy could be cited and have been by sundry writers over the years.

The Apocrypha has no place whatsoever in the Old Testament canon. The canon was closed and settled long before the time of Christ and even before the earliest of the Apocryphal books were written. Neither Christ nor any New Testament author ever quoted directly from the Apocrypha or in any way acknowledged those books as inspired, canonical or authoritative. This is strange, indeed, if the Apocrypha was supposedly a part of the “canon” represented in the LXX (Geisler and Nix 267-268). Christ and the apostles quoted from the LXX apparently more than any other version, yet never once from the Apocryphal books! It is the belief of this author

that the Apocrypha was not even included in the LXX versions of the first century AD; there is certainly no historical proof that it was. For the sake of argument, however, one might suppose that the Apocryphal books were included in the first century LXX. If that were the case, Christ's quoting Old Testament Scripture from the LXX would be akin to a modern preacher's quoting Scripture from a "study Bible" today. Everyone using a "study Bible" should recognize the difference between the actual inspired "text" and the extraneous "helps" and "articles" written by uninspired men. In other words, just because certain writings are placed alongside Scripture does not mean that those writings are Scripture themselves.

Supposedly Lost Books And The New Testament Canon

In one sense, the questions concerning the Apocrypha's inclusion in the Old Testament canon constitute a point of little consequence. After all, Jesus fulfilled the entirety of the old law (Mat. 5:17), nailing it to His cross (Col. 2:14). The old law has served its primary purpose of testifying of Christ (John 5:39) and bringing man through religious history to Christ (Gal. 3:22-25). Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4). It is the New Testament under which men live today (Heb. 10:9-10) and by which men today will one day be judged (cf. John 12:48).

Therefore a greater question concerns the New Testament canon and its completeness. Does modern man have all the inspired texts constituting the

New Testament? Are the twenty-seven books known and accepted as the New Testament complete and exhaustive? Or put in a more pressing manner, are any books “missing” from the New Testament? An honest investigation into these matters will yield some very encouraging results.

One must remember that the New Testament canon was written in a time devoid of electronic copiers and a standardized, public postal system like what is known in modern America. Neither were there modern forms of communication and media in the first century world, like telephone and television. To say that news traveled much more slowly in the first century world than it does now would be an enormous understatement. Yet the New Testament apostles and prophets did write down the will of God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37) and sent forth their missives, both to Christian individuals (cf. 1 Tim. 3:14) and to congregations (cf. 1 The. 5:27). They expected their writings to be circulated among congregations in different localities (cf. Rev. 1:11), and yet this would take time. A brother or a local church that received such correspondence would know immediately of its inspiration and authority. Locally, it would be cherished and revered instantly. However, it would be a matter of time before that particular writing would be known and accepted by the church in other regions. This is both natural and understandable, and it helps account for a “progressive” formation of the New Testament canon. Obviously, all New Testament books were not written at the same exact time, and further, as they were written it would take time for them to be circulated far and

wide. In due time, however, the authoritative writings of inspired men would come to be known and possessed by the church as a whole. “By the principle of circulation, each congregation came to have in its possession the authoritative books that had been written” (Burger 150).

It is encouraging for one to see the evidence of how quickly this process took place. With the infancy of Christ’s church and the assaults of various errors already afoot, there was a need and desire for clear apostolic teaching. The oldest manuscript of New Testament Scripture known today is “The John Ryland’s Fragment.” It is dated no later than AD 138, but some believe it was written even earlier (Burger 150). It contains portions of John 18—a gospel account that had been written in Ephesus around AD 90, perhaps as late as AD 97-98 (Woods 18-19 [1989]). Burger points out the significance of this, stating the possibility that within a span of twenty-five or so years, John’s gospel account had been circulated all the way from Ephesus in the north Mediterranean to Egypt in the south (150).

All of the New Testament books were written before the close of the first century. But almost as soon as they were being written, they were also being read (1 The. 5:27) and circulated (Col. 4:16). New Testament writings were also being collected, as Peter evidently had some of Paul’s writings (2 Pet. 3:15-16). They were even being quoted and cited as Scripture (Mosher 254). Jude quoted Peter in his epistle (Jude 1:17-18; cf. 2 Pet. 3:3) and Paul quoted Luke in his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7). “In brief, all twenty-seven books [of the NT, CG] were written, copied, and began

to be disseminated among the churches before the end of the first century” (Geisler and Nix 420).

As early as AD 140 there is evidence that the New Testament canon was substantially known and recognized as it is today. Valentinus lived during this time in the city of Rome. It is true that he fell prey to Gnostic error, but unlike most Gnostics of his day, he accepted the whole Scripture. In his writings Valentinus used almost all the twenty-seven New Testament books—even Hebrews and Revelation. Based on this fact one author stated, “It seems clear that at Rome in [AD] 140 they had our New Testament” (Harris 81). This is a marvelous statement, indeed, especially when one realizes that the apostle John had likely written the last New Testament books less than fifty years earlier!

The Muratorian Fragment is a copy of a Greek text dating back to about AD 170. It lists all but four of the New Testament books. When honestly considered, it also demonstrates that the canonical twenty-seven books of the New Testament were recognized very early in Christian history.

This is a very good list. It excludes all the forgeries but one, and includes all our canonical books except Hebrews, James, and the two epistles of Peter. Westcott, who has written carefully on this subject, thinks that the present document was copied from a manuscript that had a break here, for we know that other contemporary sources mention these four books (Harris 78-79).

Indeed, when one considers the four omissions of this

document, he might do well to remember it is The Muratorian **Fragment**. Portions of this very ancient text are missing. Nonetheless, it still yields another intriguing piece of information. It refers to Luke as the author of the “third” gospel account—naturally allowing for the placement of Matthew and Mark as is known today (Harris 78).

Suffice it to say that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament have been received and recognized since the first century. Yes it took time for copying and circulation, but everywhere these inspired writings went, they were ultimately recognized for what they were—the authoritative Word of God. As one writer put it, “There is a great difference in recognizing authority and bestowing authority” (Burger 145). The early church did not make or establish the New Testament canon; she simply received the apostolic teachings and recognized them as the doctrine of Christ (cf. Acts 1:1-2; 2:42; 2 John 1:9). Man today is blessed immeasurably to have this New Testament. But are any books missing?

The Real First Corinthians?

One of the passages cited by those who doubt the New Testament’s completeness is found in First Corinthians 5:9, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.” The translation of the verb “wrote” into English makes it appear that the apostle had previously written another epistle to the Corinthians, before the one at hand. This is not necessarily the case. Geisler and Nix remind one that the aorist tense in koine Greek is not so much concerned with the **time**

of action as it is with the **kind** of action (216). They go on to write the following.

Hence, Paul could be saying something like this: “I am now decisively writing to you.” That would certainly fit the urgency of his message in the context. Further, the same epistolary use of the aorist is found elsewhere in this very letter (1 Cor. 9:15). Moreover, there is no indication from the early history of the church that any such letter (other than the existing 1 Corinthians) ever existed (Geisler and Nix 216).

Other writers deny the use of the epistolary aorist in the present passage, but Paul’s use of that very tense just four chapters later favors this position (1 Cor. 9:15). Harris concurs, writing, “But this is probably only an ‘epistolary aorist’ as the Greek grammarians say. It means that this is what he wrote just above in this epistle. Ephesians 3:3 is another such reference” (85). Even more, as much as the early church quoted and alluded to the extant writings of their day—both inspired and uninspired—it is extremely strange that an epistle from a prominent apostle to a well-known church is nowhere quoted or even mentioned.

The Epistle from Laodicea?

A question arises again from the pen of the inspired Paul. To the Colossian brethren he wrote, “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16). What

letter were the Colossians to receive from their brethren at Laodicea? The only correspondence preserved in the New Testament that was written to the Laodiceans is the “mini-epistle” found in Revelation 3:14-22. The problem is that Revelation had not been written at the time Paul wrote Colossians, nor would it be for several years.

The Bible student should be careful not to **read into** the text of Colossians 4:16. One will note that Paul did not reference a letter to the Laodiceans, but rather one that would be coming **from** those brethren. This is an important note. It has already been established that the books of the New Testament were collected, copied and circulated as they were received from the inspired penmen. It is absolutely possible that Paul anticipated the Laodiceans’ passing along a letter that had been passed along to them. It would have to be a letter already in existence, obviously, in order to be in circulation; thus, one written before or shortly after the book of Colossians. Is there such a letter?

The book of Ephesians “fits the bill” extremely well. No careful Bible student has ever studied the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians without being impressed with how well these books complement each other. It has been said that they fit together like a “hand in a glove.” Modern Bible students are benefitted greatly by studying these letters in tandem, and no doubt, the Christians in western Asia Minor would have benefitted from this dual study in the long ago.

Does the opening address of Ephesians pose a problem to this position? Not at all. The letter opens, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to

the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). Two things should be noted at this point. One, with the use of circulation that is documented in the early church, a letter addressed to the Ephesians could very easily wind up in the hands of the Laodiceans. This is not only plausible, but such circulation would really be natural and expected.

Thus, letters written by inspired writers circulated from church to church. When a congregation received such a book, a copy was made for their keeping and then the original was sent to another congregation. In this way each church soon had all the books that had been written to all the churches (Burger 150).

Two, one should know something about some of the earliest manuscripts of Ephesians. “The best manuscripts of Ephesians 1:1 do not include the words ‘which are at Ephesus.’ It was perhaps a general letter sent to both Ephesus and near-by Laodicea” (Harris 85). Bruce confirms this information and adds an enlightening detail. “This epistle [Ephesians, CG] was listed as the Epistle to the Laodiceans in Marcion’s canon. (Ephesians appears to have been a circular letter, not meant for any single church; the words ‘at Ephesus’ in Eph. 1:1 are omitted by some early copies)” (257).

A word is offered in light of the two foregoing cases. While the plausible evidence suggests that neither a Corinthian nor a Laodicean epistle is missing, one should consider the possibility that such a question really does not matter. Either God is able to preserve for modern man the revelation needed today, or else

man is left wondering what other things God is unable to do. This author has the full assurance that God has preserved for man all the revelation to which man is accountable. Is it possible that certain letters were written in the first century that God did not see fit to preserve? Perhaps, but this does not seem likely. They would have to be letters that addressed strictly first century needs—needs facing the church in her infancy. Or, perhaps they were letters that were redundant in the revelation they contained—revelation needed urgently at the time by the initial recipients, but that would be preserved elsewhere in the New Testament writings for future generations. One thing is for sure: God is all-wise (cf. Rom. 11:33-36) and all-powerful (cf. Jer. 32:17). He has given man “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3), and He did not do that in futility.

A Book of Enoch?

This final case is a little different. It involves a New Testament author’s quoting an ancient prophecy—only the prophecy is not recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. Some allege that Jude is quoting from an extra-Biblical book, the book of Enoch (or, First Enoch), when he writes the following.

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches

which ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 1:14-15).

First, one should consider some details concerning the book of Enoch. “This is a long, rambling work, the product of several authors who lived during the period from about 200 BC to about AD 100” (Metzger 38). Bruce also acknowledges the book of Enoch as a “composite work,” meaning it is the product of multiple authors over time (171). This is useful information, indeed. Apparently portions of the book did antedate Jude and his time, but not all of the book did so. Certain portions were likely written after Jude had already penned his fiery epistle contained in the New Testament. One does well to ask whether Jude quoted from this uninspired, non-canonical book, or if one of the late contributors to the book of Enoch quoted from Jude!

Many writers addressing this question dismiss any difficulty associated with Jude’s quotation. They do so typically by referring to the apostle Paul’s quoting heathen writers. True enough, Paul quoted from Aratus (Acts 17:28), Menander (1 Cor. 15:33), and Epimenides (Titus 1:12). Many point out that all truth is God’s truth (Geisler and Nix 262). Thus, the defense goes like this: if the apostle Paul could quote heathen writers, citing only truthful and useful excerpts, then Jude could certainly quote non-canonical literature in similar fashion. This writer believes there is a better answer.

One must be careful in dealing with Jude’s quotation. Note that Jude attributes what he writes to “Enoch, the seventh from Adam,” not to some penman writing in the first or second centuries BC. Jude’s

identification of the quote's source accords perfectly with the canonical record found in Genesis 5:1-24. Beginning with Adam and counting consecutively through the names listed in the genealogy, the seventh name listed is that of Enoch. The straightforward reading, then, of Jude's text would mean that Jude was actually quoting a prophecy that Enoch had uttered back during the Patriarchal dispensation—long before Moses was ever inspired to write what is known as the beginning of the Bible. Some might ask why, then, did Moses not make a record of Enoch's prophecy? This is no problem at all. The apostle Peter reveals that Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5), but Moses did not record Noah's sermons. Even pertaining to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, the apostle John admits that not everything He did was written down (John 21:25).

Still others might press the point, asking a rather silly question. How did Jude know what Enoch said, if he did not, in fact, draw from the non-canonical book of Enoch? Woods provides an answer to such a question in fine fashion. "From what source did Jude obtain the prophecy of Enoch to which he refers? It is sufficient for our purpose merely to answer, from inspiration" (398 [1991]). He later goes on to write, "In the same fashion that Peter knew that Noah was a preacher, that Lot was vexed in Sodom, and that Paul knew the names of the Egyptian magicians; Jude learned of Enoch's prophecy—by inspiration" (Woods 399 [1991]). For these reasons, this author believes that the book of Enoch actually quotes from Jude, not vice-versa.

May all men trust in the God of the Word and live their lives in faithful obedience to the Word of God! He has given us all things (Rom. 8:32; 2 Pet. 1:3)!

WORKS CITED

- Bruce, F.F. *The Books and the Parchments*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963. Print.
- Burger, Wayne. Who Fired that Canon? The Process of Canonization, in *From God's Mind to Man's Pen, vol. 1*. Ed. Sean Hochdorf. Visalia, CA: West Visalia church of Christ, 2007. Print.
- Geisler, William L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986. Print.
- Harris, R. Laird. What Books Belong in the Canon of Scripture? in *Can I Trust My Bible?* Chicago: Moody Press, 1963. Print.
- The Holy Bible, King James Version*. e-Sword. Version 11.2.2. Electronic database.
- Jackson, Wayne. *The Bible on Trial*. Stockton, CA: Christian Courier Publications, 2009. Print.
- Lightfoot, Neil R. *How We Got the Bible*. New York: MJF Books, 2003. Print.
- , The Canon and Text of the Old Testament, in *The World and Literature of the Old Testament*, ed. John T. Willis. Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing, 1979. Print.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965. Print.
- Mosher, Keith A., Sr. *The Book God "Breathed."* Pulaski,

TN: Sain Publications, 2008. Print.

Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1989. Print.

------. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John and Jude*. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1991. Print.

Baptism Is Not For The Remission Of Sins

Westley Hazel



Westley Hazel is married to Shelley. They have two children, Evie and Deacon. He has a Bachelor and Master of Divinity degree from Freed Hardeman and Doctorate in Biblical Spirituality. He has done local work in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia. Currently, he is the Minister for the Forrest Park church of Christ in Valdosta GA.

The subject of baptism is one of the most contentious topics in the religious world today. Unfortunately, a majority of the major religious groups have found themselves on the wrong side of the arguments by settling on baptism as an important act but not necessarily an essential act. To a large degree they do not reach this conclusion because it is what the New Testament teaches but rather by way of inference and misunderstanding. Many of those who reject the essentiality of baptism do so because of the assumption that since man is saved by grace it is impossible to say that any work is essential. What they fail to understand is the difference in works of merit and works of faith. When you simply open the pages of the New Testament the reader will constantly see baptism being connected to the forgiveness of sin and salvation itself.

There is nothing significant about the act of immersion itself. I sometimes joke that my brother

used to immerse me over and over in the swimming pool. This had nothing to do with my relationship with God. Even today when I baptize someone into Christ, I usually have the thought, “that was quick.” Immersion is significant because God has made a connection between it and our relationship with Him. In the Old Testament faithful Jewish people were circumcised. Circumcision was common in the ancient world and many people were circumcised who had nothing to do with God’s people. God declared that circumcision would be a mark of His special covenant people (Gen. 17:13). It was a significant and necessary action because God took this quite common thing and gave it special significance. A failure to submit to this physical action was serious and a rejection of God’s Will (Exod. 4:24-26). It is the same with Baptism. God has placed special significance upon a common act of immersion. A failure to submit to this physical action is serious and a rejection of God’s Will. Baptism in the New Testament is constantly connected to the one’s salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 28:19-20

When Jesus gives what we refer to as the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 He instructs his disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” As He describes what making disciples looks like he continues, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” [all scripture quotations are taken from the NKJ unless noted otherwise.] This text teaches us that an essential

part of how individuals become disciples under the New Covenant is baptism. This is the reason that baptism is part of every single example of conversion in the New Testament. There is not a single example of conversion that does not include baptism. Baptism is always a part of becoming a disciple of Christ.

Acts 2:38

In Acts 2 Peter preaches the first gospel sermon. When the people become convicted of their sin, they cry out in vs. 37, “what shall we do?” Peter’s answer could not be clearer in regard to this topic. “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’ (Acts 2:38). A simple reading of this passage should make it clear that baptism is connected to the remission of sins. Unfortunately, in an effort to support the idea that baptism is not a necessary part of God’s plan of salvation, it has been suggested by some that the Greek word *eis* which is translated “for” actually means “because of” One of the most well known proponents of this view is A.T. Robertson. It is interesting to note that Robertson is clear about the fact that he favors the translation “because of” as a result of his own views on baptism rather than the demands of the text itself. He writes, “one will decide the use here according as he believes that baptism is essential to the remission of sins or not. My view is decidedly against the idea that Peter, Paul, or any one in the New Testament taught baptism as essential to the remission of sins or the means

of securing such remission. So I understand Peter to be urging baptism on each of them who had already turned (repented) and for it to be done in the name of Jesus Christ on the basis of the forgiveness of sins which they had already received” (Robertson, 36). There is nothing besides a preconceived idea that baptism is not essential that leads such a translation. I do not understand why someone would come to such a conclusion in rejection of the clear and simple reading of the text.

If one simply translates the word *eis* he will find that what Peter was instructing them to do was to be immersed in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins. J.H. Thayer said that the significance of *eis* in Acts 2:38 is “to obtain the forgiveness of sins (94). Danker says that in this context the word *eis* means, “to denote purpose... for forgiveness of sins, so that sins might be forgiven Mat. 26:28; cp. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38” (290). Daniel Wallace says that trying to make *eis* mean “because of” in reference to baptism in texts like Luke 3:3 and Acts 2:38 is a “ingenious solution” that “lacks conviction” (369-71). In texts that are not so politicized a translation of the construction *eis aphesis hamartion* is easily understood as “in order to receive the forgiveness of sins.” This is seen in Matthew 26:28 and Luke 3:3. For some reason translators have not trouble with these texts. As Robertson candidly admits, the difficulty with doing that in Acts 2:38 is based more on preferred theology than translation itself. Once the detractors are set aside it can clearly be seen that baptism was to be done in order to receive the forgiveness of sins. This connection is further seen in the fact the 3,000

who were baptized on that day added to the number of the Church (Acts 2:41).

Acts 22:16

In Acts 22:16 as Paul is sharing his conversion experience again, he tells of the time following his encounter with God on the Road to Damascus and how after praying for many days God sent a man named Ananias to him. Ananias instructed him, “and now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Clearly, he is saying that one of the things accomplished through baptism is the washing away of one’s sins. He also implies that one of the ways that an individual “calls on the name of the Lord” is by being baptized. One might argue that it means more than this but certainly not less.

Romans 6:3-4

As Paul begins Romans 6 he is concluding the most forceful presentation in the New Testament of our salvation being dependent on the grace of God rather than the works of man. As is still the case today, anytime grace is presented there are those who will turn it into something that God never intended it to be, a license to sin. He informs the reader that if their understanding of this grace is that it somehow makes sin a good thing then they have completely missed the point of our salvation in Christ. In order to make his point he wants to take their minds back to the beginning of their walk with Christ when they died to sin. How

does he do this? He reminds them of the day that they were baptized. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” It is important to see the picture that is being painted here is of someone who was outside of Christ Jesus and outside of his death. When they were baptized, they were now inside of Christ Jesus and His death. He continues in Romans 6:4 to show the imagery of what happened when they were baptized. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life.” Just as Jesus died on the Cross, we died to sin in our baptism. Just as He was buried in tomb we are buried in a watery grave in our baptism. Just as he was raised from the dead we too are raised from a spiritual death to “walk in newness of life.” This is the beginning of the Christian life and the process of being born again that Jesus spoke of in John 3.

Galatians 3:26-27

In Galatians 3:26 Paul makes a statement to all the Christians in Galatia saying, “for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” In the very next verse, he explains why they know this to be the case. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” For those who would attempt to paint faith and baptism as two separate things, this text shows that to be a false idea. Baptism is a part of the faith by which we are saved and have confidence in our sonship. This text also echoes the imagery of Romans 6 by noting

that baptism is the time wherein we “put on Christ.” The inference is that before the point of our baptism we have not “put on Christ.”

Conclusion

These are just a few of the many passages which clearly teach that baptism is an act which God has connected to the remission of our sins. There are countless sermons and books that teach the exact opposite of this truth but the reader/listener would do well to notice that in these works there is a steady and continual appeal to accepting an explanation of why the Bible does not mean what it clearly says. At times people will ask about the essentiality of baptism. I prefer to answer this question with a few questions of my own. Is it essential to be a disciple of Christ (Mat. 28:19-20)? Is it essential to have the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)? Is it essential to have your sins washed away (Acts 22:16)? Is it essential to be the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3)? Is it essential to be in Christ (Gal. 3:28)? Is it essential to be saved (1 Peter 3:21)? The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is directly connected to all of these things in the New Covenant, and is consistent in showing baptism as a part of every NT example of conversion.

Works Cited

Baur, Walter, W. Ardnt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979.

Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*,
Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930.

Thayer, J.H. 1958. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New
Testament*. Edinburgh, Scotland: T.&T. Clark.

Wallace, Daniel. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*,
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Non-Institutionalism

Steve Higginbotham



Steve is married to Kim, and together they have four children. He has been preaching for the past thirty-five years. He is a graduate of Freed Hardeman University. He serves as the Preaching Minister for the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, TN. He also serves as an instructor for the Southeast Institute Of Biblical Studies.

While some of the errors that will be examined in this lectureship are errors espoused by those who are outside the body of Christ, my topic concerns errors that are espoused by those who are my brethren. Because of this truth, and the fact that I am commanded to “love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17), I want to be especially careful to be as kind and as fair as I can possibly be, and to avoid any misrepresentations of those who hold the doctrine I will be examining. Of course, that is not to suggest that I would not need to be kind and fair if one were not my brother, but it is just that I feel an extra sense of obligation due to the fact that those who hold this doctrine are my brethren (e.g. Gal. 6:10).

The term, “Non-Institutionalism” is used as a designation for certain congregations who are generally opposed to the use of institutions in assisting the church to fulfill some of their obligations.

In times past, these brethren were called, “Antis” (e.g. anti-support of orphan homes from the church treasury, anti-sponsoring church arrangements in the area of evangelism, and anti-benevolence toward non-saints out of the church treasury). This term has often been used in a pejorative way and served to stigmatize those who were thus labeled. Needless to say, this term was resented. After all, should we not all be “anti” something? While I dislike labels and would like to discuss these matters by simply saying, “Christians believe...,” I cannot, for Christians are divided over these issues. Therefore, for the sake of communication and understanding, one must use a label to identify the respective positions held by brethren.

Therefore, with no intention to stigmatize, or belittle, I choose to use the terms “non-institutional” and “mainstream” churches to identify the opposing viewpoints discussed in this presentation, while fully realizing the limitations of such designations.

What Is Not At The Heart Of The Disagreement Between Non-Institutional Churches And Mainstream Churches

A Respect for Biblical Patterns.

While it is true that some brethren have totally abandoned the belief that the Bible serves as a pattern for the work and worship of the church, and who ridicule the concept of “pattern theology,” this is not the case with either non-institutional churches or mainstream

churches. We both believe the Bible contains a pattern for Christian life, work, and worship (Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim.1:13).

A Respect for Biblical Authority.

Again, while it is true that some brethren have totally abandoned the belief that we must have authority for all we teach and practice, this is not the case with either non-institutional churches or mainstream churches. Both equally affirm the need for biblical authority for all that we teach and practice (Col. 3:17). In fact, it is this common ground that gives me hope for reconciliation of our differences.

A Deficient Respect for God.

While it may make it easier to villainize the person with whom we differ, it cannot be done while maintaining our integrity with respect to this issue. The differences that exist between non-institutional churches and mainstream churches are not because one group loves God more than the other and respects his will more than the other. I am convinced that God's people in both groups truly love God and are doing their best to respect him through their obedience, individually as well as collectively.

**Broad Areas of Disagreement Between
Non-Institutional Churches and
Mainstream Churches**

Identifying Biblical Patterns.

While both non-institutional churches and mainstream churches respect biblical patterns, they differ in arriving at a conclusion as to what those patterns are. In other words, it is not a matter of principle, but it is a matter of properly identifying what is and is not a pattern that is to be bound.

Establishing Bible Authority.

Again, while both groups believe in the necessity of biblical authority for all we teach and practice, we do not agree upon what it is that the Bible authorizes or does not authorize. It is the application of biblical authority that divides us, not our respect for it. This is especially seen in the question of “When is an example binding?” and in identifying the difference between an expediency (which is authorized) and an addition (which is not authorized).

Specific Errors Of Non-Institutional Churches

The Work of the Church in Evangelism.

There are many points of agreement between non-institutional churches and mainstream churches with respect to evangelism. We both agree that the gospel is God’s only power to save man (Rom. 1:16). We both agree that all mankind needs the gospel (Rom. 3:23). We both agree that the church must obey the “great commission” (Matt. 28:19-20). However, the work of

the church in evangelism is one point of disagreement that has caused division.

Non-Institutional churches teach that no church has a right to receive funds from another church to do evangelistic work. In other words, non-institutional churches are opposed to a “sponsoring church arrangement.” For example, if congregation A begins a radio program, congregation B could not send funds to congregation A to offer financial assistance for two reasons:

1. They claim it is a violation of church autonomy. As they see it, when one church sends money to another church for evangelism, they have delegated to the receiving church the right to oversee their money. Thus, the sending church would lose its autonomy. Furthermore, if the sending church were to tell the receiving church how to use the money they sent, the receiving church would lose their autonomy to the sending church.
2. They claim it is a violation of the pattern of sending assistance directly to an evangelist. They assert there is no example of one church ever sending money to another church for evangelistic purposes. Therefore, in the realm of evangelism, they assert the biblical pattern is for a church to send money directly to an evangelist and not to another church.

Let us examine these two assertions above:

1. Is it a violation of church autonomy for one church to send money to another church for

evangelistic reasons? If it is, then why would it not indicate loss of autonomy for one church to send money to another church for benevolence reasons, which non-institutional churches correctly teach is authorized (Rom.15:25; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9)? I cannot see how it can be rightfully claimed that when one church gives or receives money from another church in the realm of evangelism one of the churches, either the sending church or the receiving church, loses its autonomy, but when one church gives or receives money from or to another church in the realm of benevolence, no loss of autonomy has occurred.

Another question would be, “Why would it be a loss of autonomy for one church to send to another church for evangelistic purposes, but not a loss of autonomy for one church to send directly to a preacher for evangelistic purposes (which non-institutional churches teach is authorized)? This is an arbitrary assertion.

2. Is one church sending money to another church for evangelistic purposes a violation of the biblical pattern? Non-institutional churches assert that the biblical pattern for the transfer of funds in the realm of evangelism is that a church sent funds directly to an evangelist (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 2:15; Phil. 4:15-16).

However, the passages above do not establish “direct sending” to an evangelist. Such is an

assumption on their part. These passages are “what” passages, not “how” passages. They tell us what was done (money was sent from one church to an evangelist), but they do not tell us how it was done (directly or indirectly). A binding pattern cannot be established upon an assumption.

The Work Of The Church In Benevolence.

Just as is the case in the realm of evangelism, there are many points of agreement between non-institutional churches and mainstream churches in the realm of benevolence. We both agree that the church has benevolent responsibilities (1 Tim. 5:1-16). We both agree that we can send benevolence to another church who is in need (1 Cor. 16:1-2). We also both agree that the church’s benevolence activity is limited (1 Tim. 5:16; 2 Thess. 3:10). However, non-institutional churches teach that:

1. The only time a church may send benevolent funds to another church is to “bring about equality” (2 Corinthians 8:10-15).
2. The church, through its treasury, is only authorized to extend benevolence to saints only (1 Cor. 16:1-2).
3. The church, through its treasury, cannot extend benevolence to any human organization, such as a children’s home.

Again, let us examine these assertions above:

1. Is it true that the only time a church can render benevolent help to another church is to “bring

about equality?” Does the Bible teach that it is sinful for a poorer church to render benevolence assistance to a richer church? No. In fact, the Bible gives us an example of just that. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul commands the Corinthians for giving out of their “deep poverty” (2 Cor. 8:2), and were willing to give even beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:3) to a church who was described as having some “poor among” the saints (Rom. 15:26). From the description provided, it certainly appears that a poorer church gave benevolence help to a richer church.

Furthermore, this concept of “equality” (2 Cor. 8:14) is misapplied. This is not a passage speaking of an equality that should exist between a sending church and a receiving church. Rather, it is a passage describing an equality that should exist between the sending churches.

2. Is it true that the church may only render benevolence from its treasury to saints only? No, for Paul stated that the funds Paul collected to take back to Jerusalem was distributed to “them” (the saints) and “all” (a class of individual that stands in contrast with the saints) (2 Cor. 9:13).
3. Is it true that the church cannot render benevolence from its treasury to a separate institution, apart from the church, to care for orphans? No. One must remember that it is

the institution of the home that is responsible for raising children. The church cannot function as a home, but the church can render benevolence to a needy home.

Why is a church authorized to buy services from a construction company to build a church building, buy services from a printing company to print Bibles, buy services from a radio station to preach the gospel, and buy services from a grocery store to help the needy, but cannot buy a service from an orphan home to help needy orphans?

The Issue Of Fellowship

Can these issues that divide brethren ever be resolved? Yes, I believe they can, but they will not be resolved by one group demanding or even asking the other group to give up their practice for the sake of unity. While that may seem like a solution on the surface, if you give legs to such an approach, it will eventually cripple the church and make it subject to the least knowledgeable and possibly the most cantankerous Christian. While Paul, out of concession, was willing to forego his right not to have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:1-3), he dug in his heels and would not permit Titus to be circumcised when others made his circumcision a test of faithfulness (Gal. 2:3-5).

Furthermore, it will not be resolved as long as some brethren continue to despise and judge one another. We will never have unity as long as one group accuses the other group of sin when they are engaging in that which

is authorized. And likewise, we will never have unity as long as one group despises or looks down on the other group for their conscientious convictions (Rom. 14:1-3).

I believe we can achieve unity when we go back to the table and sit down together with open Bibles, and open hearts, with love for one another and God, and seek his will about all else. The truth is ascertainable (John 8:32). But someone may object, “But we’ve tried this in the past, and it didn’t work. We’re still divided.” My response to that is, “Try it again!” Is not the unity of God’s people worth the effort (Psa. 133:1; John 17:20-21)? The scars of the past should not be used as an excuse to dissuade us from working toward greater unity and fellowship.

The apostle Paul once said, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).

When the Lord returns, he may find division among his children, but may he not find us content with it and not doing all we can to resolve it.

Premillennialism

Billy Bland



Billy is married to Terry, and together they have two children, three granddaughters, and one great granddaughter. Billy has served in the United States Army and is graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He also has completed the graduate program at the Memphis School of Preaching, and has received a B.A and M.A. from Amridge University. Billy has done local work in Tennessee and Mississippi. Currently, he is the Associate Director of the Memphis School of Preaching, an elder at the Coldwater congregation, and Director of Far East/World Evangelism.

Introduction

What is “The Mark of the Beast?” Who is “The Antichrist? What is “The One Thousand Year Reign?” These are all Biblical topics and the above questions should be answered in harmony with the Bible. The mark of the beast and the one thousand year reign are mentioned in the book of Revelation. The words “antichrist” and “antichrists” are found only in the books of First and Second John. The apostle John is the inspired author of these three books, as well as Third John and the Book of John.

Men have given all sorts of false interpretations concerning these topics. These should be discussed in the context of where there are discussed and not given over to the wild speculations that some have espoused.

Dispensational Premillennialism has done much to add confusion to these Bible subjects. Peter mentions some who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction. He wrote, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:15–16). People who wrest the Scriptures are not concerned with properly exegeting the Scriptures in order to come to a knowledge of the truth, but are more concerned with espousing some far-fetch theory of their own. They wrest (twist or pervert) the Scriptures in an attempt to make them teach what they want, rather than what God stated. God says they do such do so to their own destruction or ruin. We are to rightly divide the Word of truth. “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). There is a curse from God upon any who preach any other Gospel than that which was revealed by God. Paul warned, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8–9).

With the above thoughts in mind, we will proceed to deal with each of these topics separately, and in light

of the context in which they are located in the Word of God.

Premillennialism Defined

“Premillennialism” is a very complex and involved doctrine. Although very complex and involved, one should not conclude that it is difficult to answer.

The words “**pre**” means “before;” “**millennial**” indicates “**one thousand years;**” and “**ism**” means “doctrine or system.” “Premillennialism” is that system of doctrine which teaches Jesus Christ will return to this earth just before a one thousand year reign (millennium) on the earth. It is thought by advocates of this doctrine, that Revelation 20 is where this reign is described.

Premillennialist themselves are divided into various groups because of their differing views of events that will occur associated with Christ’s return. However, fundamentally, there have been two groups. There is “Historic Premillennialism” which is the older form of Premillennialism and does not carry the idea of the rapture, etc. Then there is the more modern “Dispensational Premillennialism,” also known as “Dispensationalism.” The seven dispensations are divided accordingly:

- (1) Innocence: Creation of Adam to the Fall.
- (2) Conscience: The Fall until the Flood.
- (3) Human Government: The Flood until the call of Abraham.
- (4) Promise: The call of Abraham to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.
- (5) Law: The giving of the law through most of Jesus’ public ministry.

- (6) Grace (or Church Age): Closing days of Christ's public ministry until the second coming of Christ.
- (7) Kingdom: The Millennium (the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth).

It is taught that we are **presently** living in the dispensation of Grace (also known as the "Church Age"), and current events indicate that Jesus will soon descend from heaven. When He descends, He will resurrect the dead saints (only) and they along with the living saints will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air. While the saints are raptured, there will be a seven-year period on earth which is divided into two "three and one-half periods." In the first half of the seven years, all the Jews will return to Jerusalem and Israel. The Old Testament temple will be re-built. A world leader will arise and demand worship. At the end of the first three and one-half years, he will be revealed, however, to be the Antichrist. Anyone who does not worship him will be put to death. During the last three and one-half years there will be a great tribulation upon the world. All those converted during these seven years will be put to death. When it seems that the Antichrist is completely victorious, Christ will descend (with the raptured saints), and a literal battle of Armageddon will take place, at which time Christ will be victorious over the Antichrist and will establish the Davidic throne in the city of Jerusalem and will rule the world in righteousness for a literal one thousand years. All those that were converted to Christ during the tribulation and were killed will be resurrected at this time, just before

the 1000 reign. At the end of this one thousand years (Kingdom Age), the wicked will be resurrected and the great white throne judgment will take place, at which time the wicked will be cast into Hell and the righteous will be taken into Heaven.

In this chapter special interest is given the teaching on the subjects of “The Mark of The Beast,” “The Thousand-Year Reign” and “The Antichrist.”

The Mark Of The Beast

The phrase “mark of the beast” is found twice in the Bible and only in the book of Revelation. When studying the great Book of Revelation, one must keep in mind that John is using a type of language which was highly figurative. One will read such figures as horses, dragon (or serpent), which were not to be taken literal, but using figures John conveyed eternal truths. John used signs, symbols, numbers, and animals to teach the first century Christians (and us) God’s Truth.

To appreciate the meaning of the mark of the beast found in the Book of Revelation, it is important to know that Christians in the first century were experiencing a tremendous persecution. The Roman Emperors who considered themselves to be gods, persecuted, tortured and killed any who would worship them. This was especially true of the emperors Nero and Domitian. Nero was known to wrap waxed or oiled cloths around Christians and put them on stakes and burn them. Concerning Domitian, Bob Winton gives the following accounts by Durant,

The revolt of Saturninus was the turning

point in Domitian's reign, the dividing line between his better and worse selves. He had always been coldly severe; now he slipped into cruelty. He was capable of good government, but only as an autocrat; the Senate rapidly lost power under him, and his tenacious authority as censor made that body at once subservient and vengeful. Vanity, which flourishes even in the humble, had no check in Domitian's status: he filled the Capitol with statues of himself, announced the divinity of his father, brother, wife, and sisters as well as his own, organized a new order of priests, the Flaviales, to tend the worship of these new deities, and required officials to speak of him, in their documents, as *Dominus et Deus Naster*—'Our Lord and God.' He sat on a throne, encouraged visitors to embrace his knees, and established in his ornate palace the etiquette of an Oriental court....

Against this new development rebellion rose not only in the aristocracy but among the philosophers and in the religions that were flowing into Rome from the East. The Jews and the Christians refused to adore the godhead of Domitian, the Cynics decried all government, and the Stoics, though they accepted kings, were pledged to oppose despots and honor tyrannicides. In 89 Domitian expelled the philosophers from Rome, in 95 he banished them from Italy. The earlier edict applied also to the astrologers, whose predictions of the Emperor's death had

brought new terrors to a mind empty of faith and open to superstition. In 93 Domitian executed some Christians for refusing to offer sacrifice before his image; according to tradition these included his nephew Flavius Clemens (Winton).

It was in this cruel and inhospitable environment Christians served and worshipped the one, true living God. It was in this time that God inspired John to write the Book of Revelation. In it in this book that the phrase “mark of the beast” is found. “And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth, and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image” (Rev.16:2). And, “And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20). The context of these verses goes back to Revelation chapters 12 and 13. John wrote,

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And

I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven (Rev. 13:1–6).

This beast made war against the saints. He was against God and all those who worshipped God. This imagery is very similar to what Daniel wrote in Daniel Chapter 7. In Daniel Chapters 2 and 7, God revealed there would be four great world empires. They are the Babylon Kingdom, the Medo-Persian Kingdom, the Grecian Kingdom, and the Roman Kingdom. It was in the fourth (Roman) kingdom that the kingdom of God was established. In Revelation 13, one reads of the great war the Roman Empire was warring against God and Christians. The Emperors demanded all people worship them. Christians (and the Jews), could not worship them. Consequently, Christians and Jews were looked upon as not be loyal to the government and were persecuted.

John saw another beast coming up out of the earth according to Revelation 13:11. This beast were causing people to worship an image of the beast. If any did not

worship the beast they were put to death (13:15). All that worshipped the beast received a mark in their hands and their foreheads. “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six” (Rev. 13:16–18). Here the number 666 is mentioned. Some have said that 666 referred to Nero. In the 1940s some tried to say it was Hitler. Some tried to make it be the Pope. Other conjectures have been made.

Premillennialists believe that this marking of the beast is soon and that Christ is about to return and establish His kingdom on earth. Some of them try to equate the mark of the beast with the antichrist mention in 1st and 2nd John. This idea is seen in the following statement:

Satan’s mark is supposedly 666, the number of man, while “777 represents perfection.” Man and woman were created on the sixth day. “Man labors six days only. The sixth commandment is “Thou shalt not murder.” Six words are used for man: Adam, ish, Enosh, gehver, anthropos, anar. Also, $6 \times 6 = 36$; $36 + 35 + 34 + 33 + 32$; $5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 666$. 666 is the number of the antichrist. This means that the name of the antichrist in Greek adds up to 666. This is a mockery

of the Trinity.” We can come close, mimic perfection, but only for a short time.

In the final scene of the original “Omen” where Gregory Peck reveals “666” marked on his own child, this mark confirms that his son is the Beast foretold in Revelation 18. We don’t know for sure if this is the number or if there will be a visible mark on followers of the Beast. Commentators understand why we expect to see a “brand” or “tattoo” on these individuals.

According to Sam Storms, marking has been common throughout society as a means of “tribal identification,” punishment, as a sign of “ownership,” of “disgrace,” and of “loyalty to a pagan deity.”

As mentioned above, Jews were marked by the Nazis during the 1930s and 40s. Satan tries to copy everything God does, as seen in the creation of his “trinity,” the resurrection of his beast, and with the “false prophet.” Why not also copy His example for marking? “And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him” (Genesis 4:15). But Cain’s mark might have been “some type of token or pledge.” Theologians suggest that “the phrase set a mark upon Cain [...] more likely means a sign for him.”

Mark of the Beast Chip

One writer has commented that technology exists to mark every person on the earth using a microchip, so marking everyone who does not pledge allegiance to Satan (or reject Christ) is technically possible.

However, Sam Storms writes that God does not physically mark believers; they are sealed with the Spirit which is invisible and internal.” Since Satan copies God, he might look for the lack of Christ’s seal and create a similar spiritual mark. Revelation 18 speaks more of a “mark of belonging.” The mark is “a symbolic way of describing the loyalty of [the Beast’s] followers and his ownership of them” (Lucey).

The above quote illustrates just how far-fetched some ideas are concerning the mark of the beast. But one should remember the context where the mark of the beast is found. What did the mark of the beast mean to the suffering saints in the first century?

Homer Hailey observed,

Since the Apocalypse abounds in the symbolic use of numbers that express ideas rather than persons or literal quantities, the same principle should be followed in the interpretation of this number. Throughout the book, ‘seven’ expresses the idea of perfection or completeness: the seven churches, seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits, and so forth. So six, which falls below the sacred seven, can never be seven or reach perfection; therefore,

it symbolizes the imperfect, that which is human and destined to fail. It is said that to the Jews the number six was an omen or symbol of dread and doom, so when it was tripled, 666, it represented the completeness of doom and failure (Winton).

Again Bob Winton observed, The number “666” is a number, not a name; it is the number of man; the number represents the character of man, and not a specific name. The definite article “the” is not found in the Greek text before the term man, thus no specific individual is intended. It is easy to turn a name into a number, but it not so easy to turn a number into a name (Ibid).

The beasts in Revelation 13 fighting against God in Rome’s day were not going to be successful. God overcame the enemies that rose up against him. The emperors, who wanted the recognition of being gods, either committed suicide or were killed. The Roman empire eventually fell and Christianity continues.

The Thousand Year Reign

Recalling what was stated relative to figurative language in the Book of Revelation, attention is now directed toward the one thousand year reign in Revelation 20. Dispensational Premillennialism asserts that Christ is about to return and rapture the saints up into the air where they will remain for seven years. During the seven years while the saints are raptured there will be a great tribulation take place on earth. At the end of the seven years, Christ returns, defeats

the antichrist in the battle of Armageddon, sets up His kingdom upon the earth and will reign on the earth for a literal one thousand years.

There is a reign connected with Christ mentioned in Revelation 20. The Bible says,

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. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–6).

Premillennialists assert that Christ's kingdom is not

yet established. They erroneously teach that when Christ returns He will set up the throne of David and reign on earth for a period of one thousand years. Afterward the “great white throne” judgment will take place and the wicked will be cast into hell and the saved will go into heaven.

It is of interest to note what is **NOT** mentioned in Revelation 20. (1) Christ’s second coming is not mentioned in Revelation 20. (2) The establishment of Christ’s kingdom is not mentioned. (3) An earthly reign of Christ is not mentioned. (4) Christ coming to sit on David’s throne is not mentioned. (5) We who are alive today are not mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. (6) The Jews’ return to Palestine is not mentioned in Rev. 20:1-6. All of the above things NOT mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6 are essential to the Premillennial scheme.

The background of Revelation 20 is found in the context of Revelation 6. One should notice that John 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.** John saw souls, not physical bodies. They had been beheaded. John sees disembodied spirits. Back in Revelation 6, John had seen disembodied spirits crying out unto God.

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I 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).

In Revelation 6 disembodied spirits are crying out to God for vengeance. Had they died in vain seemed to be their concern. They were told to rest for a little season until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled. Now, in Revelation 20, John sees disembodied spirits, not under the altar, but now on thrones and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years! Their cause had been vindicated. They had not died in vain and Christ was victorious over their enemies.

The Bible teaches that Christ will not reign on David's throne on the earth. Concerning Coniah, God through Jeremiah stated:

O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah (Jer. 22:29-30).

Note the force of this promise. No man of the seed of Coniah shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David ruling in Judah. Jesus Christ is of the seed

of Coniah (see Mat. 1:12 and Luke 3:27). Therefore, according to Jeremiah, Christ will not reign upon the throne of David in **Judah**. Christ is on the throne of David, however, not in Judah, but heaven (Ps. 110:1).

The Antichrist

The word “antichrist” means “against Christ.” If people are “antichrists” it means they oppose the Christ. As previously stated, premillennialism teaches that during “the great tribulation” there will arise a man of great power and influence who eventually is revealed as “the Antichrist.” They believe this man will arise in our generation and will fight against Christians and will bring great persecution upon them. The frequency with which some have treated the words “the antichrist,” one would think that he is mentioned quite often in the Bible. In reality, the Bible mentions the words “antichrist” and “antichrists” only five times in the word of God. Listed below is what the Bible teaches about antichrist:

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that **antichrist** shall come, even now are there many **antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time (1 John 2:18).

Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is **antichrist**, that denieth the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22).

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God:

and this is that spirit of **antichrist**, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:3).

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist** (2 John 1:7).

Does one get the idea, from the reading of these verses, that there is going to be one man rise to power just prior to the return of Christ and demand that people worship him? NO. This is every passage that says anything explicitly about antichrist. One will notice that John says that there were many antichrists. Consequently, the Bible does not teach that one man is going to rise and come to great power and turn out to be “the” antichrist. The Bible does not teach there is just one antichrist but **many antichrists**.

Likewise, John said that antichrists were already in the world in his day. So, again, the Bible does not teach that there will one antichrist come to power just before the return of Christ.

In the next place, John reveals that an antichrist is one who denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. He said, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist**” (2 John 1:7).

Conclusion

The speculative theory of Premillennialism is false. Many have been deceived by its promoters. When

Christ comes the second time it will not be to set up His kingdom upon the earth. The earth and the works therein will be burned (2 Pet. 3:1-12). The kingdom will be delivered up to the Father at Christ's coming (I Cor. 15:24). The kingdom of Christ was established on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (I Tim. 6:15).

Works Cited

- Winton, Bob, *Commentary On Revelation*. Electronic, PDF (Accessed 3/30/20 20).
- Lucey, Candice, *Christianity.com* <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/end-times/what-is-the-mark-of-the-beast-in-the-bible.html> (Accessed 3/30/2020).

The Deity Of Christ

Clifton Angel



Clifton is married to Lara and together, they have two children. He has a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the University of Georgia. He completed the 2-year program at the Memphis School of Preaching in January 2011, and he completed his Masters in Ministry with Freed-Hardeman University in the spring of 2014. Clifton enjoys learning, preaching, teaching, automotive work, and time with family. He has been preaching for the Coldwater congregation in Coldwater, Mississippi since May 2010.

To the Southaven church of Christ membership, her elders, her deacons, and her preachers, thank you for laboring to produce sound materials that are beneficial and timely. Furthermore, thank you for another opportunity to proclaim God's Word. May God be glorified in our collaborated efforts.

Introduction

It is the purpose of God from the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:11). It is the fulfillment of prophecies that span several millennia (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 53:1–12; et al.). It is the foundational bedrock of the one true church (Mat. 16:16, 18). It is the basis of belief for every true Christian convert (John 8:24; Acts 8:37). It is the public confession of every true Christian (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Tim. 6:12). It is necessary if any

sinner is to have his sins washed by the soul-cleansing blood (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5; Rom. 6:3–4). It is the core message of the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15). It is the message and the means of the New Testament (John 1:1-3, 14; 1 John 1:1-4; Heb. 9:1-28; Mat. 26:28; et al.). It is the reason we are still living, today (Heb 1:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:9). What is it? It is the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the God-Man—the only Person of Godhood to take on flesh and the only person of humankind to possess Deity.

Unfortunately, many deny, and some distort, the true teachings concerning the Deity of Christ. It will be our purpose in this study to expose some of the groups and the errors they maintain concerning Jesus' Divine Nature.

Judaism And The Deity Of Christ

The first to reject the Deity of Christ were His “own.” “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). Even His siblings rejected His Deity at the first. “For neither did his brethren believe in him” (John 7:5).

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And

his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Mat. 13:53-58).

We rejoice in the plausible evidence that Jesus' siblings repented and believed. Following Jesus' ascension, Luke recorded "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14). Furthermore, it is believed that Jesus' personal appearance to James, which is recorded at 1 Corinthians 15:7, is in reference to His own brother in the flesh. It is this same James who is believed to be the author of the epistle that bears his name.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Jews continued in disbelief concerning Jesus as the Messiah. To cite the numerous occasions this disbelief has been expressed would be to cite the majority of the text of the four Gospel accounts, much of Luke's record in Acts, and even many of the passages found in various epistles. In order that he might convert some, Matthew's Gospel account was addressed primarily to his Hebrew counterparts. While Mark and Luke both give record of the occasion, it is Matthew who expounds upon the crucial account of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and Jesus' temporary command for His disciples to conceal the same:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom

do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ (Mat. 16:13–20).

John specified in his Gospel account, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30–31). Paul persistently, and painfully, tried to get his Hebrew brethren to see the truth, concerning Jesus as the Christ:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could

wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen (Rom. 9:1–5).

Anyone who embraces Judaism, today, obviously denies the Deity of Jesus. Some contend they are still awaiting the Messiah's coming; however, their view of the Messiah is very different than that of the New Testament's portrayal. Jim Laws writes, "A very important feature of Judaism is the feature that no human figure can be a unique manifestation of the divine" (Laws 227). He continues, "In other words, it is contrary to the belief and understanding of Judaism that any attribute of deity could be given to man with human form which would cause one to be considered any kind of mediator between God and man" (Laws 227). Further along, Laws informs,

The Jews have asserted all along that it would be an impossibility to think of the Messiah that was foretold in the Old Testament being executed on a cross. ... The one thing that all Jews are in agreement upon is that the Messiah could not have taken on human characteristics and divine ability, nor could he have been executed on a cross and become a saviour in that respect (Laws 230).

To such a one, Jesus' words continue to be relevant and needed: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (John 5:46).

Gnosticism And The Deity Of Christ

Gnosticism was a prominent false religion that presented major problems for the first century church. For this reason, many of the Scriptures of the New Testament were written in refutation and correction of the Gnostic influences. In particular, there are three epistles—Colossians, First John, and Second John—that have as their central focus the false teachings of Gnosticism. Its name is derived from the Greek term *ginosko*, meaning "to know," or "have knowledge." Gene Taylor writes, "Gnosticism was a religious and philosophical doctrine which mixed doctrines of Christ with Jewish and oriental doctrines. It pretended to have some sort of mysterious knowledge (Greek: gnosis) of divine matters" (Taylor, 2). The more one digs into Gnosticism, the stranger it gets. How ironic is it that the Gnostic headquarters is now based in Hollywood? While I knew some related beliefs still existed, I thought Gnosticism as a religion had ceased. Brief research proved my thinking incorrect. In fact, The Gnosis Archive is an online database open to the public and easily found (Hoeller).

The foundation for Gnostic teaching is a corrupt view of the nature of God and His creation:

In the Gnostic view, there is a true, ultimate and transcendent God, who is beyond all created universes and who never created anything in the sense in which the word “create” is ordinarily understood. While this True God did not fashion or create anything, He (or, It) “emanated” or brought forth from within Himself the substance of all there is in all the worlds, visible and invisible. In a certain sense, it may therefore be true to say that all is God, for all consists of the substance of God. By the same token, it must also be recognized that many portions of the original divine essence have been projected so far from their source that they underwent unwholesome changes in the process (Hoeller).

Based upon the belief that the one True God has “emanated” from Himself other beings—each emanation resulting in a being that is less divine—Gnostics contend that the imperfect, physical world, in which we live, was designed by an imperfect creator. They have named this creator Demiurgos, who is said to be a “flawed” emanation of Sophia—a female emanation (or Aeon) stemming from the True God (Hoeller). “The blame for the world’s failings lies not with humans, but with the creator” (Hoeller). Arising from these distorted beliefs are many other fabricated teachings and manners, all of which our Lord’s apostles—namely, Paul and John—had to resist. Concerning salvation, “Gnostics do not look to salvation from sin (original or other), but rather from the ignorance of which sin is a consequence” (Hoeller).

Furthermore:

To the Gnostic, commandments and rules are not salvific; they are not substantially conducive to salvation. Rules of conduct may serve numerous ends, including the structuring of an ordered and peaceful society, and the maintenance of harmonious relations within social groups. Rules, however, are not relevant to salvation; that is brought about only by Gnosis (Hoeller).

“Since the body is evil anyway, and not that important, then what one does in the body is of no consequence” (Joseph 662). “Gnosticism also led to a belief that they were above sin” (Joseph 663). For these reasons, John wrote:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you,

that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 1:5–2:4).

It was no mistake that the Apostle John used the Greek words *ginosko* (to know, have knowledge) and *oida* (to know) 25 times and 15 times, respectively, in his First John epistle.

“Some believed that since the body is evil, the more abuse, punishment, affliction, self-denial placed upon the body, the more righteous one became” (Joseph 663). For this reason, Paul wrote:

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh (Col. 2:20–23).

At the center of the errors of Gnosticism was and is its teachings concerning Christ. As with many false teachings, proponents of Gnosticism vary in their

own beliefs. Jerry Joseph has provided the following information:

- (1) **Ebionites** denied the deity of Christ. To them He was a mere man.
- (2) **Docetics** denied His humanity. They claimed that He only seemed to have a body. He wasn't really flesh and blood. He was only visionary.
- (3) **Cerinthians** held to a belief that was a combination of the other two beliefs. They separated the Christ from the man Jesus. They claimed that Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism and then left Him at the crucifixion. This meant that it was Jesus the man who died on the cross (Joseph 662).

The Gnostics' denial of Christ's Deity has resulted in inspired passages affirming His Deity and denying their false teachings. In response to the false teachings of the Gnostics, the Apostle John wrote in one of his epistles, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22); "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:3). For the same purpose, he wrote in another of his epistles, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 7).

Other Misconceptions Of The Deity Of Christ

Catholicism

While Catholicism does not wholly deny that Jesus is God in the flesh, it does present a distorted view of Jesus' Deity. One way the Deity of Christ is distorted by Catholicism is with the doctrine of the papacy. To claim that any man could be a substitute (vicar) in Christ's stead is to misconceive Jesus' Deity; yet, this is the Catholic claim for their Pope. Paul wrote of God's giving Christ authority, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22–23). Jesus continues to be the Head of the church, and that has not changed (Eph. 5:23).

To claim that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is Divine and should be a recipient of our prayers is to misunderstand Mary's role and the Deity of Jesus; yet, this is Catholic practice. Jesus said to His disciples, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Mat. 6:9).

To claim that Christians should pray to dead saints, that they might mediate between us and God, is to misinterpret the Deity of Christ and true teachings concerning sainthood. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Islam

The Holy Qur'an—the authoritative text of Islam—is riddled with declarations that "the son of

Mary” is not God.

And behold! Allah will say: “O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, ‘Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?’” He will say: “Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, Thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knows what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knows in full all that is hidden. Never said I unto them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, to wit, ‘Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord’; and I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when thou didst take me up thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a witness to all things” (Surah 5:116–117; Ali 180–181).

The latter will serve as a brief example, but there are many other instances within the pages of the Quran. Dave Miller writes, “The most crucial contention—the greatest tension between the two religions—pertains to the person of Christ. On this solitary point, Islam and Christianity, the Bible and the Quran, can never agree” (Miller 152).

Mormonism

If you thought Gnosticism was strange, wait until you learn about Mormonism. Yes, they are both very strange in their teachings and practices. Being strange does not make something inherently wrong; for,

Christians are thought strange by the world (1 Pet. 4:4). However, in the cases of Gnosticism and Mormonism, their false beliefs, teachings, and practices make them quite strange in a fantasy sense.

Mormonism teaches that trillions of planets scattered throughout the cosmos are ruled by countless gods who once were human like us.

They say that long ago on one of these planets, to an unidentified god and one of his goddess wives, a spirit child named Elohim was conceived. This spirit child was later born to human parents who gave him a physical body.

Through obedience to Mormon teaching, death, and resurrection, he proved himself worthy and was elevated to godhood as his father before him.

Mormons believe that Elohim is their heavenly Father and that he lives with his many wives on a planet near a mysterious star called Kolob. Here the god of Mormonism and his wives, through endless celestial sex, produced billions of spirit children.

To decide their destiny, the head of the Mormon gods called a great heavenly council meeting. Both of Elohim's eldest sons were there, Lucifer and his brother Jesus.

A plan was presented to build planet Earth, where the spirit children would be sent to take on mortal bodies and learn good from

evil. Lucifer stood and made his bid for becoming savior of this new world. Wanting the glory for himself, he planned to force everyone to become gods. Opposing the idea, the Mormon Jesus suggested giving man his freedom of choice, as on other planets. The vote that followed approved the proposal of the Mormon Jesus, who would become savior of the planet Earth.

Enraged, Lucifer cunningly convinced one-third of the spirits destined for Earth to fight with him and revolt. Thus Lucifer became the devil and his followers the demons. Sent to this world in spirit form, they would forever be denied bodies of flesh and bone.

Those who remained neutral in the battle were cursed to be born with black skin. This is the Mormon explanation for the Negro race. The spirits that fought most valiantly against Lucifer would be born into Mormon families on planet Earth. These would be the lighter-skinned people, or “white and delightful,” as the Book of Mormon described them.

Early Mormon prophets taught that Elohim and one of his goddess wives came to Earth as Adam and Eve to start the human race. Thousands of years later, Elohim in human form once again journeyed to Earth from the star base Kolob, this time to have physical relations with the Virgin Mary in order to provide Jesus with a physical

body. Mormon Apostle Orson Hyde taught that after Jesus Christ grew to manhood he took at least three wives: Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene. Through these wives the Mormon Jesus supposedly fathered a number of children before he was crucified. Mormon founder Joseph Smith is supposedly one of his descendants (Carlson 2983–3015).

Authors Ron Carlson and Ed Decker provide many more odd details concerning the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism); however, may the aforementioned information suffice concerning their view of the Deity of Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Concerning the Jehovah's Witness doctrine, Foy E. Wallace, Jr. wrote, "The progenitors of the Millennial-Dawn cult deny the existence of the Godhead and reject the deity of Jesus Christ" (Wallace 377). Wallace further comments:

To deny that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, who said to the angel "I know not a man," and who was therefore a virgin—to deny this truth, that Jesus was thus the virgin-born Son of God, who came from God into the world, is a denial of the deity of Jesus Christ, and this was the doctrine John condemned and branded antichrist (Wallace 378–379).

"The allegation of 'Jehovah's Witnesses,' that Jesus is a created being and did not exist before his birth to

Mary, is obviously and palpably false” (Woods 291). Some time later, Woods was asked again to address this error professed by the Watch Tower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) in more detail. “They attempt to to prove this by citing statements in Colossians 1:15–18 and Revelation 3:14 where Christ is called “the firstborn of all creation,” “the beginning,” “the firstborn from the dead,” and “the beginning of the creation of God.” What is the meaning of these statements?” (Woods, Vol. 2, 264). Included in his reply was the following:

Our Lord is “the beginning,” not because he began, but because he caused all else of creation to begin! The article does not appear before “beginning” in the Greek text, and the word is a proper noun, designating Christ as Beginning, i.e., the Originator of all things. He is called “Beginning” simply because he began all things! It is a gross misapprehension of this passage to offer it in support of the theory that Christ is a created being.

He is the “firstborn of all creation,” because he ranks above all creation—a position he would not hold were he merely a created being. The term is one of primogeniture, indicating the position of the firstborn of the family as to rights and privileges enjoyed. In early Jewish literature, God, the Father, is called the first born of the world, by which, of course, it is not meant that the Father is a created being and came into existence at a certain time and place.

Our Lord is the “firstborn from (literally, out of) the dead,” because he stands first in the position of those who have returned from the dead; Lazarus antedated him in this act, but it does not signify that of those who were raised, he was and is preeminent. He is above all others in this respect that he rose from the dead to die no more. Those terms used in reference to Christ, and considered in the question, were designed to indicate priority in time, and supremacy in position of our Lord over all creation (Woods, Vol. 2, 265).

Pentecostalism

To my knowledge, the Pentecostal denomination does not deny the Deity of Christ. However, some among them herald heresy concerning His Deity. The particular false teaching in mind is referred to as “The Oneness Doctrine” or monarchianism. Rex A. Turner, Sr. writes, “Monarchianism is the doctrine that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one in both essence and person—in short, there is only one divine person and at times he manifested himself as the Father, at other times as Jesus, and at other times as the Holy Spirit. This view is especially held by the United Pentecostal church” (Turner 59).

In truth, there are three distinct Persons of the Godhead. Turner calls this “trinitarianism” (Turner 59). Each Person possesses the Divine Nature—Deity. One, we call the Father, One we call Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, and One we call the Holy Spirit. The three of Them have different roles and personalities;

however, None is more or less God—or Deity—than Either of the Other Two, and it appears that all Three have borne the name Jehovah. This is difficult for some to grasp, as it causes them to think of there being more than one God. It helps as we grow to understand that “God” is a nature and description, not a name. I suppose it may help to consider the illustration of a family unit of human beings. In my personal family, there are four distinct persons. Each of the four have different roles, responsibilities, and personalities. However, none is more or less human than any of the other three. Certainly, our family unit enjoys when we are all united; however, the reality is that there are times when we are divided in our desires and purposes. This is one of the major differences between manhood and Godhood. The Three that possess Godhood are eternally united in desire, will, and purpose.

Most of the passages that emphasize the fact that there is one God were written to combat idolatry and false god narratives. Studying polytheistic (multiple gods) religions, one will realize how divided and competitive various gods can be, even in the same belief system. Such is not the case with the One True God Nature, which nature is possessed by three listing Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

I suppose there are many other false beliefs and teachings to be considered concerning the Deity of Jesus; however, these we have highlighted should serve as some of the most prevalent to Bible students. Concerning the

fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and He Himself is God, it has never been more plainly written than by the Apostle John:

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. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:1–4, 14).

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 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 1:1–4).

Concerning the powerful love, humility, and servitude of God taking on flesh, it has never been more beautifully written than by the Apostle Paul:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5–8).

Finally, Paul exhorts us by his writing to the church at Colossae:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:8–12).

WORKS CITED

Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. *An English Interpretation of The Holy Qur'an*. Sh. Muhammad Ashram Publishers & Booksellers. Lahore, Pakistan: 1938.

- Carlson, Ron and Ed Decker. *Fast Facts on False Teachings*. Harvest House Publishers. Eugene, OR: 1994. Kindle Edition.
- Hoeller, Stephan A. "The Gnostic World View: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism." *The Gnosis Archive*. Web. 8 May 2020. <<http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>>.
- Holy Bible, King James Version with Strong's Numbers*. Accordance Bible Software, Version 11.0.3: OakTree Software, Inc., 2014. Electronic. All references are to this version unless otherwise noted.
- Joseph, Jerry. "A Study of Dangerous 'Isms in the New Testament." *Dangerous 'Isms. The POWER Lectures*. B. J. Clarke, director. Southaven, MS: 1997.
- Laws, Jim. "Judaism." *Dangerous 'Isms. The POWER Lectures*. B.J. Clarke, director. Southaven, MS: 1997.
- Miller, Dave. *The Quran Unveiled*. Apologetics Press, Inc. Montgomery, AL: 2005.
- Taylor, Gene. *Investigating the Word of God: First John*. Web. 8 May 2020. <https://padfield.com/acrobat/investigating/1_john.pdf>.
- Turner, Rex A., Sr. *Systematic Theology: Another Book on the Fundamentals of the Faith*. Alabama Christian School of Religion. Montgomery, AL: 1989.
- Wallace, Foy E., Jr. *The Gospel for Today: An Extended Edition of the Certified Gospel*. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Publications. Nashville, TN: 1967.
- Woods, Guy N. *Questions and Answers Open Forum. Freed-Hardeman College Lectures*. Freed-Hardeman University. Henderson, TN: 1976.

Woods, Guy N. *Questions and Answers Open Forum:
Volume 2*. Freed-Hardeman College Lectures.
Gospel Advocate Co. Nashville, TN: 2001.

The Baptists

Scott Cain



Scott Cain is married to Melissa and together they have three sons Walker, Tanner, & Hunter. He is a native of Lawrence County, Tennessee and a 2009 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching. He has served as an evangelist with congregations in Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama. Scott has been privileged to engage in foreign mission efforts in cities & villages in Fiji, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, & Austria. Currently, Scott serves as the preacher with the Mercedes Drive congregation in Vance, Alabama.

A soft answer turneth away wrath, but
grievous words stir up anger (Pro. 15:1; KJV).

Introduction

I love Baptists.

I love Baptists because God loves them. In love the Father gave His Son for all (John 3:16). In love the Son gave His life for each (Gal. 2:20). The blood shed for me was for them.

I love Baptists for the convictions we share. They admit “no other authority for faith and practice but God’s Word” (Rogers), and “that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired” with “God for its author” (Brown, art. I): amen! They teach, “God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with

distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being” (The Baptist Faith, art. II): amen! They see each church as “an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers” (art. VI), see baptism as “the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost” (Brown, art. XIV), and hold that no one can “become a church member except he be first baptized” (Hiscox 19): amen!

I love Baptists for the relationships we share: from dear Baptist grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, stepkin, and distant in-laws, to schoolmates, teammates, and workmates.

I love Baptists for the memories we share: my firsthand experiences of hospitality that opens the home, generosity that opens the wallet, selflessness that opens its schedule for a friend, or mercy that opens the heart to forgive, all include Baptists whose love left a lasting impression.

I love Baptists, and there are plenty to love: one in every six people is a Baptist, with “50 million Baptists in the U.S. alone” (Casanova). Our Baptist friends identify with various Baptist associations and denominations. As of 2014, the Southern Baptist Convention numbered 14.8 million members and constituted “5.3% of the U.S. adult population,” making them not just the largest Baptist association, but “the biggest protestant denomination in the United States” (Fahmy). While one in six Americans is a Baptist, one in twenty is a Southern Baptist.

I love Baptists. Obviously, Baptist beliefs frequently differ from convictions in the church of Christ. In almost a dozen other studies in this series, capable

brethren address topics that distinguish churches of Christ from our Baptist neighbors. Rather than rehash an abbreviated summary of those topics, the aim here is to engage our Baptist friends as effectively as possible.

What Does My Baptist Friend Believe?

Baptists claim “no authoritative creed except the New Testament,” but their “formulated statements of what are understood to be the leading Christian doctrines” (Hiscox 56), not as “a substitute for the word of God; but only as an expression of the views of the constituent members as to the prominent teachings of the Scriptures” (Pendleton 16), are called confessions of faith.

Baptist beliefs have much variation.

No single group typifies all Baptists. In 2004 America’s fifteen million Southern Baptists left the forty-seven million-member Baptist World Alliance over “a drift toward liberalism that included growing tolerance of homosexuality, support for women in the clergy, and ‘anti-American’ pronouncements” (Cooperman). America’s thirty-five million Baptists of other varieties more than double the number of Southern Baptists.

Baptists have varied over Calvinism’s tenets for centuries. Former Southern Baptist Convention President Frank Page called the Calvinism debate one of the chief issues confronting Baptists (Carter). Some teach inherited sin and guilt: “the guilt of sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity” (The Philadelphia Conf., ch. 8). The Southern Baptists’ carefully crafted position teaches

inherited sin without guilt, that man “fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin,” yet none become guilty until “capable of moral action” (The Baptist Faith, art. III).

Baptist views on Calvinism have historically fallen into two major camps: Particular (Reformed) and General Baptists. Particular Baptists teach individual election by God’s “special grace alone” apart from anything “foreseen in man” or “any power or agency” of man, man “being wholly passive” (The Philadelphia Conf., ch. 10); General Baptists believe each decides whether to be numbered with God’s elect; Southern Baptists merge the ideas, describing election as “the gracious purpose of God” by which He justifies individuals in a way “consistent with the free agency of man,” that “comprehends all the means in connection with the end” (The Baptist Faith, art. V). Particular Baptists teach limited atonement; General Baptists say Christ’s atoning blood was shed for all, yet only the elect opt to utilize it. Particular and Southern Baptists agree “[a]ll true believers endure to the end” and “never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end” (art. V); General Baptists teach that faithfulness is the individual’s choice.

Baptist beliefs vary concerning worship, from the usual belief that “music of worship” can include “an organ or instrumentalists, choral anthems and responses” (Goodwin 124), to the Primitive Baptist belief that the New Testament authorizes only a cappella praises to God.

With so many different Baptist positions, we cannot presume to know a Baptist friend's beliefs regarding sexual immorality, gender roles, guilt, election, atonement, man's moral agency, or worship: we must first listen to him to determine what his beliefs are.

Though varied, our Baptist friends share several near-unanimous beliefs.

Baptists can be identified by their beliefs about inspiration.

They describe the Bible as “written by men divinely inspired,” the “perfect treasure of heavenly instruction,” with “God for its author” and “salvation for its end” (Brown, art. I).

Baptists can be identified by their beliefs about salvation.

Stressing salvation to be “wholly of grace” and “solely through faith” (Brown, art. IV-V), they conclude that salvation comes to all who “accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,” that regeneration means to become “new creatures in Christ” by “repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and that faith “is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the commitment of the entire personality to Him” (The Baptist Faith, art. III). This shapes their view of baptism:

Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of “baptismal regeneration”; but it is essential to obedience, since Christ has commanded it. It is also essential to a public confession of

Christ before the world, and to membership
in the church which is his body. (Hiscox 21)

Baptism is seen as an “ordinance,” a regulation “of divine appointment” meant “for the good of man” or as “worship for the honor of God” (Hiscox 18). As an ordinance, baptism is “prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper” (The Baptist Faith, art. VII). Baptism is seen as not essential to salvation, but essential to become a Baptist and be added as a local church member, and essential to communion in the Lord’s Supper.

Baptists can be identified by their beliefs about denominations.

Since Baptists believe an unbaptized soul can be saved, but that he is not yet a member of the Baptist Church, they conclude that not all saved souls are Baptists: this identifies the Baptist Church as a denomination. “Baptists are divided into many different denominations and organize separately from Christians of other denominations” (Goodwin 178), and therefore they see themselves as a subdivided division of the “indivisible” and “invisible, universal church” (4), which is perceived as being “larger, more inclusive” than the Baptist Church (2).

Baptists can be identified by their beliefs about organization.

Baptists embrace three key ideas concerning local congregational authority: autonomy, democracy, and majority. Autonomy: each church is an “autonomous

local congregation of baptized believers” (The Baptist Faith, art.VI), and “Baptist churches are autonomous and independent” (Goodwin 22). Democracy: a church serves “under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes” (The Baptist Faith, art. VI). Majority: authority is “administered by the body of the members, where no one possesses a pre-eminence of authority, but each enjoys an equality of rights, and in which, in matters of opinion, the majority decides” (Hiscox 142).

How Can I Approach My Baptist Friend?

I can follow Peter’s advice by being always ready to give an answer “with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15): that is, with humility and respect. I therefore approach my Baptist friend like I would want him to approach me (Mat. 7:12). “A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Pro. 15:23).

Listen intently. Since Baptist beliefs vary, let me avoid assumptions and listen to learn his particular beliefs. “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Pro. 18:13). One Baptist’s beliefs do not define the next one’s.

Speak pleasantly. “The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable” (Pro. 10:32), and acceptable words help others want to hear. Abraham Lincoln advised, “A drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall.” Scripture agrees: “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Pro. 16:24). Seek pleasant words of sincerity, not flattery: “A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet” (Pro. 29:5).

Speak friendly, and not with hostility: “He that hath friends must show himself friendly” (Pro. 18:24). Instead of saying, “Here’s where you’re wrong,” let me realize that people typically see themselves as good people set on doing right: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes” (Pro. 21:2), and almost all “men will proclaim every one his own goodness” (Pro. 20:6). People love being right and hate being wrong, and rare is the sage who reacts positively to a charge of error: “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hath thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Pro. 9:8). If I begin in the accusative case and the kickative mood, it is all downhill from there: “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with” (Pro. 17:14). Besides, offensive attacks only make people defensive and unwilling to listen: “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Pro. 18:19).

Speak humbly. Combativeness is telltale sign of arrogance: “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife” (Pro. 28:25). Let me be humble enough to admit when I am wrong: “Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Pro. 16:19). Let us all face the fact that we might be wrong, but the Bible is right! As Paul wrote, “let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

Let me first find common ground rather than build barriers by focusing on potential points of contention. Let me refrain from Reformation history lessons and debates of whether Baptist roots trace to seventeenth century Puritans, sixteenth century Protestants, or first

century Christians via unbroken succession (Hudson). Besides, my Baptist friends base their faith on the Bible alone, not on uninspired men in New Hampshire in 1833, Philadelphia in 1742, London in 1689 (or 1677 or 1644), Switzerland in 1536, or Germany in 1517, right?

Where Can I Agree with My Baptist Friend?

Since our Baptist friends hold the Bible in such high esteem, what better place to begin?

We Can Agree on the Bible's Inspiration.

We agree the Bible is “divinely inspired” with “God for its author” and “salvation for its end” (Brown, art. I): beautiful! It is “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16): God-breathed! To hear God’s voice thunder or feel His whisper, we need only read His book! It tells what is right, what is not right, how to get right, and how to stay right. It fully equips (2 Tim. 3:16-17)!

Does the Bible say it has all we need to be complete and fully equipped? Yes! We agree!

We can agree that there is no need to use creeds or confessions or catchphrases to answer or to counter Scripture. If the Bible says it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not!

We Can Agree on the Bible's Clarity.

The Perfect Communicator inspired the exact words (Jer. 1:9), and they are as clear and powerful today as when He said, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). If Satan effectively used words to lure man to sin (Gen. 3:4-5), God can effectively use words to lead man to

righteousness!

Paul wrote of his inspired writing: “when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mysteries of Christ” (Eph. 3:3-4). When we read what Paul wrote, we can understand what Paul understood. God’s inspired message gives God’s intended meaning! Yes, it will take more study effort than a Dr. Seuss book, but we can understand it! Yes, we will need to use common sense (who is speaking, who is addressed, is it literal or figurative, am I forcing contradictions and complications to protect my interpretation, etc.), but we can understand it!

Does the Bible say we can understand it? Yes! We agree! Since we can understand it, then we can understand it **alike**, otherwise someone has a **misunderstanding**.

Either of us could be wrong, but the Bible is always right!

Since we agree the Bible is always right and that we can understand it, let us simply go to the Bible. If any doctrine or assumption disagrees with the Bible, whoever’s it is and whatever it is, let us agree to drop the disagreeable doctrine and agree with the Bible!

We Can Agree on the Bible’s Purpose.

We agree with our Baptist friends; the Bible has “salvation for its end” (Brown, art. I).

Every book has a thesis addressing a topic or problem. What is the thesis of the Bible?

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Man’s biggest problem is sin, meriting death.

God's solution is Jesus Christ, through Whom is the gift of eternal life. This is the Bible in one verse: from sin to salvation!

The Bible Shows Man's Biggest Problem: Sin.

Sin is never God's fault (Jam. 1:13). Sin always results from an individual's desires and decisions: "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed:" lust begets sin, and sin begets death (Jam. 1:14-15). The universal affirmative makes personal accountability absolute: for **every man** (no exception) sin results from **his own lusts** (no other's). If we agree on the Bible, we agree sin is individual, not inherited. If **any man** inherits sin, then Scripture contradicts itself.

Sin follows man's lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life (1 John 2:16): appetites, aesthetics, and arrogance. This chase leads to one end: death (Jam 1:15; Rom. 6:23).

What is sin? The New Testament defines sin in four ways. First, to break God's law is sin (1 John 3:4). Second, to commit unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17): God's very nature defines righteousness, and unrighteousness opposes God. Third, to leave God out of the plans is sin, like those James described who had done "evil" and not "good" by neglecting God's will in their plans (Jam. 4:13-16): James concluded, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jam. 4:17). Fourth, to violate an honest conscience is sin: Paul equated "weak in the faith" with "weak conscience" (Rom. 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:12), and urged saints not to violate their personal convictions, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

Does the Bible reveal man's biggest problem? Yes, and it is sin: it starts with man's desires, results from man's decisions, and leads to man's demise. Yes! We can agree!

The Bible Shows God's Solution: Jesus Christ. Sin earns a wage of death; God offers the gift of life (Rom. 6:23). A wage is merited; a gift is given. As Paul told the Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

God's gift of eternal life cannot be merited, but gifts can be offered which, though impossible to earn, still require action. Suppose a local radio station calls saying I won \$1000, and that I need only go to the station to collect the prize: if I do not go, will I get the cash? Nope. If I go, did I earn or merit that \$1000 just by driving a few miles? No, it is still a gift.

Can God offer eternal life, a gift that man could never merit, and then require man to take one step to receive that gift? Yes? What about two steps? Yes? What about three? Four? Five?

Again we agree! Sin is man's biggest problem, and Jesus is the answer!

The Bible Shows God's Plan Unfolding. When man's problem began, God had a plan.

God gave man a law (Gen. 2:15-17). Satan gave man a lie: depicting God as restrictive, dishonest, and selfish (Gen. 3:1-5). Mankind gave way to sin: a distorted view of God distorted the woman's view of sin, the threat became tempting and appealed to her lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life, so "she took

of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). Adam was “with her.” He said nothing. He ate, too.

They broke God’s law, committed unrighteousness, and left God out of their plans: sin. They violated their consciences: God’s initial “thou shalt not eat of it” had been modified to “neither shall ye touch it” (Gen. 2:17; Gen. 3:3), and touching the fruit violated the woman’s conscience. Adam said nothing. The first sin was not when she bit the fruit, but when he bit his lip. Sin became reality. Sin’s wage loomed. The tree of life was forfeited (Gen. 3:22-24).

How tragic! They tasted sin’s consequences: guilt, shame, and fear (Gen. 3:7). Hearing God’s voice, they ran from God to hide instead of running to God for help (Gen. 3:8). Examined for their actions, Adam blamed his wife and his God, and she blamed the snake (Gen. 3:9-13). No doubt the devil was pleased, grinning, smiling, laughing as God turned to him: he thought he had won. How else to hurt God than to steal away the prize of His creation, and he had done it!

God knew what transpired before His garden stroll, yet He came. He knew their hiding place and excuses, yet He asked. God came not to learn, but to teach. He came with a plan.

God’s next words halted the devil’s victory lap. After cursing the snake, He said to Satan, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). This surpasses man’s disdain for legless reptiles. This is the battle between

Satan and He Whose physical suffering would strike the death blow to Satan's head, the prophesied the seed of woman: the virgin-born Jesus Christ (Isa. 7:14; Mat. 1:18-25). As soon as man's sin problem began, God told of His plan: Jesus!

The Bible Shows What Jesus Came to Do. When He took on flesh, able to be wounded (Gen. 3:15), what was His goal? Broadly, He came to fulfill the law (Mat. 5:17), do the Father's will (John 6:38-39), and offer abundant life (John 10:10). Specifically, He had two objectives.

Can we agree that He came to save souls? The angel said it before His birth (Mat. 1:21). Jesus said it while on earth (Luke 19:10). He shed His blood to do it: "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat. 26:28).

Jesus told Peter, "I will build My church" (Mat. 16:18). He came to build His church, and He shed His blood to do it: Paul said God bought the church "with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

He shed His blood to save souls. He shed His blood to purchase His church.

The Bible Shows When Salvation Was Extended and the Church Established. We can agree on the Bible's purpose: man's biggest problem is sin, God's solution is Jesus, and He shed His blood to save souls and built His church. Are salvation and the church connected?

On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the "great and notable day of the Lord" (Acts 2:17-20): "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord

shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). As of that day salvation was a reality!

This was also when the Lord’s church was first described in present terms: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). The church was a reality!

Does the Bible teach that the Lord added saved souls to His church? Yes! We can agree! How many unsaved souls did He add to His church? None. How many saved souls did He leave out of His church? None. Jesus added only saved souls, and He added every saved soul.

We can agree that the Bible is all about sin and salvation, and that throughout time God prepared man for the arrival of His solution to man’s sin problem, Jesus Christ! We can agree that Jesus came to accomplish two goals, to save souls and to build His church, and that both of these objectives were of such importance to Him that He shed His blood!

How Can I Answer My Baptist Friend?

Let God do the talking. As Peter wrote, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). Since we and our Baptist friends agree to hold to the Bible alone, why not start with a simple question: “What does the Bible say?” Not, “What have I been told the Bible says,” but, “What does the Bible really say?” Let us search to see what is so (Acts 17:11).

We Can Agree to Speak as the Oracles of God about Salvation.

We can agree we are saved by grace through faith, as Paul penned, “For by grace are ye saved through faith;

and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Baptists believe salvation hinges on being “wholly of grace” and “solely through faith” (Brown, art. IV-V): does this speak as the oracles of God? Did Paul pen “**wholly**” of grace or “**solely**” through faith (Eph. 2:8)? Jesus said “whosoever believeth in Him should not perish” (John 3:16): did He say believeth “only”? Peter noted “that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved” (Acts 15:11): did he say grace “exclusively”?

God’s grace teaches (Tit. 2:11). His grace warned Noah (Gen. 6:8-18), and Noah’s faith trusted God enough to obey (Heb. 11:6). God’s grace teaches man what to do, and man’s faith trusts God enough to do it. Noah’s faith produced work, work that followed the pattern given by God’s grace. Noah could not boast in building the ark, for he built by the grace of God.

What God’s grace commands, man’s faith does. No human effort earns salvation. If God set salvation in a cup on Mount Everest and said, “Come get it,” all who make the climb are still saved by grace. If He made it easier and set the cup on Pike’s Peak, all who take the trek are still saved by grace. If He made it yet easier and set the cup five miles from every soul, all who make the walk are saved by grace. If God made it easier still and placed salvation within five steps of each soul and said, “Come get it,” all who take the steps are saved by grace through faith.

We can agree we are saved by calling on the name of the Lord, for Peter preached it on Pentecost: “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Are we humble enough to admit if we are wrong? Have we argued that salvation requires more than “calling on the name of the Lord”? Do we take students to Matthew 7:21 and ask, “Will Jesus save all who call on His name,” insisting the answer is “no”? Peter and Paul both said He would, “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13), and they did not contradict Christ. If we frown at our friends who make Bible contradict Bible, we must be wary of making the same mistake. Since a person must “call on the name of the Lord” to be saved, we must ask what “calling on the name of the Lord” means.

To “call on the name of the Lord” cannot equate to saying, “Lord Jesus, enter my heart,” nor to a lip service cry of “Lord, Lord,” for He wants souls to “do the will of My Father” (Mat. 7:21). Truly calling Him Lord means doing what He says (Luke 6:46). To call on His name involves admitting His name (identity) and submitting to His name (authority).

Billy Graham’s famous four-step invitation taught hearers to admit their sin, repent, believe Christ’s sacrifice, and culminated with “RECEIVE, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and life:” does this speak as the oracles of God?

When told to “call on the name of the Lord” and “be saved,” the Pentecost crowd would have had two questions: Who and how? Peter answered the first question before it was asked: he named Jesus, proclaimed the Gospel that Jesus died, rose, and left witnesses to verify His victory (Acts 2:22-35; 1 Cor. 15:1-8), and concluded that God made Him “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Having named Jesus as Lord, they asked the second question: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). How were they to call on the name of the Lord and be saved?

Peter invited “**whosoever**,” thus **anyone** who does what they did can be saved like they were. What did they do? Note the Pentecost audience’s explicit and implicit actions, and with each action let us ask two questions: 1) according to the Bible, can I call on the name of the Lord without doing this, and 2) according to the Bible, can I be saved without doing this?

First, the Pentecost audience “heard this” (Acts 2:37): the Gospel. Question #1: can I call on the name of the Lord without hearing the Gospel? No: Paul rhetorically asked how souls could “call on Him” if “they have not heard” (Rom. 10:14). Question #2: can I be saved without hearing the Gospel? No: the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16), and the message is of no benefit if not heard. The Gospel is “unto” salvation, indicating motion, direction, and destination (Thayer, “Eis”): to hear the Gospel is to be a step closer to salvation.

Second, the Pentecost audience was “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37): their sincere reaction was to believe the Gospel (Rom. 10:10). Question #1: can I call on the name of the Lord without believing the Gospel? No: Paul rhetorically asked, “How shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed” (Rom. 10:14). Question #2: can I be saved without believing the Gospel? No: it is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). The heart

“believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10), thus belief is “unto” (motion, direction, destination) righteous justification (Thayer, “Eis”): to believe the Gospel is to step closer “unto” justification, which our Baptist friends agree is integral to salvation (The Baptist Faith, art. VI).

Third, the Pentecost audience accepted Peter’s conclusion that Jesus is “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), offered no debate, but confessed Christ’s Lordship by asking what to do to submit to Him (Acts 2:37). Question #1: can I call on the name of the Lord without confessing Christ? No: to use Paul’s rhetorical query, how can souls call on the Lord without calling Jesus Lord (Rom. 10:13-14). Question #2: can I be saved without confessing Christ? No: like hearing and believing the Gospel, “confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10), so to confess Jesus is to step closer “unto” salvation (Thayer, “Eis”).

Fourth, the Pentecost audience was told by Peter to “Repent” (Acts 2:38). Question #1: can I call on the name of the Lord without repenting of sins? No: Jesus said “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name” (Luke 24:47), and refusal to repent is refusal to submit to His name. Question #2: can I be saved without repenting of sins? No: repentance is “unto salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10), so to repent is to step closer “unto” salvation (Thayer, “Eis”).

Fifth, the Pentecost audience was told by Peter to “Repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). We ask the same two questions and allow Scripture to be the ultimate authority. Question #1: can I call on the name of the

Lord without being baptized? No: when Saul was told to “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16), he was not told to be baptized because he had already called on the name of the Lord, but as an action included in what it means to call on the name of the Lord. Question #2: can I be saved without being baptized? No: Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16), Peter wrote that “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21). Peter spoke as the oracles of God, and just a few pen strokes later he exhorted saints to do the same (1 Pet. 4:11)! God’s Word says, “baptism doth also now save us,” yet Baptist confessions and Hiscox’s renowned Standard Manual for Baptist Churches teach, “Baptism is not essential to salvation” (21): the two statements cannot both be true. Which is to be believed? Consider Hiscox’s advice: “when a body ceases to acknowledge and submit to Christ as its Supreme Ruler, and to receive his word as its supreme law, then it ceases to be a true church” (12-13).

Baptism may be our Baptist friends’ most distinctive and definitive doctrine: “the administration of baptism—namely by immersion—is the source of the name ‘Baptist’ for our denominations” (Goodwin 132). Baptists insist baptism is the voluntary immersion of a person knowingly submitting to God’s authority: “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (The Baptist Faith, art. VII).

Here is more common ground: baptism is indeed an act of volition (“gladly received his word” – Acts

2:41), submission (“in the name of Jesus Christ” – Acts 2:38), and immersion (“buried with Him” – Rom. 6:4). The Bible also describes baptism as “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38 – *emph. added*): “for” is the word so often translated “unto,” making baptism a fifth step closer “unto” the remission of sins (Thayer, “Eis”). If God puts an unearnable gift five steps away and says, “Come get it,” does obedient faith earn God’s grace?

Baptism is “for the remission of sins,” just as Jesus’ blood was “shed for many **for the remission of sins**” (Mat. 26:28 – *emph. added*): baptism is only as essential to salvation as Jesus’ sacrifice. If remission of sins can be had without baptism, it can be had without Jesus’ blood, yet Scripture declares that “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

Baptism is admission into Christ, for Paul twice spoke of being “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). Baptism is for addition to His church, for all who gladly received the word and were baptized on Pentecost were added to something (Acts 2:41): “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). Those baptized were “added;” the Lord “added” those being “saved” to His church; there was no difference between the two: salvation took place at baptism, not through some mystical regeneration in the water, but because that was the point at which souls were washed of their sins in Christ’s blood (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5).

We can agree that we want to be saved like the thief on the cross. Our Baptist friends may insist the penitent thief was saved without baptism (Luke 23:39-42). We both agree he was saved: Jesus said so (Luke

23:43; Mark 2:10). We can further agree Scripture tells as much about his prior religious experience as it does about his favorite meal, and we can neither confirm nor deny if he liked lamb sandwiches or if he was with the masses baptized by John and Jesus (Mat. 3:5; Mark 1:5; Luke 3:7; John 3:25-26). We cannot know if he was baptized, so why speculate?

Still, we can agree to look to the thief's example. Jesus said that to follow Him a man must "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me," and that "whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24): the malefactor did this literally. He was literally crucified beside Jesus, which we cannot literally do. However, Paul described himself as dying like this thief: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live" (Gal. 2:20). How was Paul crucified with Christ? "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death," "we are buried with Him by baptism into death," and "planted together in the likeness of His death," and "our old man is crucified with Him" (Rom. 6:3-6). Like the thief, Paul was crucified with Christ: he did it when he was baptized. Can we agree that Paul is our example of how to use the thief's example? Baptism is the point at which the penitent believer dies to sin and dies with Jesus.

We Can Agree to Speak as the Oracles of God about Denominations.

Salvation beliefs influence overall beliefs. Believing baptism is "not essential to salvation" but "essential" to

“church membership” (Hiscox 21), our Baptist friends conclude there are saved souls outside of the Baptist church. Self-identifying as a division of the “indivisible” and “invisible, universal church” (Goodwin 4), Baptists describe “Christian unity” as “spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ’s people” and practice varying degrees of fellowship with other denominations: “Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament” (The Baptist Faith, art. XIV). On one hand Baptists admit a fellowship of saved believers “larger, more inclusive” than the Baptist Church (Goodwin 2), but on the other hand not all Baptist churches recognize non-Baptist believers as eligible for the communion of the Lord’s Supper with Baptists (142). What do God’s oracles say about Christian unity and fellowship?

Jesus prayed for unity: His Word was to be the standard (John 17:20-21). The apostles preached unity: with souls bound together “in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). The church practiced unity: “together” with “one accord” and “singleness of heart,” having “one heart and one mind” in their mutual faith (Acts 2:46; Acts 4:32). Paul pleaded for unity, begging saints to “speak the same thing,” have “no divisions,” and be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Some claim it impossible for groups of differing educations, backgrounds,

and opinions to “attain perfect uniformity of belief” (Goodwin 45), but Paul said saints could put aside social differences to be “one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28), personal differences to follow “things which make for peace” (Rom. 14:19), and doctrinal differences to “walk by the same rule” and “mind the same thing” (Phi. 3:16). Christian unity centers on Christ and can only be as broad as His doctrine (2 John 9).

Those who submit to Christ’s Word call on the name of the Lord and are saved. The saved were added to something (Acts 2:47): the church. Those who were baptized were added to something (Acts 2:41). God’s oracles specifically indicate these souls were added when they were saved; God’s oracles specifically indicate these souls were added when they were baptized; thus each was saved and added by the Lord to His church when he was baptized.

Paul called the church Christ’s body (Eph. 1:21-22). He counted one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God the Father (Eph. 4:4-6). Is it blasphemy to teach more than one God the Father, more than one Lord Jesus, more than one Holy Spirit, more than one heavenly hope, more than one saving faith, or more than one baptism? How can it be acceptable to declare that Jesus has more than one body and one bride (Eph. 5:24)? Can we opt for the God of our choice, Jesus of our choice, Holy Spirit of our choice, heavenly hope of our choice, faith of our choice, or baptism of our choice? What about the church of our choice?

Can we agree on the number one? That is where

unity is found.

Our Baptist friends claim “distinctive features which mark the difference between Baptists and other denominations” (Hiscox 6). Likewise, the Lord’s one church has distinctive features which differentiate between it and all denominations: the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

Biblical fellowship does not take place in varying degrees of separation from Christ: denominations and congregations and associations and co-operations and conventions. Biblical fellowship is simple: terms such as “fellowship,” “communicate,” “partake,” “distribution,” and “communion” describe the common bond uniting the Lord’s church, and they are not graduated concepts. Christian fellowship and unity are based solely on our relationship with Christ (1 John 1:6-7). Those who are saved, whom the Lord has added to His church, and who enjoy the continual cleansing of Christ’s blood as they walk in the light, enjoy that fellowship.

We Can Agree to Speak as the Oracles of God about Organization.

Our Baptist friends hold to congregational autonomy, democracy, and majority.

We can agree with our Baptist friends regarding autonomy. The head of the local congregation is always Christ, with authority in the local church being exercised by qualified elder presbyters, overseeing bishops, and shepherding pastors, all of which describe the same office (Acts 20:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:1-7), as our Baptist friends agree (Hiscox 146)

(Pendleton 25). Scripture also indicates that, where there are elders, there is to be a plurality (Tit. 1:5), for the direct command was to ordain “elders.” Are we speaking as the oracles of God when just one elder or pastor oversees a congregation (3 John 9-10)?

We can agree with our Baptist friends regarding democracy and majority, when they are practiced Biblically. Where there are elders, they are to lead by example, not oppression (1 Pet. 5:3), with each elder subject to the eldership. Where qualified elders are lacking, the church must prepare future leaders while carrying out the work of the church to the best of its ability. God’s oracles do not depict elders being under the oversight and in subjection to the flock (Acts 20:28). God’s wisdom ordained the eldership, a plurality of spiritually qualified leaders in the church, not a lone figurehead with local oversight being bequeathed to the popular vote of all members, wise and foolish, mature and immature. A flock’s vote cannot overrule the shepherds’ authority, nor can the flock’s vote overrule the Chief Shepherd when He adds a soul to His church.

Conclusion

In one sense we have barely scratched the surface, but in reality, we have laid a foundation. The most consistent doctrines among our Baptists friends pertain to inspiration, salvation, denomination, and organization. Their insistence of salvation “wholly of grace” and “solely through faith” shapes their entire belief system: grace-only shapes baptism beliefs, which shapes membership and fellowship beliefs, which shapes

organization and authority beliefs.

Our greatest common ground with our Baptist friends is the mutual claim of the Bible as the only authority, and this is where any discussion must begin. Not only can we agree on the inspiration of the Bible, if we will let the Bible speak, we can agree on the information in it.

Let us commit to let God's Word do the talking. He has spoken, and we can understand. In the words of John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Works Cited

- Brown, John Newton. *The New Hampshire Confession of Faith*. 1833.
- Carter, Joe. "The FAQs: Southern Baptists, Calvinism, and God's Plan of Salvation." *The Gospel Coalition*, 5 June 2012, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-faqs-southern-baptists-calvinism-and-gods-plan-of-salvation/.
- Casanova, Amanda. "The Most Well-Known Protestant Denomination: 10 Things Everyone Should Know about Baptists." *Christianity.com*, Salem Web Network, 17 Dec. 2018, www.christianity.com/church/denominations/the-most-well-known-protestant-denomination-10-things-everyone-should-know-about-baptists.html.
- Cooperman, Alan. "Southern Baptists Vote to Leave World Alliance." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 16 June 2004, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A44658-2004Jun15.html.

- Fahmy, Dalia. "7 Facts about Southern Baptists." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 7 June 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/07/7-facts-about-southern-baptists/.
- Goodwin, Everett C. *The New Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*. Valley Forge: Judson Press. 1995. Print.
- Hiscox, Edward Thurston. *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society. 1890. Print.
- The Holy Bible. Old and New Testaments in the King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976. All references are to this version unless otherwise stated.
- Hudson, Winthrop S. "History." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 25 Feb. 2020, www.britannica.com/topic/Baptist/History.
- Pendleton, J.M. *Baptist Church Manual*. Nashville: Broadman Press. 1966. Print.
- The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, 1742.
- Rogers, Adrian. "From the Chairman of the Committee: The Baptist Faith and Message." *Southern Baptist Convention* > From the Chairman of the Committee, www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmchairman.asp.
- Thayer, Joseph H. "Eis." Entry #1519. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2005. Print.

Miracles Occur Every Day

John Deberry



John DeBerry is a graduate of the University of Memphis and Freed-Hardeman University. He also attended Christian Brothers University where he studied marketing and computer programming. John DeBerry was married to his wife, Georgia for over 40 years prior to her death in 2015. They have two daughters and seven grandchildren. He has been preaching fulltime since 1968. Currently, he serves as the minister for the Coleman Avenue Church of Christ. In addition to his local work, he has served as a Tennessee State Representative since 1995.

When I was growing up, Sunday mornings at the Deberry home were extremely chaotic, but routine. Everyone knew that when my Dad yelled, “Let’s go!”, we were expected to be dressed, have our Bible and Sunday school book in hand, and get in the car. However, the morning had begun much earlier with quartet music on WDIA radio, and Brother Yelldell, our preacher, delivering a 30-minute sermon on the same station. After that, we listened to Brother Bastell Barrett Baxter or Brother Goodpastor preach on the Harold of Truth program on television. Soon after one of those sound and godly preachers had delivered the pure word of God, a famous, charismatic evangelist had a TV show that followed. I remember stopping my activity and watching with wide-eyed amazement, as this theatrical

faith healer supposedly performed miracles to a large and excited audience. He would chant, pray and scream, then smack some person on crutches or in a wheelchair hard on the head. That poor individual would appear to faint and fall back into the waiting arms of his attendants on the stage; then, recover and dance around “healed”, screaming “hallelujah”! My Dad heard me go “wow” one of those mornings, and he stopped me right there, and said, “Nick, that man didn’t heal nobody. Those folks are just playacting. They are making money doing that.” Well, of course, if you knew my parents, you would know that lead to a lesson on healing during our family bible study sessions.

My assigned topic, “Miracles Occur Every Day”, took me back to the memory of that Sunday morning miracle program. It was clear that the audience believed with all of their hearts that these were real miracles from a divine miracle worker. We all know that the “truth is the light”. I applauded the elders and leaders of this lectureship for endeavoring to “answer the error”. In a time when error and false teachings abound, it is great to simply get to the plain truth on these important and life-altering issues.

What Are Miracles?

We’ve all watched as the popular media has designated some strange or peculiar event as miraculous; The image of Jesus on a slice of bread; Paintings that appear to bleed or cry; Those with near death experiences and their testimony. We’ve even watched as a religious group sought to impart sainthood on an individual,

which requires the report of a credible miracle ascribed to them. Amid the commotion and sensationalism, the simple truth is often lost and the seductive, theatrics continue.

The dictionary defines the word miracle as, “An unusual and positive event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws; therefore, this event is considered to be the work of a divine agency.

A miracle, by this definition, is an extraordinary event or episode, or even an outstanding development. The words phenomenon or wonder are, also, used to describe these marvelous signs and sensational mysteries. It is, also, interesting to note that in most definitions, there is a recognition of human limitation and fallibility, thus accepting divine infallibility and limitless ability. Therefore, it is the accepting that a miracle is an occasion of divine intervention in the human realm. Miracles happen when the natural and the supernatural overlap. The etymology of the word miracle, according to Britannica.com, is Greek and Latin; both the Greek word *taumasion* and the Latin word *miraculum* recognize and engender astonishment; being extraordinary in itself and amazing or inexplicable according to normal standards. However, in the biblical definition of the Word, these events are absolutely recognized as the works of God, and beyond any normal human power. The materialistic world still refuses to accept biblical miracles as actual events. Even some so-called theologians choose to discredit bible miracles calling them stories, even of the account of creation. Because our culture has so loosely and indiscriminately used the term, it

has become equivalent with the words myth and fable. As we study the scriptures, the credibility of biblical miracles will be established and those of false teachers will be exposed. In what is often called “the discourse of the Mount of Olives”, Mark 13, Jesus warns of the widespread deception that was certain to come. “For false Christ and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders to seduce if it were possible, even the elect,” (Mark 13:22). In essence, then, as well as today, that which is true must be defended and protected from error. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try to the spirits, whether they are of God: because, many false prophets are gone out into the world,” (I John 4:1).

God And Miracles

When speaking from a biblical perspective a miracle is nothing unexpected or extraordinary, but simply part of God’s methodology in dealing with man. Because unbelief seems to be innate in mankind, God often demonstrates His sovereignty and power through miraculous events.

I believe God intends for man to know that His very nature and ability demands the He be a God of extraordinary wonders and signs. As a matter of fact, Jeremiah expresses this truth very well. “There is none like thee, O Lord; thou are great and thy name is great in might,” (Jer. 10:6). God, also, clearly states through the prophet Isaiah that his omniscience is above man and his sovereignty has authority over man.

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. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Over and over the word declares that God is a God of magnificent demonstrations of power; therefore, with God the impossible is always possible within the confines of His will. Very early in God's development of redemptive religion, Moses records Abraham's discourse with the Lord when he was promised as son in his old age. The fulfillment of the entire Abrahamic covenant depended on "that child" being born. Both Abraham and Sarah allowed what was at that point, "impossible", to determine their belief in God's promise.

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? (Gen. 18:11-13).

Sarah's laugh clearly represented a lack of assurance in the promise of a child in both of them. The Lord, therefore, asked Abraham a question that would be asked and answered in many forms throughout the scriptures. "is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14).

In the midst of Israel and Judah's troubles, Jeremiah, the weeping prophet heard the word of the

Lord. “Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?” (Jer. 33:27).

Now, note that wonderful occasion when the angel appeared to the Virgin Mary. This humble young lady didn’t doubt God. But, understanding God’s natural law, she was not wrong to ask the angel, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). The scripture records the angel’s explanation of this wonderful miracle.

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:35-37)

Once the angel explained to Mary the miracle that was about occur within both her and Elizabeth, Mary didn’t doubt, but humbly and obediently accepted the will and word of God without question. “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her,” (Luke 1:38).

Unlike Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samson and a host of others, Mary, without hesitation accepted God’s will. Calling herself the “handmaid of the Lord”, Mary is declaring to God, “I am your servant.” Mary’s

discourse of faith is often called the “magnificat”, because her natural response to a demonstration of God’s power was to exalt His name.

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. (Luke 1:46-49).

I am sure that the young maid, Mary, was not familiar with miracles, but she was familiar with God and His almighty power.

In essence, Mary did not obey, because she believed in miracles; she obeyed because she believed in God. Jesus, our Lord, stated this principle clearly for the benefit of His disciples saying, “With man it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible,” (Mark 10:27).

The Purpose Of Bible Miracles

God is a god of order and systems; therefore, nothing that He does is accidental, arbitrary or contrary to His plan or nature. That said, a miracle has a divine purpose, an objective in God’s scheme of things. In essence, all miracles, regardless of who performed them, were first “for the Glory of God”.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” (Gen. 1:1). This marks eternally the miraculous creation of all that we know. God, in retrospect, revealed

this truth to Moses. Man is to accept God's word that all that is in the material world was miraculously brought into existence by the "power of God", and for the "glory of God". When the apostle Paul spoke to the men of Athens upon Mars Hill, he eloquently spoke of God's purpose and power.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. (Acts 17:24-26).

Man is often called the "the upward looking one", basically saying that it is within us to worship; to seek something or someone higher than ourselves to look up to.

Paul states that the miraculous creation of all things reveals both God's divine nature and His omnipotence. Therefore, man's gift of a soul, free agency, and intellect requires Him to be influenced by God's marvelous works.

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20).

God expects powerful and glorious events to bring glory to the Godhead. Refusing to do so, according to Paul, renders man, "...unthankful, vain and foolish," (Rom. 1:21-22). All mankind has been given what they need to glorify the incorruptible God. An arrogant, dysfunctional mindset will always lead to attributing God's miraculous works to deities in man's misguided imagination," (Rom. 1:23-25).

This being true, going back to Mars Hill, when Paul preached to those Greeks, he used that perception to present the "one true God". Paul took this opportunity to impress upon these ever searching, deeply religious souls that the God that they "ignorantly worshipped was the almighty creator God, Acts 17:23. On another occasion, in the Gentile world, the renowned apostle was at Corinth speaking against division within the community. Paul reminded them that he was sent to preach the gospel, which is to the saved, "the power of God", I Cor. 1:18. Again, just as he had done in Athens, Paul exposes why they, as well as, many others required reminders of God's power.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (I Cor. 1:22-25).

Jesus was constantly harassed by unbelievers and detractors for a sign of his divinity. He, of course, knew that His miracles would have no effect on them, and they would even attribute his great works to Satan, Matt. 12:22-24. Jesus voiced His disdain with these hypocrites saying, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe," (John 4:48). Today it is the word of God which produces faith in honest and receptive hearts, Romans 10:17. It is a shame that so many people still wish to base their faith on a sign, a wonder or a false miracle.

God Always Confirms His Word

As stated earlier, God operates by order and system. Therefore, the purpose of miracles is clearly defined within his divine purpose. God has always confirmed His message and His messengers by miracles, wonders and signs. While the word of God is not from human intellect or ability, it is still presented by men for men. Paul stated that, "Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," (I Cor. 2:5). Since, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," (I Tim. 3:16), it was imperative that God act through men chosen and confirmed to impart His word. When Peter defended his authority and apostleship he emphatically stated that aforementioned truth:

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: 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).

God's word was inspired through the agency of about 40 men, who were guided and instructed in truth by the Holy Spirit. Those men were all in various ways confirmed by miracles, wonders and signs so that their words would be accepted.

Moses warned the people against being seduced by the heathens around them. God did not want them turning to idols, divination, witches, charmers, wizards or enchanters, (Deut. 18:7-12). These things would be considered an abomination to the Lord. Israel was commanded to drive these practitioners of false wonders out from among the people. God's word and will, according to Moses, would come from those sent and confirmed by God, not a magician or diviner. God promised to raise up a prophet from the "midst of thee, of thy brethren," (Deut. 18:15). This prophet, like Moses would speak God's word with authority. Such a man would have to be confirmed, because when the prophet speaks, he speaks for God.

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him (Deut. 18:19).

Since there was penalty involved for refusing to hear the prophet, it was imperative that a sign confirm him to be genuine and credible.

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:22).

God's people were often hard-headed, hard-hearted and rebellious. God was fair and just to punish them. They had witnessed great miracles, wonders and signs done through Moses, and their unbelief was without excuse. When God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt and stand before Pharaoh, Moses said, "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice," (Exodus 4:1).

God assured Moses that he would be with him and confirm him; therefore, the people would be assured that he was sent by Him. To assure Moses that signs and wonders would follow him, God turned Moses' rod into a serpent and his hand as "leprous as snow", (Exod. 4:4-5).

Throughout the ordeal in Egypt the people witnessed many, mighty miracles. The ten plagues miraculously destroyed Egypt's entire religious system. The children of Israel were then freed and walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. Moses, a type of Christ, had been confirmed by miracles, wonders and signs before the people. Therefore, when the people refused to believe, God asked:

How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all

the signs which I have shewed among them?
(Num. 14:11).

By their unbelief, Israel had defeated the purpose of the signs and miracles. They refused to accept Moses and the will of God.

Since the purpose of the signs was to confirm God's messenger, when rejected, God takes it personally. For instance, when Israel demanded a king, in spite of all that God had done for them, God considered it a rejection.

And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them (I Sam. 14:11).

Jesus And Miracles

Jesus beautifully stated His responsibilities in the creation of redemptive religion. He was to come to earth to demonstrate the love and the power of God. When speaking to a prominent Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus, Jesus declared God's nature of love and the unconditional sacrifice made on man's behalf.

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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

Jesus being God, John 1:1, was incarnated or became flesh for the salvation and redemption of fallen man, John 1:14. Miracles, wonders and signs were essential if man was to accept and appreciate the good news of the Messiah. The very fact that Nicodemus had come to Jesus, speaks to the effective use of miracles by the Son of God. Nicodemus said, “Rabbi we know that thou a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles, that thou doest, except God be with him,” (John 3:2). Also, note John 9:16.

Peter and the apostles received the miraculous baptismal measure of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost. On that day, they spoke in the tongues of every nation under heaven, Acts 2:4-5. As they preached, they exposed the hypocrisy and blindness of those of those who had murdered Christ, the Son of God. They had rejected the numerous and unprecedented miracles, wonders and signs, which were openly and prominently performed among them.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

Peter, with the legal precision of a prosecutor in a courtroom, proves his case with overwhelming evidence. He pronounces them as guilty and holds them accountable for the crucifixion of Christ. They were without defense, because of the Lord’s miracles performed before them; therefore, Peter declared that

with wicked hands they had slain the sinless Messiah, Acts 2:23.

The Lord's resurrection, was a demonstration of His power, even over death and the grave. When Thomas and others were in doubt of His resurrection, Jesus ordered them to touch His wounds and be convinced, John 20:26-29. After the Lord had rebuked Thomas for having to touch and see in order to believe, He then blessed those who will believe by the report of the scripture, John 20:29.

After this incident, John writes that Jesus continued to do signs and wonders among the disciples. John, also, tells us the purpose of these miracles, "to make them believe."

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

The Apostles

Jesus had given the apostles personal training and demonstrations of power for at least three years. They had witnessed His miracles, and saw the signs. The Apostles knew that all of the Lord's miracles were authentic, and they strongly defended that Christ was the Messiah.

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 eye-witnesses of his majesty (2 Pet. 1:16).

When Christ arose from the dead He declared, “All authority in heaven and in earth, was given unto Him,” (Matt. 28:18-19). The Lord gave the apostles the job of going into all the world and telling the, “Greatest story ever told about the greatest life ever lived,” (Matt. 28:19-20).

To accomplish this, Jesus had promised them another “comforter”, John 14:26-21. They too would perform miracles, wonders and signs, designed to confirm them as God’s messengers.

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover (Mark 16:17-18).

Acts chapter 5 reports the incident of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about a contribution to the church. Peter said that they had lied to the Holy Ghost, and both of them eventually fell dead. After their death and burial, great fear came upon all the church, because of the apostles’ power and authority, Acts 5:1-11. The miracles, wonders and signs wrought by the Apostles served as their “badge of authority”. The signs confirmed that they were God sent, inspired men. As the believers multiplied,

it was imperative that they confirm their authority by miraculous events.

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. (Acts 5:12)

The 12 Apostles were given the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:1-12. As Jesus had promised, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and He would be with them throughout the completion of the Great Commission, Matt. 28:20. There were, also, those such as Timothy and Stephen who were given the lesser measure of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by the Apostles, I Tim. 4:14, Acts 8:17. Even those who had received this gift measure of the Holy Spirit performed miracles and signs to authenticate their message. When Stephen stood before the men of the synagogue in Jerusalem, Luke reports that, "Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people," (Acts 6:8). There was no reason for this young preacher to have been slaughtered. He had confirmed his message both by the scriptures and by miraculous signs. Stephen should have been heard, and God's word should have been obeyed. That was the simple purpose of the signs.

The Predetermined End Of Miracles

The miraculous age was never intended to continue in perpetuity. As stated earlier, miracles had a design and purpose during the primitive years of the Lord's

church. All the signs that God had ordained during that period were to mature believers and make disciples, Mark 16:20. When Paul was teaching at Ephesus, he stressed unity and endurance in the Lord's church. Paul knew that he and the other apostles would suffer trials and martyrdom, so he stressed the whole armor of God, Eph. 6:10-12. Paul acknowledged that the purpose of God's actions through the apostles was preparing them for their demise. Each Christian would have to stand and be mature and fully equipped.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

If the church was to respect the Lord's authority as head of the body, they must come to the unity of the faith. Paul admonished the church at Colossae, which had seen his mighty works that they were done, "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father and of Christ," (Col. 1:28-29). In I Corinthians 12, Paul rebuked the brethren Corinth for their pride and arrogance concerning spiritual gifts. Therefore, in what is often called the love chapter, I

Cor. 13, Paul speaks of the inevitable conclusion of this miraculous phase of the church's edification.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away (I Cor. 13:8-10).

According to Paul, all of the miraculous gifts, while impressive, would end having served their purpose. Their love for mankind and love of God's word was to sustain them from this point on, I Cor. 13:11-13.

Today, the inspired word of Jesus and His apostles serves to authorize the message and the messenger. It was the word, not miracles that was to continue, because the word is perfect and complete, 2 Pet. 1:3-4.

There will always be those performing what Paul called "lying wonders", in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, like the faith healers that were mentioned earlier. Like Simon the sorcerer, mentioned by Luke in Acts 8:9-24, they amaze people with their tricks and slight of hand. Before his ascension, Jesus warned the disciples that impressive tricksters would be numerous, "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders in so much that, if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect," (Matt. 24:24). There are still those who put on a good and impressive show.

Natural Laws Are Not Miracles

We've all heard people speak of "the miracle of childbirth", or the miracle of the sick recovering. People even refer to plants growing, the sun shining or even gravity as miraculous. In the beginning, God set the natural law and all in the material world are subservient to that law. In the beginning there was no order, system or law to earth, the material world. It was dark without form and void, Gen 1:2. The spirit of God brought order out of the chaos by the giving of the Natural Laws. These Laws, not constant miracles, were ordained to govern our habitation. "And God said", is the authoritative statement that set the Natural Laws in place. God created light, divided the waters, made dry land appear, created all types of seed plants, the sun, the moon, the stars, the beast and then even man. Each miraculously created and then made subservient to Natural Law. Everything and everybody must stay where God has placed them. Now by Natural Law, we have day and night, and seasons of the year, Gen 1:14-19. By Natural Law seed perpetuates new fruit, Gen 1:11-12. By Natural Law, all that has breath of man and beast, produce after his own kind, Gen 1:24-25. Once God had completed the creation, he set everything to Natural Law and order:

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he rested from all his work which God created and made (Gen 2:2-3).

Each day the heavens declare the miraculous power of God within the Natural Law, Psalm 19:1-2. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

A baby being born is a wonderful and amazing event, but it is not a miracle, it is according to God's ordained Natural Law.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:28).

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

Fruit trees sprout up from the earth, amazing, but still according to Natural Law. What we call miracles occurring every day are results of the powerful word of God giving life and maintaining order. His grace and providence is not miraculous, but according to His will and plan.

Conclusion

I will end this lesson with another memory. Years ago, a famous "faith healer" was in Memphis for one of his revivals. The Mid-South Coliseum was packed with excited worshippers, ready for him to scream "you can't lose with the stuff I use". He did a television interview

at channel 13, where I worked at the time. People were ready to see the healing show and buy prayer cloths and healing oil. While at the station he hired several of my buddies to work with a crew of people to fill thousands of bottles with baby oil and food coloring. They were paid up to \$50 an hour and filled thousands of bottles that were called "Holy Healing Oil" They sold them as fast as they could make them. I bring this up only because there are so many people today who are still looking for a sign, a wonder or a miracle. At this point in the church's history, Paul says, "that we walk by faith and not by sight." (2 Cor.4:13)

I know that the earth is a beautiful place and marvelous wonders occur every day, but they are all set in the natural order of God's will. They all occur to celebrate God's power and majesty, Isaiah 40:22. Isaiah poetically wrote, "The heavens and the lower parts of earth sing of God's love, the fruit of the womb, the mountains and forest, are all signs of His providence," (Isiah 44:23-24). Finally, Isaiah asserts that God's laws are governing the earth and its host.

Jerimiah sings of God's power which set the order of the universes by His Natural Law, "He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His discretion," (Jer. 10:12). What we call wonderful and miraculous occurs every day, but all of these wonders and amazing events simply reveal God's love, God's design, and God's creation. As amazing as they may, be they all occur within the confines of God's Natural Law.

Once Saved, Always Saved

Mark Reynolds



Mark married Mindy in 1991 and together they have three daughters and one son in law. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He has a BA degree from Amridge University and is working on his Master of Divinity. Mark has also done extensive mission work in 13 different countries & has held Gospel Meetings in 22 different states. He began preaching full time in 1995 and has done local work in Indiana, South Carolina, and currently serves as the Pulpit Minister for the Forest Hill congregation in Germantown, TN.

Historical Background Of The Doctrine

Most would rightly subscribe to the idea that Augustine (354-430 AD) was the earliest advocate for the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, which has also been called the “once saved, always saved” doctrine. It is interesting to note, however, that Augustine’s journey to this belief did not happen overnight. As is the case with most, if not all false doctrines, Augustine grew into his view of perseverance. In Augustine’s letter to Sixtus he advocates for the complete gratuitous nature of grace as a gift of God and the denial of all human merit. When those at the Monastery at Hadrumetum balked at this idea alleging that his stance goes against the practice of asceticism, Augustine wrote a new treatise on grace entitled *De gratia et libero arbitrio* to explain himself (Knapp, 2). In this

explanation he argued for both the “doctrine of free will under divine influence and the absolute gratuity of grace” (Knapp). In his essay Knapp discussed the conclusion that those within the monasteries reached, specifically, “that since the continuation and perseverance in the grace was a gift from God, that one should not be corrected for his spiritual failings.” Again, Augustine wrote still another letter to further explain himself. In *De correptione et gratia* he vehemently denies this conclusion and insists upon the necessity of correction and rebuke of those who have fallen away. Knapp further explained:

He argues here that a believer who loses his faith bears the sole blame for such a loss, but one who retains faith demonstrates the gift of persevering grace. He further argues that no one of the elect perishes – **those who in life fall away are, and forever have been part of the reprobate.** On the other hand, if the elect were to fall away, God would necessarily ensure that that person will eventually repent and return to the church (Knapp, 3, emph. mine MR).

As with all departures from the truth, when one strays, he must either repent and go back to the beginning or continue to go further into error. Augustine, unfortunately, continued to go further as he sought to defend his new doctrine. One can easily see the progression in still another treatise entitled *De Dono Perseverantiae*. In this treatise Augustine uses the model prayer to prove his belief about perseverance of the saints: “And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from evil” (Mat. 6:9, NKJV). He alleges

that perseverance is a gift from God and is received by prayer. His argument is that if one prays for God not to lead him into temptation, and God answers that prayer, that God will never stop answering that prayer. It is therefore a perpetual answering of the prayer not to be led into temptation. “Whoever, therefore, is heard when he asks this, is not led into the temptation of contumacy [stubborn refusal to obey], whereby he could or would be worthy to lose perseverance in holiness” (Shaff). In answering anticipated objections to his teaching Augustine makes another leap upon which others would build:

But ‘why,’ says one, ‘is not the grace of God given according to men’s merits?’ I answer, Because God is merciful, ‘Why, then,’ it is asked, ‘is it not given to all?’ And here I reply, Because God is a Judge. And thus grace is given by Him freely; and by His righteous judgment it is shown in some what grace confers on those to whom it is given. Let us not then be ungrateful, that according to the good pleasure of His will a merciful God delivers so many to the praise of the glory of His grace from such deserved perdition; as, if He should deliver no one therefore, He would not be unrighteous. **Let him, therefore, who is delivered love His grace. Let him who is not delivered acknowledge his due** (Shaff, emph. mine MR).

John Calvin was strongly influenced by Augustine. In fact, Calvin quotes from Augustine freely in many of his writings. It was Calvin who tried to bring consistency to Augustine’s teachings, especially as it relates to predestination and eternal security. Calvin’s

main thesis was that since God is Omniscient, He already knows who will be saved and who will be lost (newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_Calvin), and because God already knows, there is nothing that can be done to change it. One's salvation is already sealed at his birth. Calvin's main teachings were summarized in the acronym T.U.L.I.P, which stands for Total Hereditary Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. Calvin realized that if one of these tenets was true, then all were true. If one was false, then all were false. If one can lose his salvation, then his doctrine falls and all who follow his teachings are following error.

Main Arguments For Once Saved, Always Saved

When one takes a stance in opposition to Bible teaching, he often sees his false belief everywhere he looks. Like a deer hunter in the woods who is set on getting a deer, every sound he hears is a huge buck until he looks and sees it is just a squirrel or bird. Those who argue for once saved, always saved have already made up their minds and, therefore, they see their doctrine all over the Bible. This manuscript will not attempt to chase the once saved always saved doctrine all over the Bible but will instead investigate their main arguments and passages and then give biblical answers.

One of the main passages the once saved, always saved adherents go to for proof of their doctrine is John 10:27-30.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one (John 10:27-30).

Their point from the above passage in their own words is: "The forgiveness of God through Christ is sufficient to cover all our sins – past, present, and future. There is nothing a person can do that God cannot forgive" (allaboutGOD.com). We would agree with this statement, Christ's blood is sufficient to forgive any sin we commit, and there is no sin that God cannot forgive. However, this passage does not teach that it is impossible for a "sheep" to lose his place in the flock of God but is instead showing that no "sheep stealer" is stronger than God and His Son. Tom Wacaster made the following comment regarding the possibility of the follower of Christ to stop following:

Who is the 'them' to which eternal life is granted? Who are the 'they' who shall never perish? And who is the 'them' that shall never be snatched out of His hand? If one will answer these questions he will immediately see that Jesus was not teaching the impossibility of apostasy. The previous verse identifies the 'they' and 'them' of this verse. It is that class of individuals who 'hear' and 'follow.' But one may, at any point in time this side of eternity, cease to follow Christ (Wacaster, 441).

Another passage that the once saved, always saved adherents use is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phi. 1:6).

They teach that this passage contains a promise of God that what He starts in our souls, He intends to finish. R.C. Sproul, a once saved, always saved advocate, made this statement concerning this verse: "If you have it – that is, if you have genuine faith and are in a state of saving grace – you will never lose it. If you lose it, you never had it" (Sproul). Sproul goes on to present David as an example of one who was a "regenerate man," that is one who was saved. David committed several grievous sins, adultery, murder, lying, just to name a few, yet "God brought him back." They contend that God will always bring them back because if He started a good work, He will finish it.

A closer look at this passage in its context, however, shows that the phrase "He who has begun a good work" is actually the last phrase of a sentence that Paul starts in Philippians 1:4,

always in every prayer of mine making request for you with all joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (Phi. 1:4-5).

The good work that Paul is confident God will continue is not their soul's salvation, but rather, their partnership

in the gospel. They shared in the fruit of Paul's labors. Paul had confidence that they would continue partnering with him because their track record was so good (Phil. 1:7). And if they continued to do their part, Paul knew that God would do His. Only those who have a preconceived notion of once saved, always saved could find the doctrine in this passage.

Sproul's example of David regarding Sproul's favorite adage "If you have it, you will never lose it. If you lose it, you never had it," does not hold water because David had to repent in order to get back into God's saving grace. Nathan the prophet went to David and pointed out his sin (2 Sam. 12:1-7). David's reaction is key:

So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also put away your sin; you shall not die' (2 Sam. 12:13).

Not only that, there were some who obviously walked with the Lord but eventually turned their backs on him. There are several examples, such as, Judas, Phygellus and Hermogenes. However, Demas stands out as a prime example of one who can enjoy the blessings of salvation yet turn away. Paul called him a "fellow laborer" (Phil. 24), and he is mentioned with Luke in Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:14). If the inspired apostle Paul had any indication that Demas was secretly a reprobate sinner, he certainly did not show it! Still, toward the close of Paul's life he tells us where Demas currently stood in his relationship with God: "for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has

departed for Thessalonica...” (2 Tim. 4:10). Demas “had it but lost it.”

Still another favorite passage of theirs is 1 John 2:19:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Brother Woods makes the following comments regarding this passage:

This passage shows the opposite of what once saved, always saved teaches. Notice, they were once with his disciples; they went out from them; one does not get out from a place where he has never been; had they possessed the same love for the Lord to serve Him as those who went out, they would have continued with them; they did, in fact, continue for a time, and then ceased to be faithful. It follows, therefore, that they simply apostatized from the right way (Woods, 244).

These Christians were like the followers Jesus described in the parable of the soils who heard the word, rejoiced in it, but did not allow the truth to take root, and when the going got tough, they left (Mat. 13:20-21).

Circular Reasoning

Proponents of once saved, always saved do not believe that a person can contribute to his soul’s salvation. In other words, it is all up to God, which

goes along with their Calvinistic pillars. Yet, they do say they must believe.

Another evidence from Scripture of the eternal security of a believer is found in John 5:24, where Jesus says, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.' Notice that eternal life is not something we get in the future **but is something that we have once we believe**. By its very nature, **eternal life must last forever, or it could not be eternal**. This passage says that, **if we believe the gospel, we have eternal life** and will not come into judgment; therefore, it can be said we are eternally secure (gotquestions.org/perseverance-saints.html, emph. added MR).

Their faulty logic is already seen in that they say, "One does not have to do anything to be saved, except believe."

Sproul contributes to the circular reasoning:

I think this little catchphrase, perseverance of the saints, is dangerously misleading. It suggests that the perseverance is something that we do, perhaps in and of ourselves. I believe that saints do persevere in faith, and that those who have been effectually called by God and have been reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit endure to the end. However, they persevere not because they are so diligent in making use of the mercies of God. The only reason we can give why any of us continue on in the faith is because we

have been preserved...My confidence in my preservation is not in my ability to persevere. My confidence rests in the power of Christ to sustain me with His grace and by the power of His intercession (Sproul).

Another of their strong proponents disagrees with Sproul:

Perseverance of the saints cannot be reduced to 'once saved, always saved.' That phrase does not tell the whole story of the biblical doctrine. 'Perseverance' is preferable. If we focus solely on 'once saved, always saved' we only speak of the believer's position in Christ. The phrase does not address the believer's progression in holiness, which is called sanctification. The Reformed faith holds that God is sovereign and man is responsible. The mystery of those two revelations cannot be reconciled except **through faith and then obedience to the Lord's commands** arising out of that heart of faith (Milton, 2, emph. mine MR).

Their reasoning goes something like this: One has nothing to do with his own salvation; it is all up to God. However, one must believe. Then, all one has to do is believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and it is at that point his eternal salvation is secure and there is nothing that can be done to lose one's salvation. However, one's faith must be evident by his obedience to the Lord's commands. Oh, so one must do something to be saved? No, they would say, if God chooses you then you will want to keep God's commands. Milton tries to explain it in answering the

question as to why there are so many warnings about falling away if one could not lose his salvation:

Would there be a warning if in fact God was going to guarantee their salvation? **Of course the answer is that the God who ordains our end also ordains the means to His end** (His purpose for us). And the means is obedience flowing from a renewed heart. God calls on believers to be watchful in prayer, to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, to be baptized, to remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper, to love one another, to fulfill the Great Commission, and to keep ourselves from idols, just to name a few. But the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints encompasses all of God's means to call us to faithfulness as a way to secure what God intends (Milton, 2, emph. mine MR).

Notice the line "Of course the answer is that the God who ordains our end also ordains the means to His end." They begin with belief in Calvinism and then view every Scripture through that lens. Milton did not answer any of the passages that warn Christians to remain faithful; he just says, "Of course God would warn because He has already preserved their souls." It does not answer anything. It only assumes a false doctrine based upon a false premise.

The Bible Teaches That Man Can Lose His Salvation

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer

remains a sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:26).

Their convenient reasoning is seen in how Calvinists answer this verse:

Apostates are those who move toward Christ, right up to the edge of saving belief, who hear and understand the Gospel, and are on the verge of saving faith, but then reject what they have learned and turn away. These are people who are perhaps even aware of their sin and even make a profession of faith. But rather than going on to spiritual maturity, their interest in Christ begins to diminish, the things of the world have more attraction to them rather than less, and eventually they lose all desire for the things of God and they turn away (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Hebrews-10-26.html>).

This may sound appealing; however, the pronouns do not allow this quibble to work. Notice, the inspired writer says, “For if we sin willfully...” He included himself in the warning not to sin willfully. Certainly, the Holy Spirit would not use an unsaved man to write part of the New Testament! It is even more evident when the entire context is viewed:

Let **us** draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having **our** hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and **our** bodies washed with pure water. Let **us** hold fast the confession of **our** hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let **us** consider **one another** in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of **ourselves**

together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting **one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:22-25, emph. mine MR).

Peter's encounter with Simon is another proof that one can lose his salvation.

Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done...And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this, your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you' (Acts 8:13, 18-22).

Simon was saved from his sin when he was baptized into Christ, along with the others that believed Philip's preaching (Acts 8:12), but when he sinned Peter rebuked him and told him to repent and pray. Peter told him to turn away from the path he was starting to follow in his heart. Not only that, Peter told him to pray for forgiveness. Since his past sins had already been washed away in baptism, he did not have to get back into the water. Instead he was instructed to turn from evil and ask

God to forgive him. What if he had not repented? What if he had not prayed? He would have remained in the bondage of iniquity and would have been lost for eternity.

The inspired apostle Paul also taught that one could lose his salvation: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27).

The one who bore many stripes, was beaten with rods, suffered shipwreck, spent many of his days in prison, and took the gospel to all the world, was concerned enough about losing his salvation that he disciplined himself so he would not be disqualified from finishing his race!

Paul also wrote the churches in Galatia because of his shock that many of the Christians there had departed from the gospel he had preached to them (Gal. 1:6-9). They had been influenced by false teachers who came in after Paul convincing some of the Christians that they needed to back to the Old Law, which had been nailed to the cross. His frightful warning to them showed that if they went back to the Old Law they would be lost:

You who have become estranged from Christ,
you who attempt to be justified by law; you
have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

Vincent comments on the phrase “You are fallen from grace:”

Having put yourselves under the economy of salvation by law, you have fallen out of the economy of salvation by the grace of Christ. Paul’s declarations are aimed at Judaizers, who taught that the Christian economy was to be

joined with the legal. His point is that the two are mutually exclusive. In Class of seaman thrown ashore, banishment, deprivation of an office, degeneration, of actors being hissed off the stage (Vincent, 157).

Their only hope was to repent, which is what Judas Iscariot failed to do. Simon did repent and was returned to God's saving grace (Acts 8:6-25). Hymeneus and Alexander made shipwreck of their faith and were delivered to Satan (1 Tim. 1:18-20). The man spoken of in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was delivered to Satan (1 Cor. 5). However, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we read of his repentance and forgiveness (2 Cor. 2:1-11).

Conclusion

The Christian should be cognizant of the fact that he can forfeit his soul's salvation, but not be overly fearful. God has promised us that the blood of His Son continually cleanses us as we walk in the light (1 John 1:7). When one walks out of the light and back into darkness continually by practicing a sinful life, the blood of His Son no longer cleanses. The apostle John shows us the key:

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him (1 John 2:28-29).

On the other hand, however, "whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God" (1 John 3:10). One

who makes a practice of sinning, is walking in darkness. One who lives a Christian life, even though he stumbles from time to time, but repents is walking in the light.

Works Cited

allaboutGOD.com

Knapp, Henry. *Augustine and Owen on Perseverance*.

Johnowen.org/media/knapp_on_augustine_and_owen.pdf.

gotquestions.org/perseverance-saints.html

gotquestions.org/Hebrews-10-26.html

https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_Calvin

Milton, Michael A. *Perseverance of the Saved Cannot Be*

Reduced to Once Saved, Always Saved. [https://](https://byfaithonline.com/perseverance-of-the-saints/)

byfaithonline.com/perseverance-of-the-saints/

Shaff, Philip. *Augustinus – De Dono Perseverantiae, A*

Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance. [http://www.ccel.](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.html)

[org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.html).

Sproul, R.C. [https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-](https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-perseverance-saints/)

[reformed-theology-perseverance-saints/](https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-perseverance-saints/)

Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament*

Vol. IV. Hendrickson Publishers.

Wacaster, Tom. (2015). *The Magnificence of Jesus, A*

Commentary on the Gospel of John Vol. 1.

Gospel Light Publications.

Woods, Guy N. (1964). *A Commentary on the New*

Testament Epistles. Gospel Advocate.

Saved By Faith Alone

Brian Giselbach



Brian has been married to Beth for 34 years and together they have 3 children and 4 grandchildren. Brian is a graduate of Freed Hardeman University. He serves as the Pulpit Minister of the Wood Avenue congregation in Florence, AL. Brian loves preaching and personal evangelism.

“The pattern of Christian thought that emerged from the Reformation is often summed up under the three phrases: sola gratia, sola fides, and sola scriptura” (Carson 55). So writes D.A. Carson in his book *Collected Writings On Scripture*. Carson confesses that as a boy he sometimes questioned the logic of three statements each claiming to be “sola.” But eventually he figured it out, he says. He learned “that grace is the sole ground of salvation, faith is the sole means of salvation, and the Scriptures are the sole ultimate authority for faith and life...” (55).

Carson should have permitted his inquiring soul to reflect on this matter a little deeper. Sometimes children see things better than adults. Perhaps it is not too late to see that the introduction of “sola” into one’s theological framework brings confusion (which is possibly why God did not breathe it out; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:13). As is often the case, religious stumbling blocks occur at

the point of vocabulary and phraseology.

In this lecture we are addressing the matter of salvation by faith alone. This writer, and all of the writers represented in this book, enthusiastically affirm that salvation comes by faith (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; etc.). (Note: I will use “salvation” and “justification” interchangeably, in the same manner that the Bible does; even though each term has its own uniquely recognized meaning). My objection is to justification by faith *alone*; apart from conditions or works of obedience that God prescribes in the Scriptures. I am troubled by the categories of Reformed thinking advanced by Carson and many others because they stand in opposition to the Scriptures. While we can all appreciate the benefits of organizing our thoughts around Biblical teaching, when we attempt to arrange our thoughts and teaching according to human tradition the results can be more than confusing, they can be devastating to ourselves and those whom we influence. Why create categories based on words like *sola* (“alone”) that are not used by the New Testament writers? What possible benefit is there?

Additionally, there are absurdities within the categories themselves? Why argue that salvation comes by *sola gratia*? Why choose God’s grace over God’s love or mercy? If salvation is by faith alone, then how are we to understand the role of say, repentance? This is where much of the argument for faith alone leaves me dumbfounded. If justification is by faith alone, then repentance can have no part in salvation. And yet those who teach we are saved by faith alone also teach that we must repent in order to be saved.

The subject of faith is something quite fundamental to Christianity. But just because it's fundamental, doesn't mean everyone understands it. We are wrong to assume that just because someone claims to be a Christian, or claims to be saved, they have a grasp of what this terminology means. Many fail to appreciate that "faith" is used in different, but related ways in the Scriptures. Sometimes "faith" refers to the message of salvation in the gospel (Gal. 1:23; Acts 6:7). Sometimes it used to describe the singular act of trust that must be conjoined with other conditions of salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12). At other times, "faith" is used inclusively to describe the entire obedient response of the sinner to the offer of grace (John 3:16; Rom. 3:21-26). Sometimes "faith" refers to the life of faith that must be lived before God (Rom. 1:17; Rev. 2:10). Occasionally, "faith" is applied to some whose response to God is inadequate (John 12:42; James 2:17). My experience with those who advocate the idea of justification by faith alone informs me that they often fail to appreciate the different ways "faith" and "belief" are used by the Biblical writers.

It is a popular misconception today that a person needs only to believe in Jesus as the Son of God (the Savior of the world), to the exclusion of any other activity prescribed by God, to be saved from sin. It is my evaluation that many who say they have faith in the saving work of Christ do not fully understand the meaning of their terms. Thankfully some are open to a person of understanding and kind-heartedness explaining "the way of God more accurately" (Acts

18:26). The popularity of the view of salvation by faith alone (with the word “alone” being an operative reference to the exclusion of any works whatsoever) is largely the result of traditions passed down in families and by seminaries that were created by the creeds and traditions of men.

My father-in-law, Charlie Garner, a faithful preacher, used to refer to those who hold to this teaching as “solifidians.” A “solifidian” is “one who holds that faith alone, without achievement or personal merit, is sufficient to insure salvation” (Webster 757). “Solifidianism” is the view that salvation from sin comes by faith in Christ alone, without works. If you ask a “solifidian” preacher what a person has to do to be saved, he will typically say, “Just believe Jesus is the Son of God; only believe!” This is justification by faith alone spoken in the language of today.

There are a few variations of this teaching. Some will add to the teaching of faith alone by saying, “Faith must lead the sinner to repentance” or “repentance and faith are inseparable experiences.” Others will say the sinner must believe in Jesus Christ, and then call on the Lord---in the sinner’s prayer---to be saved. Many even allege (perhaps “insist” is more like it) that the exercise of faith is the direct work of the Holy Spirit on the heart; a work that is irresistible. Roger Olson, in his book, *Against Calvinism*, makes a strong case that the real problem with justification by faith alone is the Calvinistic teaching of irresistible grace (156-168). If it is asked, “What about obedience? Do I have to do anything else?,” most solifidians will say something

like, “No, if you add anything to faith, then salvation becomes something that is earned, and that will make void God’s grace.”

Several scriptures allegedly teach this view of salvation. Some of the most popular are these:

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 5:1: Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

This last text is offered as proof that all works relative to the subject of salvation are not only excluded they even obstruct the work of Divine grace upon the soul of the sinner. I will show that these scriptures and others do not teach what solifidians allege that they teach. I will further show that this view (salvation by faith alone, without works) is unsound and harmful to the soul.

I can nearly establish my entire case by making an appeal to the Book of James; to James 2:14-26. When one reads this text it’s a little difficult to argue that “all works are excluded,” when James says: “Faith without

works is dead also.” So hold on a minute! Maybe one’s soteriology is a little out of whack. If works demonstrate that faith is alive, then we are hardly saved by faith alone, without works.

What does James have to say about “faith only?” Well, here it is, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). This phrase makes it seriously difficult to hold on to “faith only” or to justification by faith alone (*solifidianism*). This is the only time in the whole Bible where the words “faith only/alone” are found; and they are preceded by the words, “not by.”

I suggested earlier that God purposefully did not use *sola* (“alone”) in the Biblical text in order to avoid the confusion solifidians have created. But God did purposefully speak of “faith only” in James 2:24 (“a man is justified... not by faith only”). Why didn’t God just say, “a man is justified... not by faith.” Because man is justified by faith---if his faith has works. So the addition (or subtraction) of words, even words like *sola*, make a huge difference in how we understand the issue of justification.

One time I directed a solifidian to read James 2:14-26. After reading this text, he said, “Yes, but this isn’t talking about salvation from sin.” Oh really? The text uses the word “save” in verse 14, and then it makes reference to justification three times. For comparison, the apostle Paul spoke of justification in Romans 5:1. James chapter 2 makes mince-meat of solifidianism. The faith that saves/justifies is a faith that works (Gal. 5:6).

There’s more to consider. The Scriptures show us a number of people who had faith, but they were

not saved. The Scriptures tell us they had faith. Why were they not saved? Because they had faith alone. If faith alone saves, and these individuals had faith, then they should have been saved. But they were not saved because all they had was faith (faith alone). Consider these examples:

On one occasion, Jesus told a group of Jews that He was the light of the world. “As He spoke these words, many believed in Him” (John 8:30). Note that the Holy Spirit said they “believed.” How did Jesus respond to this faith? Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). It appears that their faith was not enough; they needed more than belief. They also needed to “abide” in His word (teaching); otherwise their faith would be ineffectual. Their faith needed more of Jesus’ teaching. Later, after giving them more of His word, they turned against His teaching and chose not to believe. So He said to them, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (John 8:44). So by no stretch of the imagination could it be said that they were saved. And yet they started out in faith. Why didn’t Jesus leave well enough alone (because they believed in Him)? Because Jesus knew that people are not saved by faith alone. They also must “abide” in His word!

Another example is found in John 12:42, “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” Again, the Holy Spirit said they “believed in Him,” and

that's good enough for me. But was it a living faith, or a dead faith? It was a dead faith; ineffectual faith. They believed, but they were afraid to "confess Him" because there would be repercussions. They had faith, but it did not work. Jesus made it quite clear that faith alone does not save because He said, in order for it to save, faith must publicly confess Him (trustful acknowledgement that He is the Son of God; Mat. 10:32-33).

Another example is found in Acts 11:21, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." This occurred after the Lord's spokesmen preached the gospel to the Greeks in Antioch. The Holy Spirit says they "believed." How many? "A great number." What did they do after this? They "turned to the Lord." So they believed, and then they did something else; other than believe (in addition to believing). Turning to the Lord is no insignificant thing to do. The apostle Paul said that God commanded him to preach the gospel to sinners in order "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins." (Acts 26:18). And Paul did exactly what God told him to do, so that later he said to the Thessalonian Christians, "For... you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (1 Thes. 1:9). The point is, it wasn't enough for them to believe. If their faith did not turn them to the Lord then their faith was dead. Instead, their faith was a living, active faith. We know this because they "believed," and then they "turned to the Lord."

Let's go back to James chapter 2. Do you remember

what James said about demons? He said, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe---and tremble!” (James 2:19). This is an irritating statement to solifidians. It is good to believe (and no one is knocking that; James said, “You do well”), but if this is all you do (if your faith is not conjoined with works), then your faith is no better than the faith of demons. Of course, the argument is not that there would be the possibility that, if demons showed faith by works, they would be saved. This is not the conclusion James would have us reach. Spirit beings cannot be saved by the sacrifice of Christ, faith or no faith (Heb. 2:16). James is speaking in of two categories: those who have faith only, and those whose faith is characterized by good works. Demons belong in the same category of spiritual health as those who have faith alone, without works. Abraham and Rahab belong to the category of those who are spiritually healthy; who are justified by faith with works.

So please return to the three Bible texts I mentioned earlier: John 3:16; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8-9. By now you should be more than just a little suspicious that the faith being discussed in these verses is not faith alone, as solifidians would like you to believe. The words “alone” or “only” do not occur in any of these texts in conjunction with faith. Consider John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Solifidians believe this teaches salvation by faith alone because this doesn’t say anything about works (“just faith”, they argue). They might get

away with this if they can persuade you to divorce this statement from its context.

First, John 3:16 is part of the discussion Jesus had with Nicodemus. Consider John 3:3-5. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” So the faith of John 3:16 is not faith alone, but faith that is comprised of the new birth in water and the Spirit (which is baptism and the influence of the Spirit)—without which a person cannot enter the kingdom of God. No solifidian has ever argued, to my knowledge, that faith alone is equivalent to being “born of water and the Spirit.” This alerts us to the fact that justification by faith involves more, conceptually, than merely faith alone. Justification by faith must truly be faith that shows itself in the activities of the new birth (involving water and the Spirit).

Second, John 3:21 indicates that “he who does the truth comes to the light.” So faith also involves doing something relative to the truth; “deeds” that have been “done in God.”

Third, in John 3:36, John said, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Few people realize that, in the original language, the words “he who does not believe the Son shall not see life” should be better translated, “he who

does not obey the Son shall not see life” (as it is in the NASB); meaning: You cannot be saved unless faith obeys. Everlasting life results from the faith that obeys. No advocate of justification by faith alone would admit that obedience leads to life.

Someone may object, “But Jesus said ‘whoever believes’ will have everlasting life! He didn’t say, ‘whoever believes and obeys’.” This is true, but Jesus never conceived of justifying faith being anything other than obedient faith. As Jesus launched His soul-saving mission, He said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:16). Is this not justification by faith?

The next scripture to have our attention is Romans 5:1: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, the words “only” or “alone” do not appear anywhere in the text or context as an addendum to faith. If the word is nowhere to be found in the text, why should we understand Paul’s use of “justified by faith” to mean “justified by faith alone?” Is Paul not capable of saying what he means? Instead, the faith that justifies (like the faith of James 2:24) corresponds to what Paul described as “obedience to the faith” (Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:26), which is a faith that unites us with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). I would argue that being united to Christ and being saved are just different ways of describing the same blessing from God—which is the result of a faith that obeys (not faith alone).

Before leaving Romans 5:1, I was recently interested in an article in *Tabletalk* magazine, in which the author attempted to make the case that Paul presented the case

for justification by faith alone “with particular clarity in his letter to the Romans.” The author then listed twelve statements (Rom. 3:10; Rom. 3:23; Rom. 3:20; Rom. 3:21-22; Rom. 3:24-25; Rom. 3:27; Rom. 4:4-5; Rom. 4:16; Rom. 4:20-21; Rom. 5:1-2; Rom. 5:8; Rom. 5:15) that supposedly show Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone. At best the author makes the case for Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith; not faith alone. Yet there is no justification (pun intended) for the inclusion of the word “alone,” or the exclusion of obedience to conditions, in Paul’s soteriological understanding.

And then we come to Paul’s amazing statement in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” We are saved by grace (God’s unmerited favor). God has chosen to save us “by grace... through faith.” But this is the question: Is this faith alone, or is it a faith that meets the conditions prescribed by God? We’ve already seen that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). We’ve already shown that faith by itself cannot save. We’ve already demonstrated that God expects us to obey Him in order to “see life” (John 3:36). According to Hebrews 5:9, Jesus “became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”

Someone then says, “Yes, but it says that salvation is ‘the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast’.” This is absolutely true! Salvation is the gift of God. But Bible students are able to discern different kinds of works in the New Testament. Paul speaks of works of the Law of Moses (Rom. 3:28), which Paul

warns us not to depend on for salvation. And then there are works of boasting or merit, wherein a person might say, “God will save me because I’m a good, moral person” (Rom. 4:2-4). This is what Paul is referring to when he says, “not of works.” Most of the time it’s not too difficult to figure out when the Biblical writers make reference to different kinds of works.

But then there are the works of faith (the obedience of faith; see also Acts 10:35). And while these works are not meritorious (i.e., they are not done to earn salvation), they are done because this is what God has prescribed as conditions for salvation; or the outworking of our faith. God wants our faith to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God (Rom. 10:10). God wants our faith to show itself in repentance (Acts 17:30). God wants our faith to demonstrate itself in baptism for the remission of sin (Acts 2:38). Strangely many solifidians will acknowledge that repentance is necessary for salvation; but they will deny baptism as a condition of salvation at every turn. And then God wants the principle of faithful obedience to be the hallmark of our lives---until we depart this life (1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10).

Long ago, prior to the conversion to Christ of Cornelius and his household, the apostle Peter said, “But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:35). Not a word was said about faith only. Not here, or anywhere in the Scriptures. And yet solifidians would have us believe that faith alone is a central tenet of New Testament redemption.

Again and again, in the Book of Acts, this is the

pattern you see: Sinners hearing the Word of God (from various spokesmen), and then responding to the instructions they were given in faith and obedience! This is one example: “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). And so it was.

Someone might have it in their mind, because I have been critical of solifidians (or because I have used this term), that I don't like them. Far from it. I grew up among solifidians, and most of those I know are good people. I love them and I love their souls. But I hate solifidianism! I hate the teaching of faith only, and I place it in Paul's category of “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). It gives sinners a false sense of security. It stands opposed to the prayer of Jesus for the unity of His people (John 17:20-26). The teaching of faith alone has persuaded millions that they are saved by faith alone and by praying the sinner's prayer. Please tell me how justification by faith alone can encompass the sinner's prayer (which is nowhere described in the New Testament), but justification by faith cannot encompass baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; etc).

Should someone's eyes fall upon these pages in the search for the truth that saves souls (1 Tim. 2:3-4), please listen to my plea: Instead of continuing in the teaching that Jesus saves those who only believe, face the truth that you are still in your sins. Instead of being dismayed or shocked by this prospect, finish what you started: Confess your faith in Christ, turn from your sins, and be immersed in water (for the remission of

your sins). And then be added to His church, and be faithful to the Lord (Col. 1:13).

No one can afford to be wrong when it comes to their most precious possession: Their eternal soul.

Works Cited

- The Holy Bible: The New King James Version*, Broadman & Holman, Nashville, 1988
- Carson, D.A., *Collected Writings On Scripture*, Crossway, Wheaton, 2010
- Godfrey, Robert W., “Justification By Faith Alone”; *Tabletalk* magazine, Ligonier Ministries, Sanford, May, 2017
- Olson, Roger E., *Against Calvinism*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2011
- Webster’s Universal College Dictionary*, Random House, New York, 2001

Drinking Alcohol

Bill Irby



Bill has been married to Ginger for 44 years, and together they have 2 sons and one granddaughter. Bill has a BA in Bible and Communications from Freed Hardeman University. He has a MA in Religion from Southern Christian University, and a MA in History from Georgia State University. He has also attended Virginia Commonwealth University and Harding Graduate School of Religion. He teaches history and religion at Calhoun Community College. Bill has done local work in Tennessee and Georgia. For the past 30 years, Bill has served as the Pulpit Minister for the West Hobbs Street congregation in Athens, AL.

According to what I read lately, Solomon was just dead wrong when he said, “Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whosoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). The wisest man then alive was evidently wrong again when he wrote these words:

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions?
Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine.
Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup.
When it swirls around smoothly:
At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper.

Your eyes will see strange things,
And your heart will utter perverse things.
Yes, you will be like one who lies down in
 The midst of the sea,
Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying:
They have struck me, but I was not hurt:
They have beaten me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?
 (Proverbs 23:29-35 NKJV).

Consider this passage: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). The mind of Christ is the spiritual mind of Romans 8 and the “affection” or mind of Colossians 3. A Christian is encouraged in these passages to allow the principles of Christ to order and direct his thinking. This puts a little different twist on our answer to the question, “What do you think?” on all subjects, including drinking.

This is important because folks do what they want to do. The trick to living a life that pleases God is to want to do what He wants us to do. The old preachers said that our duty must become our desire. For some this seems terribly difficult. They should try it. The principled life is never a burden; it is always a blessing.

Far too many people in the world don’t “get” this. The media pushes the idea that folks who try to live by the Word of God are robotic fanatics. Writers often follow an easily discernible narrative: that folks who oppose any use of alcohol are fanatics and prohibitionists. I oppose the sale and use of alcohol because I have thought about it. I know that any use of alcohol has the potential to and often does lead to

destructive drunkenness. Destructive drunkenness eradicates families and exacts a huge cost on the all of society. I am quite familiar with all the arguments for the supposed benefits associates with the use of alcohol. The simple truth is that the negatives outweigh the so-called positives.

I oppose the use of beverage alcohol. I argue for personal prohibition, prohibition on the individual basis. I oppose the idea that drinking “socially” is a good thing in the context of New Testament Christianity (see Gal. 5:21). I am an old drinker. I really liked alcohol. I associated with folks who liked it. Some folks could at times drink a little and be satisfied. Those same folks at other times drank to a level of serious inebriation. In other words, the danger of drunkenness is always just around the corner for anyone who drinks. I never saw booze do anybody any good. Have you?

But this should not matter because no one seems to think alcohol has any negative effects on anybody these days. It is supposedly just a magic social lubricant. Listen...so called “social drinkers” are just a few rounds away from being dangerously inebriated. Intoxicated people embarrass themselves, their families and friends, hurt people that they love as well as total strangers and are a menace to folks on the road. Booze is poison and there is no way around it. The fact that folks like it does not change the truth that it is a dangerous substance. If this is not the case, why limit its use or control the sale of it at all?

Obviously, I am hard against any use of booze and I work to encourage Christians to be just as hard

against it as I am. And by the way, “booze” is a good word to describe beverage alcohol because that word removes and subtlety from the discussion. Fine wine and aged whiskey and all other forms of such drink is still booze. I’ve got good reason. Alcohol diminished the lives of my parents immeasurably. It has done the same for countless others. I am a realistic fellow and I know that prohibition does not work in a free society. But personal prohibition can work for the faithful child of God.

We asked earlier that we might think about the mind of Christ. Can you imagine Jesus favoring behavior like the use of modern beverage alcohol? It cannot be denied that a person’s very first drink of today’s beer, wine or spirits changes his or her perception of reality. People who contend that they “don’t feel a thing” from their first drink are in one of two situations: either they are not being honest or their senses have become dulled over the years of using alcohol. The truth is that inhibitions diminish with each swallow. How can we have the mind of Christ if we lessen our ability to be rational, thinking beings?

But what of our friends who run breathlessly to John 2 and say with a clear voice of social superiority that Jesus made wine at the behest of his mother so social drinking is therefore approved by the Lord? This is surely the number one argument in favor of social drinking. I have been amused to observe that when people use this argument that they assume a relaxed pose as if they had ended the discussion there and then.

Let’s think about that. Jesus through the Holy

Spirit prohibited drunkenness (2 Tim 3:16-17, Gal. 5:21). Being inebriated is not a behavior allowed by the New Testament according to any conceivable exegetical procedure. So the position of those who think they see Jesus making something akin to a fancy wedding wine or even cheap metal top wine today is that He prohibits the use of the thing He made in John 2. Oh, but our sophisticated friends tell us that He does prohibit the over use of it. Really? Now, they had run out of wine when His mother told Him to make more. We therefore must assume that they were going to continue to drink what He just made! Especially since what He made was better than what they had started drinking. And they had been drinking efficiently up to the time the miracle was performed. You see the problem. Jesus did not object to the length of time they had been drinking that wine nor did He prohibit them from drinking what He had just made for them thus what He made had to have been non-inebriating wine. In other words, the Lord made for them out of all that water some very nice grape juice.

Thus it is further the case that our friends who justify social drinking out of John 2 must empty their cabinets and casks along with their kegs and cellars and stock up on pure non-alcoholic grape juice.

A bit of thinking undoes the argument for social drinking from John 2. Thinking and drinking do not go together. Therefore don't drink.

We turn to another element of this matter of saying that drunkenness is wrong but a little drink or two is just fine: Why have we seen this change in the attitude of people in the church? There has certainly been a change.

In a recent newspaper published among our people there appeared a discussion of these very changes. The editor of the paper, who in so far as I could tell, does not favor the use of beverage alcohol, seemed to be two minds about opposing its use outright as he published views from both points of view. He also published a well written account of a person who had terrible struggles with alcohol which I took to have been intended as a discouragement to the use of booze. Also appearing in the issue was a note or two in favor of maintaining the long-held position that total abstinence was the only safe way to avoid trouble with alcohol.

But as is often the case these days it seems it is more important to appear even-handed than to make a case clearly against anything. So there were treatments of positions held by people of Christian background who wholeheartedly advocated loosening up our opposition to use of alcohol. The idea seems to be that if we want to communicate with the younger people in the church it is best done over a glass of beer or wine or something.

This is ludicrous. Can you imagine attempting to discuss a serious spiritual matter while “having a drink or two”? Though it is contended that alcohol helps one think freely (I have contended it myself) it most assuredly does not. Alcohol does loosen the tongue, diminish sensible inhibitions and encourage rational people to make irrational decisions. In addition since we have seen that Jesus prohibits Christians from drinking that which causes drunkenness, it is not reasonable to assume that He would encourage elders, preachers and members to sit down and work out spiritual challenges

while their minds were lubricated by a substance that has one chief ability, to weaken the mind.

I had some substantial experience with alcohol before I became a Christian. My father, a very intelligent man, was also a drinker. A piece of advice he offered me came to mind early on in my work as a local preacher. I was attempting to talk to a person given to drink about their soul. The individual was enthusiastic about having the study but we made no progress. At some point I heard my father's voice say, "Son don't try to talk to me about serious things when I'm drunk. Wait 'til I'm sober." I learned then and have had the lesson reinforced since then that it is a waste of time to try to teach the truth to an inebriated person. The same is true for persons who are high on any kind of perception altering substance.

The reason this does not work is that when we work with a person who is in an altered state of mind we are not dealing with the real person. If the gospel is to do its work it must have access to the real mind of the person to be saved (Rom. 1:16, 10:17; Heb. 11:1-2). In my earlier days as a preacher I was blessed with a great friend who was a long term alcoholic. Not only that but he had much experience in all sorts of recovery programs and had directed more than one. He gave me advice along the lines of my father's words of wisdom that I follow even now. He put it succinctly: "Never try to convert a drunk." It is advice I share with young preachers today. So, always wait. Never give up but always wait.

As I recall that friendship I remember important

aspects of that fellow's experience with alcohol. When sober he was a faithful New Testament Christian who believed the Bible to be the very Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He was highly intelligent. He ran a successful business. He was good to his wife who loved him dearly. His children held him in high esteem. He was loved by a host of family and friends. Yet, with all of this from time to time he would fall back into the grip of alcohol. Such is the power and grip of this very dangerous substance.

With all this in mind, let's return to the "small end of the root cause" for the weakness in pulpits and church leadership on the matter of social drinking." It comes down to social pressure. Preachers, elders and church members in too many places are moving away from the safe and sound position of total abstinence from the use of beverage alcohol. As we have noted, some make an attempt to justify these changes by interpretations and applications of Biblical passages such as John 2. 5:23. The product of these interpretations has more to do with a desired result than with what the word actually mean. How in the world can one find a connection between the medicinal use of the fruit of the vine (1 Tim. 5:23) and a party where today's beer, wine and spirits are served? There is no such connection.

The real motivation for advocating the use of beverage alcohol or social drinking is a powerful desire to fit in with the larger culture. As more and more of our religious friends outside the Lord's church liberalize their views on drinking our members feel the pressure. No one wants to be seen as weird or backward. Human beings have a strong desire to feel included. If you are the only couple

at a social or business gathering that is not partaking you might well feel outside the inner circle.

As we grow more affluent we have a tendency to want to fit in with other people that share our economic status. If they are social drinkers we want to be. If they go to the bar after 18 we want to do the same. If they dress up for a cocktail party we want to do the same thing. It is not a matter of keeping up with the Jones; we want to be the Jones. So we give in and start having an occasional drink because of the power of the popular culture.

There are practical reasons to reject the power of the popular culture on the subject of drinking. We should remember that the use of alcohol has a huge economic component. The advertisements we see are very enticing and quite bothersome to those who are recovering from alcohol use. When we buy alcohol we are enriching an industry that really does not care all that much about the consequences of the use of their products.

We must also remember that the use of beverage alcohol has no redeeming element. Not one! People say it makes them relax and feel better. It may at first, but at what cost? We hear about hunger among children in this country. How much of that is due to the family's money being spent on alcohol or other drugs? My experience as a local preacher is that a home with hungry people has tobacco, alcohol and a number of other things present. There is a tremendous amount of violence in homes that is the result of a man losing his temper after he has had a "few" drinks. In addition, how many children do not

have proper clothing and school supplies because those funds went to buy booze? There is nothing good about drinking alcohol.

Now there is an argument for social drinking that we have not considered. It is the only honest argument that can be offered and I have heard it from time to time. Ask an honest drinker why he or she drinks and they will say that they like the way alcohol makes them feel. When I drank alcohol (my last drink was the summer of 1975) it was because I enjoyed it tremendously. I liked everything about it. It was fun. I would do ridiculous things that would lead me to say “No more booze” and in a few days or weeks I’d be right back at it. Do you know why would I do that? Because I liked it! People drink because they like it. It is not sophisticated. It is a sadness with no redeeming features.

Now, allow me to deal with another important element of the arguments being made by Christians who say that they are against drunkenness but think social drinking in moderation is just fine. Here is the truth: You may begin with “a drink or two” but you do not know when one or two turns into more, perhaps many more. It can happen suddenly. One evening begins as have many others but concludes in the hospital or under a picnic table somewhere. You may say, “That will never happen to me.” How do you know? The only way to be sure you do not get in trouble with alcohol is to never touch the stuff. And if in the past you have touched it you are in even greater danger. Be sure to keep away from it. One day at a time, forever (Matt. 6:33-34).

Now, look at the list of sins in Col. 3:5-9. What

does this have to do with the use of alcohol? Just this: fornication is facilitated by alcohol as is every other physical sin on the list. Anger and its partners wrath, malice and blasphemy all are enhanced by alcohol. Filthy language is lubricated by alcohol.

Sooner or later alcohol will bring misery to the life of all who use it and to the lives of the people who love them. Even in small amounts alcohol diminished the ability to think rationally and behave faithfully. I realize the trend these days among our people is to accept the progressive point of view and then sniff knowingly at the traditional folks among us. Any modification of the message of total abstinence from alcohol will lead inevitably to the increase of its use. Therefore let the elderships, the preachers and the people stand firm against any use of beverage alcohol.

Examining Catholicism

Adam Evans



Adam is married to Magan and together they have three daughters; Ema, Mary Kate, and Lilly. Adam is a graduate of Freed Hardeman University. He has a degree in accounting and has been preaching for 15 years. His family spent 3 years in Iringa, Tanzania, East Africa as full-time missionaries.

Adam continues short-term follow-up work in Tanzania. He is currently managing projects to translate, print, and circulate Biblical materials in Swahili. Adam also serves as the full-time preacher of the Valdosta Church of Christ in Tuscumbia, AL.

When we discuss with various religious groups, the question usually arises: **What is our authority in religious or spiritual matters?** As we examine Catholicism, we see three basic legs from which their beliefs and practices are derived: 1) Sacred Tradition, 2) The teaching authority of the Church, 3) Sacred Scripture. Let us focus our attention upon the foundational support system that undergirds all of Catholicism's beliefs and doctrines: the Catholic claim for apostolic succession. We start here, because if we prove apostolic succession is not true, then both tradition and the teaching authority of the Catholic Church (the decrees of the Magisterium which is the papacy, college of bishops, and ecumenical councils) lose their authority and validity. The following claims derive from the Catholic apostolic succession belief:

succession in the episcopate, authoritative keys given through succeeding bishops, priests and bishops provide absolution, the supreme chief shepherds are all succeeding Popes, apostolic influence will never cease, Papal infallibility, and our supreme judge is the Pope. The bulk of our time will be used examining these claims and look at the scriptures most often given in support of them.

Catholic Claims For Apostolic Succession Discussed And Refuted

Claim 1: The Right of Succession in the Episcopate.

They teach the right of succession in the episcopate: “from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth” (Catechism 34). “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.’” (Catechism 30, emphasis mine). Catholics teach “...‘the apostolic preaching’...was to be persevered in a continuous line of succession until the end of time” (Catechism 30). “But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, **the Apostles left bishops as their successors**, ‘handing over’ to them ‘the authority to teach in their own place’” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, Chapter 1:7).

Biblically speaking, what is the *episcopate*? Does it really have anything to do with the office or role of an apostle? The Greek noun *episkopé* (G1984) is used four

times in the New Testament: “bishopruck” (KJV) or “office” (ASV) (Acts 1:20), “bishop” (1 Tim. 3:1), and “visitation” (Luke 19:44; 1 Pet. 2:12). It is also defined also as “inspection.” The Greek noun *episkopos* (G1985) is used five times: “overseers” (Acts 20:28), “bishops” (Phil. 1:1), “a bishop” (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7), and “Bishop” (1 Pet. 2:25). The Greek verb *episkopeo* (G1983) is used twice: “looking diligently” (Heb. 12:15), and “taking the oversight” (KJV) or “exercising oversight” (ASV) (1 Pet. 5:2), both passages speaking of the office of a bishop, not an apostle. The word “bishops” or “overseers” is used interchangeably with the term “elders” or “presbytery” and “pastors” or “shepherds.” These are appointed by those whom they serve, according to the qualifications set forth in Holy Writ (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1; 1 Pet. 5; Heb. 13).

Let us look at Ephesians 4:11. “And he gave some, **apostles** [652-*apostolous*]; and some, prophets [4396-*prophetas*]; and some, evangelists [2099-*euangelistas*]; and some, **pastors** [4166-*poimenas*] and teachers [1320-*didaskalous*].” Biblically speaking, a man may be qualified and fulfill more than one of the above functions, yet the role of *episkipeo* and *apostolous* are not the same. There are different qualifications for each. The qualifications for an apostle are as follows: “Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection”

(Acts 1:21-22). An apostle had to be a witness of the resurrected Christ. This was not a qualification of a bishop (overseer, pastor, shepherd, elder, presbyter).

Sometimes, a Catholic will use Acts 1 to argue that the office of a bishop and the office of an apostle are used interchangeably in this passage. “For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his **bishoprick** [G1984 *episkopen*, office-ASV, NKJV] let another take” (Acts 1:20). “That he may take part of this ministry and **apostleship**, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was **numbered with the eleven apostles**” (Acts 1:25-26). Acts 1:20 references two different Psalms speaking about Judas’ position being replaced: “Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents” (Psa. 69:25) and “Let his days be few; and let another take his office” (Psa. 109:8). Only the “*Wycliffe Bible*” translates Psalm 109:8 using “bishopric.” No other English translation uses any resemblance of bishop. Even the Catholic translation uses the word “office” in Psalm 109:8, which also carries over into Acts 1:20 “... May another take his office” (NABRE). Therefore, a mistranslation brought over into the English New Testament in Acts 1 has caused some confusion regarding this discussion. The term “bishoprick” in the KJV simply means “position” and does not reference the office of a bishop (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-13; Eph. 4:11; or 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Therefore, an apostle and a bishop are

two different offices.

Digging deeper into the Old Testament quote (Psa. 109:8) that undergirds the KJV word “*bishoprick*” in Acts 1:20, we see the Hebrew word *pequddah* “office” (H6486), which is used 31 times. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon shows its usage. Definition 2A KJV: “the office” (Num. 4:16); “under the custody and charge of” (Numbers 3:36); “were officers among them” (1 Chr. 26:30). Looking at definition 2B we see: “appointed the offices” (2 Chr. 23:18); “ministers... having charge” (Eze. 44:11); “have the oversight of” (Num. 3:32); “officers” (Isa. 60:17); “officer” (2 Chr. 24:11) (Strong’s Hebrew: 6486). None of these definitions from the Hebrew Lexicon lead us to believe this should be translated as *bishoprick* (i.e. Eldership), but rather office or position. “Then they prayed, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place’” (Acts 1:24-25, NABRE). Clearly, this shows that Judas (son of Simon Iscariot – John 13:26), was not a bishop, but was a chosen apostle whose place (office, responsibility, charge) in the apostolic ministry needed to be replaced.

Claim 2: The Keys (Representing Authority) Were Given to Peter and the Ministry of the Apostles to be Succeeded Through the Bishops (Mat. 16:19)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter” (Catechism 156); “The ‘power of the keys’ designates authority to govern

the house of God, which is the Church” (Catechism 156);

The power to ‘bind and loose’ connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through **the ministry of the apostles** (Matthew 18:18) and in particular through **the ministry of Peter**, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom (Catechism 156, emphasis mine).

Even if a person conceded that Peter was a strong man with a faith of stone or rock, which was built upon Christ, there is still no biblical evidence for apostolic succession from Peter into the papacy or Magisterium. Unfortunately, a mistranslation – or at best an inability to properly convey the Greek tenses into English – has caused much confusion regarding Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; and John 20:23. “Will be” is a **future** indicative middle third-person singular verb. “Bound” is a **perfect** participle passive nominative neuter singular verb. A “Future Perfect” is an event expected or planned to happen before a time of reference in the future, like I “will have” finished tomorrow. Future Perfect is used when the past of the future is involved. The “Greek verb of the second clause is a periphrastic future perfect... ‘will be bound’... ‘will be loosed’, a rare form in koine Greek” (*Gaebelein* 194). “As in English today, the future perfect was a dying tense that ultimately

disappeared from common usage” (*Gaebelein* 194). What relevance does this have to our discussion? Either Peter could bind and loose and earth and Heaven was required to comply, (or) what was bound or loosed in Heaven was required to be complied with on Earth. This has huge theological implications. The KJV does not convey the tenses accurately here: “shall be bound” and “shall be loosed” in heaven. Only a few versions attempt to accurately translate the Greek tenses in this verse. For example: “shall be having been bound” (YLT); “will have been bound” (WEB, NET, MOUNCE); “is already bound in heaven” (HCSB); “... must be already bound in heaven... must be what is already loosed in heaven” (*Martin, Amplified New Testament*).

Bind and loose are rabbinical terms for what is permitted or unpermitted in connection with the revelation from God. Thus, it says, what you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in Heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what has already been permitted in Heaven. This is a paraphrastic Perfect passive verb (Utley).

The term periphrastic comes from two Greek words” which we derive in English “around” and “I explain” and “refers to the roundabout way of expressing the verbal idea.” This form includes a verb plus a participle, instead of just one verb to express the action. Of the six different periphrastic construction, one is most often mistranslated. It is the future perfect periphrastic phrase (Merkle 75-76).

“The verbal forms ‘shall be bound’ and ‘shall be loosed,’ in the Greek New Testament, are perfect tense, passive voice participles. The perfect tense suggests that the binding and loosing had already occurred, and the effects of that action would remain” (Jackson, Wayne. “Matthew 16:19). “Hence, there is action ascribed to the apostles and also an action that will have preceded their action that takes place in heaven” (Martin). “This is not saying what the church chooses to do, God will allow” (Utley). “What the church chooses to do, if they are following the mind and will of God, will be what is already been permitted in Heaven” (Utley). “The church will fully reflect the mind of God already in Heaven” (Utley).

The two verses (Matt. 16:19 and Matt. 18:18) involve the same verb action and actors, the apostles, the particular appears different. From the two contexts, we gather that the contemplated action of Matthew 16:19 that Peter was to perform that was already done in heaven, simply stated, involved the matter of pronouncing “lawful” and “unlawful.” Such emphasizes the authority of the scriptures and heaven’s approval, not any alleged intrinsic authority residing in Peter as a man. In the second case, Matt. 18:18, the action involves forgiveness and considers the action of the apostles, an action that had already occurred in heaven. Such again stresses that forgiveness is not the product of any inherent virtue or efficacy of man, not even the apostles... The matter of legislation and forgiveness,

re-spectively, have already been settled in heaven and the apostles simply conveyed God's will in the matter... The apostles in the matter of legislation and forgiveness did not intrinsically possess authority, they simply implemented what heaven had already declared... The action was not, (1) the apostles legislated and forgave and (2) heaven re-sponded by accepting the actions of the apostles. The action was (1) heaven decreed and (2) the apostles merely with heaven's authority declared the disposition of God in such matters as legislation and forgiveness (the grammatical information of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18) (Martin).

This grammatic structure forever shows that even if apostolic succession were true, those apostles or bishops would not have the authority to decree and force Heaven to comply or accept what has been decreed on earth. "Jesus is not giving the church the right to make decisions that will then become binding on God. Such a thought is alien from anything in his teaching. He is saying that as the church is responsive to the guidance of God, it will come to the decisions that have already been made in heaven" (Merkle 102). Julius R. Mantey says, "The apostles simply will be ratifying in their official capacity what has already been decided and established in heaven. A false understanding of the Greek tenses can lead to arbitrary and misleading exegesis. A correct understanding will throw light and clarity upon God's true revelation" (Battle).

The periphrastic future perfects are then perfectly natural: Peter accomplishes this binding and loosing by proclaiming a gospel that has already been given and by making personal application on that basis (Simon Magus). Whatever he binds or looses will have been bound or loosed, so long as he adheres to that divinely disclosed gospel....he may be authoritative in binding and loosing because heaven has acted first (cf. Acts 18:9-10) (Binding and Loosing 6: D.A. Carson).

Peter allowed entrance (used the keys) into the kingdom on that day. He did so by preaching the gospel. The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11; Mat. 13:19). When the gospel is preached today and people accept and obey it, they are allowed entrance into God's kingdom (cf. Col. 1:13-14). This is another reason the pure gospel is so important (see Gal. 1:6-9) (Martin).

Claim 3: Absolution Is Found Only Through The Priests And Bishops.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, regarding the Eucharist (Lord's Supper), the apostles are called the "priests of the New Covenant." Therefore, they claim this created a succession of priests down to the current bishops which may provide absolution.

Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it. By doing so, **the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant:** 'For their sakes I sanctify

myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth' (Jn. 17:19) (Catechism Pg 174, emphasis mine).

The succession of priests keeps me, beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave it in charge to feed His sheep, down to **the present episcopate**. (Augustine 325 A.D.; Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus, Ch. 4, emphasis mine).

Absolution is "remission of sins pronounced by a priest (as in the sacrament of reconciliation)" (Merriam-Webster). John 20:23 is the go-to passage for Catholics who believe in the authority and powers of the priest or bishop to forgive sin.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained (John 20:21-23).

However, in context this is the ability to preach the gospel, the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47). This was their authority to preach the saving message of the gospel of Christ. Jesus spoke John 20:23 before his ascension. In Acts 1, the apostles were to wait in Jerusalem for power from on high. When this power came in Acts 2, when the

apostles were asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), they did not simply voice forgiveness by saying ‘we remit your sins,’ or ‘you are forgiven by God in Heaven because we have said you are forgiven on earth.’ Rather, they preached the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-23) and people responded (Acts 18:8).

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls... the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:38-41, 47b).

Let us always remember, “who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7). Jesus as the divine Son of God had that authority while on earth and verified it by miracles. No other man has this authority nor power today. Due to an unfortunate translation of the original Greek perfect tense in John 20:23, often we gain an unbalanced view.

How are the future periphrastic perfects to be translated? In 1938, J.R. Mantey (“The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense in John 20:23, Matthew 16:19, and Matthew 18:18,”

JBL 58 [1939]: 243–49) argued that the perfects in all three instances must have their normal force. The finite perfect in John 20:23 must be rendered “If you forgive anyone his sins, they have already been forgiven”; and when the perfect participle is given its full force in the Matthean passages, the periphrastic future perfect in 16:19 becomes “what-ever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (similarly for 18:18). Thus, as Mantey insisted, there is no evidence for “sacerdotalism or priestly absolution” in the NT... Dayton’s short lists of periphrastic future perfects in Strabo, Lucian, and some papyri; for all these retain perfect force, even when used in the apodosis of a general condition. This is valuable comparative material, since periphrastic future perfects in the NT are very rare; and there are no finite future perfects at all” (*Binding and Loosing*).

It “was not until the torch of learning and theology passed from the Greek-speaking and Greek-writing Ante-Nicene Fathers to the Latin-writing Fathers that these passages were used to support such a doctrine as sacerdotalism” (Dayton 76).

The commission to forgive sins is phrased in an unusual construction. Literally, it is: ‘Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not

forgive have not been forgiven.’ The first verbs in the two clauses are aorists, which imply the action of an instant; the second verbs are perfects, which imply an abiding state that began before the action of the first verbs. God does not forgive men’s sins because we decide to do so nor withhold forgiveness because we will not grant it. We announce it; we do not create it...And all who proclaim the gospel are in effect forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the hearer accepts or rejects the Lord Jesus...” (Gaebelein 193-194).

Mantey says:

...according to the unanimous testimony of all Greek grammarians, the perfect tense pictures a past action, the result of which was present to the speaker or writer... the perfect tense always implies past action, even though the emphasis is on the continuance of the results... Thus a literal translation would seem to rule out the origination of the forgiveness in the human agent and demand that the forgiveness be an already accomplished fact (at least in the Divine purpose) at the time to which Jesus referred. In other words, the human agent must treat as forgiven none except those whom God had already forgiv-en. The forgiveness would then be a divine act simply proclaimed by the human agent but not in any real sense accomplished by him (Dayton 77, 84).

After a disciple asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), Jesus laid out a pattern for the believer to pray for forgiveness directly from God; “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mat. 6:12). In our Lord’s parable regarding humility in prayer, the publican prayed directly to God, and forgiveness was granted by God as a result (Luke 18:11-14).

Often, Catholics will use James 5:15-16 to support their beliefs in confessing to a priest. Yet, the context shows “elders” of the church being called to pray for the sick person, not a “bishop” or a “Catholic priest.” James shows the power of prayer for the Christian who needs forgiveness. “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:15-16). In this text, we confess to each other, not to a “priest,” though technical-ly every Christian is a priest in the priesthood of God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). The Hebrew author teaches us that we can come to the throne of grace ourselves: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Peter told Simon (a baptized believer, Acts 8:12-13) to repent of his sin and pray directly to God for forgiveness. “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

Claim 4: Peter And All Succeeding Popes Are The Supreme Chief Shepherds.

Jesus told Peter in John 21 to feed, tend, and shepherd the lambs and sheep, making him the supreme shepherd. They believe "...the pastoral office of the Church was conferred on Peter" due to the statements made in John 21 (Gontard 43). No, actually Peter himself said he was simply a fellow elder under the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 5:1-4). We can clearly see when there were Shepherds (Pastors, Bishops, Overseers, Presbyters, Elders) appointed, there were a plurality (two or more, Phi. 1:1) at every church (Acts 14:23) in every city (Tit. 1:5). This prevented there being a chief bishop at any congregation, lording it over the flock (1 Pet. 5) like a Diotrephes (3 John 1:9). Peter being the greatest was not understood: "But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest" (Mark 9:34). When you consider 1 Peter 5:1-4, you can see Peter describes himself as an elder (bishop) among many others. He then proceeded to instruct them; "You all [second person plural] shep-herd the flock among yourselves, exercising oversight [episkopountes, doing the work of bishoping]." Peter clearly did not believe that when Jesus told him to "feed/shepherd my sheep" (John 21:15-25, 16), it meant to take this responsibility alone. Rather, Peter taught each and every elder (bishop) was to feed and shepherd their local flock.

Claim 5: The Apostolic Influence Will Never Cease.

They claim that the apostles are the foundation of the church and their influence will never cease due to

apostolic succession in the Roman Catholic Church. “And are built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). What is interesting is that this passage not only references apostles, but also prophets. The truth is, if we continue to have the line of apostles today, we also continue to have prophets speaking for God today, since both are the foundation of the church. We certainly believe that both the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church, as both wrote down their revelation from Christ through the Holy Spirit for us to read and understand (Eph. 3:1-5). It is also interesting that the foundations mentioned in Revelation are twelve **equal** foundations—Peter is not exalted nor even acknowledged as superior; “And the wall of the city had **twelve foundations**, and in them the names of the **twelve apostles** of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14).

Neither Peter nor Paul appointed other apostles. Paul taught Titus to appoint (ordain) Elders to oversee and to teach the word and to remain true to the word. “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). No one was given the apostolic position, neither was it passed on through succession. To qualify, one had to see the resurrected Christ (Acts 1). That office has not been handed down. True apostolic succession is holding to the word given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and written and persevered by God. Paul did not command Christians to listen to future apostles (Gal. 1:6-9);

rather, they were to read what he wrote by inspiration (Eph. 3:1-5). When he departed from the elders (Acts 20:17) of the church in Ephesus, he commended them to God and His Word, not to future men or apostles. “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 20:32).

Claim 6: Papal Infallibility

Papal Infallibility is an important part of the Catholic faith. During the First Vatican Council, the 20th Ecumenical Council (1869-1870 A.D.), held under Pope Pius IX, they decreed the infallibility of the papacy.

Therefore, **faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith**, for the glory of God our Savior, the exaltation of the Catholic Religion, and the salvation of Christian people, the Sacred Council approving, We teach and define that it is a **divinely-revealed dogma**: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex Cathedra, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining

doctrine regarding faith or morals: and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church (Vatican I, Chapter IV, S22, bold emphasis mine).

From the time of the apostles (they claim) the Roman pontiff had supreme, immediate, and universal jurisdiction over the entire church, not only speaking infallibly on faith and morals but also discipline. You would be shocked at the many contradictions made through the years by various popes. If this tradition was received from the beginning of the Christian faith, why was it only an official doctrine in 1870? If this is really a part of the deposit of the faith, why was it not revealed until more than 1800 later? Why was it not believed by previous popes?

The Catholic Encyclopedia states,

(1) Under the control of the church are two swords, that of two powers, the expression referring to the medieval theory of the two swords, the spiritual and the secular... (2) Both swords are in the power of the church; the spiritual is wielded in the church by the hand of the clergy; the secular is to be employed for the Church by the hand of the civil authorities, but under the direction of the spiritual power. (3) The one sword must be subordinate to the other; the earthly power must submit to the spiritual authority, as this has precedence of the secular on account of its greatness and sublimity; for the spiritual

power has the right to establish and guide the secular power, and also to judge it when it does not act rightly... (4) This authority, although granted to man, and exercised by man, is not a human authority, but rather a divine one, granted to Peter by divine commission and confirmed to him and his successors. Consequently, whoever opposes the power ordained of God and opposes the law of God... Now, therefore, we declare, say, determine and pronounce that for every human creature it is necessary for salvation to be subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff (178-179).

Yet Jesus said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mat. 22:21). If it was not necessary to render to Caesar anything, then why would Jesus say this?

The Official Roman Catholic almanac states:

The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but, as it were, God, and the Vicar of Christ. The Pope is of such lofty dignity that properly speaking, he has not been established in any rank of dignity, but rather has been placed upon the very summit of all ranks of dignities. He is likewise the Divine Monarch and Supreme Emperor, and King of Kings. The Pope is of so great authority that he can modify, explain or interpret even divine law (*Prompta Bibliotheca* 180).

The apostle Paul describes an office that takes the sacred position for men:

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 Thes. 2:3-4).

Peter did not think of himself as the “vicar of Christ” (Acts 10:25, 26).

Can. 749 §1. By virtue of his office, **the Supreme Pontiff possesses infallibility** in teaching when as the supreme pastor and teacher of all the Christian faithful, who strengthens his brothers and sisters in the faith, he proclaims by definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held. §2. **The college of bishops also possesses infallibility** in teaching when the bishops gathered together in an ecumenical council exercise the magisterium as teachers and judges of faith and morals who declare for the universal Church that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held definitively; or when dispersed throughout the world but preserving the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter and teaching authentically together with the Roman Pontiff matters of faith or morals, they agree that a particular proposition is

to be held definitively. §3. No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident (*Code of Cannon Law*).

Just one contradiction proves there is no infallibility in the papacy. Truth never contradicts itself.

Zosimus (417-418) reversed the pronouncement of a previous pope and retracted a doctrinal pronouncement he had himself previously made. The Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681) condemned Honorius as a heretic. Leo II also condemned Honorius. This means that “infallible” popes condemned other “infallible” popes as heretics. In 495 Gelasius issued a decree which regarded the Assumption of Mary as heresy and its proponents as heretics. In the sixth century, Hormisdas also condemned this doctrine as heresy. These infallible popes declared a doctrine to be heresy; yet, on November 1, 1950, Pius XII... officially declared the Assumption of Mary to be a dogma of their faith and required people to believe it without question. Pope Pius XII’s definition regarding the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, has these words: “Hence if anyone, which God forbid, should dare willfully to deny or to call into doubt that which we have defined, let him know that he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic Faith.” One must wonder whether Gelasius and Hormisdas were infallible or whether Pius XII was infallible. Someone believes a heresy (Sanders 2-3).

Claim 7: The Pope Is Our Supreme Judge.

[In] matters of jurisdiction [the pope] enjoys supreme, universal and immediate jurisdiction over the whole Church and every member of it. This supremacy is not given by the cardinals who elect him, but immediately by God. The Pope is the Church's supreme and infallible teacher, its supreme legislator, and its supreme judge (Bertrand Conway, *The Question Box*, San Francisco: Catholic Truth Society, 1929, p. 158). (Jackson, Peter Vs. the Papacy).

I take great comfort knowing that my Savior, Jesus Christ, the sacrificial lamb of God will judge me on that great day of judgment (Acts 17:31; John 12:48) and not a fallible, fickle, unpredictable human. Our God holds "no respect of persons" or partiality (Acts 10:34). If popes overturned previous popes' decisions, then how can we take confidence that they will judge us fairly and without change or alteration, as a just and fair sovereign?

In conclusion, apostolic succession through the bishops is unsubstantiated and false. Therefore, tradition and the teaching authority of the church lose their power because apostolic succession is removed and refuted. The Scriptures contain all the truth and authority for us today.

WORKS CITED

2 Timothy 2:15 Interlinear, biblehub.com/interlinear/2_timothy/2-15.htm

“Absolution.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/absolution. *American Standard Version* (ASV). www.biblegateway.com

“Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus.” *CHURCH FATHERS: Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus* (Augustine), www.newadvent.org/fathers/1405.htm.

Battle, John A. “The Present Indicative in New Testament Exegesis.” faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/New_Testament_Greek/Text/Battle-PresentTense/Battle-PresentTense.htm

Binding and Loosing. Logos, evchurch.info/growthgroups/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/22Binding22-22Loosing22.pdf

Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. *Strong’s Hebrew: 6486*. biblehub.com/hebrew/6486.htm. Unabridged, Electronic Database, Biblesoft, Inc.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: with Modifications from the Editio Typica. Doubleday, 2003.

Ephesians 5:17 Interlinear, biblehub.com/interlinear/ephesians/5-17.htm.

Gaebelein, Frank Ely, et al. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Vol. 9*. Regency Reference Library/Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

Gontard, Friedrich. *The Chair of Peter: a History of the Papacy*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. 1964.

-
- Jackson, Wayne. "Matthew 16:19 -- Binding and Loosing." *ChristianCourier.com*. Access date: March 26, 2020. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1127-matthew-16-19-binding-and-loosing>.
- Jackson, Wayne. "Peter Vs. the Papacy." *ChristianCourier.com*. Access date: March 26, 2020. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/691-peter-vs-the-papacy>
- King James Version* (KJV). www.biblegateway.com
- Martin, Don. An Exchange on Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, www.bibletruths.net/Archives/BTAR381.htm.
- Merkle, Benjamin L. *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation*. 2019. Baker Academic. Pg 75-76. Pg 102.
- Mounce Reverse-Interlinear New Testament (MOUNCE). www.biblegateway.com
- New American Bible (Revised Edition)* (NABRE). www.biblegateway.com
- New English Translation* (NET). www.biblegateway.com
- New King James Version* (NKJV). www.biblegateway.com
- Prompta Bibliotheca, Rome: Propaganda Fide Press, article: "Papa."
- The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: McGraw & Hill. XV, 126.
- Sanders, Phil. "Is the Pope Infallible?" Academia.edu - Share Research, www.academia.edu/.
- Utley, Bob. Matthew 16 Lesson by Dr. Bob Utley. [youtu.be/17BRDlai3tI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17BRDlai3tI).

“Vatican II: Dei Verbum.” Dei Verbum, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

“Vatican I.” Dogmatic Constitution On The Church Of Christ, catholicplanet.org/councils/20-Pastor-Aeternus.htm.

World English Bible (WEB). www.biblegateway.com

Wycliffe Bible (WYC). www.biblegateway.com.

Young’s Literal Translation (YLT). www.biblegateway.com

Pentecostalism

Philip Davis



Philip has been married to Rebecca for 37 years and together they have 2 sons and 1 grandson. He has been educated at the University of Oklahoma and the Tennessee Bible College. He has worked as an architect in the State of Texas. Philip has spoken on various lectureships and has several published articles. He has done local work in Oklahoma, Alabama, and Tennessee. For the past 23 years, he has been the Pulpit Minister of the Grundy Street congregation in Tullahoma, TN.

This chapter of the 2020 Power Lectureship Book undertakes an overview of Pentecostal belief and practice and to offer suggestions on how to convert such believers. We are not speaking only of one particular body (e.g.: The United Pentecostal Church) but of the principles that underlay this form of thinking. These beliefs are found in many denominations and have served as the cause of the creation of many new churches, “fellowships,” and divisions. Pentecostal groups vary to some extent in their doctrine and structure. Most hold to the concept of modern-day miracles continuing among Christians. Some believe these to be a sign of sanctification, sometimes relating this to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Others believe in sanctification after receiving the ability to work miracles. (See *Encyclopedia Britannica online*. for some of the finer distinctions.)

Pentecostalism often seems, to this writer, to rely

heavily on an approach of subjective perceptions, extreme emotions, misguided feelings, and misunderstanding of Scripture. Those who so believe may be some of the more enthusiastic of religious people in the nominally Christian world. They are sincere, zealous, and devoted to their beliefs. However, these beliefs often depart from Biblical principle. We intend to afford respect to those who believe these doctrines and express admiration of their enthusiasm. First Corinthians 13 says “love believes all things”, so we extend the benefit of the doubt toward such people although we deny the correctness of some of their teachings. We presume their sincerity.

Introduction

The views of Pentecostals appear to some authorities to be related, at least in some ways, to the **Montanists** of the early Christian era. Montanist beliefs were widely disputed and rejected by some in the Christian community of the day. Those objections were not dissimilar to our objections to Pentecostal doctrines on the miraculous. They were known as “The New Prophecy” which certainly foreshadows the so-called prophecies of Pentecostals. It is likely that modern Pentecostals protest such criticisms as the Montanists did.

Montanism, known by its adherents as the **New Prophecy**, was an early Christian movement of the late 2nd century, later referred to by the name of its founder, Montanus.

Montanism held similar views about the basic tenets of Christian theology to those of the

wider Christian Church, but it was labelled a heresy for its belief in new prophetic revelations. The prophetic movement called for a reliance on the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit and a more conservative personal ethic. Parallels have been drawn between Montanism and modern-day movements such as Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement. (*Wikipedia, Online, S.V. Montanism*)

Each faithful believer in God wishes to please Him. This is natural. Some people contend that a **direct experience** with the Divine is the manner in which this transpires. Miracles are thought to be worked on them so that they can work miracles before and upon other people. That they would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to them, indicates God's acceptance of them, and nearness to them. Some religious writers suggest that this comes from an emotional need, often accompanying some traumatic life event. Perhaps a family member dies unexpectedly. "Feeling closeness with God" is comforting to survivors. A study by African scholars specifies some of the inconsistencies of Pentecostal thought and the Scriptural example. (This will be expanded and documented below.)

Such believers frequently attempt to substantiate their claims by purported demonstrations, such as "speaking in tongues," of which Paul once commented that they are among the least of miracles (1 Cor. 13:5). Whether their alleged proof of salvation and God's demonstration of approval arise from the miracles they claim to receive, the appearance of angels, or some supernatural

manifestation in a revelation from Heaven (one that only the individual can perceive) they feel that they are receiving assurance of acceptance from the Deity.

We see, then, that some people who believe Jesus to be the Christ of God express their faith in these extraordinary ways. They may faint or swoon (calling it being “slain in the Spirit”). They are known to go into trance-like states. They may speak what they believe is “the tongues of ... men or of angels” (1 Cor. 13:1) sometimes called ecstatic utterances. They may claim miraculous healings. Some claim even to handle venomous snakes without harm, misaplying Mark 16:17, though they are not among the “main-line” in this movement and are diminishing in numbers (as one could reasonably expect).

Such people have read Acts 2 in which the Holy Spirit fell upon the Apostles, allowing them to perform miracles and wonders as God dispensed to each severally. The apostles were seen with “cloven tongues as of fire” hovering over them (Acts 2:3), signifying their status and identity as authoritative prophetic revealers of God’s inspired word and will. They spoke in languages that they had not studied. They accomplished great feats of power among the people which could not be accomplished by mere mortal man unaided by Divine power. They could work miracles in the literal sense of that term. While others were there, and some were given the ability to do some signs, only the apostles received the apostolic measure of the Spirit.

Cornelius’ household also received the baptism of

the Spirit, as did the apostles, but they were not thus given all of the abilities of apostles, nor were they vested with their authority. Those were limited to the twelve over which the Spirit hovered at Pentecost.

Pentecostals believe that Holy Spirit baptism is available to all Christians and that at least some of them have experienced it. They would, perhaps, misapprehend Acts 2:38 “And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” to mean “receive the Holy Spirit as a gift”, another mistaken notion.

For so long as the apostles lived, serving Jesus in their apostolic role, they were, at specific times and in certain circumstances, empowered to perform these signs and miracles. Consider the example of Peter pronouncing the Divine judicial sentence upon Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 8). These Christians fell dead as they re-entered the place where Peter was staying. Not much time elapsed between their separate arrivals and little time passed between their lies, born of conspiracy, and their separate deaths. Two miraculous deaths occurred that day. Thus, “fear fell upon...”

Acts 8:9ff (NKJV) But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things

concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

Other disciples upon whom the Apostles had “laid hands” (as in Acts 19:6) were enabled to work some miracles. They could not pass the power to other disciples. Thus, miracles ended when these disciples died. God has declared that His word is sufficient and that miracles are inferior to the Inspired Word. Since miracles always served to either assert the will of God or to demonstrate that the miracle worker was speaking in God’s behalf, when Scripture was completed the need for miracles ceased. (Compare Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 13 and Peter’s affirmation that the Bible now provides all that the believer needs to please God, (1 Peter 1:3). Pentecostals may attempt to justify their beliefs by citing John 14:12ff which was also limited to some people in the day of miracles. Jesus had told the apostles that His own miracles would be reflected in those that they performed, and would even exceed His in number, (John 5:20ff).

More certain word of prophecy – 2 Pet. 1:19
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: 20 Knowing this first, that no
prophecy of the scripture is of any private
interpretation. 21 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.

Charismatics v. Pentecostals

One should be aware of the distinction between Charismatics and Pentecostals. Not all Charismatics

are Pentecostals; but generally, all Pentecostals are charismatics. As previously stated, they believe in ongoing, miraculous abilities as distributed to people by the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals are not the only believers to hold to “Charismatic” doctrine. For instance, Catholic dogma and most Catholics believe in ongoing Divine revelation, such as when the “Pope” speaks *ex cathedra* – in his official capacity. In fact, they believe that when so speaking, he cannot make a doctrinal error, being inspired.

Protestant charismatics do not normally agree with this papal inspiration and power. Yet many claim miraculous power as proof of their spiritual condition and relationship to God. A good question is, if both Catholic and Protestant charismatic prophesy by the Holy Spirit, why do their doctrines conflict.

In many ways, Pentecostalism is an outgrowth of Protestantism with its basic tenets, such as salvation by faith alone. Their transformation from the simplicity of early Protestant Reformation teaching to their present theology consistently placed even greater emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit than others. This suggests that one can only be fully like the early Church by Holy Spirit baptism and the working of signs, wonders, and miracles. Again, here are some examples of Holy Spirit gifts: speaking in tongues, divine healing, and other manifestations of supernatural power granted by the Spirit. While these gifts were possessed by only some first-century Christians (see 1 Cor. 12), Scripture teaches that they served to give proof of the teaching that accompanied them. They were not meant for personal edification so much as for the unbeliever and to build

up other Christians. Compare the explanation in **The Gospel according to John** concerning Jesus' miracles.

John 20:30 – (NKJV) And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Some miracles were given to prove the authenticity and authority of the inspired speaker to give God's instruction to humanity. Others were meant to lead the non-Christian to believe the teaching given by the miracle-working Christian who was not an apostle or prophet. That teaching agreed with that which the Apostles taught. Nor were such supernatural abilities intended to remain after the completion of the canon of the New Testament, since it teaches "all things pertaining to life and godliness," (2 Peter 1:3). (Note Wikipedia @ "CHARISMATIC RELIGION" [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?search=CHARISMATIC+RELIGION &title= Special %3ASearch &go=Go&ns0=1](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?search=CHARISMATIC+RELIGION&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go&ns0=1)); Pentecostalism – origins, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentecostalism>).

I. Further History & Some Basic Beliefs And Teachings Of The System

(When studying Pentecostalism, a Google search yields many sources. Some of these support and some oppose

the doctrine. It is strongly recommended that the reader learn more about some the various Pentecostal beliefs by reading such references as the online editions of The Encyclopedia Britannica and Wikipedia. We will quote extended parts of these articles here.)

Britannica's J. Gordon Melton, with some evident skepticism, writes the following:

“Pentecostalism, (is the) charismatic religious movement that gave rise to a number of Protestant churches in the United States in the 20th century and that is unique in its belief that all Christians should seek a postconversion (sic) religious experience called baptism with the Holy Spirit. Recalling the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the first Christians in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, or Shabuoth (Acts of the Apostles 2–4), this experience appears to have been common in the Christian movement during its first generations.

“Baptism with the Holy Spirit is also believed to be accompanied by a sign, the gift of tongues. This “speaking in tongues” occurs as **glossalalia** (speech in an unknown language) or **xenoglossy** (speech in a language known to others but not the speaker). Speaking in tongues is considered one of the gifts of the Spirit described by St. Paul the Apostle (1 Corinthians 12), and Pentecostals believe that those baptized by the Holy Spirit may receive other supernatural gifts that purportedly existed in the early church: the ability to prophesy, to heal,

or to interpret speaking in tongues. Faith healing is also part of the Pentecostal tradition, which reflects patterns of faith and practice characteristic of the Baptist and Methodist-Holiness churches—the Protestant denominations from which most of the first generation of Pentecostals came. Like them, Pentecostals emphasize conversion, moral rigour, and a literal interpretation of the Bible. However, Pentecostals never formed a single organization; instead individual congregations came together to found the various denominations that constitute the movement today.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Online* edition, accessed 1 May 2020).

Distinction: “glossolalia” vs. “xenolalia”

Glossolalia is the phenomenon of (apparently) speaking in an unknown language, especially in religious worship. It is practiced especially by Pentecostal and charismatic Christians. The difference between glossolalia and xenolalia is this: In general, coming from the Greek, “*glossolalia*” can refer to 1) speaking in either a variety of **different** languages or 2) speaking in incomprehensible sounds/gibberish/non-real languages. “**Xenolalia**” refers to speaking in many real languages. (*Oxford Dictionary*, Sep 7, 2019)

Wikipedia, offers this description.

Pentecostalism or Classical Pentecostalism is a Protestant Christian movement that

emphasises (sic) direct personal experience of God through baptism with the Holy Spirit. The term Pentecostal is derived from Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks. For Christians, this event commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Pentecostalism emerged in the early 20th century among radical adherents of the Holiness movement who were energized by revivalism and expectation for the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Believing that they were living in the end times, they expected God to spiritually renew the Christian Church thereby bringing to pass the restoration of spiritual gifts and the evangelization of the world. In 1900, Charles Parham, an American evangelist and faith healer, began teaching that speaking in tongues was the Bible evidence of Spirit baptism and along with William J. Seymour, a Wesleyan-Holiness preacher, he taught that this was the third work of grace. The three-year-long Azusa Street Revival, founded and led by Seymour in Los Angeles, California, resulted in the spread of Pentecostalism throughout the United States and the rest of the world as visitors carried the Pentecostal experience back to their home churches or felt called to the mission field. While virtually all Pentecostal denominations trace their origins to Azusa Street, the movement

has experienced a variety of divisions and controversies. An early dispute centered on challenges to the doctrine of the Trinity. As a result, the Pentecostal movement is divided between trinitarian and non-trinitarian branches, resulting in the emergence of Oneness Pentecostals.

Comprising over 700 denominations and many independent churches, there is no central authority governing Pentecostalism; however, many denominations are affiliated with the Pentecostal World Fellowship. There are over 279 million Pentecostals worldwide, and the movement is growing in many parts of the world, especially the global South. Since the 1960s, Pentecostalism has increasingly gained acceptance from other Christian traditions, and Pentecostal beliefs concerning Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts have been embraced by non-Pentecostal Christians in Protestant and Catholic churches through the Charismatic Movement. Together, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity numbers over 500 million adherents. While the movement originally attracted mostly lower classes in the global South, there is an increasing appeal to middle classes. Middle class congregations tend to be more adapted to society and withdraw strong spiritual practices such as divine healing.

Pentecostals, with their background in the Holiness movement, historically teach that baptism with the Holy Spirit, as evidenced

by glossolalia, is the third work of grace, which follows the new birth (first work of grace) and entire sanctification (second work of grace).

Pentecostals believe that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is available to all Christians. Repentance from sin and being born again are fundamental requirements to receive it. There must also be in the believer a deep conviction of needing more of God in his or her life, and a measure of consecration by which the believer yields himself or herself to the will of God. Citing instances in the Book of Acts where believers were Spirit baptized before they were baptized with water, most Pentecostals believe a Christian need not have been baptized in water to receive Spirit baptism. However, Pentecostals do believe that the biblical pattern is “repentance, regeneration, water baptism, and then the baptism with the Holy Ghost”. There are Pentecostal believers who have claimed to receive their baptism with the Holy Spirit while being water baptized.

It is received by having faith in God’s promise to fill the believer and in yielding the entire being to Christ. Certain conditions, if present in a believer’s life, could cause delay in receiving Spirit baptism, such as “weak faith, unholy living, imperfect consecration, and egocentric motives”. In the absence of these, Pentecostals teach that seekers

should maintain a persistent faith in the knowledge that God will fulfill his promise. For Pentecostals, there is no prescribed manner in which a believer will be filled with the Spirit. It could be expected or unexpected, during public or private prayer.

Beliefs: Pentecostalism is an evangelical faith, emphasizing the reliability of the Bible and the need for the transformation of an individual's life through faith in Jesus. Like other evangelicals, Pentecostals generally adhere to the Bible's divine inspiration and inerrancy—the belief that the Bible, in the original manuscripts in which it was written, is without error. **Pentecostals emphasize the teaching of the “full gospel” or “foursquare gospel”.** The term foursquare refers to the four fundamental beliefs of Pentecostalism: **Jesus saves according to John 3:16; baptizes with the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:4; heals bodily according to James 5:15; and is coming again to receive those who are saved according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17.** (Emphasis mine – PD)

Salvation: (Main article: Christian soteriology) The central belief of classical Pentecostalism is that through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sins can be forgiven, and humanity reconciled with God. This is the Gospel or “good news”. The fundamental requirement of Pentecostalism is that one be born again. The new birth is

received by the grace of God through faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. In being born again, the believer is regenerated, justified, adopted into the family of God, and the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification is initiated.

Classical Pentecostal soteriology is generally **Arminian** rather than **Calvinist**. (**which differs significantly in areas from Scriptural teaching – PD**). The security of the believer is a doctrine held within Pentecostalism; nevertheless, this security is conditional upon continual faith and repentance. Pentecostals believe in both a literal heaven and hell, the former for those who have accepted God's gift of salvation and the latter for those who have rejected it.

For most Pentecostals there is no other requirement to receive salvation. Baptism with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues are not generally required, though Pentecostal converts are usually encouraged to seek these experiences. A notable exception is Jesus' Name Pentecostalism, most adherents of which believe both water baptism and Spirit baptism are integral components of salvation.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Main article: Baptism with the Holy Spirit):

Pentecostals identify three distinct uses of the word "baptism" in the New Testament: Baptism into the body of Christ: This refers to salvation. Every believer in Christ is made a part of his body, the Church, through baptism. The Holy Spirit is the agent, and

the body of Christ is the medium. Water baptism: Symbolic of dying to the world and living in Christ, water baptism is an outward symbolic expression of that which has already been accomplished by the Holy Spirit, namely baptism into the body of Christ. Baptism with the Holy Spirit: This is an experience distinct from baptism into the body of Christ. In this baptism, Christ is the agent and the Holy Spirit is the medium.

Claims

Pentecostals' claims of supernatural powers implies the continued need of the confirmation of Christian teaching, which these miracles supply. It thus ufficiency of Scripture. This directly contradicts a Biblical statement of truth. Thus, it must be false.

II. SOME SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO PERSUADE PENTECOSTALS OF THE TRUTH, & OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Since Pentecostals are so firmly convinced that their feelings are proof of a Divine experience, one must answer with rational objections. Consider these.

- After Pentecost of Acts 2, some of the disciples, but not all, were empowered to accomplish feats beyond natural abilities:

Eph. 4:11ff - And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for

the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

- Compare 1 Cor. 13 in which Paul classes spiritual gifts as “that which is in part” and is going to pass with the coming of “the perfect”, which is the completed Bible.

- As the canon of Scripture was enlarged and completed, the miraculous, affirmative, and supernatural help they supplied disappeared from the scene. with the death of those upon whom the Apostles laid hands.

- The inspired Apostle Peter wrote that the Scriptures give “all things pertaining unto life and godliness.” Thus, miracles were no longer needed to confirm the Truth. Now, Christians could live faithful, productive lives by means of their Biblical knowledge. It was provided by revelation (2 Peter 1). Since only a limited number of Christians ever were given a miraculous “gift,” and that by the laying-on of the apostles’ hands, necessarily these abilities decreased in frequency as the Apostles died. Ultimately they disappeared.

- One who wishes to argue for an ongoing, Holy Spirit-powered element in believers’ lives must present proof of their continuation in our day. Some may claim such abilities. Others may swear that tears flow from the eyes of statues of “the saints”, or that blood drains from the wounds in statues of Jesus, but no real proof is available. No Biblical evidence exists that documents direct conferral of “gifts” by the Holy Spirit to the

saints in any other way nor past these earliest years of Christianity. Further, no one has raised a person from the dead since the Apostles' day.

The purpose of signs, wonders, and miracles was to affirm the authority of the one working them to speak or act in God's behalf to confirm complete revelation. That goal being accomplished, the wondrous abilities were no longer required. God took them from the scene to give the written revelation of His will the supreme place in forming faith (Rom. 10:17, etc.). (John 21 – that ye may believe).

**Pentecostalism Rests On Several Concepts,
Including These:**

- That the Bible alone is not sufficient to supply the needs of a Christian (2 Peter 1), so miracles must continue. But, they do not. So, it is false that the Bible is insufficient (that is, the Bible is our only guide and supplies our needs.)
- So-called miracles of today are the same as the signs, wonders, and miracles worked by Jesus and his apostles and some other of the disciples. This is false.
- That the “full Gospel” when preached includes the reception of miraculous abilities throughout the Christian era, which is an assertion, not a statement of Biblical truth. It ignores the temporary nature of the miraculous in the Christian age and the fact that in Old Testament times, only a few were witness to a host of wonders and signs, especially associated with new revelation.

- Enough faith will enable one to work miracles such as moving mountains. But, to whom did He speak such words? If He were to speak them to modern people of sufficient faith, we, too, could perform them, but He has not. Faith comes by hearing God's revelation (Rom. 10:17).
- That Inspiration has not completed revealing the will of God. It is doing so through miraculous prophecy today, which contradicts both Paul's and Peter's writings.

Suggested Objections And Answers To Pentecostal Doctrine

Beyond the refutation of the standard, erroneous Evangelical and Reformed doctrines that they accept (such as original sin, salvation by faith only, etc.) I believe the strongest means of refuting their is shown by asserting the lack of evidence necessary to prove their assertions of the Holy Spirit presently working miracles through them.

1) We move to positive objections to common Pentecostal beliefs.

2) Tongue-speaking as described in the Bible is not the same as similar-appearing contemporary phenomena. At least some examples are undecipherable noises or imitations of known words in a setting of great religious fervor and excitement wherein such signs are expected. At times, the description used includes "ecstatic utterances." These were not a part of the Biblically described occurrences. One source posits this proposition:

Glossolalia is a very important element in the life of Pentecostal Churches and is at the centre of their spirituality. This paper examines the gift of speaking in tongues from a psychological perspective in order to find out what psychologists say about this very important gift of the Holy Spirit. The paper begins by looking at the history of speaking in tongues in the Church from the day of Pentecost and how it has become the symbol of God's presence in the life of believers in Pentecostal Churches in Botswana today. The paper interrogates glossolalia on whether it is divine language or human language spoken by people who are emotionally charged. This research was undertaken in order to understand glossolalia better, since it is a contested area not only among Christians but also in other world religions where this phenomenon is widely manifested. The present work shows that while theologians are justified to consider glossolalia as divine language, there are indications that in some instances speaking in tongues can be a result of anxiety and human attempts to prove that the Holy Spirit is truly present in one's spiritual life. This conclusion has been reached especially in cases where it has been found that glossolalia is a learned language.

“there are indications that in some instances speaking in tongues can be a result of anxiety and human attempts to prove that the Holy Spirit is truly present in one's spiritual life. This

conclusion has been reached especially in cases where it has been found that glossolalia is a learned language.

Various scholars have noted that speaking in tongues is not peculiar to Christianity but that it is also common in other religions.

In the Apostolic period of the Christian era, glossolalia was in vogue and St. Paul makes repeated references to the same. It became a source of conflict and division in the church in Corinth where the congregation was divided between those who were able to speak in tongues and those who were not able to do so. Those who lacked the gift of speaking in tongues were despised by glossolalics (sic) as being not true Christians, something that prompted St. Paul to remind the believers that ecstatic utterance was by no means the only means by which the power of the Holy Spirit manifested itself in the Church. He observed that the Corinthians had too limited a concept of the Holy Spirit and reminded them that there are many gifts in the Church, but given by the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 1-11). He cautioned the Corinthians that speaking in tongues was not a passport to heaven and it was not a guarantee of the presence of the Holy Spirit, since the ecstatic phenomenon was similar to the kind of spiritual experience known to occur in pagan worship. During the Patristic period, Montanist communities spoke in tongues, experienced intense religious excitement and embraced martyrdom. They

accused members of the mainstream Christianity of being unspiritual and of rejecting the Holy Spirit because of their failure to speak in tongues. Apart from the periods mentioned above, attempts to reconstruct the movement of speaking tongues in the other epochs of Christian history have found scanty evidence.⁷

When we interviewed them after church services, as reflected in the six case studies below, regarding their understanding of glossolalia, almost all of them believed that tongues are a gift from God given through the Holy Spirit. They testified that when the irresistible spirit of God comes down upon them, the power of the Holy Spirit flows deeper into their souls. This prompts them to speak in strange languages. Few of our respondents claimed that they can interpret tongues. The majority of them said that no one has the gift of interpreting glossolalia. They said that only the Holy Spirit knows the meaning of tongues. Our observation was that those who spoke in tongues were inconsistent in their understanding of tongues. Some believed that tongues were meant to confuse the devil who cannot understand glossolalia, while others believed that tongues are meant to edify individual believers, to give them joy and deepen their spirituality.

We also noted that those who speak in tongues said that when they speak in tongues they display strange behaviour. For instance,

they fall down, crawl on the ground no matter how dirty it is and roll over with tremendous speed as a whirlwind. At other times they jump and clap hands and move around hissing and making noise which may be awkward to those who do not understand the works of the spirit. In our observation this displays elements of spirit possession leading to some form of recognisable set of symptoms or behaviour associated in most cases with distress and interference with personal functions, which is a sign of mental disorder. (Emph. mine – P.D.) .” (Tongue Speaking – see South African study; *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*; On-line version ISSN 2412-4265; Print version ISSN 1017-0499; *Studia Hist. Ecc.* vol.41 n.1 Pretoria 2015; <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2015/v41n1a2>; Articles – “Glossolalia: Divine Speech or man-made language? A psychological analysis of the gift of speaking in tongues in the Pentecostal Churches in Botswana”).

3) “From the periphery to the centre of religious worship” Kildahl (1972) in *Psychology of speaking in tongues* observed that until the late 1950s the practice of speaking in tongues was confined to a few extreme, theological conservative religious sects. The context in which speaking in tongues occurred was generally ecstatic - even hysteric. Then gradually the gift of speaking in tongues began also to appear in mainline Protestant Churches. Today the practice of speaking in tongues is found among Episcopalians in the United States of America,

among Evangelical Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and even Roman Catholics.

4) Other miracles listed in the New Testament are not replicated today. It is not for lack of “faith” or fervor among followers of this doctrine. The Lord limited these signs strictly to those mentioned above. If such wonders were extant in contemporary life, any miracle of the Bible should and would be performed by a believer. As God can use anyone to work a miracle when it is His will, then no one should die of the bite of a poisonous snake (as Paul in Acts 28 was not harmed though bitten severely by a viper, one of the deadliest of snakes known to the Bible). “Snake handlers” of some Charismatic groups should never suffer harm either. It is not reasonable to excuse these as not being God’s will at the moment.

5) People should still be able to raise the dead. In fact, no strong Christian need continue in the grave because of God’s raising him up by the power vested in other “Christians”, if indeed this is able to occur now. Obviously, there are Pentecostals buried in cemeteries frequently. None of them has yet arisen.

6) People should still be able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to prophesy the future. One of the supernatural gifts, a favored one, was to prophesy the future. Those prophecies must agree with prophecies already recorded and with each other. Yet purported prophets and spokespersons for God often disagree with each other and the Bible.

7) People should still be associated with a death event like that of Ananias and Sapphira. That is, if one is dishonest in dealing with the Holy Spirit, he should

fall dead in short order. Again, where is the example of that occurring today?

8) Show that the Bible teaches the cessation, limited purpose, and ultimate reason for miracles. It was not to continue because it was to be (and has been) replaced by the New Testament. What could a miracle do to enhance our ability to be saved? Nothing that the Bible cannot do better. 2 Pet. 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed,

9) Further, to claim that one needs miraculous ability to enhance his Christianity is to suggest that the Bible is inadequate. This is blasphemous. Moreover, this implies that additional inspired information is even today being provided. If so, why should it not be collected and placed as addendums to the Bible? Some would contain information vital to salvation and discipleship. Obviously, the canon of Scripture was finalized long ago.

2. The Cessation of Miracles – Finally, in defense of the all-sufficiency of Scripture one needs to teach those things required to become a Christian and to stay faithful. Consider some pertinent passages. Paul writes:

1 Cor. 13:8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

Some try to argue that “the perfect” refers to the Jesus at the second coming. This is precluded by

the gender of the noun. It is neuter gender, not the masculine that is required if one is to claim this refers to the Lord.

Peter refers to the fact that Scripture (God's revelation to humanity) "furnishes us all things pertaining to life and godliness," (2 Pet. 1:3). Further, to claim prophecy and revelation past the days of the apostles is to contradict Paul in his declaration "though we or an angel from Heaven preach any other (kind of) gospel than that which has been preached, let him be anathema," (Gal. 1:8f). It also clashes with Jude who taught that "the faith (which had been) once for all delivered to the saints," (Jude 1:3). Obviously "the faith" and "the Gospel" cannot be properly separated from each other. Thus, supposed modern day revelation is spurious. It is to be rejected out of hand.

Conclusion

While their zeal is admirable and their enthusiasm is impressive, the theology of the Pentecostals' belief frequently misunderstands and misrepresents Scriptural teaching on both the nature and organization of the Church as well as the purpose and perpetuity of the miraculous. Either of these is sufficient to dismiss Pentecostalism as acceptable to Heaven. If they cannot present objective evidence of their claims, the system falls. The burden of proof is upon them to authenticate their claims.

WORKS CITED

1. *Bible, New King James Version*, Online:

BibleGateway.com

2. *Encyclopedia Britannica.com*, Online Edition

3. Glossolalia; Amanze, James & Shanduka, Tino. (2015). Glossolalia: Divine Speech or man-made language? A psychological analysis of the gift of speaking in tongues in the Pentecostal Churches in Botswana. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae (SHE)*. 41. 10.17159/2412-4265/2015/v41n1a2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304222427_Glossolalia_Divine_Speech_or_man-made_language_A_psychological_analysis_of_the_gift_of_speaking_in_tongues_in_the_Pentecostal_Churches_in_Botswana; http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1017-04992015000100002&lng=en&nrm=iso&tlng=en

Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae

On-line version ISSN 2412-4265

Print version ISSN 1017-0499

Studia Hist. Ecc. vol.41 n.1 Pretoria 2015

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2015/v41n1a2>

4. *Oxford Online Dictionary.com*

5. *Wikipedia.com*, Onlinele=Special%3ASearch&go=Go&ns0=1); Pentecostalism – origins, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentecostalism>).

Sincere, Devout Christians In The Denominations

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



Robert R. Taylor, Jr., was born in Bradford, Tennessee, in 1931. He was baptized in 1944. On September, 15, 1952, he married Irene, and for the next sixty four years, they walked hand in hand, before she passed on to her reward. Robert began preaching in 1949. He was educated at Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb and George Peabody for Teachers. Has done local work in TN and MS for fifty-six years. Has been at Ripley, Tennessee, for forty-one years. He has preached in about 500 gospel meetings over 700 lectureships throughout the nation. Robert has presented over 6,500 sermons on radio and TV. For 28 years he has helped with a prison ministry and baptized inmates. He serves as an instructor for the Online Academy of Biblical Studies for 15 years. He has two children and four grandchildren. He has authored thirty-five books and twenty-five tracts. For seventeen and one-half years wrote material for *Gospel Advocate Quarterlies* and the *Annual companion*. Between 1969 and 1977 served as a staff writer under B. C. Goodpasture, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*. On January 1, 2011, he retired from local work but continues to be an active member at Ripley. He is now spending time in gospel meetings, lectureships, and an immense amount of time in writing.

It is always a pleasure supreme to appear and speak on this good, great, and grand Lectureship each summer. My heartfelt gratitude is expressed for this 2020 Lectureship invitation.

The theme this year deals with a very timely, relevant topic – *Answering Error*. The world overflows with all kinds of error. Each assignment deals with one of these

errors.

My topic touches whether there are sincere, devout Christians in the denominations. Perhaps most people, were they asked this query, would respond with a quick affirmative. But what says Sacred Scripture? It is a NO—not a YES!

Some Thoughts About Sincere and Devout Set Forth

Sincere is essential but is not all-comprehensive. Sincere means without deceit, no pretense or hypocrisy, truthful, honest, upright, and free from bitterness. A person may be in error and yet be very sincere. Jacob is an example from the Old Testament. He had been fed false information about his beloved Joseph and believed he was dead. Yet he was very much alive in the Land of the Nile and even Governor over Egypt. Saul of Tarsus was sincere and devout in Acts 7, 8 and the early part of Acts 9. Later, in the book of Acts, he told his former colleagues that he had lived in all good conscience which includes his persecuting past. Paul visited Athens, Greece, on his second missionary journey. Acts 17 tells of his visit.

Devout also is essential, but it is not all-comprehensive. It means very religious, devout, showing reverence, earnest and heartfelt. An upright man in the eyes of the world may have all these virtues and be devoutly wrong due to ignorance. Jacob, Saul, and the Athenians were devout in their feelings, and yet they were not in the know relative to facts, commandments, warnings and promises which they needed to know. (These definitions come from *Webster's Dictionary*).

What If We Were First Century Citizens?

Were it asked back then, would it not have been a strange question indeed? Indeed, there were sincere and devout people then but no denominations. They would have been Christians without being denominational in any sense of that term. Denominations were far into their future in the first century. I realize there were Pharisees and Sadducees in the first century. There were also Essenes, but they are not mentioned in the Sacred Writings. Luther and his church, Calvin and his church, Wesley and his church and John Smith and his cult would come much later, and not a single one of them exists by divine authority. They are man-made through and through. These men and their churches all came in the 1500's, the 1700's, and the 1800's. People in the first century were New Testament Christians without knowing one single solitary thing about denominations – Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Mormonism, or any of the thousands of religious organizations existing today. Can you imagine Paul being a Roman Catholic, Peter being a Lutheran, John being a Baptist, James being a Methodist, Andrew being a Presbyterian or Thomas a Mormon? I began to preach in the late 40s. Then, the number of religious organizations in our country was in the hundreds; now it is in the thousands. What will it be like at the end of the 20th century?

The Noble Name Christian

The Messianic Prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 56:5, promised God's people would be called by an everlasting name that would not be cut off. In Isaiah 62:2 the

Statesman Prophet was even clearer about this new name. When Gentiles shall have seen God's glory, righteousness, and salvation, His people would be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord would give. *God's children* was not that new name; God had children in the Old Testament. That new name was not *disciples*. Moses had his disciples in the Old Testament. That new name was not brethren; brethren was used in the Old Testament also. That new name was not *priests*. God had priests in the Patriarchal and Mosaic eras. Without successful argument to the contrary, the name Christian fits perfectly what had been predicted by Prophets of old. God Himself would do the calling. What a precious, treasured call this was in every sense of that term.

The name Christian occurs three times in the Bible. In the Book of Acts, it was used twice - Acts 11:26 and Acts 26:28. The apostle Peter used it the third time in 1 Peter 4:16. An analysis of these three verses is surely in order.

In Acts 11:26 Luke wrote that disciples at Antioch were first called Christians. They were not given that name in Acts 2 though the church is begun in that chapter. That name was not given in Acts 8 where we have so many conversions. It was not given in Acts 10, even though this is the first time that Gentiles were brought into the Lord's church. It was given in Acts 11:26 after kings had seen His glory and Gentiles had received membership in the new religion. Isaiah 62:2 was filled with beauty in Acts 11:26.

Relative to the origin of this name, some have

stated that enemies supplied it to people they despised with a passion. The Lord's people were not of the disposition to allow enemies of Calvary to legislate such vital matters. Some have stated that these new members or disciples themselves originated this noble name. Again, the Lord's people did not have authority to supply this name. "Were called" in this verse is a divine call; it came from the Lord Himself. Both Isaiah and Luke knew the source of this name.

This new name began to be worn in Antioch—not Jerusalem as one might suspect. This is Antioch of Syria—not Antioch of Pisidia about which we read in Acts 13 with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary tour. In the spread of the gospel Antioch would be to the Gentiles what Jerusalem had been to the Jews in conversion matters. Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Ephesus were considered by many as the predominate cities of the first century. Paul preached in three of these cities; there is no record of his preaching in any African city. This is most interesting due to the prominence of Alexandria in the first century.

The second occurrence of this name is in Acts 26:28 which reads, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian'." Though some have doubted he was sincere, I am not of that number and never have been. Paul's response in Acts 26:29 shows that Paul recognized his sincerity for a surety. Paul wanted Agrippa and all who heard him that day to be what he was - a Christian. There are three chapters in Acts portraying Saul's conversion to Christ: 9, 22, 26. Interestingly, it is not Paul who uses

the name. Luke does so in Acts 11; Agrippa does so in Acts 26; Peter does so in 1 Peter 4:16. In fact, Paul stated upon this occasion, “I would to God that not only thou but also all that hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am.” He wished no man to be tied to a Roman chain. Note what the king did not say – “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Pharisee, a Sadducee or an Essene.” Essenes are not mentioned in the Bible, but they were a sect in Paul’s day. I have wondered if any of the Essenes obeyed that gospel. It would be of interest to know whether there were many Sadducees who became Christians, and yet Acts 6:7 may supply part of the answer to this.

Likewise, the king did not say that Paul almost persuaded him to be an atheist, an agnostic or an idol worshipper. Were Paul here today we can be absolutely certain he would not seek to make men and women become Roman Catholics, Protestants, or a member of a popular cult such as Mormons or the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

One of my very favorite sermons is “A Christian Just Like Paul.” I have presented it to thousands of my listeners. I heard the late and lamented Fred Chunn, more than 60 years ago, speak on this topic in a meeting in Weakly County, Tennessee. I took careful notes and added some of my own points. I have six major points which are:

- (1) A Christian in Name Only
- (2) A Christian in Fact
- (3) A Christian Like Paul on Location
- (4) A Christian in Suffering and Persecution

(5) A Christian in Zeal

(6) A Christian 'til the End of Life.

I would urge preachers and teachers to work up a sermon on this concept and teach and preach it again and again. I think it will become one of your favorites, as it has with me. In a biography that Irene did of me some years ago she included some of my all-time favorite sermons. This one is included. The name of the book is *My Heart Standeth In Awe of The Word*.

The apostle Peter used this precious name a third time; it is located in 1 Peter 4:16. It reads, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." Suffering and sainthood go hand-in-hand. This has been true of every generation since the first century. Religious history bears this out for all to know.

Peter and John faced the first wave of suffering since Pentecost in Acts 2. We read of their suffering in Acts 4 with Sadducees leading in the persecution. All the twelve apostles suffered persecution and were beaten by enemies of Calvary. It is widely believed, and I think correctly so, that all the apostles, save John, died for their faith and for their loyalty to the Christ. Tradition tells us that Simon Peter requested to be crucified with head downward, feeling unworthy to die with head upward as did his Master. In life or death, Simon Peter was the very personification of total loyalty to his beloved Lord and Saviour.

Christians should not shun persecution if it comes our way because of our faith in God, Christ, and Christianity. If the persecution reaches the point when

we are told that it is either Christ or death; it must be Christ, and not life at the hands of enemies who hate Christ and equally hate His people. Religious history is filled with brave men and women who died rather give up the Christ.

Just Christians

People in the first century who obeyed the gospel became Christians - not Pharisees, Sadducees, or patrons of Judaism. They became Christians - nothing more and nothing less. People in the first century were not asked if they were Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, or Jehovah's Witnesses. All these designations would come long after the first century and long after the Bible stood complete. I have been a Christian more than 75 years. At no time in all these years did I flirt with becoming a Roman Catholic, a Protestant, a Mormon, or any cult. None of this ever had any appeal to me. Sincere people now who hear the same message they did in the first century, believe now the same message they believed, and obey that very same message they did then, will be now what they were then. If not, why not?

To become a modern-day denominationalist today one must:

- (1) Have something now that they did not have in the first century.
- (2) Hear, believe, and obey something that they did not have in the first century.
- (3) Call himself religiously what no one in the first century ever called himself.
- (4) Ask someone to join him in his denomination

that no one in the first century ever issued such an invitation.

(5) Support the concept of denominationalism that no one ever supported in the first century.

(6) Live and die in a denomination that no one in the first century ever died in.

(7) Worship in song, prayer, preaching, the Lord's Supper, and contribution that no one, absolutely no one, ever worshipped in a denominational setting in the first century.

(8) Defend denominations that no one ever defended in the first century.

(9) Pray for the success of denominational spread that no one ever did in the first century.

(10) Be willing to die as a martyr for a denominational group that no one ever did in the first century.

(11) Be willing to bring up his children in a denomination that no parent ever did in the first century.

(12) Place in his will a very generous amount to keep that denomination in business that no man ever did in the first century. And they did make wills in the first century, as we learn from Hebrew 9:16-17.

Conclusion

Sincere, devout, and knowledgeable people will not support present-day denominations which people in the first century never supported. Such then did not exist. Religiously, they supported only the Lord's church, and rightly so. This is the kingdom Old Testament prophets saw and predicted. This is the church or

kingdom Jesus promised to build in Matthew 16:18-19. This is the one He established on Pentecost in Acts 2. This is the one Paul told Ephesian elders had been purchased with the precious blood of Christ on Calvary. This is the one that the Lord adds the saved to on a daily basis. We can belong to this church or kingdom when we are born again, born of the Spirit and water, when we hear, believe, repent, confess, and are baptized into Christ. This is His church that He will come the second time and take to an eternal heaven. There will be no thousand-year reign of Christ in the old city of Jerusalem. Just this week, in mid-April I heard a prominent Baptist preacher affirm such an earthly reign lasting 1,000 years. This old earth is not going to be here for such an earthly reign. It will be destroyed at Christ's second advent. Without a single exception, we should all be prepared for His coming. We do not have a date of that development, but we should be ready all the time.

Endnote

All Scriptures are taken from the KJV.

Classes For Women

Women Need Deep Bible Study Too

Sheila Keckler Butt



Sheila is married to Stan and together they have 3 sons and 9 grandchildren. She has a BS in English and a minor in History from East Tennessee State University. She graduated from the Women's Program at Bear Valley Bible Institute and has studied Greek and Hermeneutics at David Lipscomb University. She frequently speaks at Ladies Days, Teen Girls' Days, and Lectureships. Sheila has written two books for ladies and teen girls and co-authored another with several women entitled, *We Bow Down*. She has written articles for *Christian Woman Magazine* and was featured in *Christian Woman*. Sheila was elected to the Tennessee General Assembly in 2010, serving the 64th District and served in four General Assemblies. In November of 2013, Sheila received the "Elected Women of Excellence Award" by the National Foundation for Women Legislators. Sheila is known nationwide for her integrity and for her articulate message of standing for "Faith, Family and Freedom."

Stan and I had been married six years. We had three little boys and the oldest was four years old. We owned a lovely old home on about five acres near the small town of Portland, Tennessee. We had also recently bought the only car dealership in Portland that we named "Richland Chrysler Plymouth" in deference to some of the history around the area.

We had already moved 6 times in our marriage (yes, averaging once a year) and felt like we had finally found our home! His parents lived about one half mile up the street and my parents lived about one hour down

Interstate 65. It was perfect.

I had become a Christian a few months after we married, and I knew that there was no turning back for me now. I had found something that I had been searching for most of my life. As a little girl, living in Rockford, Illinois, with many nuns around our area, I would tell my mother that I wanted to be one of those “God’s Helpers” when I grew up.

My Mother was a stay at home Mom with 5 children and Dad was a salesman. He sold everything from nuts and bolts, to shoes, and eventually he became a car salesman. We were not a religious family. My Mother had been raised Pentecostal and had by this time turned away from any kind of “corporate” religion. She had hated not ever being allowed to wear a pair of pants or shorts growing up and she grew weary of the two-week meetings on end in the heat of the summers in Kissimmee, Florida as a child. When her mother died when my mother was 18 years old, she and her sister set out for San Diego to find work and “start their own lives.” Both met and married sailors within the next two years and “their own lives” began.

Mother moved to Rockford, Illinois, with my Dad and they began a family as soon as he was discharged from the Navy. Most years when I was growing up, we would visit one of the area Denominations on Easter. That seemed to be to them the most important Sunday of all and the only one mandatory for believers.

When I was helping Mother work around the house, she would often sing Gospel music and she had a lovely voice. She would talk to me about loving God

but despising the way she grew up. Her Mother had been a very stern woman and the family had little means. Mother grew up in very difficult family dynamics.

In the summer months, Mother would load all of us who were old enough into the car or walk us to the nearest Vacation Bible School. Back then, in Illinois and then Virginia, the VBS's were a week long. Most of them went from 9:00-12:00 in the mornings because children were out of school.

I loved VBS! I remember the teachers singing songs like "I want to be Sunbeam for Him!" At a very early age, I wanted to be a Sunbeam for Him. Not that I had any idea of how to go about that. We had a large, heavy family Bible on the coffee table at home. We had marriages, births and deaths recorded in it. I never saw it opened for anything else, except on an occasional Christmas Eve when we might read the story of the birth of Christ. We did have a nativity scene with our Christmas decorations.

My sister and I recited the same bedtime prayer every night together for as long as I can remember, and that was the extent of our prayer life. And that was about the extent of our spiritual education.

But someone, sometime, had planted the seed in my heart to want to know and love The Lord Jesus Christ. I did believe in God. At the age of 12, I went trembling to the front of a movie theatre in downtown Nashville, TN, because a Billy Graham clip had been shown at the end of the movie graphically depicting Heaven and Hell. I was scared to death of going to Hell, so I responded shaking and in tears. I was supposedly

“saved” right then! But I didn’t feel saved. I still felt a longing that I couldn’t describe and was pretty sure that prayer did not make me good enough to get to heaven.

I visited several Denominations over the next few years, often by myself or with friends and was baptized into the Baptist church and got married in the Methodist church.

However, the minister who married Stan and I was the man who had baptized Stan many years earlier at his home congregation. On the day of our wedding, he told me that he wanted to join Stan and I in another way and asked if he could visit soon. I said, “Sure.” And he was as good as his word! The next Saturday night he was at our house with the Jule Miller filmstrips.

We studied every Saturday night for weeks, and on the day that I was immersed into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ I knew that I had found the Truth! I knew that I had found the way to The Lord. And I knew that I could have eternal life with Christ!

After all of those years of seeking, how is it that I could I finally know then? What was the difference between those weeks of study and that night in downtown Nashville when I was supposedly “saved?”

The difference was the Bible! The difference was the Word of God! Nothing else is the Truth that brings a person into the likeness of Christ in thought, word and deed. The Bible really is a love story. And every person must experience the love story for themselves. Neither our parents, our husbands, our children nor our ministers can fall in love with Christ for us.

God’s Word is the story of the love God, His

Son and the Holy Spirit for us. His love includes our obedience. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (I John 5:4). The individual response that He desires from every one of us is obedience out of our love for Him!

If we are familiar with the Bible at all, we understand that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). That sounds pretty benign, until one reads about judgment:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 2 Peter 3:10-12.

Does any one of us, man or woman, want to trust our position in Christ on that day to anything or anyone other than God and His Word? In Genesis, Chapter 1, Eve listened to someone else the entire paradigm of humanity and our relationship to God changed in that instant.

We can also read, “For it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11-12).

Men and women will die physically unless The Lord comes again in our lifetime. We will bow on our knees to Christ and we will face Him in judgment. We will not be giving an account for what our parents have done, what our spouses have done, what our elders or ministers have done, or even what our grown children have done. We will each give an account of our own lives before our Lord and Master (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12).

God told Ezekiel that when He decided to punish the Israelites because of unfaithfulness, that the people of that land could not rely on the righteousness of someone else to save them. He said, “even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live” says the Lord God, “they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.”

I often tell young ladies that “God has no grandchildren.” Every person will be held accountable for his/her life on this earth. No one else’s righteousness can save us.

Why do women need to study the Bible? Because we will each give an account for ourselves! On what will that account be based? We can know that, too. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, told every single one of us how our lives will be judged.

In John 12:48, Jesus tells us very plainly, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”

John, in the book of Revelation gives us more enlightenment, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to

his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city (22:12-14).

At 12 years old, in that dark theatre in downtown Nashville, I was a little girl literally terrified of going to Hell. However, I eventually realized that I was never going to be satisfied until I studied God's Word and learned the truth for myself. In my study, I realized that I needed to obey the Word of God and then I fell in love with my Savior, Jesus Christ! I learned that God would help me live out His will for my life no matter what happened. Philippians 2:13 assures us "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

A few years ago, I passed a sign in front of a veterinarian's office. The sign read: "Cats and women will do whatever they please." I smiled at first. However, I knew that was not true of godly women. I had lived long enough in love with Christ to learn that. Godly women will themselves to do God's will even when they don't feel like it!

Jesus Christ did His Father's will. Even when He didn't feel like it. In agony in the Garden of Gethsemane he entreated His Father, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will (Mark 14:36).

There is only one way to know God's will. It is only in the Scriptures that we find "all things that pertain to

life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

God be praised, I no longer live in fear of Hell. I have a joyful, excited anticipation of an everlasting life abiding in the brightness and glory of The Son and the promise of the crown of life! (Rev. 2:10).

“Because I know He lives, all fear is gone!”

And I know that is the truth because I have studied God’s Word for myself! I won’t be deceived or misguided by someone else’s word or interpretation. Eternity is too long for that! In the end, judgment day comes down to Christ and me, and Christ and you!

Ways A Young Woman Can Help Grow The Church

Cindy Rodgers



Cindy is married to Wayne and together they have two sons, Kris and Matthew. They currently live in Maryville, TN where her husband serves as the minister for the Eastside congregation. Cindy teaches ladies Bible classes, speaks at lectureships, and ladies days' throughout the year. She also owns Pineapple printing and Monograms where she personalizes shirts, coffee mugs, and decals.

I love the Lord's church. There are many reasons, but one reason is that God planned it so that we can all be workers in the Kingdom. We all play an important role whether we are a man, woman, young, middle-aged or more mature in age or in our Christian walk, we can all be workers. The world would have us think that being a Christian woman would mean that we are silenced, that we have no role unless we are rebelling against the men. This is just not true. Jesus encouraged women to not only follow Him as disciples but also wanted them to be educated, commanding that we share the Good News with others.

We find women throughout the New Testament sharing the Gospel, supporting and helping Jesus, and supporting and helping the apostles. Throughout the entire Bible, we read about women standing for the Truth and for God's people. Esther, Lydia, Mary, Martha, and

so many more. So, thinking of this brings us to examine how women, specifically, young women in this lesson, can help grow the church today. Young women often get overlooked as workers in the church. I have taken note of many times younger women, especially single women get excluded in many opportunities that can help grow the church. As Christians, we are all to be working and finding ways to serve in the Lord's church.

When I was younger, in my late teens and early twenties, I associated being a disciple with being masculine. Men were the leaders, the disciples, the ones that God had appointed to be His disciples. Immaturely and uneducated, I thought men were the disciples. When I was married and especially when Wayne became a preacher, I thought His knowledge and discipleship would pull me along with him. But I soon realized, as a woman, I am a disciple of Christ and had responsibilities as well. We are also all commanded to make disciples.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mat. 28:18-20, NKJV).

As a Christian woman, a disciple of Christ, God educates and disciplines us as His children. We are to be His and show that we are His in our life as young women, now is the time to discipline yourself and grow

your faith so that you can be an influence in this world. Discipline yourself, be the disciple God calls you to be so that you can help grow the church.

How can young women be disciples and help grow the church?

Diligence

Diligence can be defined as hard work and effort with a purpose in mind. This is not an easy task. Dave Ramsey said, “Diligence equals disciplined excellence over time” (Ramsey Financial Peace University). Peter uses this same word speaking of looking forward the “coming day of the Lord” and says, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:14, KJV).

Paul uses the same word speaking of our “studying” [KJV] or “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, ASV). As young women, you have the energy and can build your knowledge to be some of the hardest workers in the church. With study and learning from others’ examples, you can build your faith and be a purposeful worker for God. The Hebrews writer says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Find the time, make the time to diligently seek God. Be consistent in your studies so that you are ready to teach, have a Bible study, and defend the Truth.

Consider these other verses for how diligence is used in Scripture.

Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee (Deu. 6:17).

Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently (Psa. 119:4).

The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat (Pro. 13:4).

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

Inspire

We live in a visual society. There is a phrase we hear often, “show me, don’t tell me.” The examples young women see, and the examples young women set are important. As a disciple, young Christian women must be the right example. Commit yourself to the Lord. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33) Where are your priorities each day? Do you make plans to grow your faith? I recently started a group Marco Polo (an app where you video message friends) and we are reporting to one another daily the way we are filling our spiritual, physical, and emotional cups. It is vital to our relationship with God that we make time for study and prayer. It is also vital

that we realize the ways one can influence and inspire peers by our speech, our actions and reactions, and our ability to be that salt and light in this world.

Service

Jesus taught us of service in John's account of His life: "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." He lowered Himself to the form of a servant. Paul wrote:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phi. 2:5-11, NKJV).

Young women, you can be like Jesus and show your discipleship when you serve others. Paul also taught us of service one to another in the Galatian letter:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:7-10).

We should encourage one another in our strengths. Find your gifts, talents, and strengths. Remember, the gifts you have now are what you can concentrate on to help others. As young women sometimes you may not know what gifts you have to offer. Some may know but are not sure how to use them. Older ladies, this is where we come in. We must encourage and include our younger sisters. There are times when we have opportunity to serve in the kingdom and we just go and do it. Why not look around and ask the younger women to help. After all, we are commanded to teach the younger women. (Titus 2:3-5) We can ask for help in Bible classes, one on one Bible studies, helping to prepare communion, helping plan for events, VBS is a great way to get many people involved, and look for evangelistic opportunities to help guide the younger women in serving others.

Commitment

Young women must also remember their commitment to Christ and His church. It is the case that young women are often in some of the busiest times

in their lives, especially in their twenties and thirties. They may be finishing college and starting new careers. Many are just getting started in their marriages or beginning to raise young children. Often times priorities get skewed as studying the Bible and growing our faith are pushed aside for the daily grind of simply living life. Growth in one's Christian walk will often plateau. This will cause one to be weak in her commitment to God. A young mom may struggle to see the importance of having her children at Bible class and in worship services thinking that she is distracted trying to keep them quiet, but she is showing her children her commitment to God by being there.

A single young woman may feel that she does not have a place in the Kingdom, but she must be supported and encouraged to be involved, as well. Be committed to the work. This is also where the older sisters can encourage the younger sisters who are feeling weak in their faith. Paul admonished the Christians in Galatia: "...if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

I will never forget and always appreciate the older women who encouraged me to teach a Ladies class, to begin studying with and teaching teen girls. I was scared and felt unworthy, but they saw I had a talent and with their encouragement, I snapped out of my wavering commitment and focused on serving and committing to be a disciple of Christ who could help grow the church by teaching other ladies.

Involvement

Service and commitment brings about involvement. We each as disciples have opportunities to be involved. We are commanded to edify one another, “Therefore pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” (Romans 14:19) What are ways to be involved as a young woman? Attend gospel meetings, be involved with the youth, invite your friends to services, be available to help, be willing and ready to teach and share the Gospel. If unsure where to serve, but you are committed to do so, ask the elders for some direction to help find a place to help in the Lord’s Work.

Persistence

Persistence is part of diligence, inspiration, service, commitment, and involvement all wrapped into one. The idea here for our young women is doing over and over again the right things. This is about being consistent in our living. This is about staying the course. Jesus taught that “he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Mat. 10:22). This is about being faithful and not giving up.

Paul wrote:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:1-4, NKJV).

And let us not be weary in well doing: for

in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10, KJV).

It would be great if our lives were simple and easy. This year alone shows how everything can be changed in an instance just because of a virus. The difficulties of life can cause one to be distracted or unfocused and lose the drive that it takes to stay the course. Life can be discouraging with hardships throughout it. Sometimes, we may want to quit and forget the goal. We cannot do that. Young women, please stay focused on your discipleship through it all. Our goal is the same as Paul's: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 3:14).

Love

There are some beautiful gifts that God has given us in this life. One of the loveliest is the gift of love. God loves His children.

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).

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).

We love him, because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Each of these verses teach us that God first loved us. His love is our motivation for all we do in this life as His disciples. We are to love Him with all our “heart, soul, mind and strength” (Mark 12:30).

First Corinthians thirteen, the great chapter of love, Paul tells us what that love is, and how it behaves. If we are going to show that Biblical love, we must love one another. We can know how to love like this by studying God’s Word.

We are taught to do all things in love (1 Cor 16:14). We are admonished to love God’s Word and love the Gospel (2 The. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:22; Eph. 3:17). We are also told to “love your neighbor as yourself” by our Lord.

Paul explained how this should be put into practice:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and

clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:25-32).

Eternity

While His love motivates us; it is the fact of eternity that causes us to realize the value and importance of it all. All that we say, do, or teach is in view of eternity (Heb. 9:27; Mat. 25:46). Heaven or Hell awaits us all, this should drive young women to look at everyone as a soul to gain for the church.

Disciple stands for diligence, inspire, service, commitment, involvement, persistence, love and eternity. Christ commands his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mat. 28:19-20). Upon that command, we should realize a few things: we are each commanded to go; that as disciples we are to make other disciples by baptizing and teaching; and that we are not alone in the work, because the Lord is with us.

This is the command for all but certainly young women should be taught that they are important in the Kingdom. Marks account reminds us that it is the gospel preaching and teaching that makes disciples: "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; he who believes and is baptized will be saved;

but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-16).

Young women, you have the tools you need to get through this life and be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Eph. 6:10ff). You can be disciples alongside every other disciple of Christ. Be strong in your faith and having that blessed hope in Jesus Christ. Show others the way to have that hope, and you will help grow the church. Be strong, be courageous, and be a disciple of Christ and help grow the church.

Works Cited

The Holy Bible: American Standard Version. Accordance electronic ed., OakTree Software, 2008.

The Holy Bible. Old and New Testaments in the King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976. All references are to this version unless otherwise stated.

The Holy Bible: New King James Version. Thomas Nelson, 2016, *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

Being Married To A Non-Christian Husband

Melissa Cain



Melissa Cain is married to Scott and together they have three sons; Walker (15), Tanner (12), and Hunter (11). Currently, they labor with the Mercedes Drive congregation in Vance, AL. Melissa serves as the church secretary and as a homeschool teacher for their sons. She has also taken mission trips to

Hungary and Italy.

In 1937 Walt Disney released its premier princess film and won the fluttering hearts of little girls for decades to come: a handsome huntsman disregards his duties to slay a pale young princess and, when the opportunity presents itself, he rescues the damsel from her power-hungry stepmother. Fast-forward past a little sleeping, sneezing, whistling while working, and saving the day, and the young couple lives happily ever after. A long-awaited thirteen years later Disney released Cinderella, the story of a nineteen-year-old woman longing for liberty from the bondage of her cruel stepmother and the ridicule of her obnoxious stepsisters. To date Disney's library includes twelve official films strictly devoted to princesses, with ten storylines dedicated to the beloved princess' success in finding her very own true love, or better yet, him finding her while avoiding the clutches of her own personal villain. Young ladies view these movies intently just hoping for a glimpse of what true

love looks like. Since Disney launched its Princess Line in 2000, princess “dolls, clothing, games, home décor, toys” have been “a \$5.5 billion enterprise and Disney’s second most profitable franchise, after Mickey Mouse” (Suddoth).

There is something absolutely alluring for an adolescent schoolgirl dreaming of growing up and finding her very own Prince Charming. One that will be able to save her from every type of harm, be it the disgruntled stepmother like Queen Grimhilde in *Snow White*, the terrible Lady Tremaine from *Cinderella*, the malicious Maleficent of Sleeping Beauty, the sea urchin Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*, or the aggressive Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, to name a few. These have helped shape the minds of children, particularly young girls, for over 80 years.

Films do more than entertain; the stream of sights, sounds, and statements portrayed onscreen shape a person’s expectations of behavioral norms, characterizations of men and women, worldviews, and attitudes toward self and others, frequently resulting in blurred lines between reality and fantasy (Barber). In an era wherein Disney films have been prominent for almost a century, most women are well aware of what fanciful romance looks like. Many women have been **that** little girl longing for **that** kind of love, but what is marriage **actually** designed to be? What did God intend marriage to look like? The first occurrence of the word “married” is found in Genesis 19:14, “And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters” (Gen. 19:14, KJV). The Hebrew word

used in this verse is *lâqach* and means “to take” (Strong, *Lâqach*). Marriage is the oldest institution created by God and given to His children, all of mankind.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took (*lâqach* – MAC) one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:21-25).

The first wedding scene in the history of mankind included a beautiful garden paradise, animals of every kind, and two people who were absolutely made for each other. No elaborate rescue mission needed to occur for true love to be found. There was not yet a villain from whom the woman needed saved. There was simply a man who was alone and God “made him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18), one perfectly suited for his needs and him for her needs. The word for help in the Hebrew is *êzer* (Strong, *Êzer*). The cherished hymn “O, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” includes the lyric, “Here I raise my Ebenezer,” with Ebenezer being a stone of help. God has always intended for the women be an *êzer*, that is, an aid or help to her husband. “Meet for him” literally means “a front,” a “part opposite, or “a counterpart, or mate” (Strong, *Neged*). Thus marriage

is designed as a helpful partnership between a man and a woman. While this may not sound like movie-making material, it is precisely how God wrote His script for one of the greatest institutions known to man. How does a helpful partnership between a man and a woman relate to a woman being married to a non-Christian husband? Consider four questions concerning the marriage between a Christian woman and a non-Christian man. Is it sinful? Is it smart? Are there struggles? Are there ways to save his soul?

Is Being Married To A Non-Christian Husband A Sinful Relationship?

Poets and historians alike have throughout the centuries depicted tales of forbidden love. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is widely taught in English literature classes. For the students, memorization, quizzes, written exams, and recitals are at times required concerning this epic story of two teenagers who ultimately follow their forbidden love to their graves. The variations of the Capulets and the Montagues seem endless. Apparently, there is an enormous amount of entertainment provided when characters attempt do that which is forbidden. Even *The Andy Griffith Show* used the theme in the episode "A Feud Is a Feud," portraying a family fight between the Carters and the Wakefield's wherein neither father of the opposing families could recall exactly how their family feud began: they simply knew they did not want their children marrying into the other family. While many families have forbidden clauses, whether spoken

or unspoken, does Scripture explicitly forbid Christians from marrying non-Christians?

In a variety of *Google* searches relating to the subject “is it a sin to be married to a non-Christian,” several verses were repeatedly used to teach that marrying a non-Christian is sinful. The first: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness” (2 Cor. 6:14)? In the context of Paul’s letter to Corinth, the apostle described how his heart was “enlarged” with heartfelt affections for them (2 Cor. 6:11), how they had closed their hearts to him (2 Cor. 6:12), and pleaded with them to open their hearts: “Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged” (2 Cor. 6:13). Like the open hearts of children, Paul besought them open their heart to him and his teaching as his heart was open to them. Paul then discouraged them from **any** relationship that would close their hearts and minds from the truth of who and what God had called them to be: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” (2 Cor. 2:14). Farmers who utilize a yoke refer to the yoked pair of cattle or oxen as a team. The yoke is a large heavy wooden beam that is cut to fit over both oxen at one time, lifted into place, and made secure by a wooden bow. Paul told the brethren “Be not **unequally** yoked...” Many place the emphasis on the yoke in this verse but Paul placed his emphasis on the inequality of the yoke.

A comical picture captures a camel yoked to a

donkey prepared for the task of plowing: the one doing the plowing must be desperate to try to undertake such a great task with a team that have so little in common. When people enter a partnership, a team, they figuratively yoke themselves together with one with another, whether it be a business partnership, a friendship, or yes, even a marriage. Paul warns against any yoke or partnership that pulls a soul away from God. He provides a list of opposites for saints to avoid; righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, and accordance between Christ or Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-15). The yoke becomes unequal when the lost is allowed to steer the saved, that is, when the Christian allows him or herself to be steered by worldly people. Whether in friendship, business, or marriage, when the lost are given enough rein to pull believers in an unrighteous, dark, or un-Christlike path, the Christian has become guilty of the exact situation Paul told the faithful to avoid.

While marriage has the potential to become an unequal yoke, this is not what God designed it to be. When a Christian spouse lets the non-Christian spouse do the spiritual steering, the unequal yoke results from the direct choice or absolute neglect in the Christian's relationship with God. The succumbing saint displays her weakness and supplies the unbeliever with power over God's child. Christians should never be under the spiritual control of the faithless: they belong to God, their Father, "Wherefore come out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17-

18). Paul wrote to a congregation who had embraced so many characteristics of the community around them that there was little difference between Christian Corinthians and condemned Corinthians. Paul wanted them to stop feeling compelled to look like them, act like them, and be like them, quoting Isaiah's plea to "come out from among them" (Isa. 52:11). Paul had to beg the brethren to have their hearts open to him because they had apparently opened their hearts to the world and closed them to their fellow Christians. Paul did not condemn all friendships or all business partnerships with unbelievers, nor did he condemn all such marriages: he condemned imbalance in those relationships and how Christians allow themselves to be steered by such. If one of these relationships is inherently wrong, then all of them are wrong in every situation. While each has the potential to become an unequal yoke, none are inherently unequal. Marriage ought never be an unequal yoke, because God designed it to be a partnership. Can this be applied to friendship? Yes. Can this be applied to a partnership? Yes. Can this idea even be applied to marriage? Yes! The question must always be asked by the individual, "Am I doing what is best?" "Will this person try to come between me and my relationship with the Father?" "Will I be able to keep my heart and mind opened to Christ if I marry this person?" "Am I chasing my own desires and closing my heart to God?"

Another popular verse concerning the subject of a mixed marriage is, "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, emp. added). Some say Paul is teaching that a Christian widow can only remarry a Christian. The phrase “only in the Lord” is an adverbial phrase, and an adverb modifies an action (verb), not a person (noun). Thus “only in the Lord” describes how to “be married,” not whom to marry. It is grammatically impossible for “only in the Lord” to modify “whom,” therefore “only in the Lord” is not describing the groom. Since “only in the Lord” modifies the verb “be married,” widows who remarry are to do so in accordance with God’s instructions on marriage. He is “the Lord,” “supreme in authority” and the “controller” (Strong, *Kurios*), and He has the final say. What are His marriage instructions?

“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” (Mat. 19:4-6). God’s law for marriage includes one man and one woman leaving their parents and being united as one flesh. Should the unthinkable happen and they divorce, God has a law in place for that as well (Mat. 19:9). If a Christian widow meets a divorcé who put away his wife because of her poor hygiene, her poor fried chicken, or her poor taste in country music, he did not put his wife away according to God’s marriage law (Mat. 19:9). He is therefore not loosed from God’s marriage law, as Paul explained to the Romans, “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” (Rom.

7:2). If a Christian widow were to marry such a man in defiance of God's law of marriage, the union would not be according God's law, thereby not under His authority, thus not "in the Lord."

Also, if "in the Lord" means the Christian widow can only marry a Christian, then "obey your parents in the Lord" means that children must only obey Christian parents (Eph. 6:1). Like the widow's remarriage, children's obedience to parents is to submit to God's law and authority.

While many claim that the marriage of a Christian to a non-Christian is forbidden by Scripture, discerning Christians ought not act like Mayberry's Carters and Wakefield's by teaching that something is forbidden because the belief has been passed from one generation to the next. There are legitimate circumstances wherein a Christian may opt to marry one who does not share her faith. There are also marriages that ought never take place according to God's law.

As she prepares for marriage, the woman searching the Scriptures (John 5:39), seeking first the kingdom (Mat. 6:33), and striving to be like Christ (1 Cor. 11:1) must ask herself, "Can I truly expect this man to help me grow closer to God?" and "Am I making the wisest possible decision for my relationship with God?" "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge" (Pro. 18:15). A woman must give her due diligence when the privilege of marriage is before her and she must ask, is this smart?

Is Being Married to a Non-Christian Husband a Smart Relationship?

A Swiss study examined how parents' worship attendance influenced their children: when one parent worshipped regularly but the other did not practice religion, two-thirds of children attended at least sporadically if dad was faithful, while two-thirds would never attend if dad never did (Low). Two-thirds followed the father, and one-third mirrored the mother. Double!

It would seem fathers have double the influence of mothers regarding their children's faith, but that is not true. This assumption misjudges the father's influence with his children. The same study found that when both parents worship regularly, **thirty-three percent** of their children will be faithful in their own attendance; if one parent worships regularly and one is irregular, **three percent** of children attend faithfully when the mother is regular, compared to **thirty-eight percent** when the father is regular; if one worships regularly and one never attends, **two percent** attend faithfully when the mother is regular, compared to **forty-four percent** when the father is regular (Craven). So when one parent is faithful and the other is sporadic, children are nearly **thirteen times** as likely to be as follow the father (thirty-eight percent compared to three percent). When one parent is faithful and the other never attends, children are **twenty-two times** as likely to be as dedicated as dad (forty-four percent compared to two percent).

There is an enormous difference between the spiritual influence of mothers and fathers. As God's design of the home would have it, children tend to

develop their perception of domestic life from their mothers (Tit. 2:4-5), while their perception of the world comes from their fathers: “the glory of children are their fathers” (Pro. 17:6). When father does not know best and fails to put the Lord first, his children are more likely to follow in his steps.

“He’s so nice, everyone loves to be around him.” “I’ve been with him so long; if I break up with him, I’ll have to start over.” “His family has a lot of money.” “I think he’ll come to worship with me.” “He studied the Bible with my preacher a few times.” “I really think he will want to be a Christian eventually.” “I’m getting older and need to find someone now before it’s too late.” Of course, these words are always followed by chirping birds, animals having a sing-along, wedding bells, and “happily ever after” written across the screen, right?

Is that how Act One typically plays out in the movie of life? How many young to middle-age women have spoken similar words just before committing her life to a man? The question has been posed: Why would a woman who is seeking first the kingdom of God, filling her soul with God’s Word, and living her life for the one true God, make a lifelong vow between herself, her Lord, and a non-Christian? It is a good question, but it is one that can truly only be answered by the one willing to make such a commitment. “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (Pro. 14:1). A wise woman will set a standard when it comes to her household and she will continually work to raise up those who are in her home. A wise woman “looketh well to the ways of her

household” (Pro. 31:27). Any woman can find a man, but not just any woman will seek a man who will help her share the love of God with those precious souls yet to be born into their family.

Paul’s inspired words to Titus described how wives are to behave: “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, **obedient to their own husbands**, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Tit. 2:5, eph. added). Paul wrote to Christian wives in Ephesus about submission, “Wives, **submit** yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22), and concluded that “as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husband in every thing” (Eph. 5:24). A married woman must, by God’s law, submit herself to her husband’s divinely appointed authority. A husband’s authority is not diminished if he is an unbeliever, but his authority shall not supersede the woman’s submission to her Lord. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit **in the Lord**” (Col. 3:18). The woman is to be as submissive to her husband as the Lord requires. Her self-submission must not go beyond what the Lord allows, nor can it neglect what the Lord commands.

There are countless stories of Christians marrying non-Christians with outcomes that are nothing short of amazing. Many elders, deacons, preachers, and laborers are counted among the righteous because of the example of a faithful spouse. Lois and Eunice are a strong Biblical example of this as Timothy’s father was a Greek (Acts 16:1). There is no record of him obeying the gospel, but his mother and grandmother receive notable recognition

for their godly influence in Timothy's life, even from a young child (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:15). While it is very possible to please God when submitting to a non-Christian husband, a Christian woman must use wisdom in choosing the husband who will be her head. Since she is to submit first to her God, will there be struggles in being married to a non-Christian husband?

Is Being Married To A Non-Christian Husband A Smooth Relationship?

“There are no irreconcilable differences when both marriage partners are Christians” (Colley). Merriam-Webster defines irreconcilable differences as the following: “inability to agree on most things or on important things.” A divorce lawyer advertising men's divorce rights lists 5 reasons for irreconcilable differences: 1) Finances; 2) Parenting; 3) Religion; 4) Extended Family Relations; 5) Communication (Shultz).

The Old Testament records a man who married a strange woman from a strange land, and they had differences of their own. She was so strange that the man in this record named his son “a stranger here” or “refugee.” The differences between him and his wife met three of the five top excuses for irreconcilable differences: parenting, religion, and communication. Prior to this man ever becoming a husband or a father he had been commanded to lead his home and his household in every aspect in obedience to God. From all appearance the man loved the Lord, but this chosen man of God would soon be influenced by his Midianite

wife to defy God's commands. Their differences in parenting techniques and religious views caused trouble in the home and trouble between the man and his Lord: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him" (Exo. 4:24). Who was this man? What was his transgression? His name was Moses, and he had failed to circumcise one of his sons. Moses, fleeing from Pharaoh, arrived at Midian and found seven shepherdesses tending to their father's flock and being bullied by shepherds who were using the same well. Moses arrived on the scene and saved the day by helping the young women. It very well could have been a fairytale-like entrance: a handsome young man, staff in hand, delivering the distressed damsels from the sordid shepherds. When the sisters went home and informed their father Jethro of their hero, Jethro invited Moses to dinner, welcomed Moses to dwell with them, and gave Moses his daughter, the eldest Zipporah (Exo. 2:18-21). "And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, **I have been a stranger in a strange land**" (Exo. 2:22, eph. added). When God later called Moses to return to Egypt and deliver Israel (Exo. 3:8-10), Moses took his wife and his two sons and left for Egypt (Exo. 4:20), and on the way Moses marriage came between him and his God: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him" (Ex. 4:24). God's willingness to take the life of the man He chose to lead Israel from Egypt can be explained by what happened next: "Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody

husband thou are to me. So He let him go: then she said, A bloody husband art thou, because of the circumcision” (Exo. 4:25-26).

While Scripture says little about what kind of wife Zipporah was overall, she clearly, like most women, had a marital moment that was less than stellar. Circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with Israel (Gen. 17:14), and the soul whose foreskin was not cut off was to be cut off from his people. This token of Moses’ relationship with God was not a priority for the Midianite Zipporah: their religious differences resulted in different parenting practices. Clearly disgusted by the idea of circumcising “her son” (Exo. 4:25), she was only willing to do so to appease God’s anger and prevent her husband’s death. She was not a happy wife, slicing the flesh from her son and slinging the flesh at her husband.

According to Exodus 4:20, Moses and Zipporah had two sons at this time but only one had been circumcised. Was this perhaps a marital agreement? Had Zipporah made a deal with her husband that **his** firstborn could be sanctified to God but the second son was **hers** and no such ritual would be committed to both children? These questions cannot be answered with certainty, but these facts are evident: Zipporah was a strange woman from a strange land with a different religious background, and a compromise in their marriage had set God against Moses.

Similar situations arise today when couples from different religious backgrounds make stipulations concerning the children. Some have agreed that the Christian spouse can train and teach the children

concerning religion from birth to 6 years of age. Others have agreed to allow the children to attend faithful worship services and Bible school if they can have the priest sprinkle the baby in infancy. Some families allow the children to attend the worship of one parent's choice but the other parent chooses the private religious school they attend eight hours a day for six months each year. Parents are quite adept at making compromises when it comes to their children's spiritual training. Whatever the example, one thing is certain: someone will eventually bend on the compromise. It will either be the Christian spouse, the lost spouse, or both. While Moses was not the head of the house he was called to be, his non-Israelite wife eventually conformed to God's commands.

Zipporah's will finally bent to God's influence. This is also possible for Christian women wed to non-Christians, but it will not be smooth sailing. The storyline has not changed much; just different characters in a different time. In the twenty-first century scenarios there are pews with missing families or family members. There is the wife who does not attend faithfully because her husband wants "quality time" with his wife and children at home on Sundays. There is the mother whose husband has been forbidden her to contribute to the Lord's offering because they had a trying month with finances. There is the mother at home warding off the devout Catholic husband who teaches their son about the fine art of wine tasting. There is the diligent mom who wants to discipline her child but the reluctant father who sees nothing wrong with their little girl's tantrums and bad language that she learned from daddy. When

two people cannot agree on an area as significant as their faith, there will always be struggles, but they are not without hope. There are also ways to seek and to save the soul of the unfaithful or unbelieving spouse.

Can Being Married To A Non-Christian Husband Be a Saving Relationship?

Even when facing daily struggles, the faithful Christian woman looks for ways to reach the lost. For the wife of a non-Christian, she is in a unique position for opportunities to reach the one soul she would most like to take to heaven with her, and God has instructions to help her make the most of those opportunities. Peter told wives to submit to their “own husbands,” even any who “obey not the Word” (1 Pet. 3:1). The words “obey not” are translated from the Greek *apeitheō* (Strong), the basis of the English word “apathy.” This is the willful disobedience of a person does not allow himself to be persuaded. This same word is often translated as “unbelieving,” “believed not,” “do not obey,” “be disobedient,” or “were disobedient” elsewhere in the New Testament. These husbands were either indifferent or antagonistic to Christ, yet their Christian wives are still told to submit. Persistent nagging to teach unreceptive husbands can do more harm than good. Peter told wives to live a sermon, not preach one, that their husbands “also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (1 Pet. 3:1). No person can be taught “without the Word” of God, but Peter exhorted wives to use their manner-of-living conversation, not vocal conversation. There are

times when silence is the best evangelism to win a soul, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise” (Pro. 11:30). It is never wise to harp on your husband over his unbelief. “A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are a like” (Pro. 27:15). “It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house” (Pro. 21:9). Whether husbands are Christians or not, a woman’s manner of living should always be one that exemplifies Christ. It is said, “The difference between persistence and nagging is knowing when to stop.”

Peter next explained why a manner of living is so important: “While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear” (1 Pet. 3:2). The word “behold” indicates the scrutiny of an eyewitness and implies information from close and minute observation (Thayer, Epopteuo). Those who live in the same home know firsthand the temptations, weaknesses, and personal battles. They see the Christian wife’s priorities day-in and day-out. They see when and if she prays, when and if she serves others, and when and if she attends worship faithfully. Sadly, the unbelievers that are loved so dearly will at times use the believer’s most minute faults as an excuse not to change their own lives. A Christian woman’s manner of living must be “chaste” (1 Pet. 3:2), which requires a pure lifestyle (Strong, Hagnos).

It is of utmost importance for the Christian wife to treat her unbelieving spouse as God has instructed if she ever hopes to save his soul. As a side note; if Christian women are to treat their non-Christian husbands with

such courtesy and reverence, what excuse is there for Christian wives who neglect to submit to their faithful Christian husbands? Hugo McCord once said the following: “The power of a wife, for good or for bad, someone has expressed in these words: ‘For every woman who has made a fool out of a man there is a woman who has made a man out of a fool.’ Thank God, there are many examples of Christian wives who have won their husbands to Christ by following Peter’s inspired advice” (Hugo McCord, “Christian Wives”).

Closing

Real life marriage is no fairytale. However, a marriage where Christ truly rules the hearts of both the husband and wife will easily be recognized as a lifelong story of friendship, love, desire, romance, faithfulness, and walking together toward an eternal paradise. A Christian marriage is not one without difficulties and challenges. If two Christians marrying guaranteed an automatic fairytale, the brotherhood would host far fewer marriage classes and counseling sessions geared toward strengthening the Christian home. While it may not be the most prudent decision for a Christian to marry a non-Christian, it cannot be emphatically stated that it is inherently wrong for one to do so: no Scripture gives blanket condemnation for marrying a non-Christian. Should a Christian woman choose to marry a non-Christian husband, she needs to know that while she may eventually find her happily ever after, there will be additional struggles in her life and likely the lives of her children. Because of the power of God’s Word

to change the hearts of man, His patience in reaching the lost, and His mercy toward all of mankind, there are concise instructions for the Christian woman to be a gentle tool in bringing her husband's soul to Christ and save his soul from death (Jam. 5:20). The Christian married to a non-Christian has a great opportunity to show her wisdom in helping to convert her husband. When a saintly sister lives in faithful submission to her Lord and places Him first in all aspects of her life, she will be pleasing to the Lord Jesus as a member of His precious bride, the church.

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psa. 127:1). Without question, the best marriage of all is between two faithful New Testament Christians whose love for one another is surpassed only by their love for the Lord. When both put Christ first, neither will ever feel like he or she is in second place. The closer they grow to Christ, the closer they grow together.

Works Cited

- Barber, McKenzie. “Disney’s Female Gender Roles: The Change of Modern Culture.” *Indiana State University*, 24 Nov. 15AD, www.scholars.indstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10484/12132/Barber_McKenzie_2015_HT.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- Colley, Cindy. “Cindy Colley.” *Facebook*, 8 Dec. 2014, www.facebook.com/cindy.colley.
- Craven, S. Michael. “Fathers: Key to Their Children’s Faith.” *The Christian Post*, 19 Jun. 2011. Available

online at www.christianpost.com/news/fathers-key-to-their-childrens-faith.html.

The Holy Bible. Old and New Testaments in the King James Version. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976. All references are to this version unless otherwise stated.

Low, Robbie. "The Truth About Men & Church." *Touchstone*. Available: www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v.

McCord, Hugo. "Christian Wives and Non-Christian Husbands."

Schultz, Carrie S. "Irreconcilable Differences." MR. *Men's Rights Divorce Law*, Men's Rights Divorce and Family Law of New Jersey - Schultz & Associates, 17 Jan. 2020, www.mensrightsdivorcelaw.com/blog/irreconcilable-differences/.

Strong, James.

---. "Apeitheo." Entry #544. *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*. E-Sword LT: Bible Study to Go, App, 2013.

---. "Êzer." Entry #5028. *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary of the Old Testament*. E-Sword LT: Bible Study to Go, App, 2013.

---. "Hagnos." Entry #53. *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*. E-Sword LT: Bible Study to Go, App, 2013.

---. "Kurios." Entry #2962. *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*. E-Sword LT: Bible Study to Go, App, 2013.

---. "Lâqach." Entry #3947. *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary of the Old Testament*. E-Sword LT: Bible Study to

Go, App, 2013

---. “*Neged*.” Entry #5048. Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary of the Old Testament. E-Sword LT: Bible Study to Go, App, 2013

Suddath, Claire. “The \$500 Million Battle Over Disney’s Princesses.” *Bloomberg*, 17 Dec. 2015, www.bloomberg.com/features/2015-disney-princess-hasbro/.

Thayer, Joseph H. “Epopteuo.” Entry #2029. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2005. Print.

The Virtuous Woman Of 2020

Rebecca Davis



Rebecca has been married to Philip for 37 years and together they have 2 sons and 1 grandson. She has a BA from Freed Hardeman University. She worked for several years in the insurance industry before being a full time wife and mother. She has been a Bible Class teacher for many years, where she has taught toddlers to middle school & high school girls & ladies classes. She is a preacher's daughter, preacher's wife, and a preacher's mother. She has worked alongside her husband Philip for the past 23 years with the Grundy Street congregation in Tullahoma, TN.

Appreciation is expressed for the invitation and the opportunity to be a part of this lectureship. This lectureship is truly a spiritual feast, both in the deep study of God's Word and in the time of fellowship with those of like precious faith. The Southaven congregation is a gracious host, and I am thankful for all they are and all they do for the cause of Christ.

We now turn our attention to a study of virtue. My assigned topic is *The Virtuous Woman of 2020*. What does she look like? How does she act? How does she dress? What does she think about? How does she talk? How does she spend her time? Does she look different from the world around her? Should she? The answer to these questions will not be found in 2020. The answer is found in what is virtuous. To determine what is virtuous,

we must go to the only Book that can answer that. We must go to God's Word. We will find that the virtuous woman in 2020 is much like the virtuous woman in the Bible. I know that we live in a different time and place, and that we have different customs and culture. Yet virtue is not determined by time or place, by custom or culture. The principles and characteristics of virtue are set out by God in the Bible and do not change.

Virtue is defined as "conformity to a standard of right-morality; a particular moral excellence; a beneficial quality of power of a thing; chastity, especially in a woman" ("Virtue"). Bro. Robert Taylor, in his book on Philippians, defined virtue as "inward goodness and courage to pursue right and truth" (162). Virtue in in Greek language is *arete*, meaning "intrinsic eminence, moral goodness, virtue, moral excellence" (Vine 661).

Whose Standard Do We Really Follow?

Everything we do sets an example, either a good one or a bad one. As women who love God, of course we want to set a good example. We want to be virtuous women, living lives of moral excellence. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mat. 5:16 KJV). How brightly are we letting our lights shine? Are people glorifying our Father because of us? Are we being the kind of examples our God needs us to be?

While Jesus tells us to follow Him, the world pushes us to follow it. Recall the examples from the Old Testament. Time and time again, physical Israel got into trouble when her desire to be like those around

her became more important to her than obeying God. The same can happen to us today as spiritual Israel. Do we ever try to keep one foot with God and one foot in the world? Our daily choices will either keep us closer to God or move us farther away from Him. A change in direction rarely happens in a one-time, 180 degree turn around. It happens in a series of small steps, small compromises, that we rationalize, and perhaps we do not even fully realize what we are doing. Think about the following statements in view of virtue, in view of moral excellence. Times have changed; no one thinks anything about that anymore. It's just this once; one time won't hurt anything. They're only young once; let them have a little fun. No one wants to be different; everyone wants to fit in. Everybody's doing it. The problem with all these statements is that they let the changing times, society, fun, everybody set the standard for our behavior. They let the world set the standard. God has a standard and as His people, we need to be following His standards.

I confess that I tried the "everybody's doing it" line. The response from my parents went something like this: "No, Rebecca, everybody's not doing it; you're not going to and here's why." The why was always based on God's Word and the standard that we are a Christian family, not because my father was, and is, a preacher. God does not have a separate set of rules for the preacher's family. Parents today need to be willing to step up and say "no" when "no" needs to be said. Because there are so many things that we as Christian parents need to say "no" to, let me encourage you to say "yes" to your children as

often as you can, even if that “yes” requires more effort on your part. When my brother Tim and I got old enough to go places on our own with our friends, my father always told us as we were leaving to “remember whose family you represent.” We knew that he meant both our physical and our spiritual family. He wanted to remind us that our actions and our attitude would be a reflection on both the Taylor name and the name Christian. We would do well to remember that as we make our daily choices. We need parents willing to stand where Joshua stood and say, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15).

Paul gives us a divine prescription on how to 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” (Phi. 4:8). Paul is telling us that because there is virtue in these things, we should think on them. The Greek word for think here is *logizomai* and it signifies that we “make these things the subject of our thoughtful consideration or carefully reflect on them” (Vine 628). “What we think today, we shall be and do tomorrow” (Taylor 162). Our thoughts control our actions. The Proverbs writer says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro. 23:7). The Psalmist says, “I will set no wicked thing before my eyes” (Psa. 101:3). Following that would eliminate much of the evil that can be found on our screens and in many places we could go.

The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to give us a personal

growth and development scale that we call the Christian graces (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Faith is our foundation and virtue is the very first thing we are to add to our faith. Virtue is that important to God; it should be that important to us.

The Virtuous Woman Of Bible Times

By following the examples of virtuous women in the Bible, we can understand what God expects of us as virtuous women in 2020. We find in Proverbs 12:4 that failure to live virtuously brings shame. The best-known passage on the virtuous woman is, of course, Proverbs 31:10-31. Notice how many things she did and the characteristics that she exhibited in her life. Rather than complaining about what she could not do as a woman, she stayed busy doing all the things she could do. Rather than feeling like it was just too much, and she could never do it all, she just got busy and did it. Just as her tasks changed during the different stages of her life, so will ours.

The virtuous woman is valuable (Pro. 31: 10). She is trustworthy and helpful to her husband (Pro. 31:11-12; Pro. 31:23). She is a willing worker (Pro. 31:13-14; Pro. 31:19). She spends many hours caring for her family (Pro. 31:14-15; Pro. 31:21; Pro. 31:27). She is a successful businesswoman (Pro. 31:16; Pro. 31:18; Pro. 31:24). She is strong, charitable, and honorable (Pro. 31: 17; Pro. 31: 20; Pro. 31:25). She has wisdom and kindness (Pro. 31:26). She is a blessing, both to her husband and to her children (Pro. 31:28). She is known for her works (Pro. 31:31). What a worthy example she

left for us to follow!

God gives us many examples of virtuous women to learn from and to follow. Ruth left her family, her home, and her gods to go with Naomi to Bethlehem and worship the one true God. We find her to be one of the few women honored by being named in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Boaz says in Ruth 3:11 that all Bethlehem knew her to be a virtuous woman. Do the people where we live know us to be virtuous women? Hannah gave her son Samuel back to God (1 Sam. 1:11; 1 Sam. 1:27-28). Are we raising our children for God? Esther became Queen and saved her people (Est. 4:14-16). Who knows but what we are here today in 2020 “for such a time as this”? What better example of the virtuous woman could there be than Mary, chosen by God to be the mother of His Son (Luke 1:28)? If the Messiah had been born during our lifetimes, are we the kind of women God would have considered for that highest honor? Dorcas was full of good works (Acts 9:36). How much of our time in 2020 is spent doing good works? Lois and Eunice had a multi-generational family faith that they instilled in Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). How are we doing with instilling that unfeigned faith in our children? These examples are real women, living during sometimes difficult days, who lived virtuous lives faithfully following God. If they did it, we can as well.

The Virtuous Woman Of 2020

We must realize that virtue is not some garment we can put on to wear on Sundays and hang in the closet the rest of the week. It must be what we are all the time.

It will affect every aspect of our lives. It must affect us inwardly before we can demonstrate it outwardly. Virtue will determine how we think, how we talk, how we dress, how we act, and how we spend our time. The virtuous woman today realizes that her walk is to be worthy of her calling as a Christian (Eph. 4:1). If our daily choices compromise that, then our walk becomes more worldly than worthy. The virtuous woman wants to live the transformed life rather than one conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1-2). The world tries hard to get us to conform to its desires; God wants us to be transformed in Him. Much of what the world accepts today in the areas of dress, speech, and activity is simply not becoming of women professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

The virtuous woman of 2020 knows she needs to set a good example. Find good examples in those Christian women you know. Think of how they have impacted your life. What characteristics do they have that you want to follow in your life? My main example is and will always be my mother. We are all blessed to have many wonderful examples of virtuous women in our lives. Realize that just as we need those examples, we need to be those examples for others. Someone is looking to you and to me to be that kind of example. Titus 2:3-5 gives us a list of areas we need to see and be as examples. The word “chaste” in this passage means to be pure from carnality, modest (Vine 97).

The virtuous woman of 2020 recognizes and respects God’s role for women, both in the home and in the church. Some today would have us believe that our

different roles somehow make us second class citizens both at home and in the church. They do not! Some would have us believe that culture and custom, time and place should change these roles for today rather than what God's Word says. They do not! Ephesians 5:23-28 still makes the husband the head of the wife. If he fulfills his role as God intended, he will love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. If we women fulfill our role as God intended, we will practice submission. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 are not his own; they were inspired by the Holy Spirit and they still apply to us today. Paul's inspired reasoning is not based on culture or a custom. The Spirit takes us back to creation. Some say that if an eldership gives permission for a woman to preach or to teach men, then there is no usurping of authority. Men today do not have the authority to countermand the Spirit's words and authorize what God does not.

The virtuous woman of 2020 must be virtuous in her use of social media. We set an example here too, either a good one or a bad one. Our example on social media is much more public. We can be virtually connected today all over the world in ways that were not even dreamed of just a few years ago. Frankly, there is a tendency to share way too much private information in those public forums. It is way too easy to sit at home behind the security of our screen and post things we would never say or do face to face. Remember, even if it was private when it happened, it is no longer private when you post it publicly. Much good can be done for the cause of Christ on social media; much harm can be

done as well.

As these words are being written, we are in the midst of a global shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have had to change every aspect of our daily lives, including how we meet together for worship and Bible study. Our brethren have put so much great content online during this time. There have been worship services and Bible classes streamed and shared. Gospel Broadcasting Network, Polishing the Pulpit, Search TV, World Video Bible School, and others have shared the gospel in so many ways. People could watch online who might never have come into our buildings to hear the truth of God's Word. It has been one of the best uses of social media we could imagine. Perhaps now more than ever, we appreciate the ability to keep in touch online with family and friends because we could not see each other in person. There are multiple groups we can be part of to study, to grow, and to encourage each other in our Christian walk. Prayerfully, when this crisis is behind us, we will all have a greater love and appreciation for our Christian family and for the precious opportunity to worship together in person. Our example on social media can truly let our Christian lights shine.

Sadly, the opposite is also true. Can people tell we are faithful followers of Jesus from what we post? Would they see Jesus in our posts, or would they be surprised to learn that we are Christians? If Jesus sent us a friend request on Facebook, would there be some things we would want to delete before accepting? Would we need to delete some pictures because of what we are wearing

or what we are doing? Would there be some posts we would want to remove because of the language, the off-color humor, or just the angry rants? The same questions would apply if Jesus wanted to follow us on Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat. Sometimes people are even more daring in what they post on those platforms than on Facebook because of who might see their posts. Maybe it is not that our posts are inappropriate. Perhaps it is just that they reflect that Jesus and the church do not play a very large part in our day to day lives. We spend a lot of time posting our favorite music, sports, politics, pictures of our adorable children and grandchildren, pets, or jokes and memes. But some never make mention of anything religious. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat. 6:21). Where is your treasure? Does it show on your social media?

The virtuous woman of 2020 has her priorities in the right order. She loves God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). She knows that when Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments,” He meant all of them (John 14:15). Remember the account of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Was not Martha’s problem one of priorities? She was too focused on the physical while Mary was focused on the spiritual. The physical demands much of our time, but how much more important is the spiritual! Do we have time to volunteer for school, clubs, sports, and so on, but never have time to volunteer for anything at church? There is nothing wrong with those things unless we let them take precedence over God. It goes back to that worthy walk of Ephesians 4. It goes back to the transformed

life of Romans 12. Our children need us to be the kind of parents we read about in Deuteronomy 6. There is a tremendous amount of time in that chapter. God wants us to diligently teach our children about Him as part of our daily lives (Deu. 6:4-9). He knows our children will ask why, and we need to be able to tell them (Deu. 6:20-23). He wants us to realize that His teachings and commandments are for our good always, for our righteousness (Deu. 6:24-25). God wants our whole hearts (Jer. 29:13). He deserves to be first in our lives (Mat. 6:33). Our leftovers will never be good enough.

Conclusion

We have studied together from Scripture what God means by virtue. We have looked at some examples of virtuous women in the Bible. We have discussed some of what being virtuous looks like in 2020. As women who love God, we want to live lives of virtue, demonstrating moral excellence. May God help each of us to be the virtuous woman every day of our lives. That is what He wants us to be. That is what our families, our congregations, our communities, and our world need us to be.

Works Cited

- The Holy Bible: King James Version*. Print.
Taylor, Robert. *Studies in Galatians and Philippians*. Taylor Publications. 1986. Ripley, TN.
Vine, W. E. et al. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Thomas Nelson. 1996. Nashville, TN.

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN OF 2020

“Virtue.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virtue