

The Gospel Preceptor

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

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Proxy Christianity

Jerry C. Brewer

“Christianity” is practiced in mainstream churches of Christ by proxy—much like the Mormons who baptize by proxy for the dead. This allows the dead to be baptized without getting into the water, and certainly places no responsibility on them. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *proxy* as “the agency, function, or office of a deputy who acts as a substitute for another.”

Within mainstream of Christ is a myriad of proxies that individuals have substituted for their own responsibility. They believe that by sending some kind of “contribution” to a radio or television evangelistic program (however small) they are fulfilling the Great Commission. They **substitute** and assign their individual responsibility to something (or someone) else. The means of conversion is no longer an individual effort to study God's word and teach it to others. It is now a corporate project and the only effort made by individuals is to throw money at it.

Whenever there is a clamor for “church growth” or the cry goes up that “we are not growing,” so the remedy is usually some kind of proxy “program” to accomplish that end. Churches “hire” a preacher to preach as the proxy for individual members who should be teaching others. Churches “hire” a “Youth Minister” to teach and entertain the young people—a proxy for parents Eph. 6:4). Some churches even hire an “Out-reach Minister” as a proxy for personal, individual efforts to teach others.

When the disciples were scattered from Jerusalem **they** “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). That was individual effort, **not** preaching by proxy. They had no organizations or “ministries” to which they could contribute a few mites and call that “preaching the word.”

Many of us well remember a time when churches of Christ were the fastest growing religious group in the United States. There was no secret to that growth. Individual Christians were then known as “walking Bibles” because they studied and **knew** the Scriptures. They then made individual efforts to teach their neighbors publicly **and** from house to house as Paul did (Acts 20:20). Their house to house efforts were called “cottage meetings” in which great numbers learned the message of salvation and became Christians. Their public efforts in Gospel meetings also reaped a great harvest of souls for the Lord, but large numbers of those began with **individual** efforts. In 1952, my Grandfather and two uncles were among the 25 who were baptized into Christ during a summer meeting of the Taylor church of Christ—a country church south of Elk City, Okla. Those were largely the result of individuals teaching their friends and neighbors all year long and the preacher coming along and reaping the harvest in a Gospel meeting.

But over the years, Christians have been brainwashed by money-collecting proxies organized to do what the individual child of God should be doing. Hence, money is the medium of evangelism. Although it is unspoken, and perhaps not even in mind, that philosophy says that a person can “**buy** his way into heaven.” In all of this, the idea that Christianity is to be practiced by corporate proxy predominates and far fewer souls are saved by the blood of the Lamb.

The same kind of attitude took root among Christians in the 19th century. The remedy then was an organized proxy for individual effort—the Missionary Society. In Volume 1 of his work, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, Earl Irvin West wrote “...the history of the church has well shown that the less zeal and devotion there is in the church, the more institutionalism and human organizations are needed” (1:170). West wrote that Benjamin Franklin also addressed that point:

...Franklin attempted to get at the very root of the weakened condition of the brotherhood...If the cause was languishing, it was so only because the preachers were not as fervent as they once were. He says, “If preachers lament that the cause languishes, let them cease scheming about some organization unknown to the New Testament, and go into the field and labor for the Lord’s sake, and for the Lord’s name, as brethren did years ago, and as we are doing now, and as certain as God is the author of the Bible, we shall prosper...Preaching is what is needed, fervent, soul-stirring preaching, exhortations, entreaties and impressive persuasions with the people to turn to God, and be saved.” Unquestionably, Franklin was hitting at the real cause. The history of the restoration movement shows that the less devotion men have to Christ the more they stand in need of human organizations (1:212).

Franklin and West zeroed in on the problem. The perceived **need of human proxies** to do the work Christ left for us, rises as **individual devotion** to Christ **falls**. The **same** problem today—Christianity by proxy—is manifested in the unnumbered, inane “ministries” touted on websites of mainstream churches. It has **never been** the responsibility of the church or its “ministry” proxies to fulfill **individual responsibility**.

God does not save in groups. He saves one at a time. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20) and “**He** that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). No proxies for **the soul that sinneth** or **He that believeth**. Jesus’ parable of the talents teaches individual responsibility and our accounting in the day of Judgment shall be as **individuals** (Rom. 14:12). I cannot “buy” a proxy to do my work on earth for Christ, and I will **certainly** have no proxy to stand before the Judge of all the earth.

[Like reader of the “**Absolutely The Truth**” (Part 4); by Harrell Davidson, then read “**Christianity Proxy**” “**Sloven Trained Monkeys**” and by Jerry Brewer and “**Seeking One Who Will Stand the Gap For God**” will by Marvin L. Weir. The reader see a picture of the church that is morally and spiritually with no salt light. The church may stand of a “darkness of age.”]

“**Absolutely The Truth**” (Part 4)

Harrell Davidson

Many years ago I began to speak and write about the change agents in the church. All change agents are not bad. There are some change agents that are fighting to correct wrongs they find in congregations. Some normally give them a less constructive name such as legalist or worse. I am altogether for those who are trying to get brethren to go back to the old paths. I applaud their efforts entirely and without equivocation. The unscriptural change agents started in the early 1970s and have flourished to this new century. Our Lord said that “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Change agents are not confined to the body of Christ or to the problems that we have within ourselves. I say this kindly, but I say it strongly because I feel strongly about it. We need to stop the play like things and get serious about doing the Lord’s will.

The problem exists due to a lack of study of the Sacred Scriptures. We need to know the Bible and how to make valid arguments using the Scriptures. We need to be bold, but kind. Kindness does not eliminate taking a strong stand. I sincerely believe that in time to come, if the world stands, our children or perhaps our grandchildren will have to involve themselves in a restoration movement. The departures from the truth are getting broader and the number is increasing rapidly. I well remember times when you could be on a trip and stop where there was a sign indicating that brethren met there;

stop go in and worship scripturally. There is less respect today for the authority of the Word of God today than I have ever seen in my brief lifetime.

My grandfather was born in 1881 and was a mighty man in the Scriptures though he could not read or sign his name. My grandmother would sign his name for him and beside that he would make an X. She read the Scriptures to him every night of the week. He became an uncompromising elder in the Lord's church. He never feared combating error. Those might have been simple times, but I am deeply disturbed today when our very learned so called preachers and specialists in the church know little about or just plainly will not defend the truth. Mum (silence) seems to be the word while 1 Pet. 3:15 still tells us to day what it did two thousand years ago. Be ready to give an account. Those teaching and condoning error have made the choice that they do not have to give an account. They are accursed of the Lord and he cometh with judgment in His hands.

What is the truth? What does it mean? Truth applies to propositions. It is the case that God exists and I know it. The Word of God is the truth and we can know it. What does it mean to be sound in the faith? It means that valid arguments are made regarding the Scriptures. Do we not do that? Are you kidding me? Many, if not most, who occupy the pulpits today do not know how to make a sound argument because they do not study the Scriptures. They seem to be wrapped up in themselves and speaking smooth words that will not ripple the water. Those of us who are "seasoned citizens" in the kingdom today were brought up studying the Holy Bible. I well remember the card class that those of us were in from about the ages of one to six or maybe seven. A good sister taught us from those little cards from the Gospel Advocate Company and instilled in our minds truths that remain there. My how times have changed! We have gone from this to "lock ins" or "sleep over's" or whatever else these kinds of things are called. Truly times have changed and we let some professional pulpiter lead us like piper down the primrose path of destruction.

The truth is that we need to know the Bible. When Jesus was tempted three times in Matthew 4 with each temptation he said "it is written." Today some would say, "Well I think this is in the Bible somewhere, but I don't know where." In those three temptations each time Jesus used the same phrase. Here is this and this and this so what are you going to do with this Satan? Satan had no reply. Jesus logically put these statements together and we need to learn how to do this to the best of our ability.

"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thess. 5: 17). How are we to do that if we do not know what the Bible says? Jesus has given us a job that we do not know how to do. No He has not! It is something that every faithful Gospel preacher, and faithful Christians as far as this is concerned, should be able to do, but it cannot be done as long as we are divorced from the Scriptures. It takes preparation to prove all things. Why is something true? Who can answer the question? What preparation has been made to make the correct answer? Surely we can see where we have failed individually and well as collectively.

Truth is reasonable and is not irrational. You can go back to Matthew 4 and start over again following the argumentation of the Lord and see the results. Nothing is more valuable than the truth. Truth is necessary (Rom. 1:15-17) for one cannot obey the Gospel which has the power to save if that Gospel power is not known. One cannot be saved without the Gospel. Truth is attainable and it can be learned. Nothing is more important than the truth. The conclusion must be that if truth is unknown to a living soul it will not save.

Truth is unique (cf. Gal. 1:6-9; Acts 19:1-5) there is no other truth from God that will save and produce eternal life. Is that specifically stated in these particular verses? No. There are implications. I read such passages and I infer what it means, but I must be careful in drawing the proper conclusion. You see, I could infer something that is not right that could cause souls to be lost. I suggest to you that the numbing placating sermons that we are hearing today are many times brought about by wrong implications or inferences out of one or two reasons. One is out of sheer ignorance and the other is to deliberately lead congregations into apostasy. What other answer can

there be?

Obligatory matters must be obeyed. This means that I have to do it. The plan of salvation taught in the Bible must be obeyed—I have to do it because it is obligatory on me and/or anyone else who would be saved from alien sins. The Christian life—walking by faith is obligatory. There are also forbidden matters—things I must not do. If I do them I sin and if I die in that condition I am lost eternally—forever. No one can do these forbidden matters and not be guilty of sin. Think back for a moment of those who are leading the church away from the truth! If you have paid attention you know that they are lost and there is no reason to beat around the bush about it.

Some things are optional which means that we do not have to do them. Why did we put pews in our buildings? We did not have to because there is no command. Where in the Bible does it say we have to have a building? It is not there. It is not obligatory. It is optional. Where is the passage that commands us to have a preacher with a salary and benefits as we know it today? It is not there. It is optional. We must understand that there are some things that are expedient and the aforementioned things fall into that realm.

Jesus put Satan to rout by saying it is written, it is written, it is written and Satan could not handle it. Neither can a denominational preacher. There is not one of them in the world that can defend his doctrine. I think today they recognize this more than ever because they will not debate today. Through our television program I challenged every denominational preacher regarding spiritual gifts such as talking in tongues. They were also challenged on channel 22 to defend their premillennial doctrine. Not one taker! Why? None in this area can or will defend their error. Our own erring brethren will not debate. It has been almost five full years since I challenged a brother to a debate representing the elders of the Northside church of Christ in Calhoun, Georgia. Five years later he is no better than the denominational preachers here that surround me. Silent as the tomb! Those who stand shoulder to shoulder with him will not debate it and neither will they respond to plain questions. It is written still applies today as it did two thousand years ago.

What about authority? We understand authority in ordinary affairs. I go to the doctor to find out what ailments I might have. He says that you need this and this and this. How does he know? I look and there are no medical degrees. He has not been to medical schools so how does he know? What authority is he using? This is simple enough for us to understand. I go to the pharmacy and he reaches up and gets stuff off of the shelf and tells me to go take it. What authority does he have? Authority must be honored. A child is sent to the store to get bananas and comes home with a toy. Did his mother authorize him to buy a toy? No. He failed to recognize the authority. Suppose you order a pair of shoes—brown size 12 B. Your order comes and the shoes are white and size 8 D. Who authorized this? It is a failure to recognize authority.

Elders and preachers should be especially careful in the matter of authority. Whatever we say or do in the realm of religion is to be done by the authority of Christ (cf. Col. 3:17). There is almost no end to the abuses that I find in this area today. We are farther away from divine authority than anytime in my fifty three years of trying to preach and establish authority. One congregation was building a gymnasium. It was called a family life center. I asked the preacher about the measurements of the floor and asked if goals were hanging down from the ceiling. I asked him where he got the authority. His reply was, “No one asks that old question anymore.”

The Bible authorizes by direct statement—command. This includes imperative statements such as Acts 2:38 and Matt. 11:28-30. Implication authorizes. This has already been addressed in this piece. We are authorized by approved examples. There is much more that could be written in this regard. We must do that which is authorized or we will lose our souls. What is authorized is that which is obligatory and that which is optional that expedites. What is not authorized is that which is forbidden. They are simply not even mentioned and thus not even authorized.

Trained Slovenly Monkeys

Jerry C. Brewer

Today's hip culture disdains any kind of dress code. When our local school system mandated prescribed uniforms for all students a few years ago, the snowflakes and their indulgent parents raised a hue and cry, saying their clothing was an expression of who they are and they needed to express themselves. Ironically, that is true. The grandchildren of the hippie generation now dress (or **undress**) to the point of nudity, in rags. Their high-fashion jeans, into which it appears they have been liquefied and poured, have holes in the knees, thighs, and other places where my mother would have promptly patched my jeans. She knew that clothes were an expression of what the wearer is. She also knew that her children's clothes reflected her competence as a mother and would have been ashamed to send my brothers and me out in public with lumps of our skin protruding through rags.

Culture and Christianity are generally at odds. That includes the way people dress. The sloven dress of culture is not the mark of a child of God who comes to worship. About 20 years ago, Dub McClish was asked to speak in chapel at the Bear Valley Bible Institute (BVBI) when he was in a Gospel meeting in that area. What he saw during his visit did not impress him:

J.J. Turner invited me to speak and I spoke in chapel at BVBI approximately 5 years ago when I was in a Gospel meeting in the area. I must tell you that I came away disappointed in what I saw. A student led a prayer to which I could not say amen. It would have sounded very much in place in a Pentecostal religious service. Moreover, the sloppy appearance of many of the students unfavorably impressed me. I admit that I'm from the "old school" in such matters. I believe that one makes a statement by the way he dresses. I came away with the impression that the students were not being taught the seriousness of their studies and of the work for which they were preparing. I interpreted these things as a woeful lack of discipline (Letter to BVBI, 2005).

The key word in brother McClish's letter is *sloppy*, which sums up today's dress culture in one word. He also pointed out the crux of the matter with: "...one makes a statement by the way he dresses." Keep in mind that those who "express themselves" by their clothing make a statement and not a few preachers today express themselves as hipsters in the pulpit.

Does God have a dress code? Yes, He does. Now, I know that the hills are alive with the sound of protest: "**No!** God doesn't look on the outer man. He looks on the inner man." True, but the outer man expresses the inner man's thoughts and actions. That principle is found in David's refusal to squeak by with a cheap sacrifice.

Because he numbered Israel David angered God and was given one of three choices for punishment—seven years of famine in the land, three months of flight before his enemies, or three days of pestilence (2 Sam. 24:11-13). David chose three days of pestilence in which 70,000 men died from Dan to Beersheba (2 Sam. 24:5). When the angel came to Jerusalem, God stopped the pestilence and ordered David to build an altar of sacrifice at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. When David offered to buy the threshing floor, Araunah told David that he would **give** him the threshing floor, oxen for sacrifice, and the wood without charge.

And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy *it* of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam. 24:24).

The principle for us is in David's words, "...neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing." How many people come before God in worship wearing the cheapest, common, everyday things they have? Clothing worn in worship does not have to be expensive, or even new. But it should reflect reverence that ought to characterize the heart of the worshiper.

My grandparents were poor people who lost their farm in 1935 during the Great

Depression and Dust Bowl years in Oklahoma. My grandfather's Sunday-go-to-meetin' best consisted of starched and ironed striped overalls, a starched and ironed white shirt, a necktie, and straw fedora. That reflected his reverence for God in worship. In later years, he was able to afford a suit which he wore thereafter. He would never have gone to worship in the overalls he wore in the cotton field.

When Moses approached the burning bush in Midian, God told him to, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). The ground around that bush was not inherently holy. It was made so by the presence of God in His meeting with Moses. The church building is not inherently holy, but we are in God's presence when we stand before His throne in worship. Should we not, therefore, present our physical selves in the most honorable and reverent manner possible.

In an effort to "identify" with the hip generation, some "preachers" today dress for worship like they just came in from the cotton field. One example is Bryan Nix who preaches for the mainstream Wilbarger Street church in Vernon, Texas. His "dress" for worship consists of a short sleeved, open collared shirt with the tail out and hanging down, and a pair of jeans. No one can tell him he is "not hip."

His "hipness" is further by jumping around the pulpit like a trained monkey and employing common street language to explain scripture. Recounting Saul's entry into the cave at Engedi, the cool, hip Nix read 1 Sam. 24:3 from a version that says: "And he came to the sheep fold by the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave" Here is Nix's explanation of that verse:

So, this is a situation right out of a movie. You can't make this up...David has been running for his life. God has said, I am going to deliver the kingdom into your hand, away from Saul and so Saul comes to take a leak (emits a slight snicker at his own humor) in the cave.
(www.wilbargerchurch.com/media).

Dress **and** words reveal a man's heart:

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man...But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matt. 15:11, 18-19).

"Evangelize! Evangelize!"

Dub McClish

The English word "evangelize" does not appear in the common versions of the New Testament. Yet, it is an imminently Scriptural word. It comes about as near being transliterated, letter for letter, from the Greek to the English as any word in our language. The Greek form (anglicized) is *euangelidzo*, occurring 48 times in the Greek New Testament. It is ordinarily rendered "to bring glad tidings or good news." In some instances, it refers to a bringer of good news in general (cf. Luke 1:19, 1 The. 3:6). In most cases It means to preach the Gospel of Christ and it is often translated thusly (cf. Acts 14:21; Gal. 1:8-9).

A church that does not have evangelism as the very core of its life and work will not survive as a spiritual institution, much less thrive. It cannot be a church of Christ and not be evangelistic. There simply is no either/or option for God's people on the subject.

The pulpit is evangelism, but not all of it. Home Bible studies are evangelism, but not all of it. Bible classes are evangelism, but not all of it. This publication, Christian camps, correspondence courses, radio/television programs, and other such efforts are all evangelism, but no one thing is all of it.

Our evangelistic spirit must be felt at home as we refuse to rest until all of our community has had an opportunity to say "Yes" or "No" to the claims of pure Christianity. Our

evangelistic spirit must project beyond our own borders to people we can never meet this side of the Judgment. We must learn to “think evangelism” in every word and deed. Our whole life must be lived in the consciousness of evangelistic responsibility and opportunity. Evangelism is to the soul what blood is to the body. Just as the church is strong in direct relation to its emphasis on evangelism, so the individual Christian is likewise.

There is tremendous power in evangelistic fervor. God put His own power in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) and when it is spread and shared, it works. The necessary food for evangelism is a love for souls that are unprepared to meet God. Christ has not repealed his charge to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. My prayer and aim is that we ever make evangelism our consuming priority!

Love For Unfaithful Family Members?

Charles Pogue

If you are like many members of the Lord's church today, you have family members who are not Christians. Some of them may be irreligious, others may be members of a denomination. What is also likely today is that you have family members who at some point in their lives obeyed the Gospel. Perhaps they were faithful for a time, but now, they are caught up in sin, or they are not as faithful as they ought to be. Maybe they have even abandoned the church completely. Consider, if you will, relatives in either the condition of unfaithfulness or apostasy.

Do you love them? “What a silly question to ask,” you would probably say. “Of Course, I love them. I go to see them all of the time. When they need help or comfort, I am right there for them.” When was the last time you pleaded with them to return to the fold of Christ? They are overtaken in a fault, have you attempted to restore them? (Gal. 6:1,2; Jam. 5:19,20). “I've tried, but they just want listen, so we just visit and talk about other things now,” you say.

If you are doing that, you are not only risking your own soul (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 2 John 9-11) but are also ignoring their welfare. One's relationships with family members is undeniably different in some ways from that with those who are either friends or strangers who reject our admonitions, aren't they? Shaking the dust off one's feet is not so easy when it comes to a brother, sister, son, daughter, parent or some other close family member. The question is, when is it time to quit attempting to restore an erring relative? If you have considered that question closely, you may have arrived at the same answer I have. When is that time? I believe it is when they respond to you by saying, “stop badgering me about it, get away from me, out of my house, and I don't want to see you anymore.”

I understand that answer is hard, but isn't it really the truth that trying to restore that erring relative is something one can't give up? If one says, “Yes, I can give that up and stop reminding them about it,” isn't there something wrong with the love one has for that relative? Personally, though some may disagree, I believe there is. It is also the case that when it comes to fellowship, the time comes to discontinue it, and the Scripture makes no exception for blood relatives. There are family responsibilities such as honor your mother and father, and husbands love your wives. Admittedly it is hard to balance both, but we must not ignore one to satisfy the other.

The adage is true that it is sometimes harder to talk to those who are closest to us. It is also true that we may have a more difficult time trying to get a relative to listen to our words of exhortation. However, if we are going to be in their company, to be in accordance with what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, when we are with them, we need to be there to admonish them. That is the only way to show them the true love that we have for them. I just cannot see truly loving a relative who is unfaithful or has abandoned the church of our Lord, without saying something to them when we see them. It is not easy, is it?

How Baptists Value The Church

Charles A. Holt, Jr.

Baptists have a difficult time when it comes to teaching about the church. They will affirm that the church is a non-essential and useless institution as far as man's eternal salvation is concerned, and that one can be saved “regardless of church membership.” Yet they turn around and stress with might and main the importance of being a member of it—and they mean the “Missionary Baptist Church.” They try to make Baptists of all possible. They truly will compass land and sea to make one proselyte to their denomination. They do not hesitate to proselyte members of other churches and would, if possible, do away with all other churches. They are really wedded to their sectarian order.

It is hard to reconcile the place of honor, dignity and importance that they have given the church in their more serious moments, with their teaching that the church is a non-essential, unimportant institution. Mr. Kirkland, in our debate, affirmed that all true believers are saved “regardless of church membership.” The church, according to this, is of no value as far as man's salvation is concerned. With this in mind, let us look at how important this useless, non-essential church is according to the Baptists. This should help all to see how inconsistent their teaching is.

In a little booklet, *Baptist Doctrine* (a study course used in Baptist churches of Kirkland's brand), written by E. C. Gillentine, there is a chapter on “The Church, its Dignity and Identity.” Mr. Gillentine says:

By 'Dignity' of the church we mean the high-ranking position of honor which is given to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the sacred scriptures; its elevation of rank its moral worth; and the many wonderful qualities possessed by it which are worthy and inspire or command the respect and reverence of all God's children (P. 32).

This sounds like he thinks the church is of some value and importance. Yet it cannot be of any value or importance relative to man's salvation. It has no place in his being saved, his staying saved, or his final entrance into heaven—according to Baptists. One can stay out of the church, and just so he believes Jesus Christ is God's Son, he is saved and bound for heaven regardless! Nothing of value can be gained by being in the church. Now look at how important Gillentine says the church is.

First, he says, “It is the purchase of Christ's blood, Acts 20:28.” That is exactly what the inspired Paul said in the passage cited. Is the “purchase of Christ's blood” of no value? Does it have no part in man's salvation? This is what Baptists would have us believe. What did Christ purchase with His blood? The church! Did He purchase a useless institution, that has absolutely no connection with man's salvation? Really can anyone believe such? The church is as valuable as the price paid for it, which makes it of equal value with the blood of Christ. All who are in the church are “blood-bought.” This is not true of any outside the church. The Baptists say that the church “is a congregation of baptized believers.” Hence, baptized believers are the ones who are blood-purchased the ones “washed in the blood of the Lamb.” One is not purchased with Christ's blood before he enters the church. If so, Christ did not and could not purchase the church with His blood. If one has ten dollars and purchases a pair of shoes with the money, he cannot use the same purchase price to buy something else once it is spent. Everyone can see this, and should be able to see the same with reference to the church. The purchase price of the church was the blood of Christ. If one is purchased or redeemed by the blood of Christ, he is in the church; if he is in the church, then he has been redeemed by the blood. If there was no other passage to set forth the value and the indispensable place of the church, this one passage is enough.

Mr. Gillentine says further that the church is “the light of the world,” and “the salt of the earth.” Yet one does not have to be a part of the light of the world or the salt of the earth to be a Christian. He can refuse to be such and it effects not his eternal welfare, so say Baptists. He can join any of the many human churches that he pleases, which will keep him from being a part of “the light” and “the salt,” and be saved regardless.

Next he says that the church is “the body of Christ—Christ is the head and the church is His body, Eph. 1:23.” Then the body of Christ is useless! It has nothing to do with the salvation of man! Can one be a Christian and not be a member of the body of Christ? The New Testament says the church is the body of Christ as plainly as words say anything (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18,24). There is **one** body (Eph. 4:4), and every Christian is a member of it. All who are Christians have been baptized into that one body, and in that one body they all drink into one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:13) No man can be a Christian and not belong to the church, any more than he can be a Christian and not belong to Christ, for the reason that the church is the body of Christ. If a man can be a Christian out of the church, he can also be a Christian out of Christ. A man's relation to Christ defines and determines his relation to the church, for the reason that the church is the body of Christ. If a man is in either Christ or the church, he is in both; if he is out of either, he is out of both. Can one be a Christian out of Christ? Certainly not (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:10).

Furthermore, Christ is the head of the body—the church, and no man can be a Christian without being a member of the church, unless he can be a Christian without having Christ as his head. Every man over whom Christ is head is a member of the church because Christ is the head of the church. To say a man can be a Christian and not be a member of the church is to say he can be a Christian and not have Christ as his head.

We learn also that Christ is “the Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). That which Christ saves is the body over which he is the head—the church. If a man can be a Christian and not be a member of the church, he can be a Christian and not be saved. To be saved, one must be a member of the church because Christ is the Savior of the body. He does not save those who are out of the body. All who are in the body are saved, and all who are out of the body are not saved. To get into the body is to be saved, and to be saved is to get into the body. That is why we read that the Lord added to the church daily “such as were being saved.” (Acts 2:47—R. V. marginal reading). So the body of Christ is of vital importance, the teaching of Baptists notwithstanding.

Mr. Gillentine further says of the church, that it is “the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit on earth” “a school for religious instructions” “a field for service.” “It is a witness of the Lord on earth.” Though the church is all of this, one does not have to be a member to be saved! He does not have to work in the field of service. He can spend his life working in the devil's field, outside the church—the field of the Lord, and still be saved. One need not enter the “school for religious instructions.” Stay in the devil's school, heed his instructions, that is all right—so says Baptist doctrine! Who can believe such? In spite of all such confusion and error, the honest heart can, by taking God's word as his guide, see through all such to the glorious truth regarding the importance of the church.

Gillentine also says that the “church of Christ is the House of God on earth, 1 Tim. 3:15.” This statement is certainly true. It is the church of Christ that is God's house, and not the human institution known as the Baptist Church. This should be apparent to any discerning person. God's house is God's family. The word *house* is used to mean family. Nearly all Baptist scholars admit that the church is God's family. J.M. Pendleton and A.T. Robertson are two outstanding examples.

Now, if the church is God's family—and it is—where are God's children? Can one be a Christian and not be a child of God? Can one be a child of God and not be in His family—the church? Surely not. God has no children outside of His family. Therefore, all of God's children are in His family, the church. Thus, the importance and absolute essentiality of the church of the Lord is seen.

“The Baptist Church—The Bride Of Christ”

In the above I set forth the Baptist teaching concerning the church and how they value it. In this, I want to discuss the church as “the bride of Christ” from the Baptist viewpoint. Let us begin with a quotation from the booklet by Mr. E. C. Gillentine, called *Baptist Doctrine*. On page 14, discussing the subject of “The Church, its Dignity and Identity,” we find this:

The most highly honored position, and the most dignified place spoken of

concerning the dignity of the church is that she is called the Bride of Christ, John 3:29; Rev. 2-9-10; 2 Cor. 11:1-2; Eph. 5:23-27. The church is now the Bride of Christ, but when He returns He will take her unto Himself and then she will be His wife...Christ is not a polygamist—He will marry but one woman. He will have but one wife; He will marry but one church. It is a wonderful joy to anticipate being a part of the bride of Christ and participating in the marriage feast with Him and His church.

Be sure to read the above statement carefully. The church is the bride of Christ according to Baptist doctrine and this is the “most highly honored position” of the church. Yet, according to Baptists, the bride of Christ is not essential and has absolutely no connection with man's salvation. One does not have to be, yea, does not even **need** to be a part of the bride of Christ to be saved. Mr. Kirkland affirmed in our debate that “all true believers are saved regardless of church membership.” What is so wonderful about the church being the bride of Christ, if it is wholly useless as far as man's salvation is concerned?

Mr. Gillentine says that the church is now only the **prospective** bride of Christ, and when Christ comes the second time He will take her unto Him as His wife. Baptists think that Christ is not now married to His bride. This is simply the “engagement period.” The marriage is something that is supposed to take place in the next age—the millennial age. Of course, this is not true, but I will not take time now to discuss this angle. Gillentine says, “It is a wonderful joy to anticipate being a part of the bride of Christ and participating in the marriage feast with Him and His church.” Why is it such a wonderful thing to anticipate? It is wholly useless as far as man's salvation is concerned.

Mr. Kirkland had no little trouble explaining about the bride of Christ in our debate. It proved to be most troublesome in the light of his proposition. I asked him if one had to be a part of the bride of Christ to be saved. He answered in the negative. Then I kept asking him to tell us about the marriage feast of Christ and His bride. I asked him if the Baptist Church is the bride of Christ. He said, “Yes,” in so many words. Now since Christ is to marry His bride and His bride is the Baptist Church, and since “He will **marry but one church**” according to Gillentine, what about those who are not a part of the Baptist Church—which is supposed to be the bride of Christ? Will they be saved? If so, can one be saved and never be married to Christ? What about the Methodists? They are not a “part of the bride of Christ” if the Baptist Church be that bride. Will they be married to Christ? Will they get to enter the marriage feast? If so, on what condition and why? There is not a Baptist preacher that can explain this. Christ will not then marry Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, etc. He will only “**marry one church**” and that church is the Baptist Church! Those in these other churches are certainly not members of the Baptist Church, therefore, are no part of the bride of Christ, and will never be married to Him. That is Baptist doctrine for you! Actually Baptists teach that the Baptist Church is the only true church and that they are the only ones right, the only ones who will be married to Christ.

According to Baptist doctrine, if people of all the other churches will be saved, then they will be saved without being a part of the bride of Christ. Only Baptists enjoy this exalted position. Only the Baptists are to be married to Christ as His bride and hold this “most highly honored position.” If any Methodists make it they will only be attendants at the wedding! None can enjoy the place of dignity of the Baptists. The Methodists, Presbyterians, and others will not enjoy heaven as fully as the Baptists. Let Mr. J. E. Cobb, a Baptist scholar, tell us about these others. On page 11 of his *New Manual For Baptist Churches*, he says:

God's children who, in the gospel age, are misinformed and misguided, and do not unite with the true church, or with a true church, will not be, in some mysterious way, injected into its membership in the coming age. Those who, because of misinformation or misguidance, refuse to become attached to a true church will suffer loss in the age to come. God, in His divine word of truth, has revealed the true way and the true church, but if one allows prejudice, misinformation, or misguidance to keep him out of the true church,

God is not responsible, but He will hold the individual responsible for his gullibility.

Thus, we can see that Mr. Cobb holds out some small hope for those of God's children who are not in the Baptist Church, but says that they will not be "in some mysterious way injected into its membership in the coming age." Hence they can never be a part of the bride of Christ and share with the Baptists all the exalted privileges and blessings thereof. "God's children" in all these other churches are "misinformed and misguided," and because they are not members of the Baptist Church they "will suffer loss." They will have to suffer for their "gullibility." They will only have a second-rate salvation and not a real first-class salvation like the Baptists! In other words, one can be saved out of the Baptist Church and make it to heaven, but his salvation is not as full and complete as it would have been had he been a member of the Baptist Church—the bride of Christ, and thus been able to participate in the marriage feast. Only by being in the Baptist Church can one really enjoy the fullness of heaven and eternal glory. That is Baptist doctrine.

After all then, according to these Baptists, it is important that one be in the church—the Baptist church at that—if one really expects to share fully in the joy of heaven. The Baptist Church is "the true church," and one must be in it to fully enjoy heaven. All the Methodists, Presbyterians, and others, are "misinformed and misguided" and "gullible." They are members of false churches. They have allowed "prejudice, misinformation, or misguidance" to keep them out of the true church. But the Baptists will be generous to them. They will let all the others come in, but they cannot participate in the marriage feast as a part of the bride of Christ, and they will all "suffer loss." They will have only a second-rate salvation and not be able to as completely and fully enjoy heaven as the Baptists.

Such is the inconsistency and the absurdity of this man-made theology as taught by the Baptists. People need to learn the truth about such.

A Case of Immersion

Cled E. Wallace

I recently preached a plain gospel sermon and got a rise out of a Methodist preacher who was in the audience. He was agitated over my insistence that to be baptized a man must be immersed in water. There is nothing more clearly taught than this in the New Testament. This teacher of religion demanded that I point out just one clear case of immersion in the New Testament.

I patiently read to him in Acts 8th chapter about the man who came to a certain water, went down into the water, was baptized and came up out of the water. That was not sufficient to satisfy the demands of the critic. He readily admitted, that the man went down into the water before he was baptized, and came up out of the water after he was baptized, **but** "it does not say that he was immersed." Who ever heard of a man going down into the water, and coming up out of it, just to have a little water applied to his head?!! Even a Presiding Elder is not capable of such absurdity!

I patiently explained that Paul called baptism a burial in Romans 6, and that the word for "baptize" employed by New Testament writers, primarily meant to dip or immerse, according to all Greek-English dictionaries. No reason has ever been adduced why the primary meaning of the word should not be employed here, as it fits in perfectly. They came to a certain water, went down into the water, and he immersed him, and they came up out of the water. There is no reason, outside of prejudice, why it should not be this way. Did this satisfy the critic? It did not. He insisted that the eunuch was sprinkled and that he would not under any circumstances immerse a man.

This was a partial repudiation of his creed, and I asked him for a case of sprinkling for baptism in the New Testament, as clear as the case of immersion he insisted that I give. He quickly forsook Christ and the apostles and ran to Moses for some help. The sun is an immeasurable blessing, but if a man insists on walking clown the middle of

the road with his eyes tightly closed, the sun cannot do him much good. If he gets run over it is his fault!

Respect for Authority

Dub McClish

In every system there is a basic, core principle that largely determines the nature and operation of the whole. In the business world, the guiding principle is to turn a profit. In the sports world, winning is the principal thing. In politics, getting elected and remaining in office are paramount. And so it goes in every area of endeavor. In God's plan for man, the fundamental principle that overrides all others and that applies to all of our human endeavors is respect for and obedience to appropriate authority.

There have always been rebels. However, widespread rebellion against authority in modern times may be traced to the 1960s when the “flower child” and “hippie” cultures made their appearance, defying such things as conventional modes of dress and cleanliness and abandoning civilized moral standards. This period of rebellion climaxed in student riots on college campuses and demonstrations in the streets for various causes. The rebels marched to the slogan, “If it feels good, do it.” There were many (and often violent) “peace” protests aimed at stopping the Vietnam War. Anti-authoritarianism and antinomianism captured the hearts of a large percentage of the young people of that generation.

The “sexual revolution” occurred in this period---one of the tragic symptoms of the rebellion against all previous norms of decency and sexual purity. This revolution became increasingly noticeable in the lyrics of the songs, especially from the rock culture. Theatre productions, movies, and TV programs began at first to dabble a bit in risqué and suggestive scenes and profanity beyond what had previously been allowed by the producers themselves. With this crack in the dam of decency and modesty, the flood was not long in coming.

It has gradually grown ever wider, sweeping away practically all restrictions in its downward course. The movie and TV “rating” systems are some of the biggest jokes around. The PG movies of today would never have been allowed out of Hollywood fifty years ago, because they would have been deemed utterly indecent and prurient for adults, let alone children.

The break in the dam has grown far beyond a mere crack. It is now so wide that about the only arrests for pornography of which one reads anymore is an occasional bust of Internet viewers of and/or traffickers in child pornography. Otherwise, the several laws against pornography still on the books are generally ignored. The “adult” video and bookstore owners rest secure in plying their filthy and corrupting trade. What was once a business that had to stay largely underground and under the counter is now a wide-open multibillion-dollar business, shoved in our faces almost everywhere we turn.

The roots of the rampant spiritual apostasy that characterizes so many in the church are not mysterious: They are easily traceable to the anti-authoritarianism that crept into the church in that same era. All of these things (and there are many others) are symptomatic of the rebellion against authority that began manifesting itself in the latter half of the twentieth century. When attacks upon authority are allowed to flourish unchecked, they have a way of growing in ever-widening circles. We can see it all about us in our beloved nation, to say nothing of the world at large: The widespread anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible sentiment, the seemingly ever-increasing crime and divorce rates, the mushrooming cases of sexually transmitted diseases, the illicit drug traffic and usage, the cheating in corporate boardrooms involving billions of dollars, the selfish and power manic politicians, and on and on the list goes.

Surely, none can deny that there is a desperate need for a re-emphasis—followed by a constant emphasis—on the ultimate importance of respect for duly constituted authority. In its absence, civilization will be reduced to universal barbarianism.

God's Ultimate Authority

Riding over all areas of our human life and behavior is the umbrella of the ultimate authority of the Godhead. He was not created, but is eternally self-sustaining. He created the material universe (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1–3; Rev. 4:11). Only in Him do we “live, and move, and have our being” because He sustains and upholds all things by the “word of his power” (Acts 17:28; Heb. 1:3). The same power that brought the universe into being from nothing will, at the coming of Christ, return it to nothingness with great noise and fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10).

The Son of God began His reign upon His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:34–36). He will there reign till His return, at which time He will raise the dead and “deliver the kingdom up to the Father” (1 Cor. 15:22–24). From the beginning God has rightly demanded an obedient response to His authoritative will in every facet of our lives (Gen. 2:15–17; Deu. 6:5–6). Anything short of obedience He has labeled “sin” which, if not removed, will cause our eternal damnation (1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

The Son of God exercises His authority over all men in this age through the New Testament portion of His inspired Word (2 John 9), by which all who have lived since He shed His sinless blood shall be judged at last (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10). The Word of Christ sets forth God's authority for each sphere of behavior and relationships common to men.

Respect for God's Authority in the Church

Fellowship with God and His Son is impossible outside of the church Jesus built and bought (Mat. 16:18; Acts 20:28). All of the saved (i.e., those who have come into fellowship with Deity) are in it, because the Lord has added them to it (Acts 2:41, 47). Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22–23; 5:23), and He exercises His headship through His Word—the written record of the oral teachings of Jesus and of the first-century apostles and prophets.

The means of entrance (i.e., the plan of salvation), its worship, its organization, its designations, and its destiny are all revealed in the Gospel. Christ alone has the right to dictate these because the church belongs to Him, not to men. Men dare not tamper with that Divine institution by ignoring Christ's authoritative Word. It contains numerous, frequent, and repeated warnings against departing from its teachings (Mat. 7:15; Rom 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 1:6–9; 2 Tim. 4:1–4; et al.).

The *change-agent* mentality that has moved many congregations steadily toward denominational status represents rebellion against the authority of Christ over His church. Those who practice things unauthorized and those who reject obligatory matters pertaining to the church have alike rejected the authority of its Head. Christ has delegated authority in local congregations to men (always a plurality) called “elders.” Their chief functions are to lead, teach, and protect the church under their oversight (Acts 20:28).

Respect for God's Authority in the Home

In the beginning God established the home/family as the basic unit of society when He created Adam and Eve for each other. He established a certain pattern of authority in the home and family. He made man the head of woman and the husband the head of his wife (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22–24). He is not thereby authorized to be a cruel tyrant, but is to love and cherish his wife as himself (Eph. 5:25, 28–29). God has placed parents over their children, commanding children to obey them, with the father taking the leading role (Eph. 6:1–4). The principal place of breakdown in the “authority chain” is in the home. Many modern parents obey their children (even two-year olds), allowing their offspring to speak to them with great disrespect and to flagrantly disobey them. If children at an early age are not taught respect for authority in the home, beginning with submission to their parents, they will likely have a most difficult time learning it at all. When children learn to respect the authority of their parents they will be more likely to learn respect for other authority figures.

Respect for God's Authority in the Workplace

Even when we are at our places of employment, the Lord teaches us the way we should behave. Inspiration commands “servants” (i.e., employees) to be obedient to their

“masters” (i.e., employers) (Eph. 6:5–7). To do so with sincere service is thereby to serve Christ. Servants are to work “from the heart” with good will, as though working directly for the Lord. Mere “eye-service” (i.e., working hard only when the supervisor comes around) is unacceptable.

Employers also have Scriptural instructions. They are warned not to be mean, but to render to their employees just and equal treatment, remembering that they have a Heavenly Master (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1). A revolution would take place in the business and industrial world if every employer and employee alike respected the authority of Christ through His Word.

Respect for God’s Authority in Civil Government

God has ordained the existence of civil government and human rulers (Rom. 13:1). This fact does not mean that every specific ruler or form of government meets with God’s approval, for many can be documented that did/do not. The **concept** of civil authority is what God has ordained—for the purpose of protecting those who are workers of good and for punishing those who are evil workers (Rom. 13:3–4). He has also ordained that men respect the **authority** of civil government (Mat. 22:21; Rom. 13:2; 1 Pet 2:13–14). To reject the authority of civil government is to reject the authority of God (Rom. 13:2, 5). This simply means that we must obey the laws of the land to be pleasing to God.

Conclusion: An Overriding Principle

One essential principle applies to each of the latter four areas described above: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The “laws “of those who are in places of authority (i.e., husbands, parents, employers, and rulers) sometimes contradict the law of God. In all such cases, as Peter boldly declared under threat of death, we must choose the higher authority—the superior authority of God. Our world would be much nearer perfect if all mankind would submit to the authority of God in every area of their lives: “And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). Let us all dedicate ourselves to this challenging command and to its application in regard to authority.

Endnote

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“He,” The Holy Spirit

D. Ellis Walker

He, the Holy Spirit, is a person, masculine in gender and singular in number. Jesus Christ recognized His masculinity and singularity, for in speaking of the Holy Spirit, He often used the singular personal pronouns, **He** and **Him** (John 14-16).

Christ promised the apostles that He, the Holy Spirit, should be their *paraclete*, which, according to the lexicographer, means that He was to be their monitor, instructor, guide, helper, supporter, and comforter. He was promised to the apostles, not to the world, for Jesus said that the world cannot receive Him, “for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him.” (Jn. 14:16-17 ASV). So it is foolish and absurd for anyone to contend that He operates immediately on the heart of the alien sinner in order to convert him.

Jesus told the apostles that the *paraclete* “shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you” (John 14:26 ASV). In another place, He said, “He shall bear witness of me” (John 15:26 ASV). Jesus promised the apostles that when He sent the *paraclete* to them that, “when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:8 ASV).

“Now,” says someone, “is this not the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the alien?” No! And why do we say this? First, because Jesus emphatically said that the world could not receive Him, “for it neither beholdeth Him nor knoweth Him,” but that He should be with and in the apostles. Therefore the convicting of the world by the Holy Spirit was to be done in and through the apostles, not through the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Second, because the alien cannot be convicted of both sin and righteousness at the same time. Third, because Jesus Himself explained what He meant (John 16:9-11 ASV)—the Holy Spirit through the apostles was to convict the world of sin, “because they believe not on me [Christ].” By proving that Jesus is the Christ of God, the world would be convicted of sin for rejecting Him. The *paraclete* was to convict the world “of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more.” Convict the world of whose righteousness? The world's? No. Christ's. Why? For the simple reason that Christ was going to the Father and would not be on the earth to convict the world of His righteousness—especially his righteous claim of being God's Son. The Holy Spirit, working through the apostles, would perform this necessary task.

He would also convict “of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged.” Is this hell fire and damnation? Certainly not! Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, and the “prince of this world” pronounced Him an imposter. Hence, the *paraclete*, working in and through the apostles, would convict the world of the unlawfulness and untruthfulness of that wicked judgment. Finally, Jesus said of the Holy Spirit,

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth; for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak; and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you (John 16:13-14).

We have now learned that He, the Holy Spirit, is not only masculine in gender and singular in number, but that He was the apostles' *paraclete*, and, as such, that He, through the apostles, vindicated and bore witness to the Divinity and Sonship of Jesus Christ, refreshed the apostles' memory, taught them all things, and guided them into all truth.

It was so imperative that the apostles have the *paraclete* that Jesus said, “And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 ASV). “He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5 ASV). If it was so necessary for the apostles to wait until they received the promise of the Holy Spirit, should it not be a topic of absorbing interest to examine the fulfillment of that promise—and much more so when you are cognizant of the fact that He was promised to the apostles alone as the *paraclete*, or Comforter?

Now, He, the Holy Spirit, the *paraclete*, was received by the apostles on the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection (Acts 2). So great was the sound that heralded His coming that the multitudes rushed together in order, no doubt, to discover its cause, and they were confounded and amazed to see the apostles, uneducated Galileans, speaking in the languages of the foreign nations from which the visiting Jews had come.

Because some mockers attributed this wonderful manifestation to drunkenness, the *paraclete*, working through the apostle Peter, refuted the false charge upon the ground of its unreasonableness and by showing that the happenings of the day were in fulfill-

ment of Joel's prophecy. Then the *paraclete*, through the apostle Peter, vindicated the Lord Jesus Christ by proving conclusively that He was both Lord and Christ. First, by reminding the people that Jesus of Nazareth was “a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know” (Acts 2:22 ASV).

The force of the argument is this: You people saw that Christ had the approbation of God, for He performed great wonders, such as raising people from the dead. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to believe that God raised **Him** from the dead. Hence, the statement, “Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24 ASV).

Second, the *paraclete*, through the apostle Peter, cited a prophecy from David concerning the Lord's resurrection and showed that Christ's resurrection and exaltation were the fulfillment of God's oath to David, “that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne” (Acts 2:25-31 ASV).

Third, the *paraclete*, through the apostle Peter, said that the apostles were witnesses of Christ's resurrection. “This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32 ASV).

Fourth, Jesus Christ had received the promise of the Holy Spirit and had given Him to the apostles in such a way that there could not be any doubt about it. The Holy Spirit would not be connected with an imposter. Then, inasmuch as the people could see and hear the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, they accepted the fact of the Lord's resurrection and exaltation, for it was confirmed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus He, the *paraclete*, convicted the world of sin for not believing that Jesus was the Christ of God; of the righteousness of Christ, and of the unrighteousness of the judgment that pronounced Christ an imposter.

Through Peter, He set forth the conditions of pardon to the alien sinner. The first condition of pardon is, “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified” (Acts 2:36 ASV). This simply means we must **believe** that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, for “faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1 ASV). Those who believed cried out, “Brethren, what shall we do?” In answer to that question, the *paraclete* guided Peter in replying, “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Now, inasmuch as He, the Holy Spirit, is masculine in gender, singular in number, and was the apostles' *paraclete*, we must conclude that before an alien sinner can receive pardon for his sins he must believe as a result of testimony that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. “Repent ye, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins.” “But,” says one, “what do masculine gender, singular number, and *paraclete* have to do with these items being indispensable to the pardon of the alien sinner? The masculine pronouns **He** and **Him** prove the Holy Spirit is a person. The pronouns are also singular in number. Therefore, He is one person. As the apostles' *paraclete*, He guided them “into all the truth,” so He is absolutely truthful and certainly would not set forth conditions of pardon in a dozen contradictory ways. When you have one person who is **absolutely truthful**, you are not going to hear a score of conflicting ideas about the same question.

I wish members of “Ministerial Alliances” could see these truths about the Holy Spirit. They think that they have **all** got **it**, the Holy Spirit, and that **it** is guiding each one of them in his preaching. For instance, the Baptist preacher guided by **it**, the Holy Spirit, will not baptize any save penitent believers, while the Methodist preacher guided by **it** baptizes infants. Baptist and Methodist preachers say to one another, “You have **it**, the Holy Spirit, as well as we do.” Then the Baptist preachers preach that baptism is only immersion, while the Methodist preachers say only sprinkling or pouring is sufficient. Almost all of the Protestant preachers in a Ministerial Alliance will say to one another, “You have **it**, the Holy Spirit,” and then on Sunday morning will contradict each other in every conceivable way.

You may ask, “Do you mean to say that these preachers do not have **it**, the Holy Spirit?” Absolutely! Why? Because He is **not it**, the Holy Spirit. He is **He**, the Holy Spirit, masculine in gender and singular in number. Thus, because He is only one person and absolutely truthful He is certainly **not** behind all the contradictory ideas set forth by either Protestants or Catholics. If a Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian preacher preached as many different doctrines as are attributed to the Holy Spirit, it would **ruin** him. No one would have confidence in such a preacher, and the idea that the Holy Spirit does so is false!

Sinner, do you want to be saved? The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Peter, has shown you what to do. Believe that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36); “Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). If anyone tells you that you do not have to do any or all of these things, or that you may do something else, remember that He, the Holy Spirit, is absolutely truthful and would not teach a plan of salvation today that contradicts the one He gave on Pentecost in Acts two.

Marriage, Divorced and Remarriage

Nana Yaw Aidoo

What is Marriage?

Marriage is a union between a scripturally eligible man and a scripturally eligible woman, who have bound themselves under God’s law, to live together in holy matrimony as husband and wife, until death parts them (Gen. 2:18-15; Rom. 7: 2-3). For marriage to be constituted there must be mutual agreement to marry and a compliance with the laws of the society where the marriage is formed. Thus, any “marriage” that falls short of God’s own definition of marriage is sin. Examples of sinful marriages include same-sex marriages, incestuous marriages, polygamous marriages, child marriages and cohabitation or “shacking up.”

When Does a Marriage Begin?

A marriage begins when the couple comply with the mores of the society where the union is formed, which in almost all cases includes or culminates in a ceremony. Some cultures organize a ceremony whereby the man pays the bride price of the woman. Others also organize a ceremony whereby the man and woman exchange vows and register their marriage under ordinance. Today, most Africans do both of the above. Notwithstanding, when the ceremony is over, the marriage has begun.

Some have suggested that marriage does not begin until the man and the woman have engaged in sexual intercourse. The text relied on to teach this idea is 1 Corinthians 6:16. While we shall deal with this text later, we deny that this position is correct because first, it flies against many passages of Scripture. Consider the following;

1. God’s order is leaving, joining and then consummation (Gen. 2:24) not leaving, consummation and joining.
2. Ruth became Boaz’s wife before any sexual union (Ruth 4:10, 13)
3. Joseph and Mary were husband and wife before they engaged in any sexual activity (Matt. 1:24-25). Some say this was a betrothal. Mary and Joseph were betrothed before Joseph encountered the angel in his dream (Matt. 1:18). In the dream, Joseph was encouraged to make Mary his wife (Matt. 1:20). After the dream, Joseph “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife” (Matt. 1:24). At this point, they were no longer betrothed but were **husband and wife**. Yet, even though they were married, Joseph “knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn Son” (Matt. 1:25). Was Jesus born to a man and a woman who were “shacking up” or cohabiting?

Second, not only does the theory under review fly against Scripture, it flies against logic. What do we say about unmarried people having sexual intercourse? We say they are fornicators. Yet, why do we not call the man and the woman who have gone through a marriage ceremony fornicators when they have sexual intercourse, if it is true that they were not married prior to the sexual act? **Friends, if they were still unmarried**

when the ceremony was over, then they committed fornication when they had sex because sex between unmarried people is fornication. However, if they did not commit fornication when they had sex, then they were married prior to the sexual act (Heb. 13:4). Our position is set forth in this syllogism;

Premise 1: Sexual intercourse between unmarried people is fornication.

Premise 2: Sexual intercourse between a man and woman who have gone through a marriage ceremony is not fornication.

Conclusion: Therefore, the man and the woman who have undergone a marriage ceremony are joined together in marriage before the sexual act.

Sexual intercourse is a privilege of marriage. It is not that which constitutes a marriage. Why do we not call those who have cohabited for years and have brought forth children as a result, a married couple, if sex is what makes a marriage? Why do we tell them to go get married?

What About 1 Corinthians 6:16?

Some contend that 1 Corinthians 6:16 proves that God joins a couple through sex. This is an unfortunate interpretation of the text. If 1 Corinthians 6:16 teaches that God joins a man and a woman in marriage via sexual intercourse, then it has to follow that based on the exact same text, when a man has sex with a prostitute, then God joins or has joined them in marriage. Look carefully at 1 Corinthians 6:16 and you would see that whereas the apostle does not speak about a man and a woman with the intention to marry, he speaks about a man and a prostitute. Does God join a man and a prostitute in marriage when they have sex? Ridiculous. No one would so argue. This proves that the joining of 1 Corinthians 6:16 is not a joining that is done by God. **Therefore, we do not and cannot learn how God joins a man and a woman who have agreed to marry from 1 Corinthians 6:16 because the joining that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:16 is not a joining that is done by God.** To teach that God joins a couple in marriage via sex because of 1 Corinthians 6:16 is to teach that God joins a man and a prostitute in marriage when they have sex. God does not join the man and the prostitute and thus the joining of 1 Corinthians 6:16 is not a joining that God does.

Paul does not teach that the Christian man who commits fornication with a harlot is one body, in the sense of being married to the harlot, but rather that he has brought his body which is a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit into a union with the harlot's body which desecrates his body and makes it unfit to be used by Christ and unfit as a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The body of the woman of Samaria was "one body" with the man with whom she was living, yet Jesus said he was not her husband. So being "one body" with a harlot does not constitute marriage with that harlot. It is unthinkable that such an unholy act as fornication can form such a holy union as marriage, or that God would join two in holy marriage who had no love for each other and had no intention of forming a union which would fulfill the purposes of God, but rather would only fulfill their unholy lust for gratification of unholy desires. (Lanier, 1972).

Who May Marry?

Based on the Sacred Writings only three groups of people are eligible to marry.

1. One who has never before been married (1 Cor. 7:36, 38).
2. One whose spouse is dead (Rom. 7:2-3).
3. The innocent party in a divorce (Matt. 19:9).

A scripturally eligible person can only marry another who is him scripturally eligible to marry.

What Does the Bible Teach About Divorce and Remarriage?

The Bible teaches that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). This however does not mean that God hates **all** divorce. God who is the joiner of people in marriage reserves the right to put them asunder (Matt. 19:6). No man has the right to bind where God has not bound

and to loose where God has bound (Rev. 22:18-19). In the law of Christ, we see God's law on divorce and remarriage. "And He saith unto them, whosoever shall put away (divorces—NKJV) his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). By combining the entirety of God's Word on this issue (Psa. 119:160 Asv), we learn that the only exception to this rule is fornication as seen in Matthew 19:9. Divorce and remarriage for any cause save the scriptural one is a sin. The one who does that lives and continues to live in adultery. And more, since "whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt. 19:9), the fornicator or the guilty party has no more right to re-marry than a lazy man has the right to an industrious person's riches. Eminent Greek scholar A.T. Robertson wrote this about Matthew 19:9; "Jesus by implication, as in Matt. 5:31, does allow remarriage of the innocent party, but not of the guilty one."

Those who contend that the innocent cannot remarry because Mark and Luke's accounts supposedly "contradict" Matthew's account, interestingly, do not make this same argument when talking about the accounts of these same writers on the Great Commission. They know that we must combine the entirety of the accounts of the Great Commission in order to know the totality of what Christ said on the issue. Yet, they feign ignorance of this principle when it comes to the issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Denominational preachers have long taught error on what a person must do to be saved simply because they do to God's Word what some brethren do, when it comes to the issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage. They formulate doctrines based on isolated texts, rather than use the correct hermeneutical principle of induction and deduction, which involves combining the entirety of God's Word on the issue of salvation, and drawing such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. Whiles we **personally** believe that the innocent should remain with the guilty if he/she can, we hold that those who forbid the remarriage of the innocent party are forbidding what God has allowed and are therefore teaching a doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1, 3).

Is God's Law on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Gospel Accounts an Old Testament law?

Some teach that the law of Christ on marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Gospel accounts is Old Testament teaching and as such has been nailed to the cross. Two reasons have been given for this position. First, the fact that the death of Christ nailed the law to the cross. (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14) "So" say they "since Christ was born and bred under the law (Gal. 4:4) then everything of His, including all of His teachings, was nailed to the cross." Second, the fact that a testament or a will takes effect when the testator is dead (Heb. 9:16-17). The argument therefore is that, Christ's teachings in the Gospel accounts are Old Testament teachings since he taught them prior to His death.

This position is false for three reasons. First, "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1) is **not** Old Testament teaching. Second, the fact that our Lord taught things that were not meant for the old dispensation, such as His teaching on acceptable worship (John 4:21-24). Third, our Lord's repeated use of the phrase, "but/and I say unto you." Take for example the discourse in Matthew 19:1-12. Some teach that when Christ said, **and I say unto you** (v.9), He was simply explaining or clarifying the Law of Moses. This cannot be since under the Law, the penalty for fornication was not a divorce but death (see Lev.20:10). Thus, if in Matthew 19:9, the penalty for fornication was no longer death but a divorce, then does this not clearly prove that Jesus Christ, by His use of **but/and I say unto you**, changed the law? I submit that this is the case. Every single time our Lord used the phrase **but/and I say unto you**, He was teaching His own law (Gal. 6:2) that would take effect in His kingdom.

Dub McClish (1997) has aptly noted;

If Matthew 19:9 is merely a clarification of Moses' law, it is exceedingly strange that the law existed for fifteen centuries without such clarification and that the clarification was given only a matter of months before it was an-

nulled with the rest of the law. Jesus was not teaching Old Testament law, but His own doctrine that would prevail in the Christian age, soon to begin.

Whiles it is true that a will/testament takes effect after death, Hebrew 9:16-17 in no way means that a will must be or is written after death. Unless dead people can write wills or testaments, a testament must necessarily be written whiles the testator is alive. Thus, Jesus Christ wrote His will (not all - see John 14-16) whiles He was alive, with this will or testament taking effect at His death. Indeed Christ was born and bred under the Old Testament. However, His teaching, will or testament was not meant for that dispensation of time.

To Whom does God's New Testament Law on Marriage Divorce and Remarriage Apply?

Does the word "whosoever" (Matt. 5:32, 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18) mean "regardless of who" like the Oxford dictionary says it does? Then God's New Testament law on marriage, divorce and remarriage applies to every accountable person on earth. The apostle told unbelievers to repent because Christ will judge **all** men, which of course included them (Acts 17:30-31). Since Christ will judge all men living today by one universal standard, His Word (John 12:48), it follows then that "all men everywhere" and "whosoever," are amenable to God's law on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Thus, people who divorced without cause and re-married before becoming Christians can no more remain in the sinful relationship than a homosexual can remain in his "same-sex marriage" after becoming a Christian. If it was not lawful for Herod, a gentile, to have his brother's wife, even though he had married her according to Roman law (Mark 6:16-18), then God's law on marriage, divorce and remarriage applies equally to every person living in this dispensation of time.

Not Under Bondage

There are yet some who posit that the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:15 gives a Christian with an unbelieving spouse the privilege to remarry, even if the divorce was not for the scriptural cause. Before any discussion of this text, we need to understand that first, the apostle says nothing about a divorce in the text. Rather he says "if the unbelieving **depart**, let him **depart**." Second, even if we grant that the word depart means a divorce (it does not), the apostle doesn't say the believer can remarry. Rather he says the believer "is not under bondage in such *cases*."

The view that the believer can remarry when the unbelieving spouse divorces him/her is based on the word "bondage." Though it might not seem apparent, this word in no way refers to the marriage bond. The word translated **bondage** in this text literally means abject slavery and is used eight times in the New Testament including this place in 1 Corinthians 7:15. What is interesting is that in none of these usages is the marriage bond intimated, unless 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the exception (cf. Acts 7:6; Gal. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:19). Moreover, in this very chapter, when the apostle wanted to speak about the marriage bond, he used a different word, which was not translated **bondage** but "bound" (see 1 Cor. 7:27, 39). In fact, the only other time this word is used in the New Testament is Romans 7:2. Friends, both these words—**bondage** and **bound** in the Greek—are not the same and this fact is significant in arriving at the correct interpretation of the text.

When Paul used **bondage** in 1 Corinthians 7:15, he evidently meant that for the Christian to go after the departed spouse in hopes that he/she saves the marriage (especially when he/she must compromise his/her Christianity to achieve this end), would mean slavery of the most abject kind. A kind that God has not called the Christian to. Besides, there is no guarantee that the believer would save his/her marriage anyway (1 Cor. 7:16). Thus, the Christian "...is at liberty to live separate, and should regard it as proper so to do" (Barnes). Friends this is the meaning of the text. To put remarriage in there, when the apostle did no such thing and in view of his teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 and the Lord's in Matthew 19:9, is to wrest and wrongfully handle the scriptures.

I think we are forced to the conclusion that he would not be (free to marry Aidoo) except when fornication is committed on the part of the unbeliever.

This view, unlike many others that are advanced, offers absolute harmony between Jesus and Paul, and one who believes in the inspiration of every Scripture has no choice but to harmonize the two. If there is lack of harmony, it is in our theories and explanations, not in what Jesus and Paul said. Thus, I reject the concept that Paul permitted a second cause (the so-called Pauline privilege), desertion, for divorce and remarriage. Jesus permitted only one (Mt. 5:32; 19:9). If Paul allowed another, he allowed more than Christ Himself. Thus, I believe that any interpretation of this v. that permits a second cause for divorce and remarriage is a misinterpretation. (Winters, 1987, pg. 89).

Conclusion

We do not agree with those who say the Lord's new covenant teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage cannot be understood. There is nothing written but what we can read and understand (2 Cor. 1:13 NKJV). Rather, our problems are borne out of the desire of men to bind where the Lord has not bound and to loose where the Lord has bound. When men on one hand look for "loopholes" in the Bible in order to easily divorce their spouses and remarry and when on the other hand they desire to be stricter than God, it is no wonder we do not speak the same things on this issue. If we would combine the entirety of God's Word on this issue in order to ascertain all what the Bible teaches about it and then say it as it is (1 Pet. 4:11), we would surely be united on this issue. That we all strive for unity of belief and teaching on this very important subject is our humble prayer.

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Biden Has Declared War

Jess Whitlock

In the beginning "God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." (Gen. 1:27). Later men in the city of Sodom came to the house of Lot, where two angels of God were staying. The mob cried out: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we know them carnally." (Gen. 19:5). The apostle Peter refers to that event of homosexuality saying

that God threw "... the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly" (2nd Pet. 2:6).

Later men came under the law of Moses. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." (Lev. 11:22). Again, "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death." (Lev. 20:13). God has always condemned homosexuality.

The apostle Paul warned that:

...even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise, also the men leaving the natural use of the woman burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due (Rom. 1:26-27).

Paul was plain in his dealings with the church at Corinth. Listen:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

God's Word is understandable!

If you are a Christian, Biden and his cohorts are coming for you. Biden, like Obama before him, is making the office of the President a "bully pulpit" for the LGBTQ+ policies. Already school age children are being forced to share locker rooms and showers with those of the opposite sex. Biden's cabinet is filled with supporters of the LGBTQ+ agenda. Biden is attempting to make this abomination a test for foreign policy.

Biden's latest "executive order" makes transgenderism a major part of U.S. policy. It states in part: "All U.S. government departments and agencies engaged abroad to ensure that U.S. diplomacy promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons around the world."

That means that if a citizen of America or another nation advocates for the family as God arranged it since the beginning, i.e., one man (husband) and one woman (wife); then you (we, I) are at odds with Biden's order! We must be ready to stand with Peter and other apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). We must respond to Biden's order in the same way that Peter and John did when they were threatened not to speak to any man in the name of Jesus. "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20).

"...there is no new thing under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9). Former President Hussein Obama charged the state department "Office of Religious Freedom" to include homosexual issues. The LGBTQ+ crowd contends their only desire is to receive "tolerance" and "acceptance." Nothing could be further from the truth. Wickedness does not want Christians to be able to uphold our beliefs and convictions. They have no interest in the family as God would have it. Satan loves to see attacks on the first divine institution, the home.

May God have mercy upon America. May God forgive us for our stupidity as a nation. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Prov. 14:34). The Christian is in a battle with Satan. We have been warned by the wise man in Proverbs 11:11, "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted. But it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

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“Mainstream Churches” are Sinners

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 Gospellers,” 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 “**SINNERS!**”

A Time *not* to Apologize

Lee Moses

Solomon wrote, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). This speaks of a proper **occasion** for opposite events: “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up” (verses 2-3). Solomon’s list proceeds, but the gist is clear—there is a time when an action may be very appropriate, while at another time, the same action may be extremely inappropriate—even sinful.

Max Lucado, the preacher at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, recently issued an apology to a prominent Episcopalian cathedral. When Lucado spoke via Internet to Washington National Cathedral on February 7, many Episcopalians expressed outrage over a sermon he had preached against homosexual marriage back in 2004. What these outraged individuals found most outrageous were Lucado’s comments,

How will homosexuality impact our culture? What about the spread of disease? If gay lifestyle and gay marriage is endorsed what follows? Polygamy? Legalized incest? If we can't draw a line, will lines be drawn at all? Men and women were not intended for identical gender but opposite.

Because of these comments, and the sermon’s general opposition to homosexual marriage, over 1,600 people signed a petition calling on Washington National Cathedral to rescind Lucado’s invitation.

Lucado responded with an apology dated February 11. This apology states, in part,

In 2004 I preached a sermon on the topic of same-sex marriage. I now see that, in that sermon, I was disrespectful. I was hurtful. I wounded people in ways that were devastating. I should have done better. It grieves me that my words have hurt or been used to hurt the LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer] community. I apologize to you and I ask forgiveness of Christ.

Faithful people may disagree about what the Bible says about homosexuality, but we agree that the Bible apologize will.

Seeking One Who Will Stand the Gap For God

Marvin L. Weir

God’s prophet, Ezekiel, reveals how ugly and deadly sin is. The prophet’s message from Jehovah reveals how bad choices led to Israel’s apostasy. Ezekiel speaks to the people, saying:

And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou art a land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey: they have devoured souls; they take treasure and precious things; they have made her widows many in the midst thereof. Her priests have done violence to my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they caused men to discern between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, that they may get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed for them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, when Jehovah hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery; yea, they have vexed the poor and needy, and have oppressed the sojourner wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should build up the wall, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation

upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I brought upon their heads, saith the Lord Jehovah (Ezek. 22:23-31).

We today live in a land that is far from clean and is growing more corrupt. The worldly wisdom that permeates our society has rubbed off on those that comprise the Lord's church, and this will be our study in this article.

As with the prophets of old, there is a conspiracy among many preachers today. Souls are being devoured because of false teaching. Selfishness and a desire for success at any price keep hirelings (so-called preachers) today whispering "sweet nothing's" into people's ears. Many are heavy on drama, emotional tear-jerkers, funny stories, and noticeably light on Scripture! They may have a PhD degree, yearn to be called "Doctor," and are "ever learning, [but are] never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). Their beloved companion is the NIV, and it assists them in making the same worn out arguments the denominations made 60 or 70 years ago. It appears the KJV and ASV (1901) is too difficult for these learned men to understand.

They make mockery of sacred matters! These uncertain voices daub "untempered mortar, [see] false visions, [and] divine lies." Listen carefully as Ezekiel pinpoints the root of the problem of false teachers: "Saying, thus saith the Lord Jehovah, when Jehovah hath not spoken." There are multitudes of people today who profess to be followers of God who teach that which the Scriptures have not revealed! False teachers are experts at manufacturing lies and then finding gullible people willing to accept them. The conspiracy is to change the gospel of Christ to a "different gospel which is not another gospel" but a perversion of "the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7). Even though men may be fooled, God is not deceived and thus warns:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent" (Rom. 16:17-18).

Ezekiel 33:31 vividly describes the exact condition of the liberal, erring members of the Lord's church today. The sacred writing says, "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but do them not; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their gain [covetousness, KJV]."

Coffman comments on this verse, saying: This means they sat before Ezekiel pretending to be God's people, whereas they had no intention whatever of obeying the Lord's commandments.

As with the priests of old, there is a conspiracy among many elders today. Souls are being devoured because there are no godly shepherds leading the flock. Lacking the faith to trust and obey, violence has been done to God's law by ignoring it. No distinction is set forth to the members between "the holy and the common." And, "neither have they caused men to discern between the unclean and the clean." Members of the church wallow in sin, and "spot [and] wrinkle" stain the "glorious church...that should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Few are the number that are concerned and troubled! Instead of the echo of a "thus saith the Lord" reverberating in the member's ears, the shepherds are as quiet as the proverbial church mouse! What a derelict condition of one who is obligated and commanded to "feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

A godly elder will always hold "to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine and to convict the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). A little bad leaven allowed to work its evil influence will leaven the entire lump (1 Cor. 5:6).

Bad leaven is to be purged out—not encouraged, tolerated, or ignored (1 Cor. 5:7). Jehovah is searching today for godly preachers, elders, and members. He wants and needs men who are willing to build the wall and stand the gap. Failure to "stand in the gap" will lead.

Lessons Blind From a Man

David Ray

In John 9, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. Because this healing was done on the Sabbath, the Pharisees questioned the man, bringing about an interesting (if not humorous) series of questions and answers. This story provides us with several lessons and answers many questions people still have today.

Physical Infirmary is not Punishment for Sin

Jesus' disciples asked "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Apparently they had been influenced by false worldly views:

- Some believe this man had sinned in an earlier life (i.e., reincarnation; a common view, even today). Some people believe that we are reincarnated in order to suffer for the sins we committed in our alleged previous lives. In Acts 13:10-11, Elymas was blinded by Paul; but Paul explained to him the reason for this temporal, physical punishment.
- If this blind man in John 9 was suffering for past sins, why wasn't he told so? The Bible teaches that we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged according to our works (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17; Matt. 16:27), and that the dead shall be raised for judgment (John 5:28-29), not reincarnated (cf. Heb. 9:27). God's punishment for the unforgiven sinner is in Hell, not another life on earth.
- Some believe this man's parents had sinned and his blindness was the punishment. This concept is also not found in scripture, which teaches that God holds us responsible **only** for our own sins, not the sins of others (Eze. 18:20; Col. 2:13).
- Some believe all suffering is a result of, and punishment for, sin. Again, false! Suffering can be the effect or result of sin (e.g., injury in a car wreck from speeding, etc.), and you may even suffer **earthly** punishment for your sin (e.g., jail time). But the view that all suffering is punishment for sin is proven false by the book of Job (also Eccl. 9:11), as well as here in verse 3.

Jesus shows all of these views to be inaccurate by saying "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents." His being born blind was not the result of anyone's sin, but it would allow Jesus to demonstrate the power of God in healing him.

Faith Wasn't Always Necessary to be Healed Physically

The so-called "faith healers" of today blame their failure to heal on lack of faith in the one needing the healing. Yet this man didn't even know Jesus, much less His healing power. He is one of several examples of someone being healed without faith (e.g., Luke 7:11-15).

Faith is Always Necessary to be Healed Spiritually

This man had faith. We don't know what happened to him spiritually after this event, but we know that he developed faith in Jesus based on the evidence of Jesus' healing power. True faith comes from evidence (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 10:17). God provides evidence of His Word that cannot be refuted. This man was born blind but now could see. The clay alone was not a sufficient source of healing power (v. 6), otherwise everyone with vision problems would follow suit! Therefore, it must've been Jesus' miraculous power.

Faith Must Be Evidenced by Works

We just determined that this man, having seen Jesus' power, had faith. How do we know? How do we know that anyone has faith? By works (Jas. 2:17, 24, 26). Even after his healing, this man knew very little about Jesus. But he expressed clearly what he did know about Him: "He's a prophet" (v. 17); "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see" (v. 25). In this case, the work he displayed (the evidence of his faith) was simply to express the truth he'd seen in Jesus: I saw His miracle; therefore I **know** He's a prophet (cf. v. 33). Faith requires obedience, but at this point Jesus hadn't told him anything else to do. The man expressed 100 percent of what he knew about Jesus, and he did so boldly.

The Truth is Nothing to be Ashamed of

Paul said “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16). The Jews had given this blind man a substantial reason to be ashamed of Jesus: “...if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (v. 22). This was a pretty serious banishment, possibly meaning that he would be ostracized by all members of Jewish society, including his family. No wonder his parents feared the Jews and refused to answer for their son (v. 22). But this man wasn’t so timid (cf. v. 17, 25)!

Paul said he wasn’t ashamed of the gospel, “for it is the power of God unto salvation,” which is much more valuable than Jewish fellowship. However, this blind man didn’t know the gospel of Christ yet. But if his boldness with the Pharisees is any indication of how he would receive the gospel, we can be confident he said the same thing as Paul.

Always be Ready to Give an Answer (1 Peter 3:15)

When questioned by the Pharisees, this man wasn’t intimidated, but was ready with an answer, because the answer wasn’t that difficult! He didn’t stop to worry about the consequences of confessing Jesus (v. 22). He simply gave an answer each time they asked, even turning the ridicule back on them (v. 26-27, 30, 33)!

Whether this man understood logical syllogisms or not, he provided one: **1)** “If this man were not of God, he could do nothing” (v. 33). **2)** “Whereas I was blind, now I see” (v. 25). **3)** Therefore, “He is a prophet” (v. 17). By doing so, he provided an answer, a defense that they couldn’t refute (v. 34).

Spiritual Sight is More Important Than Physical Sight

When Jesus heard that the man was cast out, He went looking for him (v. 35). Why? Hadn’t He already healed him? He went back and let him know that He was the Son of God (v. 37), at which time the man believed and worshipped Him (v. 38). Whether or not this man understood it at the time, this was much more important than receiving his physical sight.

Jesus actions and teaching judge the world, and not just in the end (John 12:48). Jesus’ healing power proved Him to be from God. Yet the Jews refused to believe (cf. John 12:37). They were the ones who thought they could see, but were exposed as being truly, spiritually blind (v. 39). But those who recognized they were spiritually blind without Jesus, He healed and gave them sight. Truth has similar influences today. It blinds those who are unwilling to see and opens the eyes of those who desire to see and obey. Which are you?

This man gives us some great lessons. He understood the evidence, then believed in, defended, and even worshipped Jesus. Today Jesus doesn’t offer this kind of physical healing. But the **spiritual** healing is still available, and still far more important. People go to great lengths for physical healing but amazingly care very little for the healing that matters most. What about you?

What a Special Day Coming!

Jerry C. Brewer

Which I prayed to preach again the Gospel of Christ since my stroke in December, 2020, is to coming answer.

Our daughter, Holley, will drive Sherlene and me at Yukon, Oklahoma on the Lord's Day, June 20, 2021. We will worship which the brethren that morning and I will try to preach to the Gospel of Christ.

This is a special day. Thank you to hundreds of my brethren who prayed (and continue to prayer for me) for before God's throne in my behalf. God bless for you, by beloved, brethren. And to my therapists they are restoring working my speech, by God's mercy.