

The Gospel Preceptor

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Psa 119:104

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“Hybrid Churches” And Their “Ministries”

Jerry C. Brewer

In assessing the errors of Phil Sanders, speaker for the television program, *In Search of The Lord's Way*, brother Johnny Oxendine described the departure of what may be called, “mainstream churches of Christ” in the last few decades.

For years we have mentioned Phil Sanders as the type of brother who would come to exemplify the mass movement from the church of the New Testament to a new hybrid conglomerate that seems to be familiar, but is entirely different from what Jesus, Paul, and Peter describe (*Bulletin of the San Mateo, Calif. Church of Christ*, April 13, 2014).

Brother Oxendine describes the emergence of a foreign entity—a “hybrid conglomerate”—that has been gradually emerging from the fellowship of Christ in the last several years. *Merriam-Webster* says a *hybrid* is, “something heterogeneous in origin or composition: composite,” and *heterogeneous* as, “consisting of dissimilar or diverse ingredients.” What we are witnessing today in the work, worship, and language of “mainstream churches of Christ” is a religious body “that seems to be familiar, but is entirely different.”

“Mainstream churches of Christ” are counterfeits of the one Jesus established and the unsuspecting are easily fooled by them. (After all, the sign on their building says, “Church of Christ”). Counterfeit money is passed every day because it bears a resemblance to genuine currency. So it is with hybrid churches. Presenting themselves as the church of Christ, they only **resemble** it. While retaining many of the church's characteristics, they have piled layers of heterogeneous elements onto it that find no basis in God's word.

The mission of the church is to preach the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:1, 3), but hybrids have changed that. Even a cursory look at their bulletins and websites reveals a skewed terminology. An obvious departure from the mission of the New Testament is seen in the almost universal use of the word **ministries** (plural) among them. The word **ministry** is used 18 times in the New Testament and **not once** is it used in the plural. The Greek word *diakonia*, translated “ministry” is used in Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 12:25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 4:1; 5:8; 6:3; Eph. 4:12; Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:5; and 4:11. The Greek word *leutergoia*, also translated “ministry” is used in Heb. 8:6 and 9:1, describing Christ's function under the new covenant and the function of priests under the Law of Moses. The New Testament church has only **one** ministry—preaching the gospel.

From whence, then, are all of the **ministries** practiced by hybrid churches today? They are products of the Social Gospel, a hybrid of socialism and religion that arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Of that, Wikipedia says,

In the United States prior to World War I, the Social Gospel was the religious wing of the progressive movement which had the aim of combating injustice, suffering and poverty in society. Denver, Colorado, was a center of Social Gospel activism. Thomas Uzzel led the Methodist People's Tabernacle from

1885 to 1910. He established a free dispensary for medical emergencies, an employment bureau for job seekers, a summer camp for children, night schools for extended learning, and English language classes...The Baptist minister Jim Goodhart set up an employment bureau, and provided food and lodging for tramps and hobos at the mission he ran. He became city chaplain and director of public welfare of Denver in 1918. Besides these Protestants, Reform Jews and Catholics helped build Denver's social welfare system in the early 20th century.

The Rev. Mark A. Matthews (1867-1940) of Seattle's First Presbyterian Church...built a model church, with night schools, unemployment bureaus, kindergarten, an anti-tuberculosis clinic, and the nation's first church-owned radio station.

Another of the defining theologians for the Social Gospel movement was Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist pastor of a congregation located in Hell's Kitchen. In *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch states that the individualistic gospel has made sinfulness of the individual clear, but it has not shed light on institutionalized sinfulness: "It has not evoked faith in the will and power of God to redeem the permanent institutions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion." This ideology would be inherited by liberation theologians and civil rights advocates and leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rauschenbusch articulated the false notion of "corporate guilt" and that "the individualistic gospel" must be redirected toward civil institutions and government to rid the body politic of social ills. To him, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15) is not the church's mission, but religious socialism "ministering" to society's material needs.

Hybrid churches have adopted Rauschenbusch's religious-robed socialism whole hog today. Take a look at their websites, and you will find an inexhaustible array of Social Gospel works listed there—usually under the tab, "Ministries." Those sites would lead one would believe that the Lord established a social service organization instead of His church, and incorporated the works of The Salvation Army, Meals on Wheels, The Lions Club, the WPA, Little League, and the Make-A-Wish Program into it. Illustrating this are the following "ministries," gleaned from websites of so-called "Churches of Christ."

"Youth Ministry," "Children's Ministry," "Education/Internet Media Ministry," "Outreach Ministry," "Discipleship Ministry," "Family Life Ministry," "Worship Team Ministry," "Service Team Ministry," "Whiz Kids Ministry," "Employment Assistance Ministry," "Our Town Ministry," "Celebrate Recovery Ministry," "Technology Ministry," "Disaster Relief Ministry," "Impact Worship Ministry," "Divorce Recovery Ministry," and "Park and Garden Ministry." The Canyon View Church of Christ in San Diego, Calif. relegates evangelism to last place in what they call their, "Five Pillars of Ministry"—which sounds vaguely like the "Five Pillars of Islam." Those are listed in this order: "Education, Fellowship, Worship, Service, Evangelism" (www.canyon-view.org About Us, Our Mission).

The above list reflects the extent to which "mainstream churches of Christ" have embraced the Social Gospel. In brother Oxendine's words, they have become "a new hybrid conglomerate that seems to be familiar, but is entirely different from what Jesus, Paul, and Peter describe." Unless, and until, they return to the New Testament pattern, the remnant of churches of Christ who still heed the call to, "Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths..." (Jer. 6:16) do not, and **cannot**, have fellowship with them (1 John 1:7; 2 John 9-11).

Editor Travels

I suffered a stroke, Dec. 15, 2020 but June 20, 2021—7 months after the stroke—I preached for the first time since for Dec. 15. Our friend Pat Craig, whom we have loved for a half-century, and his wife Teri, were among beloved our friends at Yukon, Okla. That day was a sweet foretaste of heaven.

Does the Church Saves?

C.R. Nichol

A stock expression with preachers who hold union meetings, as well as some others, is, "We wish to see people saved, and then let them join the church of their choice." Often you hear, "One church is as good as another; the church does not save you." Many people hold the view that membership in the church the Lord built is not necessary to one's salvation.

If one church is as good as another, it must follow that the Mormon Church, built by Joseph Smith, is as good as the church built by our Lord. Mr. Smith was finite, limited in knowledge, and imperfect in character. The Lord is infinite, perfect in character, and possesses all power. Do the two compare favorably?

The Lord ordained that through His church "the manifold wisdom of God" is to be made known (Eph. 3:10). Christ is the head of the church He built (Col. 1:18), but churches built by men exist by no higher authority than that residing in the men who built them. Unless a human institution is as good as a divine institution, it must follow that a church built by a mere man is not as good as the church the Lord built!

"Good Men in all Churches"

It is often said that, "There are good men in all churches." As the world measures goodness, I grant that there are as good men in one church as in another. There are also good men in the world—men who are examples of moral rectitude and in acts of charity. But that does not prove that the world is as good as the church. A Christian possesses all the virtues possessed by the man in the world, and, in addition thereto, is a child of God, honors Him in worshiping as He directs, and gives Him the glory for the acts of charity performed.

If a man is saved because of his moral worth, it must follow that the death of Christ and the grace of God are not necessary to one's salvation, for there were moral men in the world before Christ died to save us. Cornelius was a man of outstanding moral righteousness, just in his dealings with his fellows, and fruitful in acts of charity. But he was not a member of the church the Lord built, and it is declared that he was an unsaved man (Acts 10:1-6; 11:14).

Jesus said, "I will build my church..." (Matt. 16:18). He did build His church (Rom. 16:16). Did the Lord build a church that was useless in the economy of Jehovah and unnecessary in the salvation of man?

"The Church Does not Save"

Often you have heard, "The church does not save you." It is meant by those who make such remarks that it is not necessary to be a member of the church to be saved. All who read their Bibles understand that **God saves**. To pardon is the act of Jehovah. True, one **must** believe in the Lord before God pardons him (Acts 16:31), but it is not faith that pardons. God forgives. God pardons.

Though one must repent to be saved (Acts 2:38), it is not repentance that pardons or saves the man—God saves! Repentance is an act the man must perform before God will save him.

One must be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), but it is not baptism that pardons. God pardons—God saves! The church does not save you, but consider this: "Are the saved in the church or in the world?"

Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul said they were "sanctified in Christ Jesus," "justified in the name of the Lord," and "saved" by the gospel (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 15:1-2). So certain as one is enjoying these blessings, that sure is it that he is one of the number composing the church. The church does not save, but the **saved ones are the church**.

The Church—the One Body

"There is one body"—there is "but one body" (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:20). What is the "one body?" "He is the head of the body, the church..." (Col. 1:18). Christ is the head of what? "He is the head of the body, the church." If one is not of the number constituting

the church; if he is not one of the number composing the body of which Christ is head, is he saved?

When one is prepared in heart and life; when he believes in the Lord with all his heart, repents of his sins, and is baptized as the Lord commands, he is baptized into the “one body” (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13). In one verse it is declared that one is baptized into the “one body,” and in another verse it is affirmed that one is baptized “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Hence, to be baptized “into Christ” is to be baptized into the “body” which is the church. From this, it follows that if one is saved without being in the “body,” he is saved without being in Christ, for to be “in Christ” is to be in the “one body.”

In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...” (Eph. 1:7). Salvation is **in** Christ. That they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ...” (2 Tim. 2:10). Obtain what? Salvation. Salvation is where? In Christ. To be in Christ is to be in the “one body,” “which is the church” (Col. 1:24).

From this, it follows that if one is not in “the body” he is not in Christ, and if not in Christ, he is not saved. But to be in “the body” is to be in the church. “He is the head of the body, the church. The church does not save you, but **the church is the saved ones.**

The Church is Blood-Purchased

Christ “is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Though Christ died for the whole world, not all will be saved, because there are some who refuse to appropriate the blessings provided. Those who embrace the blessings are “loosed” from their sins by His blood (Rev. 1:5). Who are that number? “To feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Those composing the church are the ones who have been “loosed” from their sins “by his own blood.” They are the purchased ones. It is not the church that saves you. **The church is the saved number.**

But if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God...” (1 Tim. 3:15). “The house of God” is the “church of the living God.” No one entertains the idea that the house of God is the meeting house in which His children meet for worship. God’s house is not composed of brick and mortar, but of men and women who are his children. Crispus believed on the Lord with all his house...” (Acts 18:8). His house was his family, not his residence

Of those saved in Ephesus, Paul said, “Ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” (Eph. 2:19). Since the church is “the house of God”—“the household of God”—and one’s household is composed of his family, it follows that if one is a child of God, he is in the household of God. To affirm that you are a child of God, but not in the church, is to declare that God has children not in His household, or family! The church does not save you, but **the church is the saved number.**

The Conversion of a Good Man

Ron Cosby

From the description of Luke and those who knew Cornelius, he was a good man. When a “good person” dies, we hear people say, “if anyone goes to heaven, he will, for he was such a good man.” How do good people who do not have Jesus, stand before God? To answer this very difficult question, we need to turn to the Scriptures. Since Cornelius is obviously a good man, we ought to find our answer in his conversion.

Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision openly, as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him... fetch one Simon, who is

surnamed Peter...who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house (Act 10:1-5; 11:14).

Cornelius Was Lost

Since Cornelius needed to hear words whereby he could be saved (Acts 11: 14), he was lost. We need to establish when salvation is obtained and what is essential and what is non-essential in obtaining salvation, making the proper distinction between essentials and peripheral matters.

When Was Cornelius Saved?

We are expressly told that Cornelius was devout (Acts 10:2). Vine says that “devout” is derived from the Greek word that indicates “reverence exhibited especially in actions.” Most of the world would certainly think that such a condition and characteristic as “devoutness” would constitute salvation. However, Cornelius—though devout—needed to hear words of salvation because he was lost.

Cornelius believed in God yet, at the time, he was unredeemed and in danger of eternal doom (Acts 10:2; 11:14). Therefore, the teaching of salvation by faith only is not biblically sound. Cornelius “feared God.” The Holy Spirit, through Luke, states it clearly:

Cornelius “**feared**” God” (Acts 10:2). From Acts 10:34-35, Peter correctly concludes that “God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him.” This being so, Cornelius must have been saved. Wrong. He “feared God,” but, at that time in his life he did not know what to do to work righteousness. He had to **hear** what to do.

Cornelius “gave much alms to the people.” He was very generous and apparently had the kind of compassionate heart that God sought (Acts 10:2).

Not only did Cornelius pray, we are told that he “prayed always” (Acts 10:2). Now, since he was lost, though he was a praying man, it is obvious that we are not saved by prayer.

Among some of the miraculous happenings associated with Cornelius was the vision that he received (Acts 10:3). Many think that if a person has a vision, this is a sure sign of personal salvation. However, seeing and hearing the angelic being did not save this good man.

Cornelius wanted to **hear preaching**. He even invited others to hear the gospel. It is highly commendable when one wants to hear the preaching of the gospel, as did Cornelius. (Acts 10:8, 24). In fact, Cornelius is described as “waiting” to hear. He was enthusiastic and **eager** to learn how to be saved.

Cornelius had a respectful attitude and was just—had a good report of the Jews (Acts 10:22). It was unheard of for a Gentile to be so highly regarded and respected by the Jews in the first century. Surely such a one is saved, isn't he? Not according to Holy Writ (Acts 11:14).

Cornelius spoke in tongues, having received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45-46). But even speaking in tongues did not save Cornelius, nor was it a sign that he was already saved (Acts 11:14). This may sound strange in view of those who teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was for the salvation of the recipient.

What Are the Words Cornelius Had to Hear?

All men must fear God and work righteousness (Acts 10:35; Rom. 1:16-17)—possess a godly attitude that is coupled with obedience to God—prescribed actions. Salvation is not all of grace or all of works. The salvation of Christ is of grace but it is also of obedient works.

He had to hear, believe and acknowledge certain facts pertaining to Jesus: Jesus did good; God was with him (Acts 10:38); Jesus was crucified (Acts 10:39); He arose from the grave (Acts 10:40, 41); these words also stressed future judgment (Acts 10:42); the wonderful news Peter preached to Cornelius was that he could have, “... remission of sins” through the name of Jesus (Acts 10:43). When Cornelius received the gift of the Holy Spirit, he had not believed in or heard of this Jesus because Peter had only “be-

gan to speak” (Acts 11:15). After receiving the Spirit, after hearing the gospel, after being baptized into Christ, he was saved.

Cornelius was obedient to all of heaven's message (Acts 10:47-48). It was at this point that Cornelius and his household were saved. Regardless of a person's goodness, it takes the blood of Jesus to wash away sins (Matt. 26:28; Jas. 1:18-21). Sinners contact the blood in water baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). Since remission of sins is tantamount to salvation, we see why Cornelius had to hear words whereby he could be saved (Acts 11:14). The remission of sins was obtained when Cornelius submitted to water baptism (Acts 2:38; 10:47, 48).

Conclusion

People have trouble keeping their theology consistent. They argue that one cannot be saved by what he does, contending that salvation is by faith alone. However, the same people are the very ones to say at the death of a good neighbor, “He was such a good man. If he doesn't make it to heaven, no one will.” Which stance correctly represents his theology? Faith only, or being good? Cornelius has taught us that neither position is biblical.

“[I]n none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 ASV). All men are lost without Christ, even those we might classify as “good men.”

The Church Walking Before God

Gene Hill

It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the prophetic nature of the church other than to note prophecy regarding it in Isaiah 2:1-4. Please see Paul's use of prophetic language writing to Timothy in discussing behavior of a Christian (1 Tim. 3:15). Nor will we be discussing church government, an important element in identifying the church founded by Christ, other than seeing that a congregation properly constituted will be overseen and led by faithful, scripturally qualified men (3:1-7), assisted in that effort by other men likewise qualified through Scripture to serve as deacons (3:8-13).

It is proper for us to define our terms when discussing things spiritual in nature. The church, as a body, is indeed a thing spiritual in nature. “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). In Acts 2:47 we find, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” While writing to Timothy, Paul says: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Furthermore, Paul tells us that God made Christ head over all things to the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). Then he reverses that order in addressing the Colossians that Christ is head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18). Especially regarding the nature of the church, Paul reveals that there is only one that makes up this kind of organization. “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling*” (Eph. 4:4). In Ephesians 4:4-6 there is a series of ones. If there is more than one of any of these seven, then it would be reasonable to believe there could be more than one of any or all of the rest.

The religious institution we read about upon the pages of the New Testament is singular in nature. This is the case because the Lord promised to build it, added only the saved and all the saved to it, and Paul gave specific instructions to Timothy how he was to behave while in it.

Membership in the Church

Jesus is able to establish entrance requirements for church membership (Heb. 5:8-9) since He is head over all things to the church (1:22-23), approved of God (Acts 2:22), with assurances given to us in that God raised Him from the dead (17:31). Jesus said that those who are properly taught and who have learned will come to Him (John

6:44-45; Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:33-34; Joel 3:16-17). Such ones then validate their learning in believing that Jesus is the Messiah (John 8:12, 24; Isa. 9:2; 49:6). Believing in Jesus as the Messiah will lead one to repentance (Luke 13:3), and then to confessing Him as Lord and Savior (Mat. 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). Since faith is a consequence of hearing and believing truth, trust results and leads us to being baptized to obtain the remission of sins (Mark 16:16). Sins are purged by blood (Heb. 9:21-22; 10:9-10, 22), and Jesus shed His blood for this purpose (Mat. 26:28). We contact His blood in baptism (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5; 7:14; Eph. 5:25-27), receiving sanctification (1 Pet. 1:22-23; Heb. 9:21; 10:22; 13:12) and imputed righteousness (Jam. 2:20-24). This is the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23) that puts us into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

Those souls whom the Lord added to the church on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:14-47, did what Jesus commanded to receive by grace His blessing of salvation. It is these people we discuss in this lesson of "The Church Walking Before God" (1 John 1:6-10).

It is a Walk of Faith

Scripture tells us, "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Yet we can know that "he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). We can know this because, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psa. 19:1). God has not left Himself without witness for the earnest seeker of truth to find Him, for whom he seeks and his heart yearns (Mat. 5:44-45; Acts 17:14; John 5:39).

Once it is understood that God exists, the Bible is His final revelation to man (1 Cor 2:7-13; 13:4-8), and that obedience to His Gospel takes place as discussed, the process of maturing in the faith begins in earnest. Our search for deeper Biblical truth begins and never ends until we close our eyes in death, exhale the last time, and our spirit departs this tabernacle of flesh (2 Pet. 1:12-14).

Walking Before God

With the prophesied change in covenants having been fulfilled (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13; Col. 2:14), the church is now the Israel of God (Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8). As our text points out, spiritual Israel's best interests will be realized when we do those things God has commanded and leave all else undone (2 Cor. 5:7; Mat. 15:8-9). Hear what God told Jeremiah:

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you (Jer. 7:22-23).

This same lesson applies to God's people today just as much as it applied unto Israel of old. Jesus says as much in Matthew 6:33.

This walk is bounded by the Word of God (Col. 3:17). It is characterized as walking in the light (1 John 1:6-7). To walk in the light, Scripturally speaking, we will be using God's Word as our sole guide in faith, work, and worship. In walking in the light, we are fulfilling God's will for His children (Psa. 119:105, 130). The **only** sure way of knowing we are pleasing to God is to do all of that and only that contained in the Scriptures (1 John 2:3; Psa. 119:172; Mat. 3:15; Eph. 2:9-10).

In walking before God, the church accepts the mind set of Christ as He addressed Paul on the road to Damascus. Hear the Lord Himself:

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me

(Acts 26:15-18).

The world is lost in sin and bound for eternal damnation unless their current walk is diverted from the way called **broad**. Whereas Jesus went about doing good (10:38), and we are to do good unto all (Gal. 6:10), the work assigned to the church is not welfare and benevolence but rather evangelism (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-49).

All that the local congregation does or accomplishes is done through the hands of its individual members. Each member, by virtue of individual sanctification (1 Pet 1:20-23; Heb. 13:12), is a member of the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9-10) tasked with praise of God (Heb. 13:15) and obligated to a life worthy of a sanctified priest (1 Pet. 2:11-19). Jesus likens His followers to salt, light, a city, and a light set on a candlestick. The illustrations have the purpose of God being glorified (Mat. 5:13-16). The stated purpose of creation and faithful disciples of Christ is to glorify and honor God and from which activities God receives pleasure (Rev. 4:11). The only lifestyle befitting those professing to be followers of Christ is one that models their Lord and Master, Jesus. Christians are to be in the forefront of those seeking to live godly lives.

Our behavior is to be impeccable. Faithful Christians heed Paul's directions in 1 Thesalonians 4:1-7 and refrain from fornication. Men are treated respectfully and women in purity (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Marriage is an honorable relationship designed by God as the sole outlet for sexual needs (1 Cor. 7:1-5; Mat. 19:1-9; Gen. 2:21-24).

Our speech is to be seasoned with salt used only to edify (Col. 4:6; 3:16). Corrupt communication is never to flow over our tongue, pass our lips, much less to be considered in the first place (Eph. 4:29; Mat. 12:34-37; Jer. 17:9). Paul urges Titus to speak only sound doctrine which cannot be condemned causing those that are contrary to be ashamed.

Titus 2:1, 8

When a congregation of God's people walk before God, they are walking in a way and manner which glorifies God, saves their own souls, those that are interested in the truth, and at the same time will bring persecution from the world. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Walking before God brings strife into families (Luke 12:49-53), disrupts society (Acts 19:23-41), yet brings peace with God (Eph. 2:11-22).

Look to the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. See how not walking in the old paths condemned the nation of Israel. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). May we ever seek the face of Jehovah, the Lord God Almighty with a tender heart and a listening ear.

Work Cited

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

Reprinted from the 2018 Bellview Lectureship, Pensacola, FL, *The Church*, ed. Michael Hatcher.

Christ and the Spirits in Prison

Nana Yaw Aidoo

The apostle Peter wrote;

Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water (1 Pet. 3:18-20 ASV).

The popular view concerning this passage is that, **our Lord at His death, and whiles He was in the hadean realm**, preached to the disobedient of the pre-flood age. It is this writer's belief that to accept this interpretation is to give comfort to the

Catholic doctrine of “purgatory,” which is the doctrine of a post-death second chance. Two questions enable us to see the error inherent in this popular view. First, why did our Lord choose to preach only to those who lived in the time of Noah?

Were there not wicked people who lived during the days of Abraham who needed an opportunity to repent and turn to God after death? Were there sinners who defied God during the days of Moses who would cherish an opportunity to be saved after death? Does the reader not believe that during the days of the Judges there were those who went to their graves rebelling against God? Would they not relish the privilege of being “preached to” again? Absolutely! (Marvin Weir; *Studies in 1, 2 Peter and Jude*; 1998 Annual Denton Lectures, ed. Dub McClish).

Unless the God who would have all men be saved is a respecter of persons, then the view under review cannot possibly be a true one.

Second, what exactly did our Lord preach? If the gospel, then He preached an incomplete one since He had not yet resurrected from the grave (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4). If a message to get His hearers to repent, then what of passages like Hebrews 9:27 that teach that the state in which a man dies is the state in which he will be for all eternity? If it was to inform the faithful in the hadean realm that through His death He had completed their redemption, then we hasten to remind the reader that Peter did **not** say Christ preached to the faithful but to the **disobedient**.

The foregoing ought to be enough to show that the popular view that Christ at His death, and while He was in the hadean realm, preached to some people is a false position.

While it is true that the text teaches that Christ did some preaching, the preaching was done by Christ “in the spirit” to those who lived “...in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing...” Christ did the preaching “in the spirit” through the agency of Noah (2 Pet. 2:5) and not in His own person. The disobedient of the pre-flood era are said to be “spirits in prison” because at the time of the writing of Peter’s epistle, they were disembodied spirits in the prison of those who die in their sins (cf. Jude 6; Rev. 20:1-3, 7). Those who argue that since it is written that Christ “went and preached” then He must have done it in His person, must explain why it is said in Ephesians 2:17 that Christ went and preached peace to the Gentiles, when He never did anything of that sort in His own person? Clearly, though it is written that Christ did preach to the Gentiles, He did it by the agency of His apostles especially the apostle Paul. Obviously, “what one does through an authorized agent, he is said to do himself...” (Guy N. Woods; *Commentary on Peter, John and Jude*; pp.101). (See also John 3:1-2). The apostle in 1 Peter 3:18-20 combines what Christ in the spirit did through Noah to those who lived in the pre-flood age, and their state at the time of the writing of his epistle. That is to say, at the time of Peter’s letter, they were “spirits in prison.” However the preaching was directed to them in the days of Noah, their lifetimes, and was done by Christ “in the spirit” through Noah.

The preaching to these who are now deceased occurred on earth during their lifetimes. Common “horse-sense” is all that is necessary for one to realize that all the lost in torment would repent if given the opportunity to do so... Those who go to their graves guilty of practicing the works of the flesh “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21). The statement of the Hebrew writer is still true: after death “cometh judgment” (Heb. 9:27) (Weir, *ibid*).

Must or Can We Forgive If the Offender Refuses to Repent?

Dub McClish

God’s example of forgiveness answers, “No.” God’s Word constantly urges men in both the Old and the New Testaments to repent so that they may be forgiven. God sent His prophets to Israel and Judah generation after generation and the theme of them all

was repentance. When they steadfastly refused and mistreated God's prophets, He finally brought destruction upon both of those nations of His people. I am not aware of a single case in all of the Bible where God ever promised or extended forgiveness apart from repentance (which in its fullness includes recognition and confession of the sin, regretting the sin, doing all one can to correct the wrong done, and ceasing the practice of it). Men have always had only two alternatives: Repent or perish (Luke 13:3)! (This is not to imply that repentance is the only condition of forgiveness in every circumstance, but it is simply to illustrate that at the very least repentance has always been required by). God does not forgive unconditionally, as we have already emphasized, and forgiveness has always required man's repentance. Paul told the Athenians, "He [God] commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent" (Acts 17:30).

The teaching of our Lord also answers, "No." Jesus said, "If thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if **he repent**, forgive him. And if he sin against **thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent**, thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). Twice in this passage Jesus emphasizes our duty to forgive offenders, but also, twice He emphasizes that our forgiveness is dependent upon the repentance of the offender.

There are those who have suggested that Christ implied God bestowed forgiveness upon His impenitent crucifiers when He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). However, this could not be so for at least three reasons. (1) It places Christ in the position of asking His Father to contradict His immutable will which requires repentance of the sinner. (2) It places Christ in the position of contradicting Himself (Luke 13:3; 17:3-4). (3) It makes the apostles' words on Pentecost to the crucifiers of Christ superfluous at best and ridiculous at worst. Clearly, the apostles were addressing those responsible for the Lord's crucifixion (Acts 2:22-23). They were told by the twelve, "Repent ye, and be immersed every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). If God instantaneously granted the Lord's prayer on the cross for the forgiveness of these people short of repentance, then they did not need to repent because they had already received the remission of sins some fifty days before! The fact that they were told to repent and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness on Pentecost is positive proof that they were not immediately forgiven when Jesus prayed for their forgiveness. What we are to understand from Jesus' prayer on the cross, therefore, is that His crucifiers would be granted the opportunity to repent so that they could be forgiven, which in exactly what Pentecost provided. We are to understand the dying prayer of Stephen in the same way (Acts 7:60). At least one among those who encouraged his death (Saul of Tarsus) would subsequently hear and obey the gospel and have his sins washed away in the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16).

It is manifestly impossible for God to forgive those who sin against Him before they repent. Surely, none would argue that mere men must do that which God cannot do!

Denominationalism: A Religious Crime

Cled E. Wallace

Toward the close of His personal ministry Jesus said: "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). He did so and years after its establishment Paul referred to it and its divine mission as being "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11). It is not an accident, an afterthought nor a substitute, but is identified with the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy. It was "at hand" in the days of John the Baptist and during Christ's ministry on earth and had an established existence when Paul was preaching the Gospel. It is the "kingdom which cannot be moved" which took the place of shaken and fallen Judaism. Beyond any doubt we have a new kingdom, a new law and a new priesthood. It is a sickly hope that pines for an earthly kingdom and a revival of Judaism in view of what the kingdom of God is and the blessings it confers upon its citizens and the promises it holds out before them. We have our inheritance in heaven.

Faith Versus Flesh

In view of his purpose to build the church, or establish the kingdom, Jesus said: "And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). But Judaism had to go first. So Paul said that Christ broke down "the middle wall of partition" between Jews and Gentiles by abolishing the Jewish law, that he might establish the church which is called the "one new man." In this church, which is also called "one body," Jews and Gentiles without distinction are reconciled to God (Eph. 2:11-16). This church of Christ is the new kingdom of Israel where faith counts for everything and blood-kin counts for nothing. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7).

It is both strange and false, this idea that is freely advocated, that a man can be a true child of Abraham by faith, reckoned with the true Israel of God, an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ, and not even be a member of the church at all. Paul makes it clear that Christ established the church "that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross." A man who contends that salvation is outside the church has the choice of an undesirable classification. He is either ignorant of New Testament teaching on the subject, or in rebellion against it. All Christians we read about in the New Testament were members of the church because they were Christians. They became members of the church at the same time and in the same way they became Christians. It follows quite naturally, then, that they were all members of the same body:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Christians Versus Sectarians

Since the New Testament was written, differences have come up over matters not in the New Testament. An Ashdodish language has sprung up to describe conflicting parties and their principles, and so we have denominations and human creeds. Believing and doing what the New Testament teaches never did and never will make a man anything but a Christian. It takes something else to make a sectarian. These weeds of sectarianism did not grow up from the planting of the word of God. They came of another sowing. And we might do well to remember that Jesus said: "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13).

Denominationalism, which is partyism in religion, is the outstanding religious crime of today. Its condemnation is established by the testimony of its own advocates. Each one of them will inform you that you can be saved and go to heaven without being a member of his particular denomination. They do not jointly, or separately, constitute the body of Christ, for the body of Christ consisted of all Christians before there was any such a thing as a denomination in existence. The sure way to go to heaven is to get into the body of Christ by obeying the gospel, stay in there by living as the New Testament directs, and stay out of the partisan affairs which everybody admits you do not have to belong to in order to be saved.

The Church Versus Choice

"O, but one church is just as good as another," we are told so often it starts a yawn. How such a piece of pious inanity ever enjoyed the currency it has is beyond me! If I believed it, which I really think nobody does, my advice to inquirers would be brief. I'd tell them to flip a coin and choose according to heads or tails. It would be so much simpler than proving all things and holding fast to that which is good. My idea of a hard job would be to have less respect for popular religion than it has for the plain teaching of the New Testament.

It was popular for awhile to thank God for so many churches so that the whims of the individual could be satisfied in choosing what suited him. Each partisan brotherhood was supposed to emphasize some "truth" and the individual made his choice according to the "truth" he wanted emphasized. The whims of human weakness were exalted above the duty of obeying God. If a man were found who wanted to emphasize all the

truth, he would have to join all the denominations or find himself cut off from some of the truth by a partisan fence. And this contradictory situation would not allow him to join even two. Who ever heard of a man being a member of two religious denominations at the same time? The whole thing was and is a farce, a travesty, to be ridiculed. A man who belongs to the body of Christ, the church of the New Testament has all the truth that anybody else has and all the truth that others do not have. The apostles' doctrine, which is the creed of the true church, includes the entire will of God, and the membership of this church is not cut off from intimate fellowship with any of the people of God by sectarian adherence to partisan principles. Party lines will vanish and party organizations will dissolve when everybody stands firmly on the New Testament. It is the only perfect bond of union.

Popular religion with its disgraceful divisions is rapidly settling down to a sort of truce where fundamental and irreconcilable differences are politely ignored and smooth tongues cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace." It is not the unity that Jesus prayed for and the body of Christ represents.

Many communities have been treated to so-called union revivals where denominations united to make "Christians" and divided again to make sectarians out of these same "Christians." What advantage is there in being a sectarian? Whoever makes a sectarian out of a Christian has played a dirty trick on him. But whoever makes a Christian out of a sectarian has done a divine piece of work. The thing that makes a Christian is not Methodist doctrine, or Baptist doctrine or Presbyterian doctrine or any other partisan doctrine. The Gospel does this work most effectively. It was preached by the apostles before modern denominationalism ever existed. It is no compliment to "our denominations" to recognize the fact that a universal acceptance of the New Testament would destroy every one of them.

When We Preach Against Denominationalism...

Lee Moses

Churches of Christ are known for standing firmly against religious denominationalism. Sermons refuting denominationalism have been common in churches of Christ. Members of churches of Christ are known for taking denominational errors to task. Perhaps unsurprisingly, members of denominations do not always appreciate this stance. But unfairly, many accuse churches of Christ of self-superiority—as well as malice, envy, and hatred against members of denominations—for preaching against denominationalism. None of this is true. Such accusations stem in large part from a misunderstanding of what message churches of Christ seek to convey when preaching against denominationalism. When we preach against denominationalism...

...We are not saying that members of denominations lack intelligence. Some seem to take it this way. However, it is neither from superior intelligence that one has become a member of the Lord's church, nor from lesser intelligence that one has become a member of a denomination. The apostle Peter did observe that Paul wrote "some things hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:16). But those are only some things, deeper matters calling the Christian to deeper contemplation—not all things in the New Testament are hard to be understood. Einstein-level I.Q. is not required to understand the fundamentals of the Gospel to become a Christian (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26).

...We are not saying that members of denominations are deceitful. Most of them truly believe what they say they believe. Honest, sincere people can be led to believe error is true, just as Jacob was led to believe his living son Joseph was dead (Gen. 37:31-35), and as Saul of Tarsus was led to believe that his continuation in Judaism and opposition to Christianity would secure God's favor (Acts 22:3-5; 26:9). One can likewise respect the conviction that members of denominations have while at the same time warning them that what they believe is incorrect and a dire threat to their souls.

...We are not saying that members of denominations are immoral. False doctrines certainly can and do lead to immorality (cf. 2 Pet. 2:13-15). However, New Testament Christians have all known members of denominations who exemplified

kindness, morality, and helpfulness. We all consider it a privilege to number such people among our neighbors and friends. To preach against the doctrines that denominations hold is not the same as saying all members of denominations are horrible, awful people. They are not, and I have never known a Gospel preacher to suggest otherwise.

Churches of Christ simply seek to convey and uphold the message of the Gospel. However, the Gospel leaves no place for denominationalism, as it nowhere authorizes denominationalism and condemns the very idea of it. Furthermore, denominationalism obscures and destroys the message of the Gospel. When we preach against denominationalism, it is never a personal attack against all members of a particular denomination or of all denominations. What we are saying is that members of denominations need to exchange the man made snares in which they find themselves for the true kingdom of Christ.

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Hell is Hot!

Jess Whitlock

Many people do not believe in the biblical doctrine of hell. Guess what? Fire will burn whether we believe it will or not. Frost will freeze whether we believe it will or not. Poison will kill whether we believe it will or not. Hell is real and the lost will be there in eternity whether any man believes it or not!

I once read a denominational preacher's thoughts on the subject of hell. He concluded: "The doctrine of an eternally burning hell is not found in Scripture; it is tradition." John said, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [prove—ASV] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

What saith the Scripture? Christ said hell was an "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...everlasting punishment" (Mat. 25:41, 46). Jesus said that it is a place where "the fire...never shall be quenched...Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-44). Hell is further described as a place where "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever" (Rev. 14:11). Along with Satan the lost will be "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). Please consider: Matthew 3:12; 8:12; 25:12ff; Hebrews 6:8; and Revelation 14:10; etc. The Bible teaches hell is real! The Bible teaches hell is a place of torment, fire, pain, and that it is everlasting!

The Northwestern University School of Education distributed a questionnaire to 500 ministers of various man-made denominations in 1995. They were asked to respond to a number of questions. One question was: "Do you believe the Bible's teaching of a literal hell?" In this survey 69% denied the Bible's teaching, while 31% said they agreed! There will always be those who deny what the Word of God so plainly teaches! I once had a man contend that it is wrong to take a man who has lived in disobedience to the will of God for 50 or 60 years and then condemn him forever. I responded that if it is wrong to take a man who has lived in disobedience for 50 or 60 years and condemn him forever; it would be equally wrong to take a man who has lived in obedience to God for 50 or 60 years and bless him forever! If not, why not? This man failed to recognize sin for what it is! He refused to realize that Christ died on a Roman cross because of the sins of man!(Rom. 5:8;John 3:16). Note the words of Matthew

25:46, “And these shall go away into **everlasting** punishment: but the righteous into life **eternal**.” Notice the duration of time for the wicked in hell is exactly the same as the duration of the righteous in heaven! “Everlasting” and “Eternal” are both taken from a Greek term, *aiōnios*, and that word means “eternal, without end, never to cease, everlasting, indeterminate as to duration.” If the wicked in hell cease to be punished after 1,000 years or 100,000 centuries, then at that point in time the righteous in heaven will cease to be blessed! How do I know? For the same word is used to describe the duration of both in Matthew 25:46! The Word of God is the Word of God and hell is hot!

Coping with the Plague of Biblical Ignorance

Dub McClish

Introduction

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

Such is the awful assessment of the ignorance of God's people in the 8th century BC. Plainly, God was displeased with his people in the Old Testament because of their ignorance of His Word. If ignorance of God's Law was inexcusable in a day when there was no way to mass-produce it and circulate it among the people except by public reading, how much more inexcusable is ignorance among us with our multiple copies of the Bible in our homes and the many opportunities to hear it preached and taught?

Time was, in previous generations, when we were known as a "Bible-totin', Bible-quotin'" people by our neighbors and friends. Now we can't even get our brethren to bring their Bibles to classes and worship. At one time, we had the reputation of being able to find the Scripture needed if we could not quote it. Now, many of the saints know less about the Bible than their sinner friends. Surely, there is evidence aplenty to indicate that we no longer deserve being called a Bible-knowing people generally.

In saying these things, I do not have in mind the babes in Christ who have had little time to learn. I am speaking of those who have been members of the body for a decade, or two, or three, or four and still have hardly even a vague concept of what the Bible says specifically or (in some cases) teaches generally.

Why are we so timid about talking to our friends about Christ, the Gospel, and the church? More than anything else, I believe it is because we feel insecure and inadequate in our knowledge of God's Word. A few years ago, I took a survey in a Bible class, asking where the key verses on the plan of salvation are found. While many in the class knew what the plan of salvation was, not even the elders of that church could tell where to find them.

If you wanted to look up the passage quoted in the first paragraph, would you look near the beginning, the middle or the end of the Old Testament? Is the book of Hezekiah in the Old Testament or the New? Are you sure? Can you place Moses, Abraham, Joshua, David and Noah in chronological sequence? Was Luke an apostle? How many New Testament books can you name? In order? “But,” you say, “these things are not important.” Perhaps not. But if we know not these simple factual “unimportant” things, chances are good that we don't know many of the more important things. Please read Hebrews 5:12–6:1 (it's in the **New** Testament).

Why Such a Plague of Ignorance?

1. **We do not study like our spiritual forbears did.** We have become slaves to frenzied schedules. Parents and children alike are involved in so many **good** things we haven't time for the **best**. Our family members run in many directions, making it difficult to even assemble for a meal together. In those rare moments when everyone is at home, often we are offering up our devotions to our TV altars. Consequently, Bible school teachers are greeted by pupils (young

and old) who have made no preparation, some of whom will cease to attend if strong encouragement to study is applied or homework is assigned. Along with our instant and effortless coffee and oatmeal, people want instant and effortless Bible study. Some would just as soon have none.

2. **Weak preaching has done its part.** Mind you, no one ever became learned in the Bible by listening to preaching alone, however strong it was. But our grasp of God's Word can be powerfully accelerated by strong Biblical preaching. The less people study at home the more they need strong preaching from the pulpit. Ironically, the people who need it the most have the least appetite for it.

Several years ago the cry began to go up that our preaching had been “too hard,” “too doctrine-centered,” and “too tactless.” If that ever was the case, it certainly is not so now. Many of our preachers are so up-to-date that they know more about the fine art of ear-tickling than of sounding forth the clarion call of the saving and strengthening Gospel. Many “pew-sitters” have confused polite little twenty-minute talks that would be met with approval in any church building in town, with Gospel sermons. Some not only like such; they demand it. Preach the Bible to such people and you’ll raise their ire. Say what you will about our preachers of yore (and many who are still like them today, thank God), their hearers knew more Bible after their sermons than before.

3. **The profusion of Bible versions is at least suspect.** I am not opposed to up-to-date and accurate Bible versions, and no Bible student should be. Excellent translations have been in circulation for generations, nixing any excuse for a constant stream of new ones—except financial profit from their publication. With the proliferation of versions has come a corresponding lack of distinction in men's minds about what is and what isn't Scripture. Often the most farfetched, subjective paraphrase is most readily adopted by the most ignorant person on the Bible. Rather than being a source of enlightenment, such volumes only compound ignorance of the true teachings of the Bible and mislead the uninformed reader. More about this subject later.

Consequences of Our Ignorance

If one remains totally ignorant of the Bible, so that he never learns its message of salvation, he will be lost eternally (Mark 16:15–16; 2 The. 1:8–9; et al.). Even those who learn enough to obey the Gospel and do so, imperil their souls by choosing to remain in spiritual infancy. Biblical ignorance results in dire consequences:

1. **A teacher shortage in the churches** (Heb. 5:12). I am sure that the most frequent reason given for not teaching is, “I don’t know enough.” It is probably the truth in many cases. One can no more teach Bible than Biology without knowing the subject.
2. **Spiritual pygmyism** (Heb. 5:12–13). Biblical ignorance causes one to perpetually remain a spiritual baby. It is from these that most of the “bawling and squalling” is heard in local churches when “the whole counsel of God” is declared (Acts 20:27).
3. **Inability to “discern good and evil”** (Heb. 5:14). A person who cannot see the difference in worldly and Christian conduct is demonstrating his Biblical ignorance. A person who says, “there are no moral absolutes,” shows his ignorance, for God says there are such things as “good” and “evil.” A Christian who says he can see no harm in social drinking, dancing, or viewing obscene movies, and cannot distinguish between modest and immodest clothing often fails these matters through ignorance.
4. **Susceptibility to “every wind of doctrine”** (Eph. 4:13–15). Perhaps the church has felt the devastating curses of her ignorance at this point more than any other. The devil will never invent a false doctrine that the Holy Spirit has not anticipated and refuted in the Bible. However, this is all for naught if we don’t know the Book. The old doctrines of Calvinism and the more recent waves of “holy-rollerism” have been exposed repeatedly by faithful preachers in public debates spanning centuries. Many among us think these doctrines are new because they are ignorant of the Bible and church history alike. Some are deliberately leading the church toward denominationalism; many are following because of their ignorance.

Overcoming Our Ignorance

How can we cure the great famine of Bible knowledge that is so prevalent among the saints? The following suggestions may be oversimplified, but I submit them for consideration:

1. **There must be a desire to learn more.** The Lord likely meant more, but surely, He included spiritual knowledge that produces righteousness when he promised, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Mat. 5: 6). We will remain ignorant only if we are content to be. A great part of the cure lies in our priorities. As long as we view the concerns of the kingdom as an inane pastime, engaged in only two or three hours every Sunday, we guarantee our own spiritual malnutrition.
2. **Get a good, reputable version of the Bible, and stick with it.** I deeply respect the King James Version and some other versions have some strong points. The New King James Version (1979) is a faithful update of its original namesake. However, it is generally conceded by sound brethren that the American Standard Version (1901) is the closest thing to a literal, word-for-word English translation in existence. While it has some weaknesses, it probably has fewer than any other. I unhesitatingly recommend it. I use it in my private study and in the pulpit and classroom. Most "modern speech" versions are one-man efforts, resulting in many biased renderings (Williams is perhaps the safest of the lot). Also, remember that some of these are not even translations, but paraphrases, making them biased commentaries, at best. The committee-produced volumes of the last several decades (e.g., The Revised Standard Version, The New International Version, The Easy-to-Read Version, et al.) are little better. They reflect Calvinistic, Premillennial, Pentecostal, and even skepticism errors held by various committee members. Further, beware of so-called "study Bibles," the commentary notes of which are loaded with denominational poisons of various sorts. I recommend use of such books only comparatively with your basic version.
3. **Set aside a time each day to study, and follow a system.** Here is one suggestion: Choose one book and devote your study time to it until you complete it. Use good commentaries, Bible dictionaries, atlases, a concordance, and other helps. Read everything you can on the book or subject, compiling a notebook on your research or making notes in your Bible's margin. When you have done all you can on one subject or book, dig into another one. **Don't neglect at least reading some portion of the Bible every day.**
4. **Faithfully attend all the Bible classes and worship periods.** Study your lesson before coming to class. If possible, outline the sermon as it is being preached. Take advantage of every special lecture series and Gospel meeting conducted by your home congregation and other faithful congregations in your area, for such will greatly enrich your knowledge. Enroll in a Bible correspondence course, and try to enroll others.

We must use every opportunity to ". . . grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.." (2 Pet. 3:18). Our own salvation and that of the world depends upon our efforts to this end.

Faith and Baptism

Foy E. Wallace, Jr.

The person whom the Bible designates a believer is one who having been persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, accepts him in implicit trust as his Saviour (John 20:31). He is not one who has merely assented to gospel truth or fact, but one who has believed with all the heart; a belief that involves every faculty of his intelligent being-his reason, his sensibilities, his will (Rom. 10:9, 10). The noun *pistis*, (faith) means confidence, trust. The verb *pisteus* (believe) means adherence to, reliance on. The nobleman's (Acts 8) belief with all his heart meant his reliance on what Phillip had preached unto him as essential elements of salvation. His faith in Jesus and his confession of that faith

meant nothing less than his acceptance of all terms and conditions of salvation laid down in the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:12). And the conviction of those “pricked in their hearts” on Pentecost (Acts 2) was a faith that yielded the willing spirit of obedience in the pleading question, “What shall we do?” Such a faith implies and embraces all necessary conditions named in God’s law of pardon.

Salvation

The commission according to Mark says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” This salvation is the forgiveness of past sins; pardon, the complete absolution of guilt; remission of sins. But this pardon is an executive act. It takes place in the mind of God in heaven; not in the heart of man on earth. The thing we know as inner consciousness cannot determine by inward feelings that pardon has been granted. Pardon can be known only as God declares it. The man in the penitentiary can know that he is pardoned only as the executive, the Governor, declares it. No warden of such an institution would release an inmate of it on the ground of an inner consciousness that the Governor had pardoned him. Inner consciousness cannot testify to anything outside of the man himself; it cannot measure or weigh any outward thing. There must be a standard for all such. And God has a law of forgiveness-the sinner is not pardoned until he has complied with it.

By Faith

The issue is not whether one is saved or justified by faith-to that we all agree. The issue is in the degree of faith-when is one saved by faith. The Baptist order is repentance before faith, but they do not mean salvation by repentance before faith. The Bible order is faith before baptism. Why should a Baptist insist that salvation comes by faith before baptism seeing that they will disavow salvation by repentance before faith in their order of things? True, faith comes before baptism, but one is not saved by faith before baptism any more than one would be saved by repentance before faith in the Baptist order of things. This one thing answers every argument that can be made by a Baptist against baptism on the ground that one is saved by faith and that faith precedes baptism.

All passages that declare justification by faith (Rom. 5: 1) and others of like import we accept and believe and claim. But we deny that any of these passages teach or imply that one is saved by faith before he is baptized. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

By Faith

When The eleventh chapter of Hebrews lists the men of faith in the former dispensation, by faith they were approved but faith plus what? By faith Abel offered his sacrifice and was justified by it. By faith Enoch moved in godly fear. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called. Try faith alone on any of these examples of justification by faith and see how it works. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.” (Jas. 2:21, 22). In further proof that it requires an active faith to produce justification, contrast the cases of the priests and rulers who believed. In one case (Acts 6:7) a great company of priests became obedient to the faith. In the other case (John 12:42) many of the rulers believed but would not confess. Both of these companies of Jewish officials believed; but only one company was justified. It proves that faith only does not save, else both companies would have been saved seeing that they both believed. “Ye see, then, that by works a man is justified and not by faith only.” (Jas. 2:24).

Faith Plus

If a man exercises faith but his faith does not exercise him; either the subject has a poor faith or the faith has a poor subject. Some plain passages from the New Testament suggesting some pointed questions will serve to show that mere faith does not save.

First: “But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”(John 1: 12) Question: How does a believer exercise the power to become a child of God?

Second: “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number that believed turned unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:21) Question: What did these believers do when they turned unto the Lord?

Third: “Repent ye, therefore, and turn again (be converted) that your sins, may be blotted out.” (Acts 3:19) Question: What did these penitent persons do when they turned?

Fourth: “And without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God ‘must believe that he is.” (Heb. 11:6) Question: What does one who has believed do when he comes to God? Becoming a child of God does not consist in mere faith, for in the first passage above it is stated that the believer is given the power to become a child of God. One cannot be given the power to become what he already is, therefore, the believer as such is not a child of God. Turning to God does not consist in faith for the second passage above states that they believed and turned. The turning followed the believing. What was the turning act?

Again, turning to God does not consist in repentance, for in the third passage above the Jews were told to repent and turn. What was the turning act in this case? Moreover, coming to God did not consist in faith, for in the fourth passage above it is stated that one cannot come before, or without faith; the coming, therefore, must follow believing. Then what is the coming act? The turning act in Acts 11:21 is not faith, for they believed and turned. The turning act in Acts 3:19 is not repentance, for they were told to repent and turn. The coming act in Heb. 11:6 is not faith, for there it is said that one must believe in order to come to God. If one is saved at the point of faith—by faith without further acts of obedience—then he is saved (1) before he comes to God (Heb. 11:6); (2) before he becomes a child of God (John 1:12) ; (3) before he turns to God (Acts 11:21; 3:19).

The Bible order in these passages is this: The persons who believed turned to God; the persons who turned to God were pardoned; hence, faith, turning, pardon. It follows just as certainly as day follows night that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys.

The Turning Act

It is evident that the turning act is not faith, nor repentance, for in the passages cited they believed and repented and afterward turned to God. There is but one act left in which the turning can consist. Baptism is that act. Baptism is the act in which faith obeys. It is the turning act. Who shall be saved? “He that believeth and is baptized.” It is the command that points out the man who is saved. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be”—what? Shall be saved?—not if he is already saved before he is baptized in the exact sense that the passage says “shall be saved.” If one is saved before he is baptized the whole construction of Mark 16:16 is a fallacy. The doctrine of salvation before baptism changes the order and tenses of the verbs in Mark 16:16. The passage reads : “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” To fit the doctrine of faith salvation without baptism it would read : “He that believeth and is saved shall (or may) be baptized.” But Jesus did not say is saved nor shall be baptized. He said is baptized and shall be saved. The change in the order necessary for a Baptist to get salvation before baptism involves a change in the tenses of the verbs the Lord used. That is simply too much change for anybody to make who has an ounce of respect for the word of God. Belief and baptism are joined together by the copulative conjunction “and”—the coupling pin. To both thus united is annexed the promise “shall be saved,” which is conditional upon complying with both belief and baptism. Respecting salvation—the whole matter of salvation depends on faith—the exercise of it, “and is baptized.” Respecting damnation—the whole matter of damnation depends on faith—the lack of it, “he that believeth not shall be damned.”

If it be urged that the text does not say “he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned,” we answer certainly not, the disbeliever cannot be baptized. It all depends on which way the man, is headed as to the conditions necessary to his destination. If he is headed toward perdition disbelief is enough to damn him. If he is headed for salvation it requires every condition named to reach it. When God appoints two things for the accomplishment of one end, it takes both of those things to accomplish that

end. Is there anybody who will dare to say “he that believeth and will not be baptized shall be saved”? And does any preacher have the authority to say “he that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved?”

Some Errors Compared

The Romanist says: He that is baptized shall be saved—without faith. The Baptist says: He that believeth is saved—without baptism. The Bible says: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Which shall we take? Paraphrasing further, suppose it should read: He that believeth and is baptized shall receive five thousand dollars? There is not a person who could not understand it. Or, if Noah had said “he that believeth and enters the ark shall be saved” would it have meant that one who believed could have been saved without entering the ark? What the Son of God joined together, let no preacher put asunder.

Links to Bible Study Resources

The Scripture Cache

Precept Upon Precept You Tube

Spiritual Perspectives – Gary Summers

Biblical Articles & More – Gary Grizzell

False Doctrines of Man

Yukon, Okla. church of Christ

Berea church of Christ

South Seminole church of Christ

The Catholic Denomination

E.G. Creacy

This ecclesiastical hierarchy is a mixture of Judaism, paganism and Christianity. It did not come into vogue over night—it was a development. Today it is a system that threatens religious and civil liberties.

In the study of the New Testament church, we learn that each local congregation of Christians had officers (when material for such was available) known as elders and deacons. Be it remembered that each church had a plurality of elders. These elders, as provided through the Divine plan, were to have authority, exercise dominion, and feed the church (Acts 20:28-30, etc.). Paul predicted that a “falling away” would come (2 Thess. 2), and that “grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). There is a great responsibility resting upon the elders (bishops, pastors, overseers; all these terms mean one class—the elders). It is human to err—the history of mankind reveals that it is! To become dissatisfied with God’s arrangement has been the tendency of the human race from the beginning.

Departure in Organization

Step by step, members of the church departed from Apostolic teaching and practice, until the falling away, as predicted by Paul, became a reality. About the first step in departing from the simplicity of God’s way, was to substitute a priest (or “pastor”) for the elders over a local church. That simply meant that one man had the rule over the church, instead of the elders. Then a distinction had to be made between the members, designated as the *clergy* and the *laity*. No such distinction is made in the New Testament. Next was **the Bishop**, who ruled over a plurality of local churches, then the Archbishop over all churches in a state or province, and then the Cardinals were named who should rule over all the churches of a nation. Only one more step to take, and that was to create a head to rule over the whole world, and in 606 A.D. Boniface III was made Pope. Thus the development of an ecclesiasticism with reference to the

administration was completed. Think of it: 600 years after the church—a perfect organization— was planted by the Father, came this humanly devised system with its administrative power. It was an apostasy—a “falling away” from the simplicity of a congregational form of government, as outlined in the New Testament. With this “administrative organization,” the New Testament can no longer be the Rule of Faith and Practice. Any responsible person can easily recognize this human structure to be adverse to the institution revealed in the New Testament—the church of Christ.

Apostasy in Doctrine

The doctrinal system of the Catholic Church had its inception during the second century, when “holy water” was introduced. Gleaning the historical data of doctrinal defecations, we compile the following items:

- Holy Water, A.D. 120.
- Penance, A. D. 157.
- Latin Mass, A.D. 394.
- Extreme Unction, A.D. 588.
- Purgatory, A.D. 593.
- Instrumental Music, A.D. 666.
- Kissing the Pope’s Toe, A. D. 709.
- Transubstantiation, A.D. 1000.
- Celibacy (forbidding to marry), A.D. 1015.
- Indulgences, A.D. 1190.
- Auricular Confession, A.D. 1215.
- Sprinkling, A.D. 1311.

It took 1,300 years for the doctrinal system of the Catholic Church to reach its climax. The “doctrinal system” of the New Testament church was reached when the New Testament itself was completed by the close of the first century. This fact alone is enough to prove that Catholicism is purely a human arrangement. The “doctrinal system” of the New Testament church was reached when the New Testament itself was completed, by the close of the first century. This fact alone is enough to prove that Catholicism is purely a human arrangement.

If any man, or even an angel from heaven, should add to the completed revelation of God to man (the New Testament), or preach another gospel, he stands condemned before God (Gal. 1:8-9). Catholic Church doctrines are another gospel—a departure from New Testament teaching and it necessarily follows that those responsible for it were of the evil one, and all who propagate it today are doing the work of the evil one. This is a strong indictment, but truth and facts allow no other conclusion.

Every distinctive doctrine of the Catholic Church is at variance with “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1); the “Apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) and the “doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). Denominational bodies are in reality “branches” of **this** ecclesiastical hierarchy, and every peculiar doctrine advocated by them is simply copied from the Catholic Church. Some of their tenets however are colored; but certainly originated with this system of human corruption.

The Catholic Church suffered a severe blow in 1054, when it divided into the Greek and Roman Churches. The division was largely due to jealousy between the Bishop of Rome and the Bishop of Constantinople. The official title of the Greek Church is “The Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Eastern Church,” and the Roman Church is officially named, “The Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church.”

As the matter stands, we have Catholicism on one hand and Protestantism (denominationalism) on the other. Neither are New Testament institutions. This magazine is definitely set for the defense of the church against every form of false doctrine, whether in the ranks of Catholicism or within the circles of denominational bodies. We plead for

Apostolic authority. We have no higher power and would have all men to be Christians—just Christians—and simply belong to “the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22–23).

Error is the enemy of the church, within and without. Departure came gradually first in organization, second in doctrine. The Roman Apostasy began in an error no greater in importance than are the consequences of any other system. We cannot be loyal to truth, and fail to expose error that is propagated in the church, as well as out of the church. To entertain a leniency toward error in any form, is to betray the church. “Preach the word;...reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”

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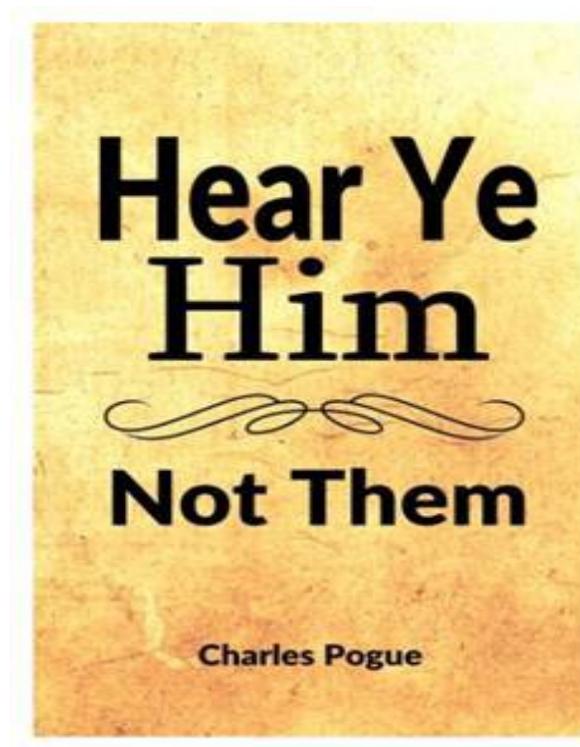
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“Mainstream Churches” are Sinful

The time for recognizing division has come—again. The steadfast, doctrinally sound remnant of the church, in widely scattered (and mostly small) pockets across our land, must mark mainstream churches of Christ as the apostates and sinners they are. God's Word commands us to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (emph JCB). The multitudinous “ministries” of the “Social Gospelers,” their flirtation with the world, and their embrace of doctrinal error aims to “gain thereby the recognition of the conflicting sects about us, to become popular, and be considered orthodox and really one of the branches of the church,” to quote one of them. Such a statement is nothing short of heresy, and the Biblically ignorant masses in mainstream churches of Christ are no longer merely bidding Godspeed to apostates—they themselves are apostate.

These “Mainstream Churches” are **not** in “**ERROR.**” They are plain vanilla “**SINFUL!**”

“What Saith The Scriptures?”

Harrell Davidson

Would I be correct in assuming that a great number of Christians in the first century possessed spiritual gifts? (1 Cor. 1:7; the prophecy of Joel in Acts 2:17-21; Peter and John in Acts 8, when the Samaritans believed; in Acts 19 when Paul laid hands on the 12 men.) In Romans 12:6 Paul mentions gifts. Some say these are **natural** abilities but prophecy is mentioned in First Corinthians 12:10 as a spiritual gift, and the best gift in First Corinthians 14:1. —**Dennis Tucker, Rogersville, Missouri**—

One would probably be correct in saying that many Christians possessed spiritual gifts in the first century church. Spiritual gifts were only accomplished through the laying on of apostle's hands. A good text to emphasize this is found in the following: "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:17). This is the record when those in Samaria had heard the preaching of Philip the evangelist, one of those selected in Acts 6 to minister to the Grecian widows who were being neglected with their daily needs, Peter and John— apostles—were sent for the purpose of laying their hands on them to enable them to have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are some misunderstandings regarding these spiritual gifts. Paul said in First Corinthians 12:8-10:

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.

The misunderstanding here is that many say that there were only nine spiritual gifts. While nine are enumerated here there were others. If we have counted correctly there were about 15 or 16 different gifts. We must use all accounts of such gifts and not limit ourselves to one or two passages.

A second misunderstanding is that every Christian received a spiritual gift. There is an interesting statement in Acts 2:39 where in part Peter said, "...even as many as the Lord our God shall call." This is interesting because of the meaning of the word *call*. It comes from the Greek word *proskaleo* and is used only in the middle voice. One might ask what this means.

First, it signifies that only those called would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Within the framework of all of those who obeyed the Gospel only those called would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Second, this implies that all who were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, from within the larger group that obeyed the Gospel, a smaller group would receive the gift as the Lord saw fit. The spiritual gifts were given so that the church in any location could function scripturally.

The church in Samaria is a good example of this. When Peter and John had laid their hands on sufficient individuals to enable the church to function properly, it is interesting that Samaria no longer needed Philip, Peter and John. Why? They had been given spiritual gifts so they could carry on their own worship. The Bible student should ever keep this in mind. Yes, many received spiritual gifts, but this side of eternity no one will ever know how many.

Spiritual gifts were no longer needed when the Word was completely revealed and confirmed. Since revelation and confirmation occurred in the first century, we have no spiritual gifts today nor do we have the need for them.

You Feed Them

(Mt. 14:14-21; Mk. 6:31-44; Lk. 9:11-17)

David Ray

In John 6 Jesus and His disciples were followed into the wilderness by a crowd of people who wanted to hear Jesus. After a while the people naturally became hungry. The disciples came to Jesus and said “the people are hungry”, seemingly expecting Jesus to handle the situation.

Interestingly, it would be easy to assume that the apostles were expecting Jesus to perform a miracle, as He had done with the water into wine. But this is proven false by the responses of Philip and Andrew.

Jesus had told the apostles, “give ye them to eat” (i.e., “**You** feed them”). This is almost humorous. How would you have answered Jesus? John records that He asked Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” He was looking to the apostles for their input and involvement. Could **they** do anything about this enormous need? Did they not recognize that certainly Jesus could?

The next verse confirms for us that Jesus was testing Philip with this question, “this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.” Philip’s failure is evident in his doubt-filled response: “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient....” Andrew similarly displayed a lack of faith when he said “There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”

We all know that Jesus fed this multitude of people miraculously. But let’s consider the apostles’ doubt and the application for us today.

The church is surrounded by a multitude of hungry people. Most don’t know they’re hungry, but they are spiritually starving. Who will help them? Jesus answers, “**You** feed them!”

But there are too many! I have a **little** food, but it’s nothing amongst so many people! What can my feeble efforts really accomplish? After all, people don’t want the truth!

Jesus had given the apostles every resource they needed for this test. With everything they’d seen from Jesus, why should they have doubted? Why should five loaves of bread and two fish be insufficient?

Do **we** not have enough to accomplish the task of feeding the world around us? Why do we doubt? Simply because people don’t want what we offer? This is true, but it has nothing to do with what we can and should be doing. The apostles had the ability, through Jesus, to provide physical food for all the thousands of people there, and it was totally irrelevant whether or not the people chose to accept it and eat. Likewise for us, we have the gospel, complete and sufficient to provide spiritual food for the entire world. What should we be doing with it?

“You feed them!” says Jesus to us. Set the table and ring the dinner bell. Whether or not anyone shows up to eat is up to them. Talk to people lovingly about Jesus, the truth, their lost condition and the opportunity they have for salvation in Him and His church. Study the Scriptures with them if they’re willing. If they choose to obey the gospel then we are accomplishing exponentially more than feeding five thousand (plus) with an insignificant amount of bread and fish, all of whom would need to eat again a few hours later. We’re providing eternal salvation in Christ. One **physical** meal, even though provided miraculously by the Son of God Himself, pales in comparison to what we can do!

So, **you** feed them!

God Blesses Only the Obedient

W.O. Davis

God has always blessed those who obey Him and pronounced a curse on those who disobey Him. Humble, unquestioning, absolute and implicit obedience rendered to

God by His creatures has been, and always will be, pleasing to the Heavenly Father. Since it is through strict conformity to God's thought and purpose as revealed through His word that He gives spiritual blessings to men, it is therefore of the greatest importance that we learn His will and render absolute obedience in all things that pertain to our eternal salvation.

The laws of life must be obeyed if we would enjoy health. The laws of justice must be obeyed if we would enjoy the blessings of civilization, and the laws of the natural world must be obeyed if we would use its mighty forces for the general welfare of all. Is it any wonder, then, that God has set certain spiritual laws for man to obey and that He blesses man when man renders humble obedience to them?

If men will not obey and serve God, they are the servants of the devil, sin, lusts, riches, cares, and pleasures of this world. In either case, the act of obedience is exercised. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Not all of life is worship, but all of life is service, and man is a creature of choice. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" was the farewell charge of the veteran Joshua to the tribes of Israel who gathered at Shechem (Josh. 24:15). The Israelites were at a solemn crisis, and their destiny hinged upon the choice they made. Man today is responsible for the choice he makes in life, just as Adam and Eve were responsible for the choice they made in the garden of Eden. Sin came into the world by disobedience because man chose the opposite of obedience.

The life of Christ is our perfect example of obedience to God. He came to do the will of the Father. Jesus lived, without deviation or exception, by the words proceeding out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). He conquered by obedience. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). Yes, He bore the penalty of disobedience of the race, enabling men thereby to become partakers of the divine nature. "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phlp. 2:8). This all-embracing sacrifice should challenge all that is in man and cause him to gladly render humble obedience to Christ in all things. The Saviour left us an example in His suffering that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

Our Lord said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Paul expresses it thus: "Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Love makes obedience natural and inevitable, but to the loveless heart the commands of God are irksome. Obedience is the test of sincerity and whenever man serves and worships God acceptably, love and obedience go hand in hand. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21). The proof of love is obedience. Men need to love God more.

God does not, cannot, and will not bless those who are living in disobedience. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). When men refuse to be baptized for the remission of sins, they deliberately disobey a plain command of God and, therefore, cannot expect the spiritual blessings promised the obedient.

There are four ways one may disobey God:

1. By adding to the word of the Lord,
2. by taking from His word,
3. by substitution for something God commanded, and
4. by deliberate disobedience by a refusal to hear His word.

These different ways of disobeying God are practiced today throughout the religious world. If man would adhere strictly to the teachings of the Bible, we would not hear of so many 'isms' and there would be much less confusion in the minds of people who are seeking after truth.

How We Got the Bible

Doug Post

The Bible is the most popular book in history. It has been printed more than any other book since the invention of the printing press. Guinness records estimates that 2.5 billion Bibles were printed between 1815 and 1975, while *The Economist* estimates 100 million Bibles are printed annually, creating over 6 billion in print. *The New Yorker* magazine conservatively estimates that 25 million Bibles are sold annually in America alone; they also pointed out that in 2005 the number of Bibles sold in the U.S. alone was conservatively estimated at 25 million (Pepper).

The Bible is the Book of books. It contains everything we need to know for life and eternity. It is the wisdom of God and the mind of Christ between two covers. God's Word is the means by which God instructs mankind because it contains everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). It is the source which contains knowledge for our understanding, advice that counsels us, food which feeds us, milk which nourishes us, honey that sweetens our lives, gold that enriches our lives, a sword that cuts our hearts, minds, and souls, a hammer that molds and shapes us, a lamp that leads and guides our paths, and a mirror to see ourselves as we are. The Bible is infallible, never failing, ever reviving, always relevant, and forever settled in heaven. We read the Bible to be wise, obey it to be saved, believe it to be happy, and proclaim it to be joyful. The Bible is unique because of its Author, wisdom, and message. The Psalmist praised God's Word—the Bible—not only in Psalm 119 but also in declaring that God, Himself, magnified His Word even above His own name (138:2). There is no other book like the Bible, but how did we get the Bible? Where did it come from? Who wrote it?

Before answering these questions, it needs to be understood that the Bible does not begin with a twelve-step program to believing in God, nor does it provide a defense for God's existence. The Bible simply begins by declaring, "In the beginning God." At the very outset of the Bible, God's existence and eternity are immediately established—God Is! Therefore, it is not the purpose of this presentation to prove God's existence, or to prove that the Bible comes from God. God does exist and, therefore, the Bible is His revelation to mankind. The Bible is, indeed, the Word of God—the greatest book of all!

From God to Man—A Process

All of the content of the Bible is revelation. Revelation discloses what had been previously unknown. Quite simply, God revealed His Will, making known His thoughts, desires, and intentions to and for mankind. Without God revealing all of this, we would not ever know God intimately. We could not know how to have a relationship with Him, nor would we know of our lost condition and need for a Savior. The revelation of this content involved a process, and the process by which the content of the Bible was revealed is called inspiration. The Bible makes a clear distinction between revelation and inspiration:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:7-13).

Paul says he spoke of the "wisdom of God" which had been previously hidden. No one knew or understood because this "wisdom of God" was hidden from men (2:7-9). However, God would reveal these things, by the Holy Spirit, to the apostles (inspired men

including Paul), which is the meaning of us in this passage (2:10). Then Paul says he took that revelation and made it known to the Corinthians (and others) through the power of the Spirit guiding him. Note that Paul said the things which were revealed to him, he spoke. Paul spoke by inspiration, the Holy Spirit giving him the exact words to speak (2:13). Therein lies the difference between **revelation** and **inspiration**.

According to Gausson, “inspiration is that inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit aforetime, exercised upon the authors of Holy Scripture, to guide them even to the word which they have employed, and to preserve them from all error, as well as from any omission” (37).

Inspiration simply means that the Holy Spirit exercised supernatural power upon those who wrote the Bible, guiding them and giving them the exact words to write, in the way in which the Spirit wanted it expressed. In fact, every word in the Bible was given to the writers, by the Holy Spirit, and the teachings these authors wrote down contain the exact words, forms of words, and wording the Spirit desired, including tense, voice, mood, gender, and number of a word. The fact that a certain word in Scripture is found in the singular rather than the plural is all part of the Divine purpose and work. Everything in Scripture is there because God wanted it. Some refer to this as the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, meaning that every word (verbal) in the entire Bible (plenary) is Holy Scripture (inspiration). Of course, we should be careful not to confuse natural inspiration with “God-breathed” inspiration. Saying someone was inspired to write or say something is a result of being **indirectly** motivated by someone or something. Perhaps a writer draws inspiration from another source such as a person or an object. An artist may be inspired to paint a wonderful picture based upon some life experience. On the other hand, Bible inspiration always involved a **direct** or miraculous activity of God, providing men with supernatural guidance in speaking and writing for God.

To further understand what is meant by *inspiration*, Paul writes: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). “Inspiration of God” is from the Greek word *theopneustos* combines two words, *theos* meaning “God” and *pneustos*, from *pneuma* meaning “spirit” or “breath.” The Scriptures are literally “breathed out” or “spirited out” of the mouth God—“Godbreathed.” Packer writes: “*theopneustos* means ‘out-breathed’ rather than ‘in-breathed’ by God—Divinely expired, rather than inspired” (29). God “breathed out” “all Scripture” and all the words contained therein. Therefore, the inspiration of Scripture is directly connected to God’s authority, which is illustrated by, “What the Scriptures say, God says,” for they are one and the same with regards to authority.

Because the Bible is a product of God, the Scriptures are authoritative. This means that whatever God asserts in Scripture must be believed, whatever God enjoins in Scripture must be obeyed, and whatever God prohibits in Scripture must be avoided.

Although God used men to write the Scriptures, none of the words they wrote down originated with them. It is through inspiration that men of God were able to both speak and record in writing Divine words. While God provided these men the words to use, they were still able to write using their personalities, demeanor, backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences. Such is the miracle of inspiration. Of course, this is the point Peter makes when discussing this particular phenomenon: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Here we learn some things about the *inspiration* of Scripture. First, Peter emphatically declares that Scripture is not the product of man. Men did not and could not conceive of such a work; rather men were “moved by the Holy Ghost” in speaking and writing the words of God. Second there are some key words we need to consider. Peter (by the Spirit) uses the Greek word *ou*, which carries an absolute negative of possibility—“in no way” or “not ever.” The idea is that man could in no way (not ever) produce such a message as found in Scripture. Man could not perceive to conjure up such a message

for mankind. Without having God's supernatural help, it is impossible for men to do. Second, the verb *phero* means "to bear, carry along, convey, produce, bring forth, or bring along." (The word image is like that of the wind blowing a boat along on the water.) No message was ever conveyed, borne, carried along, produced, and brought forth by an act of human will. Instead men were (*phero*) carried along, moved along, conveyed, brought forth by the Holy Spirit to speak from God. The Holy Spirit provided them the supernatural ability to speak and write words from God. Third, the Greek word *apo* comes before the word "God," which means "out from God," evincing the fact that the source of the words is God. God gave the words to the Spirit, who in turn gave the words to the holy men of God, directly guiding them as they spoke and wrote.

Finally, the passage stresses the passivity of man's involvement even though they physically penned the words. God gave them through His Spirit! The Bible explains that David was inspired of God and his example also demonstrates the process involved with inspiration: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, And his word was in my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). Luke confirms this activity saying: "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus" (Acts 1:16; cf. Psa. 41:9).

In writing his first epistle to the Thessalonians, concerning inspiration, Paul writes:

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

God chose selected men to speak and write. These men were miraculously and supernaturally guided and aided by the Holy Spirit to ensure there would be no errors or omissions when they either spoke God's words or wrote those words down. In this manner, God—through the Holy Spirit—not only delivered His message to mankind but preserved it as well. The Scriptures are indeed God's Word, and we can be assured of their authenticity, authority, and accuracy.

Bible Formation—Canonization And Transmission

Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which is plural for "books" or documents written on papyrus. *Scripture* (which is synonymous with Bible) comes from the Greek word *graphai*, meaning "writings." As we previously noted, all Scripture (the writings) are "God-breathed."

The Bible is actually a library consisting of sixty-six documents or books. It is divided into two testaments—the Old Testament and New Testament. *Testament* means "covenant." There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew, the language of the Jews. The New Testament was written primarily in Greek. A tiny portion of Aramaic is found in both testaments. All of these books were written by 40, inspired men over a period of approximately 1,600 years.

As God revealed His mind, and as inspired men wrote it down in the words of their language, they would do so on materials common for their time. These materials included, stone, clay, papyrus, animal skins, leather, vellum, and parchments. By the time of Christ in the first century, the Jews had divided the Old Testament into three sections, which today is known as "the Tanakh, from the first letters of the Hebrew *Torah* (the Law), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets) and *Kethuvim* (the Writings, which begin with the book of Psalms)" (Hulme). Jesus was familiar with this division and referred to the entire Old Testament in similar fashion: "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). In other words, the entire Old Testament testifies about Christ.

Sometimes the entire Old Testament is simply referred to as "the law": "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?" (John 10:34). Here Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 referring to it as "law." The apostle Paul, similarly, refers to the

entire Old Covenant as the “law” and finally, in allegorical fashion, as the “bondwoman” (Gal. 3:2-24; 4:24-31). Paul also referred to the Old Covenant as the “holy scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15). In fact, the entire Old Covenant (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) was referred to as the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1-2), and it is here we learn that God entrusted the Jews with the responsibility of preserving the Old Testament Scriptures.

Involved in the preservation of the Old Testament is what is called “Canonization” or the process of identifying and recognizing what books are sacred or Scripture and which books are not. *Canon* comes from the Hebrew word *qaneh* and the Greek word *kanon*, both meaning a rule, measurement, or a standard. “With respect to the Bible, it speaks of those books that met the standard and therefore were worthy of inclusion” (Beckwith 51). The New Testament acknowledges that the Jews had identified, codified, and established the canon of Old Testament Scripture long before the first century (Mat. 5:17-18; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16-17; 24:44; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21). Moreover, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 demonstrated that the Old Testament contained in our modern Bibles were the same books contained in the Hebrew Bible of the Jews.

Moses gave the Jews instructions in identifying error and preserving Truth. Any teaching that was contrary to the already-accepted canon of Scripture at that time was to be rejected (Deu. 13:1-18). Furthermore, if there was no miraculous evidence in connection with the teaching, it was to be rejected as well (18:15-22).

Therefore, we know God preserved His message in the Old Testament Scriptures, safeguarding them through inspiration, aiding and guiding inspired speakers and writers. We know God preserved all the books of the Old Testament through the instrumentality of His chosen people, the Jews. The thirty-nine books of our modern Bibles are the identical contents of the Hebrew Bible. The Old Testament points to a time when it would be replaced with the New Testament:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, That I will make a new covenant With the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day that I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; Which my covenant they brake, Although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord (Jer. 31:31-32).

The Hebrews’ writer begins his treatise saying: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the preeminent spokesman for God, the One for whom the Old Testament prophets prepared (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The Hebrews’ writer contrasts the *old revelation* with the *new revelation*. God revealed Himself “in time past”—to the fathers in the prophets. He dealt directly with the fathers of each household during the Patriarchal period (Abraham—Gen. 12; Isaac—Gen. 26; Jacob—Gen. 28), and during the Mosaical period God expressed His will to men through prophets such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, et al.

This “time past” or *old revelation* came in differing proportions and made in different ways. As the prophet Isaiah said, “here a little, and there a little” (Isa. 28:10-13). The revelation of the past (Old Testament), came piece by piece—bit by bit, however “in these last days” (New Testament) God has spoken by His Son, Jesus Christ. In the transfiguration of Matthew 17 God said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (17:5). Jesus Himself affirmed He was God’s spokesman (John 5:19; 12:49), which makes it necessary to heed His message:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2:1-4).

Here we learn God spoke through Jesus and Jesus spoke to His apostles and inspired men, who not only spoke for God, but also wrote for God. Jesus told His disciples (apostles): “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13).

Christ would speak to His inspired men through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would guide them, teach them, and bring to their remembrance all things Jesus said to them while He was with them on earth (14:25-26). The Spirit would give them the very words God wanted spoken (Mat. 10:19-20). The truth of the Gospel of Christ, the New Covenant, which the apostles and inspired men spoke and wrote, was free from error (inerrant), as it was guided and aided by the Holy Spirit. This message was authoritative because Jesus had “all authority” (28:18—ASV).

In similar fashion to the Old Testament writers, the apostles and inspired men wrote down the words of God, creating Scripture. The early church made copies and shared them with each other (Col. 4:16). Therefore, the Christians of the first century would immediately recognize Scripture. The Thessalonians knew immediately that Paul’s writings were Scripture and the Word of God (1 The. 2:13). They were able to discern true documents from false ones. Miraculous gifts were granted to first century Christians as the Spirit willed (Heb. 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:11). Certain gifts, including that of prophecy and “discerning of spirits” (12:10; 14:29; 1 John 4:1) were exercised for purposes of determining which documents were truly Scripture or canonical (1 Cor. 14:37). Once an epistle was written, it was automatically regarded as Scripture or canonical. Therefore, we know and can be assured that all 27 books of the New Testament were accepted as God’s Word—and only these 27. While there are no “original” documents in existence, there are literally thousands of copies (these copies are now called manuscripts). In addition to trusting God in preserving His Word, we can also verify this preservation through historical means. Various men of the second, third, and fourth centuries made reference to the New Testament books:

Athanasius gives us our earliest list of the 27 books in the AD 367, while Origen (c AD 250) may have mentioned all of them a century earlier (though there is debate whether he named the book of Revelation as manuscripts differ on this point). Either way, the core of the New Testament was functioning as canon by the end of the second century as other evidence shows. At that time, Irenaeus and the Muratorian Canon mention the core of the New Testament, noting the four gospels, Acts, the Pauline Epistles, I Peter, and I John. These were the books that had apostolic roots and that churches in many distinct regions were using. Origen, Irenaeus, and the Muratorian Canon predate any church councils where some claim the canonical books were chosen. New Testament books were not chosen but recognized by their use over time in churches (Bock).

Furthermore, it has been said that the entire New Testament, with the exception of eleven verses, can be reconstructed from the writings of the early church or what has been termed the “Church Fathers.” Whether or not that is true, we do know that the early church did, indeed, quote the New Testament extensively. In many cases, while a direct quote was not provided, allusions to the New Testament saturate all of the early Christian writings. The index of New Testament references in Clement of Rome, Mathetes, Polycarp, Ignatius, Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus shows they all were familiar with nearly every canonical work.

We who trust in the Lord God Almighty are cognizant of His existence and are keenly aware of His mighty power. We know that the very same power exhibited in the creation of the universe is the very same power which sustains and preserves the powerful Word—“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:25).

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A "Pastor"

J.W. McGarvey

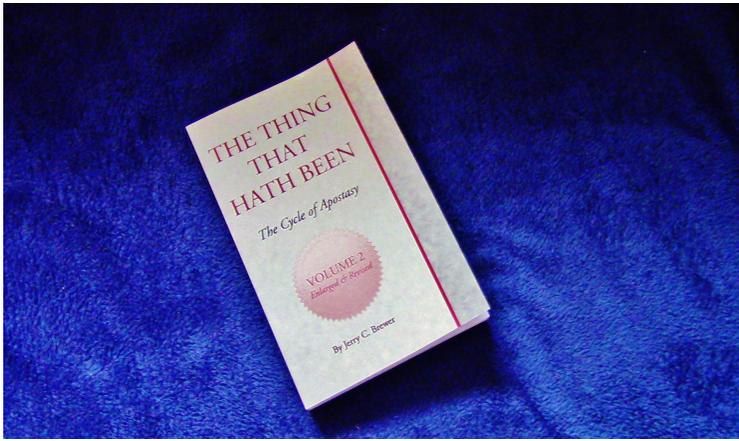
The third and last official title which we shall notice [of an elder] is pastor or shepherd. This term, in the substantive form, is used but once in the New Testament with reference to church officials. It is in the well-known passage, Ephesians 4:11, where pastors are enumerated among the gifts bestowed upon the Church by Christ. The evidence that this term designates the overseers or elders, is conclusive, and may be briefly stated. The Greek term for shepherd is *poimeen*, and the verb *poimaino* means to do the work of a shepherd. Now, he to whom this verb applies is a shepherd, just as he who sows is a sower, he who reaps is a reaper, he who speaks is a speaker, he who sings is a singer, etc. But Paul exhorts the overseers in Ephesus "to be shepherds to the church." Acts 20:28; and Peter exhorts the elders of the churches to which he writes, "Be shepherds to the flock of God which is among you," and promise that when the "chief shepherd" shall appear, they shall receive a crown of glory. They then, were shepherds and Christ, the chief shepherd.

The, term *pastor*, the Latin for shepherd, has come into common use from the influence of the Latin version of the Scriptures. There is one all-sufficient reason for preferring our own Anglo-Saxon term shepherd. It is found in the fact that *pastor* has become perverted by sectarian usage, and designates in popular phraseology, an entirely different office from the one to whom it is applied in the Scriptures. It has become a synonym for a settled preacher, and is often used for the purpose of distinguishing the preacher from those who are Scripturally called the pastors of the church. It will perhaps be impossible to recover the term from this abuse, and therefore, it is better to throw it away.

Another good reason for preferring shepherd is, that its primary meaning is familiar to the most illiterate reader, and the metaphor by which the overseer is thus styled is perfectly intelligible to every one; whereas, the term pastor is known to the masses only in its appropriated sense.

The title Shepherd is still more significant than either of the other two. The Jewish shepherd was at once the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of his flock. Often, like the shepherds to whom the angel announced the glad tidings of great joy, he slept upon the ground beside his sheep at night. Sometimes, when prowling wolves came near to rend and scatter the flock, his courage was put to the test: (John 10:12); and even the lion and the bear in early ages rose up against the brave defender of the sheep. 1 Sam. 17:34-36. He did not drive them to water and to pasturage; but he called his own sheep by name, so familiar was he with every one of them, and he led them out, and went before them, and the sheep followed him, for they knew his voice. John 10:3-4. A relation so authoritative and at the same time so tender as this could not fail to find a place in the poetry of Hebrew prophets, and the parables of the Son of God. (*A Treatise on the Eldership*, Published in the *Apostolic Times*, 1870).

“The Thing That Hath Been...”



The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us (Eccl. 1:9-10).

Apostasy is the bane of God's people as Israel in the shadow of Sinai.

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which *are* in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring *them* unto me...And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt...To morrow *is* a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (Exo. 32:1-6).

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