

The Gospel Preceptor

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

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“Absolutely the Truth”

Harrell Davidson

Attitudes toward truth today are lamentable. In the Lord’s church there is less interest in truth than ever before in my lifetime. In this missive I am going to give some false views (fatal error) regarding the truth as well as Scriptural views.

Truth is absolute. By this I mean that it does not change. The Fount from which it comes is pure and it is incorruptible and undefiled and does not change. Philosophy says that truth is relative. They mean by this that truth changes and more so with every generation. We thus have the need for new Bibles every year or two. It may be wrong today to lie, cheat, steal or commit adultery etc., but in a decade or two these all may be accepted as a proper way to live. The truth is still the same—absolute—objective and never subjective. It is the truth whether anyone knows it or not. I could write many pages on this aspect alone, but what I am attempting to do is to elevate the truth to its proper level for reasons that will follow.

There are many religious doctrines that are false that are being taught in the world. Great numbers laugh at the truth; even among those who have attained high academic degrees. These doctrines are taught so that people will live by them. They make fun of the truth. One holds one view of truth another a different view and they are both contradictory. Why should one man accept a religious doctrine which is nothing more than a human doctrine? Many things could be said regarding this, but there is only one major thing of importance to be said and that is we should hold to a doctrine because it is true. It comes from God. One philosopher said that the only reason that one should hold a certain doctrine is because it is found to be true. If there is truth in religion there should be the compelling notion that one should change their views when they find out that what they have believed is false. Universities are constantly trying to turn people away from God. I believe that the USA is in great danger. Many of the people who should be helping are actually hurting by not making Christianity what it ought to be. There are many in the church that have turned away from the truth with the idea that it is not all absolute and you can believe what you wish to believe.

Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth and **the** [eph.hdd] truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32). The seed is the word of God Luke 8:11. Peter said, “... you have purified your souls in obeying the truth...” (1 Pet. 1:22). Knowing and obeying the truth is absolutely necessary to the saving of one’s soul, I do not equivocate on this, but am ready to defend this in public. Since truth is so important it is good that we look at some incorrect and some correct views of truth.

It is a fatal error to hold that truth can be diluted by mere human doctrine and still be acceptable to God. It is hard for me to believe that people could believe that. Since my parents and grandparents were members of the church, and as a child I was taught the Bible is true always and error will not change that. I realize that I had a helpful situation in my life, but today the church is not like that. Jesus said that it was a sin to add to this Book Rev. 22:18. This is a plain and simple statement. If you do not speak what the Bible speaks you will be held accountable before God. The Bible is inspired, it is complete, sufficient and is authoritative. It does not need any help from me or you or

anyone else in the world. It is already exactly what it ought to be.

It is a fatal error to hold that men can take away from the truth and achieve the result that it will still be acceptable to God. They argue that they are not changing anything, but we are just dropping out a few chapters here and there. Jesus further said something about taking away, “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:19). You have to try to misunderstand those simple words. At times men are prone to not study all that the Bible says on a subject because they might find where they are in error. As a result, they read only that which will accommodate their view or lifestyle or drop the Bible from their lives altogether. Many years ago, there were many Gospel preachers who were willing to meet in public debate those who hold error, but a terrible thing has happened. We have fewer, who are willing to do this, but we have many who do not care enough about the truth anymore to defend it. This ought not to be. Moses said not to add to or diminish ought from the Word (Deut 4:2). It is clear that the Word of God is perfect! It is clear that the Word of God is perfect and God will not tolerate me changing anything in His Word. Neither is He going to tolerate you or anyone else in the world, whether they have read the Bible or not, He will not tolerate our changing it. It does not need our help in any way to make it truer. It is a false view to think that we have the right to add, diminish or change anything in it. As that truth now stands it is able to furnish man completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:17).

Why cannot we as human beings, who came from God, come to learn and trust in God by trusting in His sacred Word? In times past and gone we have had the opportunity to really preach the pure Gospel, but now the situation is different. So many congregations have departed from the way of the Lord. They clamor for change. We do not have the privilege to change it. We have many perverters of the Word Gal. 1:6-8. When anyone teaches anything other than the true Gospel; he is under the judgment of God. Paul said “let him be accursed.” The Gospel is God’s power unto salvation and there is no other Gospel. This nation is heading headlong toward atheism. If we do not awaken it will be too late for perhaps a hundred years. We have turned our attention to the problems within the church, and we should, but there still awaits the world who does not believe in God’s Word as being the only objective truth. Pervert means to change something from one thing to another. Some would have us to believe that a perverted Gospel is just as powerful to save as the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many have rejected scriptural evidence and the sound conclusions that are drawn there from for a perverted word. There are other so called gospels, but none of them have the power to save (cf. Gal. 1:6-7).

Another fatal error that we find in regard to truth is to hold that it is not the exclusive means of salvation from sin. Everyone can have his own doctrine. Many churches believe that they teach the truth. Our towns and villages are filled with such even to this day. According to Peter souls are purified in obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). Jesus still says that it is the truth that makes man free. In a negative way the Bible makes clear that those who do not obey the Gospel will be damned to eternal torment. Is it your belief that God equivocates on this? Is it the case that God leaves it out there and that people cannot understand this? The idea that is advanced, even in our so-called Christian colleges is that everyone has the right to believe what ever they wish to believe. How can this be when the perfect Will of God shows us that if one does not obey God’s will, he will face eternal punishment? It is tragic that this is being taught to our young. God does not say that it is merely probable that damnation will occur if one does not obey the Gospel. He unequivocally and plainly and unambiguously teaches that all those who disobey the Gospel of Christ will be punished eternally. If a man can read this and not even quiver some within his soul, he does not believe the Bible is God’s Word. He thinks it is some kind of fairy tale.

Another fatal error is to believe that a preacher can preach anything else and be pleasing unto God. Jesus did not commission His disciples to preach just some religious message. He specified the message—the Gospel. In order to do this one must study to

see what the Bible says. He must look at various passages on the same subject to make sure what the Bible says. Preaching the truth is not as easy a task as some church members believe. This false belief, on the part of some, may be why we have some of the problems that we have today. Do we truly understand that there are buildings that we pass that have a sign that says "Church of Christ" and inside people do not believe that doctrine is important? They would have us believe that all that is needed is a pious attitude. We can all have a pious attitude or "play like" we do, but a real pious attitude is essential to us satisfying God. Being pious is essential, but by itself it is not enough. We must believe and obey the truth.

Another fatal error toward truth is that it can be regarded as true by one person and false by another and both be right. There are so many who now say, "I know that we do not agree on something, but that does not matter. We can both work together and do the Lord's work." This is not true at all. I am not about to accept that. When there is something that the Bible teaches that is adamant in its teaching then we must believe it or not believe it, do it or not do it, and one must do it the way the Bible tells us. Where did the notion come from that hints toward the soul damning doctrine of "go along to get along?" You cannot agree to disagree. This is the devil's doctrine if one has ever been taught! Are we ever going to rise up again to be what we were in the 1940s, 50s and 60s? In the 1970s is when we really began to see drastic changes.

A Christian college can be a wonderful thing, but they are a curse when they staff it with people who have no convictions regarding the truth about the truth. It is false to assert that one can hold to doctrine "x" and another to doctrine "y" and both doctrines be true. Truth is objective and absolute. This means that it does not matter what I think about it or what we have ever heard or read. It is not a matter of what I think about it. It teaches exactly what God wishes for it to teach and never shall it be changed. It has a status all its own and what it teaches. It is not subjective and relative. A relative thing only has to do with circumstances. To say it is subjective is to say that it is what each man believes. If the proposition that Jesus Christ died for my sins it is true, then He died for everybody that has ever lived or will live upon this earth. When Peter said on Pentecost that Christ had been raised from the dead it was true although some rejected it, but their rejection did not change the fact. What the Bible then taught is what it has taught for centuries down to this very day. Truth is truth and it does not change.

We would be in enormous error to hold the position that the truth is unattainable. Though there is some over lapping with points already made, this one also needs our attention because there are those who believe that we can seek the truth, but never attain it. Always looking for it—always looking down the road for it, but never really see it or find it. This has happened to many in the Lord's church who early in life heard good preaching and started listening to something else and they have been turned away from the truth. However, today we get advertisements of meetings and the preacher does not believe nor does he preach that the truth is all that important. He teaches that you do not have to believe and obey the truth, and you are still alright in the sight of God, and you do not have to be baptized into Christ or live a faithful life. Or that you can skip services for the Super Bowl or not attend when you are away from home. The person who teaches this is not a Christian. Some of these preachers, so called, never extend the Lord's invitation. These need to be marked if they do not repent. Their argument goes something like this; you surely do not claim to know everything. You are surely not infallible and since you are not infallible how do you claim that you are certain on anything. This is not gospel preaching it is preaching a false philosophy. This argument takes the shape that it is the case that no one knows everything. Then it is also the case that no one knows anything at all. If it is the case that no one knows everything. Therefore, no one knows anything at all. Paul said "prove all things." How are you going to prove something if you do not know how to prove it? Are you going to study and use reasoning based upon the Scriptures to prove all things? This is a must or we will lack in proving all things. In our Lord's temptations by Satan He said, "It is written." He is essentially saying here is one thing, here is another and then another. Put them altogether and you have the truth. Satan understood this and

knew that he could not defeat the truth. Fit these things together and you will come to the right conclusion.

There are many things that I do not know. I do not even pretend to know all things, but there are some things I know that I know because revelation has made them known to mankind. I also know that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” You can take this simple statement and put to shame the greatest philosophers that ever lived whether they be graduates of Harvard or Yale. I may not know all the Bible teaches, but every time I open its pages, I learn more. I heard one of the professors from one of our college’s say that he did not know anything, but he does know that he does not know anything. This is circular reasoning and contradictory. He argues that he knows nothing and then asserts that he knows something. It so happens that the something that he knows is that he does not know anything. This is silly! This surely makes some impression on the young minds under his tutelage, but it lends nothing to spiritual truth.

If we cannot know the truth then the Bible is not a meaningful book to us whatsoever. If we cannot know the truth then we cannot know God’s meaningful revelation and His efforts are totally wasted on us. If this was true none of us could know the truth or find out that we had learned it. Men deceive themselves into thinking that they can contradict one another and we are all going to heaven. The Bible teaches what it teaches without regard to what I or anyone thinks about it. I repeat; truth is objective and absolute. It is not subjective and relative.

Saved by Grace in the City of Phillipi

Nana Yaw Aidoo

In the Acts of the apostles, the inspired historian teaches us how one is saved by the grace of God. May we with open hearts and open Bibles, study the sixteenth chapter of the Acts and learn how alien sinners in the city of Philippi were saved from their sins.

After the disagreement over John Mark, Paul parted ways with Barnabas and embarked on his second missionary journey, taking Silas with him (Acts 15:36-41). They went through many towns until they got to Troas. Here, Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with Paul saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9). Paul interpreted that as a call from the Lord to do evangelistic work in Macedonia and so he and those with him left Troas and went to Philippi, which was a big city in Macedonia.

Having landed in Philippi, Paul and his group went to a prayer meeting of Jewish women to preach the word. One of the praying women was a woman named Lydia, whose heart was opened by the Lord, through the Word she heard (Psa. 19:8, 119:130), “to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14 ASV). It is interesting to note that in heeding the things, which were spoken by the apostle, she and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). Friends, if this does not prove the essentiality of baptism in the salvation of the alien sinner, then nothing else does. Proponents of the error of “infant sprinkling” allude to this and similar passages and contend that, since Lydia’s “household” was baptized, then it had to include babies and thus, this text justifies the practice of “infant sprinkling.” Friends, this proves too much. In 1 Corinthians 1:16, Paul affirmed that he “baptized also the household of Stephanas.” Yet, in 1 Corinthians 16:15, **the household of Stephanas** is said to “have addicted (devoted – NKJV) themselves to the ministry of the saints.” Did this include the helpless infants? If not, then why not?

Paul and his group continued to make the trip to the prayer meeting, evidently to continue their work of evangelism. On one of those days, it so happened that one slave girl who was possessed with “a spirit of divination” and “which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying” (Acts 16:16) confessed that Paul and his group were proclaiming “the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Who can deny that she spoke the truth? If Paul was proclaiming **the way of salvation** (he was) and if Lydia upon hearing Paul’s message got baptized (she did), does it not follow that we get to walk

the way of salvation when we are baptized unto the remission of sins (cf. Acts 2:38)? Yet, denominational preachers would have us believe that baptism is not necessary in order to be saved. Even demons know the truth.

This demon-possessed girl kept on making this proclamation and when it had gone on too long, a greatly distressed Paul exorcised her (Acts 16:18). When her masters realized that their source of profit was gone, they accused Paul and Silas of teaching things contrary to Roman law (Acts 16:20-21). This led to severe beatings and Paul and Silas ending up in jail. In spite of all these trials, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God (Acts 16:25). We can learn a lot from the life of this peerless apostle. It has been said that “a messenger embodies his message.” This same apostle would later write, “In everything give thanks” (1 Thes. 5:18). Indeed Paul is worthy of emulation just as he also emulated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

As they sang, “...suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s bands were loosed” (Acts 16:26). When the jailor woke up and saw what had happened, he almost committed suicide but for the intervention of Paul (Acts 16:27-28). Subsequently, the jailor went in, brought them out and asked the most important question ever to be on the tongue of man; “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Friends, have you asked yourselves this question yet? If not, why? Notice the answer the jailor received; “...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). The “faith-only” proponent sees this and erroneously concludes that Paul was teaching the doctrine of salvation by faith only. Of this text, J.W McGarvey wrote;

Those who argue that the jailer obtained pardon by faith alone, leave the jail too soon. If they would remain one hour longer, they would see him immersed for the remission of his sins, and **rejoicing** in the knowledge of pardon **after** his immersion, not before it (Original commentary on Acts).

Notice what we see happen after Paul makes that statement. We see the Word preached to the jailor (v. 32). We see the jailor wash the clothes of the preachers (v. 33), which is proof that he had repented of how he treated them. “And...the same hour of the night...immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33 NKJV). Did Paul not tell him to “believe?” Why then was he baptized? And why the urgency to be baptized in **the same hour of the night**? It is evident that Paul used the word **believe** in a more comprehensive sense to mean an obedient faith (Rom. 1:5, 16:25). This is synecdoche, a literary figure in which the part is put in place of the whole. This figure is also seen in Acts 18:8; “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” Did Crispus do less than his fellow Corinthians did? No, for later we see Paul make this statement; “I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius” (1 Cor. 1:14). Crispus was not saved by “faith only” because no one is (Jam. 2:17, 24). Thus, when Paul told the jailor to **believe**, he used the word in a comprehensive sense to include the entire plan of salvation, which culminates in baptism unto the remission of sins (cf. Acts 2:38, 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21). So important is baptism that the Philippian could not wait even until the next day and it was only after his baptism that he “rejoiced” (Acts 16:34), which is the reaction of one who has been saved from his sins (cf. Acts 8:39). Notice also that it was only after he was baptized that he is said to have “believed in God with all his household” (Acts 16:34 NKJV).

What have we learnt from this study? We have learnt that those who are saved from their sins by the grace of God are those who hear the gospel preached, believe it, repent of all their sins and are baptized unto the remission of their sins.

Dear reader, have you been saved by grace? If not, what is hindering you? (cf. Acts 8:36).

“That Will I Speak”

Jerry C. Brewer

Jesus' preaching elicited opinions from His hearers that He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets (Matt. 16:13-14). To understand why they thought that, one needs to look at the preaching of those men. John was beheaded because of his devotion to the truth (Matt. 14:1-12). Elijah boldly opposed Baal's false prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Ki. 18:20-40). In the face of hostility and danger to his own life, Jeremiah thundered God's awful warnings to a wicked and backsliding Israel (Jer. 26:8-11; 37:15-16), and Jesus was ultimately crucified because He spoke the truth (Matt. 26:1-4; 27:23-26). All of these were men of deepest conviction and devotion to the word of God. Fearing no man, they preached His message and were willing to suffer persecution and/or death for their preaching.

Amid cries for “change” that are raised by those who disdain a “thus saith the Lord”, the church across the world is in the throes of apostasy. That has resulted from watered-down preaching by weak-kneed appeasers who have neither conviction nor courage. They have sold out to Satan and his denominational servants, perverted the gospel to their own ends, and would rather climb a tree to preach sectarian lies than stand on the ground and preach the truth. Having more concern for “unity-in-diversity” than the “faith once delivered,” they have rejected the devoted spirit that animated Jesus, John, Elijah, and Jeremiah.

But the spirit of those men burned intensely in the late 18th and early 19th century restorers. They turned the world upside down with their clarion call to return to Biblical principles, to reject human creeds, and to speak where the Bible speaks (1 Pet. 4:11). Without today's material advantages, they willingly, and wholly, gave themselves to the cause of the Lord. Earl West presents their magnificent portrait:

They loved liberty and were willing to sacrifice everything for what they believed to be true...At first their views were peculiar to most hearers. Consequently, they invoked study. Moreover, with the clergy of the day they were greatly abhorred. Nobody accepted then the gospel message because it was popular, for it wasn't. There was that courageous love for the liberty of the gospel, free from human creeds and from the authority of council that gave the impetus for men to submit to the living oracles. Once converted, they worked intensely to convert others. They were convinced they were right and would have others to be. The whole restoration movement soon took on the color of belligerency and aggressiveness. These pioneers believed in their cause, and they pressed on, wilting before no tribunal, but with the profound conviction that they had the truth and that the truth, under God, would triumph (127)

While we do not place the pioneers of the restoration on the same level as inspired men, we admire their fervor and its consequent results. Like Jeremiah, God's truth burned in their souls and they were not able to contain it (Jer. 20:9). West's observation offers great lessons on the kind of preaching that **remains necessary** in our time. The gospel they preached, which swept the frontier like a prairie fire, consumed the hearts of its hearers. Their message was not one of compromise and they who proclaimed it were willing to sacrifice for it. That should be the conviction of every man who mounts a pulpit today.

The pioneers' preaching was “peculiar” and invoked study by their hearers. What is distinctive about our preaching today? Do hearers leave the assemblies and search the scriptures after hearing our preaching? There is no need for them to do so when much of what is called “gospel” preaching today is designed to soothe the psyche, instead of pricking the heart. There is no need to study the scriptures when preachers deliver entertaining, “feel-good” sermons that could be preached in any denominational pulpit in town with the approval of its auditors. Sermons of flattery, praise and public relations offer no incentive for Bible study.

True gospel preaching will always bring opposition from many who hear it. Jeremiah

suffered opposition (Jer. 26:8-11). Ahab accused Elijah of troubling Israel because of his preaching (1 Ki. 18:17), and Jesus incurred the wrath of the Pharisees, but did not shrink from His scathing denunciation of their ungodliness (Matt. 23). How unlike those who strike hands with denominational error today! Jesus was ignorant of the oxymoronic concept of “unity-in-diversity.” So was Paul, whose preaching resulted in a Jewish plot against his life (Acts 23:1-12). Like Jeremiah, Elijah, and Jesus, the pioneers and their message were “abhorred” by the clergy of their day.

A sterling example of courageous preaching that is sorely needed today is the Old Testament account of Micaiah. Israel’s king, Ahab, and Judah’s king, Jehoshaphat, allied to make war against the Syrian king at Ramoth-Gilead. But before he would consent to the plan, Jehoshaphat asked Ahab to inquire of the Lord about the matter. When Ahab produced 400 false prophets who told the kings wanted they **wanted** to hear, Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may inquire of him” (2 Ki. 22:2-7). Ahab’s answer could have been spoken of most faithful preachers today. “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (2 Ki. 22:8)

When Jehoshaphat insisted on consulting Micaiah, the messenger who was sent to fetch him gave him some stern advice about the message he should deliver, but Micaiah was true to his calling:

And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak (1 Ki. 22:13-14).

Micaiah could have stood before the kings, clasped hands with the false prophets, raised them above his head, and given his blessing to their smooth words. Having done so, he would have received the praise of the false prophets and the blessings of the kings, and achieved “unity-in-diversity” with them. But that was not the message of God. Micaiah was not only **bold** in proclaiming God’s message, but **called the false prophets liars as well** (2 Ki. 22:15-23). What he spoke incurred Ahab’s wrath and resulted in his imprisonment (2 Ki. 22:26-27). Micaiah was a man of deep conviction, in whose soul burned a love for God’s word, and he was willing to suffer rather than compromise that word.

The ancient gospel will **still** bring not only the same salvation today that it brought when first preached; it will also bring vitriolic opposition from the secular and religious world toward those who have the courage to preach it. When the heat of battle bears down upon us, we must never falter or compromise. With our faces steadfastly set toward Jerusalem, and our souls set for the defense of the gospel, God’s servants must always,

...preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come [**has come**, JCB] when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

End Notes

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version

West, Earl Irvin, The Search For The Ancient Order, Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, 1964, Vol. 1

Ready This Month!

**“The Thing That Hath Been...”: The Cycle of Apostasy
Volume 2, Enlarged and Revised By Jerry C. Brewer**

Intentional Ignorance

Dub McClish

It would be difficult to exaggerate the cursed consequences of ignorance. Various prophets explicitly blamed the downfall of God's Old Testament people on their ignorance of God and His law. God's indictment of His people through Hosea says it all: "**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, emph. DM). Because of their rebellion God finally sent them into captivity in a strange land. We read the record of the apostasy of the Jews and wonder at their folly. Then, often without realizing it, thousands among God's spiritual Israel duplicate their foolish errors. One of the greatest populators of Hell will doubtless be ignorance.

Sundry Observations on Ignorance

Not all ignorance is bad. Stated another way, it is good to be ignorant of some things. Paul once wrote: "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple unto that which is evil" (Rom. 16:19b). It is impossible to avoid all of the tawdry, profane, indecent, and wicked influences in our profane, sex-saturated society. They slap us in the face from billboards, radio and television, the Internet, magazines, movies, and "music." However, for the sake of pure minds and lives we must filter out all of the trash we can (Phi. 4:8). We need to remain as ignorant as possible about the filth and evil of the corrupt culture of our times. Ignorance of these things really is bliss.

Not all ignorance is avoidable. Regardless of one's brilliance and education level, he/she will still be ignorant about some things. This statement is true of secular knowledge due to the vast wealth of extant information. It is no less true of spiritual Truth: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? ...the world through its wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:20–21). If one could totally avoid ignorance, he would be omniscient. However, the admission that no human being can know all things does not imply (per agnosticism) that no one can know anything. We can (must) know the Truth which makes us free in Christ (John 8:31–32) because it has been revealed by the Holy Spirit through inspired men (1 Cor. 2:7–10, 13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Some are ignorant twice over. They are ignorant, and they are ignorant of their ignorance. The old Arabic apothegm says it well: "He who knows not and knows not he knows not, he is a fool." "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Pro. 12:15a) is Solomon's version of the same idea. It is downright disgusting to listen to someone who thinks himself to be an expert spout false information. Pity the congregation that appoints a man as an elder who knows little of the Bible, but who fancies himself a Bible scholar!

Men bereft of extensive formal education are not necessarily ignorant. Some of the greatest Gospel preachers and Bible scholars of the past two centuries have been men who had little opportunity to attend school. We should be thankful for highly educated men who loved Truth, such as the Campbells, Lard, McGarvey, and, more recently, Woods and Warren. However, where would the church be without the likes of Raccoon John Smith, Ben Franklin, and Gus Nichols—spiritual giants and scholars who lacked formal education?

When we warn of the pitfalls of higher education for Gospel preachers, we should never leave the impression that there is some safety or advantage in ignorance for the sake of ignorance. There is an old tale that depicts an anti-education preacher boasting from the pulpit of his ignorance: "I ain't never been to nobody's college, and I ain't never goin'. Futhermore, I pray that God will make me igner'nter and igner'nter." Someone in the back was heard to mutter, "Poor God. He's sure got a job on His hands!"

The church has suffered greatly from ignorance for several years. It is filled with Biblical illiterates, for lack of a better term. Preachers dare not underestimate the Biblical ignorance of their auditors if they wish to be understood. Bible facts (e.g.,

narratives, occurrences, places, and persons), which were “common knowledge” two generations ago, now have to be explained. This woeful condition prevails, not because of inability or opportunity to learn, but (at least in part) because of laziness, carelessness, apathy, and neglect. Elders, teachers, preachers, and parents must ever seek ways to motivate the saints to exclaim with David, “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97).

The Worst Ignorance of All

Ignorance of the Bible, whatever the causes, is a terrible handicap. However, if there is one cause of ignorance that is worse than others, it surely is self-imposed, intentional ignorance. There have been some dedicated Bible ignoramuses in every local congregation of which I have been a member. These folk devoutly believe in the bliss of Bible ignorance and are determined to maintain their happy state. They refuse to do more than nibble a bit on the Bread of Life occasionally. They despise the Sunday morning and Wednesday night Bible classes—they simply refuse to attend. Preaching, visiting, and encouraging simply do not move them.

These folk attend Sunday morning worship if it is convenient (which it rarely ever is on Sunday evening). Can anyone realistically imagine that they read their Bibles at home? Such folk will have much for which to answer on this account, if none other, at the Judgment. Even among brethren who are faithful in Bible class and worship attendance, few can be persuaded to buy and read good books that will add to their Biblical knowledge. Some of these same folk may gladly pay \$25.00 for the latest novel (which may be filled with gutter language), but they would not consider spending half that amount on a book to help them go to Heaven.

There is another area of spiritual information upon which many have deliberately chosen to remain ignorant. This area of ignorance has already had devastating effects upon the church worldwide. It manifests itself as sort of an “elitism.” I have observed it in many rank and file Christians, but I have especially seen it in certain preachers, elders, and university professors and administrators. These folk seem to consider it a mark of spiritual superiority to remain ignorant of false doctrine and its proponents. They pride themselves on being unaware of “brotherhood issues” and “problems” (as if ignorance would make them magically disappear).

Many years ago a group of about fifty brethren (I among them) approached an eldership with deep concerns about liberal influences in the congregation. The spokesman for the elders said he had heard people talk about liberalism in politics, in the schools, and in the church, but he did not know what they were talking about. He had remained intentionally ignorant of matters all about him. Predictably, that church has digressed increasingly under his leadership. Such brethren sometimes boast, “I never read any of the brotherhood papers.” These are the sort who do not “have a clue” about the current apostasy, and they are perfectly content in their ignorance.

I once received a letter from an elder requesting some information on Max Lucado, if I had any. The elder said he had been told that Lucado was a false teacher, but had “never read any publications” that so stated. He explained that he did not “want to accuse him if he is a sound Gospel preacher.” I appreciate his seeking information and not wanting to falsely accuse. However, with the volume of material published in papers and books in the past six or seven years on this fallen brother, it is amazing that a man charged with protecting the church had read none of it. He has either not been reading the papers he needs to read or he has been reading none at all! How can shepherds feed and watch for the safety of the flock (Acts 20:28–31) if they are not constantly reading and informing themselves?

On “Keeping Files”

More than once within the past twenty-five years I have registered my dismay to administrators in universities operated by brethren concerning some of the men they featured on their lecture programs. The administrators consistently pleaded ignorance. Yet one of the objectionable speakers lived in the same city as the university that invited him, and his participation in an interdenominational “unity” meeting appeared in their local paper only a few months before. The administrator self-righteously

responded to my concern by saying, “I do not keep files on my brethren.” I told him he would not have even needed to “keep files” on this brother if he would just read his own newspaper! Another administrator from a different school likewise chided me a few years later for “keeping files” (do they all have the same handbook with the same pat responses?).

Does John’s command to “prove the spirits” (1 John 4:1) still apply? Are we accountable to the Lord’s command to “beware of false prophets” (Mat. 7:14)? If so, then we (especially elders and preachers) are obligated to stay informed concerning what brethren are saying, writing, and doing. The Lord apparently “kept some files” on the scribes and Pharisees (Mat. 15:1–14; 23:1–36). Paul must have had a rather extensive set of “files” on various brethren (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 1:10–12; Gal. 1:6–9; 2:11–14; Phlp. 3:2; 2 The. 3:6, 14; 1 Tim. 1:19–20; 2 Tim. 2:16–18; 4:9; Tit. 1:11–12; et al.). Apparently, Peter, John, and Jude kept some “files” (2 Pet. 2:17–22; 1 John 2:19; 4:1–3; 3 John 9–10; Jude 4, 11–16). It matters not whether these “files” were kept mentally or in written form—in principle there is no difference. These men did not pride themselves in being ignorant of what false men were doing and saying, as some do presently.

It is impossible to please some folk. When we must regretfully expose the digression of some brother or brethren, those who are exposed (or their defenders) immediately ask for proof (in other words, “files”). Yet if we keep careful files and records, they call us “witch-hunters,” “watch dogs,” or worse.

Some elderships/congregations have not been innocent victims of liberalism and apostasy, but have knowingly led the way, while others have eagerly embraced digression and unauthorized change when it came their way. However, some elders/congregations have simply been victimized by apostasy because of their woeful ignorance, either of the Bibles, of the men leading the digression, or both. It is a foregone conclusion that those who do not know the Truth cannot recognize error when they hear it or see it. Many have been duped by sweet-talking, forked-tongued deceivers simply because their Truth tanks registered all but “empty.”

There is simply no excuse for intentional, self-imposed ignorance! The body of Christ has paid and is paying a terrible price for it. Let us all study God’s Word more. Let us also read good books and journals that will build our knowledge of the Truth and keep us informed on what is transpiring in the church of God. Some of us have much catching up to do!

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A Charge to Preachers

G.K. Wallace

“I charge thee therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

There are a lot of priggish, puritanical brethren who are led astray by the assumed piety of certain preachers. “What Brother Longface preaches is **surely** the truth because he is such a **devout man**.” They size up what he preaches by his piety and not by the Book. I am not opposed to piety. The Bible teaches us to be sober. It also teaches us to be honest. But the man who keeps insisting that he is honest is generally a crook, and he who parades his piety is usually a hypocrite.

Piety, like honesty, flourishes better when it is treated as something personal and too sacred to be put on parade. If our piety is the test of our soundness, then the Pharisees would be orthodox. They were reverent. The Pharisee instead of leaving the door of his room open while he was on his knees praying, would stand out on the corner of the street and make long prayers. Thus he could be seen of all men. I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, nor a dresser of sycamore trees, but I predict that these super-pious brethren will be on the street corners next. Paul was reverent, saintly, godly and heavenly minded, but was not too pious to call one fellow a “son of the devil” (Acts

13:19). His brotherly love did not keep him from resisting Peter. “I resisted him to his face because he stood condemned” (Gal. 2:11). The real test of one’s orthodoxy is not his sincerity nor affected devotion, but whether he is true to the charge to preach the word.

Realizing that the gospel and **not piety** is the power of God unto salvation, how shall we preach it? It must be preached boldly and without fear or favor. The second recorded prayer in the book of Acts is a prayer for boldness. Brethren today call the preacher aside and ask him to tone his preaching down until it is so tame as to be insipid.

Some say that we should be like John, the apostle of love. Of course, they think John was not vigorous and trenchant in his preaching. Was John a shy, soft, effeminate preacher of the Word? The Sanhedrin was amazed at the boldness of Peter and John (Acts 4:13). Please notice that the text says “Peter and John.” John was just as bold as Peter.

What reckless saints were those early preachers! They did not so much as regard their own lives in preaching Christ (Acts 20:24). Watch these great men in action and compare some brethren who are apparently afraid to quote the Great Commission with emphasis lest they should offend some sectarian. No doubt the uncompromising fearlessness of these apostles was derived from Christ. “They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). No one would suspect a compromising, cringing preacher of having been associated with the world’s greatest Preacher.

Faithful preaching of the Word of God will accomplish divine results. First: The word preached, believed and obeyed will put one into Christ where he is saved from his sins. (Acts 2:38 ; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Gal. 3:26-27) Second: The word preached will expose false teachers. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus that false brethren would arise among them. “I know that after my departing 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). False teachers should be exposed. Those in the church shall not be spared. Third: The word preached fulfills the sacred charge of Paul to Timothy.

We would thus save ourselves. “Take heed unto thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things: for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee” (2 Tim. 4:16).

The gospel preached “with thoughts that breathe the words that burn” will please God and disturb man. The early preachers did not please everybody. Occasionally a preacher of our day boasts that all were pleased with his work. Even the sects dismissed to attend his services. How different from Paul. He did not please the world nor all the brethren. When he went into a place to preach he had a revival or a riot. The enemies of the truth spoke of Paul and his companions after this fashion: “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (Acts 17:6).

A Tale of Two Sorcerers

Lee Moses

The word of God condemns and justifies. Practices not in harmony with its teachings are condemned, but the same word provides the means of justification for humble souls willing to change their practices. One practice that God has always condemned is sorcery (Deut. 18:10-12; Mal. 3:5; Gal. 5:20; Rev. 21:8). The New Testament speaks of two sorcerers who were blessed with the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, they were blessed to know that their practices were condemned and to know what the means of their justification were.

Elymas

As Paul and Barnabas traveled through the island of Cyprus on Paul’s first missionary journey, they met with the proconsul of the province, a “prudent man,” or “man of understanding” (American Standard Version), named Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-7). A Roman inscription in Cyprus identifies the proconsul as Quintus Sergius Paulus. The pro-

consul demonstrated his understanding and prudence by having two men of God preach the Gospel to him. However, the proconsul had with him a man who was not so prudent or understanding—a sorcerer named Elymas.

The biblical account indicates that Elymas had an important position with the proconsul, likely as a highly trusted advisor. However, his advice on this occasion was not such as to benefit the proconsul, but such as to benefit his own position of prominence. Elymas “withstood” Paul and Barnabas, particularly their preaching, “seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith” (13:8). The Gospel which Paul and Barnabas were preaching, though it was the word of God, went against the practices of Elymas and threatened his position of prominence.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul rebuked Elymas:

O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season (13:10- 11).

And indeed Elymas was struck blind for a period of time, to further rebuke him for his stubbornness and pride. Elymas had heard the Gospel, understood that it condemned his practices, and therefore “withstood” it.

Simon

The Holy Spirit describes Simon as a very prominent and powerful man in a city of Samaria—but a sorcerer:

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries (Acts 8:9-11).

Despite the complete sway that Simon and his sorcery held over the city, a Gospel preacher from Jerusalem named Philip was able to “preach Christ unto them” and “when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (8:5, 12). No longer were the people of Samaria under the sway of Simon; as a matter of fact, they had completely turned away from him. When this took place, one can only imagine the effect it had upon Simon’s pride. So did Simon plot a way to regain his prior status? Did he plot a way to “get even” with Philip? No. “Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (8:13). One who had duped others for years with false miracles knew true miracles when he saw them. Although he had been dishonest, he was willing to admit honestly that the Gospel of Jesus Christ had a power far exceeding “the great power of God” that the people of Samaria had believed Simon held.

As with all new converts, Simon did not yet understand all that pertained to Christianity. The apostles had the special ability to transfer miraculous gifts to other Christians, and Simon offered Peter money to purchase this ability (8:18-19). For sorcerers to purchase the secrets to the tricks of other sorcerers was a common practice. However, Christianity was not akin to sorcery, and Peter gave Simon a scathing rebuke for equating the two (8:20-23). Peter was only an “unlearned and ignorant” fisherman of Galilee (4:13), yet he dared to rebuke this prominent citizen of Samaria? Again, Simon demonstrated his humility before God, as he answered Peter and John, “Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me” (8:24). The practice of Christianity was absolutely contrary to what Simon’s practices had been when he lived as a sorcerer, yet he was willing to humble himself and change to live as a Christian.

Those in positions of earthly prominence often find it difficult to humble themselves before God. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (I Corinthians 1:26). As the apostle

Paul preached the Gospel to mighty King Agrippa II, the king mocked Paul, “With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Yet some in positions of prominence have obeyed the Gospel: Crispus, the chief ruler of the Corinthian synagogue (18:8); certain members of Caesar’s household (Phlp. 4:22); and the proconsul Sergius Paulus believed as he heard and saw the testimony of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:12).

The Gospel opposes the practices of all those not walking in harmony with it. Elymas was both a man of prominence and was completely out of harmony with the will of God. Having both of these factors in place made Elymas unwilling to conform his practices to the Gospel, even though the Gospel held the very means of justification for the wrong which he had done. However, Simon was a man in a very similar position, yet was able to make the effort to do what was right. While each of our own positions in life might make us more or less receptive to the Gospel and willing to change ourselves as it instructs, each of us can. This applies whether rich or poor; well-known or relatively anonymous; Christians, erring children of God, or those who have never obeyed the Gospel. This applies even to sorcerers.

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.

The Church at Athens

David Ray

The apostle Paul did much traveling, teaching, and debating in order to establish multiple congregations of Christ’s church throughout the areas of modern Turkey and Greece. We read of these efforts in chapters 13-20 of the book of Acts. Then, in his subsequent communications to these churches in the New Testament letters, we find continued teaching, encouragement, admonishment, and even rebuke when necessary.

Some of the cities where he worked include Antioch of Syria, Antioch of Pisidia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. He also spent some time in Athens teaching and debating many of the religious leaders there. Acts 17 tells us about this effort and gives us some important information about the polytheistic mindset of the people of Athens at that time.

However, while we can read a lot in the New Testament regarding the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth, we find nothing about a congregation of the Lord’s church in Athens. Was there one established? Or did Paul’s efforts fall on deaf ears, there being so little interest that a congregation couldn’t be started? Or was the church at Athens established at that time but fell away soon thereafter?

Verse 32 tells us there were at least a few there who followed Paul (“Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them”). But other than this, we know nothing of any other converts. We know Paul began his work there in the public meeting areas, debating with the philosophers, rather than his usual routine of going to the Jewish synagogue. Does the lack of a large Jewish population answer our questions about the existence of a congregation?

Why this concern? Because, though the success of his effort appears to have been less than desired, **Paul was still compelled to try:** he traveled there, taught the truth, debated with unbelievers, and attempted to save as many souls as possible. And almost two thousand years later, we can read of and learn great lessons from this effort, though it may not have yielded any **apparent** fruit.

This should be an encouragement to us as we also attempt each day to win souls to the Lord through discussion, teaching, challenging, and debating the people we encounter in our lives, even though a majority of those souls lacks the necessary spiritual interest that would cause them to respond to the gospel call or even to sit down and open a Bible. If Paul continued teaching even when interest was low and opposition was high, if he steadfastly sought to engage lost souls in productive spiritual discussion regardless of the outcome, shouldn’t we? And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

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“The Thing That Hath Been...”: The Cycle of Apostasy Volume 2, Enlarged and Revised, is at the printer and will be ready soon. It contains **5 new chapters** with much more material on mainstream churches of Christ, their Pentecostalism, their preaching schools, their tangled web of fellowship with error, and an in-depth expose' of pornography in Freed-Hardeman University's art classes. The Enlarged Edition is 360 pages, compared with the first edition's 214 pages. This **BOOK is FREE** and **POSTAGE is FREE for single copies**. Multiple copies will be sent boxed, via Priority Mail. To order early, send your name and address in an email message to us at dbray46@gmail.com. Your copy will be mailed as soon as we receive them from the printer.

The Unity Which God Demands

Jess Whitlock

God demands unity! There is but “one way” (John 14:6). The apostle Paul wrote “unto the church of God which is at Corinth ...Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:2, 10). This world cannot and will not be **won to** Christ until we are **one in** Christ. The Psalmist wrote, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psa. 133:1).

Paul wrote to “the saints that are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus...There is one body...” (Eph. 1:1; 4:4). Paul informs us that the Law of Moses, that middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, had been broken down (Eph. 2:14-ff). Thus, the faithful in Christ are members of the **one body**, which is the **one church** for which Christ died. New Testament Christians must give “diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). There is not a Jewish church and a Gentile church; Jesus is the head over His church which is His body. Paul told the Ephesian brethren, that God “put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). A unity based upon the Bible cannot be shaken. Our standard of unity must be found in the divine and authoritative Word of God. Most of us preach the “one body”; but do we practice it? If we cannot be at peace one with another in the local congregation, how can we ever win others to the Christ?

In Ephesians 4, Paul listed the seven **ones** which, if followed, will result in the unity that God demands of His people. I call this “Paul’s Platform for Unity” (Eph. 4:4-6). “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3); let us consider the path to true unity:

There is:

- One Body—Unity of Organization (1 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 2:14-16)
- One Spirit—Unity of Guidance (Gal. 5:16-26; Rom. 8:1-17)
- One Hope—Unity of Expectation (Heb. 6:19; 9:7)
- One Lord—Unity of Authority (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23)
- One Faith—Unity of Message (Jude 3; Rom. 10:17)
- One Baptism—Unity of Immersion (Acts 8:26-ff; Rom. 6:1-5)
- One God—Unity of Worship (John 4:23-24; Matt. 4:10)

The night before His crucifixion, our Lord prayed diligently for unity for those who would follow Him (John 17). In order to build the ark, God gave a “pattern” to Noah (Gen. 6:14-22); in order to build the tabernacle, God gave a “pattern” to Moses (Exo. 25:40; 40:16; Heb. 8:5). Likewise, God has given to us a “pattern” for **unity** within His church (Eph. 4:1-6).

When it comes to that “pattern” for unity, let us heed the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, when she said to the servants, “Whatsoever he (Jesus-JLW) saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5).

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Prepared for Judgment Day?

Marvin L. Weir

God's Word emphatically teaches the necessity of being prepared for "the day of the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). As one aptly states, "This readiness consists not in idly staring into Heaven, but in actively doing those things that are pleasing unto Him." Jesus words it like this: "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matt. 24:46). Not all people who will be lost are evil, immoral, and detest God! Many basically **good** people will simply be **unprepared** for the Day of Judgment. The five foolish virgins teach us a valuable lesson on the appearance of being ready for the coming of the Lord while actually being unprepared. Let us learn from their sad plight (Matt. 25:1-12).

Without Reproach and Blameless Before Men.

There is no indication that the five foolish virgins were living worldly lives. Their conduct toward others was not in question. Their motives appear to be sincere, and they desire to be with the Master when he comes. They enjoy the company of the five wise virgins and the wise seem to enjoy the fellowship of the five who are called foolish. All outward appearances suggest they are of good character, respectful, courteous, kind, and looking forward to a home in Heaven.

Good Intentions.

They go "forth to meet the bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1). They make sure they carry their lamps for therein lies their hope. Many today carry their Bible and profess that therein lies their hope. But as the foolish virgins were not concerned with how much oil was in their lamps, many professing Christians are not concerned with what is in the Bible. So many people never search the Scriptures to see if they have obeyed the gospel plan of salvation or if they are worshipping "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Many do have good intentions, but are blind to their needs and what the Lord requires to be His follower.

Careless Neglect

The text states, "For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them" (v. 3). All hope of the foolish virgin was in her lamp, but the lamp was useless without oil. The hope of so many today is in "faith only," but "by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (Jas. 2:24). God illustrates this truth in saying, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead" (Jas. 2:26). It is impossible to demonstrate your faith without works, but engaging in works God has commanded will show your faith (Jas. 2:18). Many today who are convinced their faith is going to save them do very little for the cause of Christ. When that "little" is done—they are done! They will meet the same fate as the foolish virgin who had only a "little" oil for her lamp.

Crippling Indifference

Hear these words: "Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (Matt. 25:5). God's grace and longsuffering are indeed wonderful, but indifference toward them are not cause for rejoicing. The testing and proving period of time people have been so fortunate to possess will one day come to an end. The foolish virgins had time to go and buy extra oil, but they slept! Indifference to one's obligations and responsibilities will keep him from obeying the gospel and will also keep the one who has obeyed the gospel from "walking in the light" (1 John 1:7) of God's Word.

Urgent Request

"And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out" (Matt. 25:8). Reality is enlightening! One cannot borrow the necessary fruit of salvation. The "works" of the faithful will not transfer to the unfaithful. The Bridegroom will one day come, and the door of mercy will forever close.

Sincere Attempt

"And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came..." (v. 10). Sincerity and eager desire will not save one who is not prepared when the Lord comes. One cannot "seek" when time has run out. Hoping to be ready while failing to prepare is false hope.

Futile Appeal and Eternal Damnation

“...the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not” (vv. 10-12). A child of God who is not prepared to meet the Lord is no better off than the scoffer and the immoral of the world.

Too busy! Hurt feelings! Secular activities! Social gathering with friends! Aches and pains! Hypocrites in the church! Members not living right! Children to help! Grandchildren to care for! None of the above excuses or any other excuses will be acceptable reasons for not being prepared for the Judgment. Hope built on the doctrines of men, the whims and wishes of individuals, and the many activities of the world will not prepare one to enter the Heavenly Home.

Nothing is more needed now, or will be more meaningful then, than successfully preparing to meet God!

Catholicism's Favorite Text

Ted W. McElroy

No man can be a part of the church and ignore Christ. No man can have Christ and ignore the church. This vital lesson of the relationship between Christ and the church is taught in Matthew 16:13-20.

To center the minds of the apostles upon this fact, Jesus asked them, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” They gave a variety of answers in reply, “Some say John the Baptist; some Elijah; others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” Men were not agreed on this religious question; neither are they agreed on any other major question of religion. Indeed, they are not even agreed on the existence of God. When you ask today concerning what men say about a religious question, you will be certain to receive many answers contradictory, the one to the others.

When Jesus asked the disciples, “Who say ye that I am?” the impetuous Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To this noble acknowledgement, the others all agreed. Jesus then said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.” There is found here a good lesson on unity and division. When Jesus asked concerning the opinion of men, there was division in the answer. Men, following their own human reasoning, could not agree. But when He asked the same question of the disciples, they with one consent agreed (Peter acting as spokesman) that He was “the Christ.” Jesus said that their knowledge came from God, not man. Theirs was by revelation, not by the processes of human reasoning and judgment. Human reasoning led to false conclusions; divine revelation made known the truth.

Following the statement concerning the source of their knowledge (i.e., that it had come from God) Jesus promised to build His church, “And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Jesus promised to build His church. It is, therefore, Christ's church; which is exactly what Paul called it when he said, “The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). Any institution not built by Christ, not wearing Christ's name, is a false church. Calvin, Luther, Wesley and others were never authorized by the God of heaven to build any kind of church; and their institutions bear no relationship at all to the church that Christ built.

The Foundation

There has been great controversy over the question, “What is the foundation of the church?” Catholics have tried to establish the doctrine of the primacy of Peter, asserting that Christ in this passage promised to build the church upon Peter as the foundation. They say that the Greek word for Peter is a word meaning *rock*, and that Peter is the *rock* upon which the church was built. Their argument is erroneous. The word *Peter* and the word *rock* are **not** identical words, either in the Greek or the English. The Greek word for Peter (*Petros*) is masculine gender, and means “a pebble or fragment of

rock.” But the word Christ used in this passage is **not** *petros* but *petra*. Now *petra* is feminine gender and means “a solid ledge of rock.” The Greek words, therefore, are different in gender and in definition; they are no more synonymous than are the English words Peter and rock. Jesus Christ and the immutable truth of His divinity provides the foundation of the church. Any other foundation could not stand.

That Christ is the foundation, which cannot be shaken, was prophesied by Isaiah: “Therefore saith the Lord Jehovah, behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, and a precious cornerstone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste” (Isa. 28:16). This prophecy can belong to no one but Christ, to whom it is often applied in the New Testament. Paul taught that there is no other foundation, “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). These scriptures **exclude** the idea that Peter or any other man has ever been the foundation of the church; the only foundation of the true church is Jesus Christ. If you are building on any other foundation, you are building on the sand.

Church Succession

Some religionists have based a false doctrine upon the clause, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” They cite this passage in efforts to prove church succession or perpetuity. They say that the promise means that the church must always exist, and that therefore the church can be traced through succession back to the days of the apostles. Their position is contrary to the facts of history and their idea of church succession is **not supported** by the word of God. The erroneous argument is based on the assumption that the pronoun *it* refers back to, and has for its antecedent, the word *church*. But this is obviously false from the fact that the church has never pressed the gates of Hades either trying to get into it or out of it. At no time has the kingdom on earth been trying to get out of it. This is proof that the pronoun *it* does not refer back to the church.

To what, then, does it refer? The word refers to the building of the church by Christ. The “gates of Hades” were not powerful enough to prevent Jesus from building His church. Hades is the place of departed spirits. Jesus was crucified, His spirit went into Hades, but the gates of Hades could not hold Him prisoner; He came forth after three days, conqueror over death, Hades, and the grave. On the following Pentecost He built His church according to the promise He had made to the disciples.

Binding And Loosing

After declaring that he would build the church in spite of “the gates of Hades,” Jesus described the work of the apostles in these words, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” Some people want to restrict this power to the apostle Peter alone. But as is clearly shown in Matthew 18:17, this “binding and loosing” power was given to **all** the apostles alike. There is nothing on this point to sustain the doctrine of the supremacy of Peter. All the apostles had exactly the same power that he had.

The keys given to the apostles symbolize their authority to declare the terms of entrance and the conditions of continued fellowship in the kingdom of God. The first announcement of the terms of entrance into the church was made by Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2). The conditions of continued fellowship with Christ are also given by Peter (2 Pet. 1:5-8) as well as by all the other writers in numerous places. These terms and conditions cannot be set aside; they are bound on earth, because they were **first** bound in heaven.

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