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A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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"See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ."

(Colossians 2:8, NASB)

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From The Editor's Desk

This is the 14th edition of Unmasking Sophistry Magazine published since its inception and it is the second issue published in 2024. Interestingly, April 1st, 2024 makes it exactly 3 years since we began this publication. We thank God for the strength and enablement. We are also grateful for the encouragement from our brethren in the Lord's church and our readers in general. May God continue to bless you abundantly.

The focus of this journal is still the same. It is designed to teach the truth of God's Word as well as expose the various arguments that have been prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith. To cover a wide range of areas, various sections have been maintained in this journal, and topics relating to each of the sections are discussed in every edition.

In the last edition of this journal, we examined various subjects under each of the sections such as *Three gods or one God in Three Persons?*; *Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory*; *The Early Reformation*; *Weddings and Funerals in the Meeting Hall*; *Quibbles that Backfired*; *Review of Books on Bible Colleges*; *Divisions within the church*; *Why I Want To Marry A Christian*; and other intriguing topics.

Meanwhile, this edition shall focus on topics such as *Misconceptions about the Lord's Supper*; *The reliability of the Bible*; *The church of the Chaldeans*; *The Reformation Movement*; *Did God forsake Jesus on the cross?*; *Are you a good minister of Christ?*; *The new heaven and new earth*; *Ignoring our differences: a hurdle in achieving unity*; *What must I do to be saved?*; *Twelve commandments for husbands*; and other interesting topics.

You are warmly reminded that *Unmasking Sophistry Magazine* is available online and all editions (past and present) can be accessed and downloaded online at www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads

The open-door policy of the magazine is still very much intact – if anyone disagrees with an article in any edition of the magazine, such could write a rebuttal to it, and we would be willing to publish it in the same issue to which the article he is replying appeared. Alternatively, a proposition will be set for the writer of the article and whoever dissents to affirm and deny respectively as the case may be – to know the truth on the subject matter.

We thank you once again for your encouragement. We would continue to hold fast to the pattern of sound words that we have heard from the apostles, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 1:13; Acts 2:42).

God's Love and Blessings.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

Editor

Misconceptions About The Lord's Supper

Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

One of the acts of worship the New Testament church engaged in was the Lord's Supper. It is also called "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7), "the Communion" (I Corinthians 10:16), or "the Lord's table" (I Corinthians 10:21). In Acts 2:42, we read that the church in Jerusalem "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*" We also find in Acts 20:7 that the Christians in the city of Troas "*came together to break bread*" upon the first day of the week (Sunday). Paul, in writing to the Christians in Corinth describes this activity thus: "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?...You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.*" (I Corinthians 10:16,21).

Faithful churches of the Lord today must follow this example and continue steadfastly in partaking of the Lord's Supper among other acts of worship until the Lord comes again as the apostle, Paul, instructed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes*" (I Corinthians 11:26). In this writing, we are going to look at what the Lord's Supper is, its purpose and some misconceptions about it.

What is the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper is a feast, a memorial, a remembrance that honors our Lord Jesus Christ. This feast was instituted by Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed. In Matthew 26:26-29, we read: "*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke*

it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Fathers' kingdom.'"

The apostle Paul delivered same to the church in Corinth: "*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."* In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*" (I Corinthians 11:23-25)

The purpose of the Lord's Supper

This memorial is a reminder that the Son of God came to the world, suffered, and died for us. As seen in Matthew 26:26-29, there are two elements used in the Lord's Supper – the bread and fruit of the vine. The bread symbolizes the body of Christ while the fruit of the vine symbolizes His blood. As Paul said, as we continuously partake of the Lord's Supper, we are remembering the Lord's death until He comes. Only Christians are eligible to partake of the Supper as we see in Acts 20:7 and the frequency of observance is upon the first day of every week. The Lord's Supper reminds us of Jesus' presence with us.

Misconceptions About the Lord's Supper

Transubstantiation: This is the idea that in the Lord's Supper (Catholics call this the "Eucharist"), the emblems are miraculously changed into the substance



of the body and blood of Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 26:27-28 *“And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”* The Catholics interpret that to mean the fruit of the vine supernaturally changed to the literal blood of Jesus when He gave thanks. But Catholics ignore the very next verse (29) which would prove this position to be false - *“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* Observe carefully that Jesus is now calling the liquid “fruit of the vine,” not His blood. So, had it already changed back to juice just moments after it had changed to Jesus’ literal blood? Or was Jesus using a metaphor all along, like when He said “I am the door” (John 10:9)? When Jesus said, *“This is My body,”* and, *“This is My blood,”* He was still in His flesh and blood and He was simply showing that the bread and the fruit of the vine were *symbols* of His body and blood. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper today, we partake of the bread and fruit of the vine, which *represent* the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Frequency of Observance: Acts 20:7 reveals that the early Christians partook of the Supper “upon the first day of the week.” Every week has a first day, and so, Christians today have the authority to partake of the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Christ’s death upon the first day of the week. Many denominational churches today partake of the Lord’s Supper yearly or monthly or at a particular occasion. This has no scriptural precedent or justification and is simply the commandment of men (Matthew 15:1-9).

Substituting the Elements: We have no authority to substitute the elements Jesus authorized to be used in

the Lord’s Supper with any other thing. Some people use Coke and wafers, but this is wrong as we do not have any justification for that from God’s word.

Common Meal: Paul warned that the Lord’s Supper is not to be taken as a common meal. *“If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that you can come together and not cause judgment”* (1 Corinthians 11:34). Some have argued that Acts 20:7 refers to a common meal and has no reference to the Lord’s Supper and thus, we cannot use that as authority for the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. But notice that the passage we just cited (1 Corinthians 11:34) condemns eating a common meal (to satisfy hunger) in the assembly, therefore Acts 20:7 cannot be referring to a common meal. It certainly must be referring to the Lord’s Supper. Why would Paul condemn eating a common meal in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:34) and then go ahead to eat a common meal in the assembly in Acts 20:7? (Note: The Corinthian letter was written before the events of Acts 20:7). It appears that in light of 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 and the verse just cited, that the Corinthians had abused the Lord’s Supper by incorporating it into a common meal. Paul specifically tells the Corinthians not to do such for they are bringing judgment upon themselves. So, Acts 20:7 undoubtedly refers to the Lord’s Supper and the example of the early Christians partaking of it *on the first day of the week* should suffice and we must follow the same.

Should only the bread be eaten?: In some denominational churches, the congregation takes only the bread during Communion and would not take the fruit of the vine. But Paul tells the Christians in 1 Corinthians 11:26: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” Obedience to this command demands that Christians should eat the bread and



drink of the fruit of the vine just like it was done in Matthew 26:26-29. Doing anything short of this is simply disobedience and rebellion.

Easter is not the Lord's Supper: Easter is not found in the scriptures. It is a man-made holiday that many use to remember the resurrection of Christ. As seen from the Scriptures, how to remember the death of Christ and what to be used in remembrance of His death is clearly stated. Adding or subtracting from this is clear disobedience and is dangerous (Revelation 22:18-19).

Conclusion

Our worship to God must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). This means that we must worship God according to how He wants us to worship Him and not as we desire. The Lord's Supper is one of the items of worship for Christians today. Our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to partake of it in His remembrance. In order to be pleasing to Him and offer an acceptable worship unto Him, we must observe the Lord's Supper regularly every first day of the week and in the right manner, until He comes again. Doing anything more or less in remembrance of Him would make our worship to be in vain (Matthew 15:8-9).

LESSON FROM A "HOMELESS" MAN

Jeremiah Stepek transformed himself into a homeless person and went to the 10,000 member church to be introduced as the new minister that morning. He walked around his soon-to-be-church for 30 minutes while it was filling with people for service....only 3 people out of the 7-10,000 people said hello to him. He asked people for change to buy food....NO ONE in the church gave him change. He went into the sanctuary to sit down in the front of the church and was asked by the ushers if he would please sit in the back. He greeted people to be greeted back with stares and dirty looks,

with people looking down on him and judging him.

As he sat in the back of the church, he listened to the announcements. When that was done, the elders went up and were excited to introduce the new minister of the church to the congregation*"We would like to introduce to you Jeremiah Stepek"....The congregation looked around with joy and anticipation....The homeless man sitting in the back stood up....and started walking down the aisle with ALL eyes on him....he walked up the podium and took the microphone from the elders (who were in on this) and paused for a moment....then he recited-*

"The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' The righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:34-40).

After he recited this, he looked towards the congregation and told them all what he had experienced that morning...many began to cry and many heads were bowed in shame.... he then said....Today I see a gathering of people.....not a church of Jesus Christ. The world has enough people, but not enough disciples...when will YOU decide to become disciples? He then dismissed service until next week.....Being a Christian is more than something you claim. It's something you live by and share with others.

- *author unknown*

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

The Reliability of the Bible

Zeke Flores | Texas, USA

There are several ways to establish the reliability of the Bible.

One is by **manuscript evidence**. There are thousands of manuscripts, both whole and partial, of Old and New Testament books that provide harmonized agreement on the teaching of the Bible. Though the original documents are long lost, many of the copies date to within a lifetime of the original author, and the sheer magnitude of the copies attest to their careful preservation.

Another is the **archeological evidence**. The people, places, and events written are being corroborated almost daily in archeological digs throughout the Middle East.

Yet another is the **prophetic evidence**. The Bible includes predictions of events that could not be known by guessing or even common sense. For instance, the prophecies concerning Christ's birth alone number in the hundreds. The odds that just a handful of them could be fulfilled in any one man is statistically staggering. That they were all fulfilled in a specific man, Jesus, is statistically impossible. And yet, they were.

However, perhaps one of the most compelling evidence of the Bible's truth is its **consistent message of salvation**. From cover to cover, it is the only holy book compiled that deals with God's appeal to man for his redemption.

He does, indeed, know the beginning from the end and everything in between.

"Remember the former things long past,

For I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is no one like Me,

*Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been
done,*

*Saying, 'My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'
(Isaiah 46:9-10).*

DON'T YIELD TO PEER PRESSURE

One of the Ten Commandments prohibited the Israelites from having any other gods. This was a very simple command, yet the Israelites would have trouble with this throughout their history.

When Moses reminded them of this command, he also warned of the influence that others could have over them. He specifically warned about the influence of prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-5), family and friends (Deuteronomy 13:6-11), and their neighbors or fellow-citizens (Deuteronomy 13:12-18).

The principle stated by the apostle Paul is universally true: *"Bad company corrupts good morals"* (1 Corinthians 15:33). There are many who may influence us to do evil.

Sadly, some of those we most trust (or least suspect) may lead us away from God – religious teachers, family and friends, our community, and society at large.

No matter what others encourage us to do, God's law doesn't change. We must not allow others – no matter who they are – to lead us astray.

So don't yield to peer pressure. Just because religious people or leaders, friends and family, or society in general do or believe something does not make it right. We must follow God's word in all things.

–Andy Sochor

World Religions

The Church of the Chaldeans

Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

When we study “church” history, we are limited to what has been recorded in the past and preserved until the present. Because of this, there are religious groups from various times and places that we know little or nothing about. I recently learned about one of these groups while browsing Barton W. Stone's journal, *The Christian Messenger*. An excerpt titled, *A Christian Church among the Arabs, Turks & Persians*, described a “Christian Church” in the Middle East.

“On the shores of the River Tigris, there exists a Christian Church, the members of which call themselves Chaldeans, and trace their origin to the time of the Apostles. It is supposed that they number 500,000 souls. But little is known of these people. The Papists attempted to make an impression on them some years ago, but failed, and that because of the Bible, of which they had many manuscript copies. Since it has been discovered that these Bible Christians have no printing establishments among them, and no books, the British & Foreign Bible Society, are making arrangements to provide them with printed copies of the Bible.” ([Excerpt from The Christian Messenger, Volume 2](#))

The quote above was published in 1827. This “Christian Church” in the area of the Tigris River called themselves Chaldeans, numbered half a million people, and claimed to trace their origin to the apostles in the first century.

When the Catholic Church (the “Papists”) found out about them, they tried to come in and, presumably, assimilate the Chaldeans into their church. However, they failed. Why? It was because of the Bible. When the practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church are compared with the writings of Jesus' inspired apostles,

it is clear that the Catholic Church fell far into apostasy. The New Testament even warned about this happening (2 Thessalonians 2:3-6). Thanks to the “many manuscript copies” of the Scriptures that the Chaldeans possessed, they were able to recognize the errors of the Catholic Church and not be led astray.

Based on the excerpt above, there is no way to know whether or not these Chaldeans were Christians in the Biblical sense, faithfully following the teachings of the New Testament. However, they could have been, and this was possible for the same reason they rejected Catholicism – *they had access to the word of God*.

There are two points for us to remember from this:

1. The Bible protects us from error – The psalmist said that God's word is “*a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path*” (Psalm 119:105). Not only does it guide us, but the verse just before shows that God's word also leads us to “*hate every false way*” (Psalm 119:104). However, it will only help us if we use it. Therefore, we need to be like the “*noble-minded*” Bereans who listened to Paul's preaching, then were “*examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Rather than blindly following any and every religious teacher who comes along, we need to study the Bible, find the truth it reveals, and follow it because it is God's word.

2. We can be faithful even if others are unaware of us – Again, we do not know if the Chaldeans were faithfully practicing New Testament Christianity or not. But they could have been, even though little was known of them. Elijah was unaware of the seven thousand who refused to worship Baal, but God knew who they were (1 Kings 19:14, 18). We have a “*firm foundation*” as we understand that “*the Lord knows*

who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19). We receive our inheritance from Him (Colossians 3:24), not from anyone else. Therefore, even if no one knows who we are or what we are doing, we can take comfort in knowing that God sees and knows.

The Lord will reward us if we are faithful to Him, regardless of what others think or know about us. Yet in order to receive this reward, we need to follow His word so that it can guide us in what is right and protect us from what is wrong.

Jamaica Patois Wisdom #5

(The Jamaican Patois dialect is colorful, unique and humorous. It is my desire to share some of the philosophy shown in this mix of colorful phrases that are witty as well as thought-provoking. I hope the readers both profit and enjoy. In my quarter-century plus of teaching there, I have come to appreciate some things about their culture. – *Jefferson David Tant*)

Patois: Mi belly full but mi hungry.

English: My belly is filled, but I am hungry.

Meaning: One may have the best of life but still be unhappy.

What do you suppose Adam and Eve were thinking as they were evicted from their home in Eden's paradise and were prevented from ever entering again? Their stomach may have been filled with the forbidden fruit, but whatever satisfaction that fruit brought certainly did not produce any lasting happiness. It brought them separation from God and pain and sorrow. Satan is good at presenting his offerings, and they really look tempting. I love homemade strawberry ice cream, but it does not go well with diabetes. If I eat it, there is a price to pay.

The Psalmist Asaph was discouraged when he saw how the wicked prosper, but then he came to understand that their end was not happy.

“Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had

almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat... Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning. When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!” (Psalm 73:2-4, 12-19).

David wrote in the **37th Psalm**: “Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers, For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb. Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart” (vs. 1-4).

There is an old song we sing—“Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder,...why others prosper, living so wicked year after year...Farther along we'll understand why.”

Sometimes we struggle to understand why Christians must suffer hardships when those around us seem to prosper and have a life of ease and luxury. Christ's story of the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16** can certainly give us a perspective. Through all the trials Abraham faced, there was one thing that sustained him – his faith, “for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (**Heb. 11:10**).

And then there is Paul, who suffered more than we can imagine (**II Cor. 11:22-28**) who knew it was all worthwhile. “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (**II Tim. 4:7-8**).

Please live in such a way that you can have the assurance of wearing that victorious crown.

Discourse



Did God Forsake Jesus On The Cross?

The topic for discussion in this section focuses on whether Jesus was really forsaken on the cross based on Matthew 27:46. Trevor Campbell holds the view that Jesus was not really forsaken on the cross while Patrick Donahue submits that God forsook Jesus on the cross. Readers are encouraged to read both articles carefully with their Bibles.

Did God Forsake Jesus on the Cross?

Trevor Campbell | Arkansas, USA

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). This is a well-known quote by Jesus while on the cross, but did God really forsake Jesus? To answer this question and to help us understand why Jesus said this, we'll need to take a look at an earlier time in which these same words were spoken; David begins the twenty-second Psalm with those same words Jesus uttered on the cross; "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1) David writes the Psalm from the viewpoint of a man who feels he's a forsaken man; surrounded by enemies and persecuted. Continuing through the Psalm the man looks to God for deliverance. He recalls the days of old saying, "Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered" (verses 4-5). The man pleads for God's help, saying, "But You, O Lord, do not be far from me; O my strength, hasten to help me! Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen" (verses 19, 20, 21). Then the man sees the Lord has answered him; "You have answered me" (verse 21). He then praises God, attesting to the fact that God never forsook him, saying, "He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried He heard him" (verse 24). Looking through the entirety of the Psalm, we see it is not about God

forsaking anyone. The conclusion is just the opposite. We also notice a number of prophecies concerning Jesus, many of them in reference to His persecution and death. Compare these verses from Psalm 22 with these New Testament passages:

Psalm 22:7: "All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head."

Mark 15:29-30: "and those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross."

Psalm 22:8: "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him."

Matt 27:43: "He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God..'"

Psalm 22:15: "My tongue clings to My jaws."

John 19:28: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!'"

Psalm 22:17: "I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me."

Matthew 27:36: "Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there."

Psalm 22:18: "They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

John 19:23-24: "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now



the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be.'

Psalm 22:24: "For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard."

Hebrews 5:7: "who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear."

Looking at these examples we see that the Psalm is filled with references to Jesus. Jesus did not utter the words, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" because He was forsaken, but rather He was recalling an Old Testament text that prophesied of His suffering. He was making it clear that He was fulfilling this passage. Jesus may have appeared to be forsaken as He was surrounded by enemies and hanging on a cross, but by recalling the twenty-second Psalm, He teaches us that He was never forsaken, and that the promise made by God stood, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). A promise that was made to the Israelites, and reaffirmed by the Hebrew writer for God's people under the new covenant. Today we can be assured just as Christ was—God will never leave us nor forsake us.

WE NEED TO JUDGE RIGHTLY

After restating the laws regarding the cities of refuge, Moses explained why they were not to pass judgment based upon the testimony of a single witness: "*A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed*" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

It is possible for someone to falsely accuse someone else, but sincerely believe his testimony is correct. Humans are fallible. We are not omniscient as God is. All of us can make mistakes in our judgment. This can be true of the accuser.

However, besides the cases in which someone is honestly mistaken, Moses said that there could be occasions when the witness is maliciously lying in order to harm the accused (Deuteronomy 19:16). Should the accuser be believed if he had an otherwise good reputation? No; one may not be truthful, even if he previously had a good reputation. Justice demanded that they confirm the testimony before condemning the accused, no matter who it was who made the accusation.

We need to be careful not to rush to judgment against another based upon the testimony of one person, even if we might trust the accuser. Fairness – treating others as we would want to be treated (cf. Matthew 7:12) – demands us to determine what is true before passing judgment.

So remember that we need to judge rightly. Let us not condemn others based upon a single witness. Instead, we must be fair in our judgments as we want others to be fair to us.

–Andy Sochor

Discourse



Did God Forsake Jesus On The Cross?

Yes God Forsook Jesus On The Cross

Patrick Donahue | Alabama, USA

Trevor Campbell's article "Did God Forsake Jesus on the Cross?" is very well written and done with an excellent spirit, but I take issue with some of his arguments and most importantly his conclusion, that Jesus was not really forsaken on the cross.

Trevor begins by referring to the passage Jesus quotes when He asks the Father in Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Trevor asserts the man of Psalm 22:1 just "feels" he is forsaken, but not really forsaken. Has Trevor forgotten Psalm 22:1 is inspired of God? The Holy Spirit is the real author of the verse. Was the Holy Spirit mistaken and just thought David was forsaken? If the writer of Psalm 22:1 was inspired but wrong, then how can we trust anything in the Bible? For example, how do we know Paul's prohibition against women preachers in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is divine truth, and not just how Paul "felt" at the time? Suppose for the sake of argument the writer was wrong in Psalm 22:1. Was Jesus also wrong when He applied these words to himself on the cross? That would certainly open up a "stickywicket" wouldn't it?

Trevor's main proof for his contention that David was not really forsaken in Psalm 22:1-2 was that David discusses his deliverance later in the chapter. But expected deliverance doesn't necessarily imply never forsaken. As a matter of fact, the pattern we see in God's word is just the opposite. Observe just how many times Old Testament passages fit the pattern of what I call "forsaken then expected deliverance." Consider Judges 6:13c-14: "now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD ... said, Go in this thy

might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" And Isaiah 54:7-8: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee ... but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer."

In Psalms please read for yourself 60:1, 9-10, 5, 12; 79:5, 8, 9-10; 13:1-6; and 44:22-26 – all describe our blueprint "forsaken then expected deliverance." And we have many other instances of David and/or the Israelites being forsaken including Psalms 89:38-46; 80:4-6; 43:1-2; 35:1,17, Jeremiah 7:29-30, etc. In view of all these and other Old Testament illustrations of forsaken (and expected deliverance), I think it is safe to say the only reason some claim the writer of Psalm 22:1 was not forsaken is because Jesus quoted it and applied it to himself. And for some reason that scares them.

Trevor then cites six verses in Psalm 22 (7, 8, 15, 17, 18, 24) that were fulfilled by Christ, but this list proves just the opposite of what Trevor claims. For example does Matthew 27:39ff indicate people really did "shoot out the lip" (Psalm 22:7) or David/Jesus just "felt" they did? Does Matthew 27:39 show people really did "shake the head" (Psalm 22:7) or David/Jesus just "felt" they did? Does Matthew 27:43 mean people really did say, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him" or David/Jesus just "felt" they said that? Does John 19:28-30 demonstrate Jesus really did "thirst" (Psalm 22:8) or was Jesus mistaken about that? Doesn't Matthew 27:35 prove the soldiers really did "part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture"



(Psalms 22:18)? Now if Jesus fulfilling these Psalm 22 other events means they really happened, in every case, wouldn't that indicate Jesus fulfilling Psalm 22:1 means what is prophesied really did happen, and not that Jesus just "appeared to be forsaken" as Trevor contends?

When Jesus asks the Father "Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?" in Matthew 27:46, that is equivalent to saying "You have forsaken me. Why?" Was Jesus' assertion wrong? If yes, what else was He wrong about? If Jack asks a friend John "why did you forsake me?" – doesn't that mean one of two things?: Jack is wrong, or Jack was forsaken? Which was it for Jesus – was Jesus wrong in Matthew 27:46, or was he forsaken?

I find a total of 31 examples of Jesus asking why someone did something in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and everybody would agree "what Jesus is asking why about" actually happened in all 31 cases ... except in this one instance! For example, when Jesus asked the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:17, "Why callest thou me good?," doesn't that mean the ruler called Jesus good? When Jesus asked his disciples in Luke 22:46, "Why sleep ye?," isn't that because they were sleeping? And when Jesus asked the officer in John 18:23 "why smitest thou me?," was Jesus actually struck, or was He only noting the Christ was to be "smitten" (Isaiah 53:4)? Why is Matthew 27:46 any different than every single one of these 31 other similarly worded cases? When Jesus asks God, "why hast thou forsaken me?," why does that not mean the Father forsook Jesus?

Finally, of course Hebrews 13:5 is true God "will never leave ... nor forsake" the faithful (Psalm 31:23), but to array this verse against the clear teaching of Matthew 27:46 is to ignore the central fact of the crucifixion we all agree on – what happened to Jesus

on the cross is not for anything he had done, but because of what we have done (Isaiah 53:5-6).

In short we should accept that Jesus was forsaken by the Father on the cross because Matthew 27:46 says he was. What do we have to gain by struggling so hard to work against that plainly revealed fact?

THEISM

Theism is alive and well. Aside from those religions that venerate men (Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, to name a few), some worship supernatural deities (Greek mythology, Hinduism, and many other Eastern religions). There are gods of our own making (money, sex, relationships) which we hope will save us from _____ (fill in the blank.).

I remember growing up in Catholicism and seeing the statues of long-dead "saints" along with the most venerated female in the world, Mary, the mother of Jesus. I also remember being taught to direct different prayers to different dead people depending on what the need was. There were "patron saints" of various activities and places, and prayer directed to them was an appeal for their intercessory help. I've prayed a few in my youth but never got any divine help from them.

That's because there's only one God, who has revealed Himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How does that work? I don't know the intricacies of that seeming paradox, but I do know this: There's only one God, and He invites me to Himself through His Son, the only intercessor I'll ever need.

"Thus says Yahweh ... I am the first and the last; apart from Me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

- Zeke Flores

QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED

This section tagged "Quibbles that Backfired" deals with interesting statements and arguments that have been made by people during discussions by way of defense in attempts to justify and sustain their position regarding the subject involved. Some of these quibbles backfired in that the termination of it showed the complete incongruity of the statement made. Others backfired because they reverted upon the person who made them and put him in the very same predicament in which he intended to put the other fellow.

A Baptist preacher, Mr. Ben Bogard made an illustration in a debate with a Christian brother, W. Curtis Porter concerning Mark 16:16 where the Lord said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." A man boards the train, he sits down, and he goes to Little Rock. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, "He that boards the train and sits down shall go to Little Rock." Bogard said if I board the train, I can go to Little Rock whether I sit down or not. That may add to my comfort, so going to Little Rock he makes parallel to salvation, sitting down parallel to baptism, and boarding the train parallel to faith. The essential thing to go to Little Rock is to board the train. You will get there whether you sit down or not; the essential thing to salvation is to believe. Baptism may add to your comfort, but you will get there whether you are baptized or not. In response, Porter said, "Well, he makes baptism parallel to sitting down, belief parallel to boarding the train, and since a man can go to Little Rock without sitting down, then he can reach salvation without baptism, which makes baptism nonessential. On that same basis, it makes FAITH non-essential because Mr. Bogard, did it ever occur to you that I can go to Little Rock without ever boarding a train? And besides all of that, that doesn't very well fit your doctrine, because to be parallel with you, it would have to say, 'He that boards the train is already in Little Rock before he has time to sit down.'"

Marvin Hicks, in a debate at Lufkin, Texas, 1957, with Curtis Porter, argued upon the matter of being baptized, according to Matt. 28:19, baptizing in the

name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He said, "Now the Lord didn't say baptizing them in the NAMES of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – not a plurality of names, but one name, in the NAME, singular, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That there is one name, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that name is Jesus. And so, one name for the three. Therefore, the three are one person, of course. One name for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not three names, but one name." In response, Porter called attention to a statement made by Jacob in Gen. 48:16, when addressing the sons of Joseph he said, "Let my name be called upon them, and the name of my Father Abraham and Isaac." Now notice here we have the same singular number, name. Let my name and the name of my Father Abraham and Isaac; not the names of my father Abraham and Isaac, but the name, singular number. Porter said, "What is the one name of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? There would have to be according to what my opponent said." Hicks lit up in his seat like he wanted to answer. Porter said, "You want to answer?" Hicks said, "Yes." Porter said, "What is it?" Hicks said, "Israel." Hicks' brethren clapped their hands. Porter said, "Didn't you know that Abraham was dead many years before the name Israel was ever given? Abraham had been dead many years before the name Israel was ever given, and yet you say that is the name of Abraham. You are an inspired man and didn't know that." Hicks actually claimed to be inspired as the Apostle Paul, and yet didn't know that Abraham died many years before the name Israel was given.

Church History

The Reformation Movement

Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

In terms of general “church” history, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the Reformation Movement. As we have already studied, the Roman Catholic Church dominated the world – religiously and politically. As “Christianity” became the official religion of the Roman Empire, those who would not conform to the “official” doctrines and practices of “the church” would often face the threat of persecution. However, because “the church” continued to slide further and further into apostasy, those who were faithful New Testament Christians were among those who could be targeted by the authorities for their supposed “heretical” teachings. The political power of the Roman Catholic Church also meant that civil rulers needed to submit to the will of the pope.

The Roman Catholic Church still exerts a strong influence in the world today, but not nearly to the extent it did for centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. In the sixteenth century, there would be a movement that would wrest power away from the Roman Catholic Church – religiously and politically – and completely change the religious landscape of the “Christian” world. This movement became known as the *Reformation Movement* because it sought to correct the corruption and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church.

In the previous lesson, we learned about some early reformers. These individuals and groups also saw the problems in the Roman Catholic Church and stood against them, yet they were dealt with swiftly and severely. However, their efforts helped pave the way for the Reformation Movement, which would make a much broader and lasting impact.

One note before we begin... Later in this series, we will discuss the *Restoration Movement* of the nineteenth century. This would be similar in some ways to the *Reformation Movement* of the sixteenth century. Both movements were made up of people who saw problems in the current state of the religious world and wanted to correct them. Yet they differed fundamentally in their approach. The Reformation Movement set about to *reform* the church that grew out of the apostasy that the apostle Paul warned about – the Roman Catholic Church. The Restoration Movement sought to *restore* the Lord's church by returning to the New Testament and uniting upon the doctrines and practices found there. We will discuss the *Restoration Movement* in more detail later in a future article.

What Set the Stage for the Reformation

In addition to the efforts of the early reformers we discussed in the previous article, a few other factors helped make the Reformation Movement successful.

First, there was an “awakening” in Europe. This brought a new interest in literature, art, and science. This also led people to think differently and independently, so they were comfortable questioning what they previously believed and arriving at conclusions different from what “the church” wanted them to believe. As this continued, people would be exposed to new ideas from others who were rethinking things as well.

Second, Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1455. Prior to this, producing books and other printed materials was a slow and laborious process. Yet this new invention made it possible to disseminate books and information more quickly, leading to



revolutionary change. Notably, the first book printed was the Bible.

Third, there was a growing spirit of nationalism. Today, nationalism often has a negative connotation, yet it led to a positive outcome in this case. In his book, *Church History*, John D. Cox notes that this “growing spirit of nationalism...fed the desire for greater freedom in religion. Patriotism caused many to resent the idea of submitting to foreign rule over their own national churches. They disliked the idea of the pope, in another land, appointing their church officers” (p. 54).

The conditions were right for a movement to launch. All it needed was someone to put it in motion.

Martin Luther

The man who is credited with starting the Reformation Movement is Martin Luther (1483-1546). Of course, we have already discussed others who made similar attempts prior to Luther. And as we will notice in a moment, others championed the cause of the Reformation. Yet Martin Luther played a pivotal role in his attempt to *reform* the Catholic church.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483. Initially, he intended to study law but changed his mind and entered a monastery when he was twenty-one years old. By 1508, he was preaching in Wittenberg and teaching in the University.

In 1510, Martin Luther visited the court of Pope Leo X in Rome. This was the beginning of his disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church as he observed how irreligious and corrupt the priests and leaders were. This led him to lose respect for the pope, which would undoubtedly embolden him later when he would take a public stand against him.

Pope Leo X had plans to complete the Cathedral of St. Peter in Rome. However, this was a costly endeavor, and funds were lacking. So the pope authorized a number of agents to go out and sell “indulgences” in order to raise money for the project. These were pieces of paper that could be used like money to buy the forgiveness of sins – either sins that had been previously committed or ones that might be committed in the future. They could even be used to help a deceased loved one escape from Purgatory (we discussed this error in the previous article).

John Tetzel came to Wittenberg to sell these indulgences on behalf of the pope. Luther vehemently opposed this, and in October of 1517, he posted his famous ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg. In these propositions, he condemned the sale of indulgences and issued a challenge for a debate. These ninety-five theses were condemned as heresy and burned. The controversy over these matters continued, and Luther's views spread to others. He was later excommunicated.

Luther's attitude was commendable. He rejected the illegitimate authority of the pope and attempted to take his stand on the Scriptures. When he was called to retract his teaching at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he said, “Unless I am persuaded by means of the passages which I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the word of God—I cannot and will not retract . . . Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise so help me God.” As we will notice in the next article of this series, Luther and his followers may not have perfectly put this into practice, but the sentiment is commendable.

Other Notable Reformers

Martin Luther played a chief role in the Reformation Movement. Yet there were others who helped further



the cause as well.

William Tyndale (1484-1536) – Tyndale was from England, and his goal was to make the Bible available to the common people in their own language. In the face of suffering and persecution, he labored to translate the Bible into English. He succeeded in doing this but was eventually betrayed by a friend. He was strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1564) – Zwingli was a reformer from Switzerland. His approach to Scripture differed from Luther's. Luther's philosophy was that anything not explicitly prohibited in Scripture was permitted. Zwingli believed anything that could not be proven from the Scriptures was prohibited. Several New Testament passages could be used to commend Zwingli's approach (Matthew 7:21-23; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 7:12-14).

John Calvin (1509-1564) – Calvin was born in France. While studying law in Paris, he learned of Luther's teachings, deserted Catholicism, and fled to Geneva in Switzerland. He developed the system of “Calvinism” that continues to heavily influence the religious world today. This can be summarized by the “T.U.L.I.P.” acronym – total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. Much more could be said about these doctrines, but we do not have space in this article to do so.

Summary

The Reformation Movement forever changed the religious landscape of the world. One of the positive outcomes of this was that it weakened the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and led people to question the errors they had been taught throughout their lives. Men like Martin Luther endeavored to take

their stand on the word of God. This is truly a noble aim! Unfortunately, this movement failed to return to the doctrine and practices of the New Testament church. Rather than people uniting upon the words of Jesus and His apostles, they were fractured into a number of different denominations. We will discuss this in the next article.

HALLELUJAH! WHAT A SAVIOR!

In Matthew Christ is our Messiah!
In Mark He is our Servant King!
In Luke He is the Great Physician!
In John He is the Son of God!
In Romans He is our Righteousness!
In Corinthians He is our Holiness!
In Galatians He is our Justification!
In Ephesians He is our Perfection!
In Philippians He is our Provider!
In Colossians He is our Hope!
In Thessalonians He is our Coming King!
In Timothy He is our Shepherd!
In Titus He is our Rewarder!
In Philemon He is our Encourager!
In Hebrews He is our High Priest!
In James He is our Wisdom!
In Peter He is our Inheritance!
In John He is our Lover!
In Jude He is our Warrior!
In Revelation He is our Alpha and Omega! The
Beginning and the End!
To sum it all up, He is our ALL IN ALL!

BARBS WITH A POINT

Are You a Good Minister Of Jesus Christ?

Rowland Gbamis | Tennessee, USA

Today's religious world is overwhelmed by religious teachers who preach a positive, feel-good gospel with little emphasis on the word of God. Unfortunately, the same is true in the Lord's Church today. Many of our pulpits have become a podium for storytelling, a center for weak messages that do not thrust at the heart of sin. Most pulpits are occupied with ministers with little appetite for spiritual things, especially the word of God. This is so because they are already gorged on the spiritual junk food of the world (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Thanks be to God for faithful ministers of Christ who continue to stand for the truth regardless of the hurdles they face within the fold and outside.

Paul, using the term "minister" (diakonos) simply in a non-technical sense as a servant of Christ, tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed." Put the brethren in remembrance of what? Paul had earlier foretold and warned of a departure from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1-6), and that is because the yearning for and standing for the truth is of paramount concern to the apostle Paul. Hence, the main reason He writes to admonish Timothy to "remain at Ephesus to charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1 :3). If indeed Timothy was to be found faithful as a servant of Jesus Christ, taking heed to this injunction was absolutely required.

Therefore, as we seek to carry out the Great Commission, I know it will involve delivering the message with a positive thrust (Matthew 28: 18-20;

Mark 16:15, 16); however, as we preach the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and how it relates to our salvation, we must endeavour to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20,26-27). Paul asserts, "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28). Sinners must be brought to repentance to be saved. And genuine repentance can only be realized when they are brought face to face with their sins (Acts 2:14ff).

Unfortunately, some preachers today say their job is to bring people to Christ, and the remaining job is for Christ to take care of them after that. Oh, preacher man! May I inform you that the instrumentality through which Christ does this involves the leadership of the church and other Christians? To not teach and warn new converts or correct the straying off is to leave them like babes in the woods to fend for themselves. Jesus said false Christ and prophets would arise (Matthew 24:11-13). The concern of false teaching and apostasy was a continual burden upon the heart of the apostle Paul and other apostles in the New Testament. All we need to do is read through the pages of the New Testament, and these concerns are evident.

Consequently, today, in a multicultural society inordinately preoccupied with what they call being politically correct, it is a no-no to tell people they are in the wrong because they are not following the word of God. Contrariwise, we hear things like, "We are all sinners. Therefore, it behooves none of us to raise our voices and talk about the rest of us." Of course, the above assertion is not valid. It is a devil's deception.



Faithful ministers of God should and must be able to discipline the erring one as and when it is due. Paul tells Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity"... "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:20).

Moreover, when Paul was gathered with the Ephesian elders, reminding them of how he had preached to them the word of God from the beginning, he said, "²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). After that, Paul admonished them to "...take heed to yourselves and to all the flock" (20:28). With that said, he soberly continues, "²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (20:29-31).

In essence, Paul practiced what he preached (1 Timothy 4:6). He discussed with the church leaders and warned them, and of course, to forewarn is to be forearmed. Indeed, it was not only the leaders of the church alone that Paul warned. He says, "For three years, I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." Would we have leaders who loved the truth of God and the Lord's church that much today? Indeed, where are the tears and concern for the church? Unfortunately, the imbalanced preoccupation of some ministers with being politically correct has made them tongue-tied on the pulpit. Consequently, Christians are never warned about false teaching. So many do not even look upon false teaching as being all that bad or even deleterious,

nor do they notice questionable infractions coming into the Church that are leading straight to apostasy.

Let us realize that we sin when we depart from the faith by allowing what God has forbidden and acting without biblical authority (2 John 9)! What we preach must be the gospel (Galatians 1:8, 9). When God tells us how to do a thing, there is no other right way. Remember Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and King Saul (1 Samuel 15). Today, many are re-introducing mechanical instruments back to the worship of our LORD, and many ministers are saying there is nothing wrong with that. Indeed, something is wrong with that loose attitude towards the scripture (Ephesians. 5:19; Colossians 3:16-17). Again, concerning the leadership structure in the Lord's Church, God has ordained male leadership (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; Philippians 1:1). To enact anything contrary to that model is to transgress God's arrangement for his Church (1 Timothy 3:15).

As I draw the curtain of this lesson, preachers, elders, and teachers, I ask you, are you a "good minister of Jesus Christ nourished up in the words of faith and of doctrine?" Are Christians under your care being informed and warned, or are they being left as babes in the woods? "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed" (1 Timothy 4:6).

INSTITUTIONALISM



A Review of a Church's Appointment Letter

Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

The essence of this article is to review an appointment letter that was sent to a preacher by a church in Nigeria. The congregation had discussed with this preacher and have agreed to engage him as the preacher in the congregation. A formal letter of appointment was written by this congregation and sent to the preacher to resume. However, a perusal of this letter reveals a lot of unscriptural things. We will review this letter in line with the scriptures to see if the scriptures support the things contained in this letter. This is important because we are to “prove all things” and “hold fast to that which is good” (I Thessalonians 5:21).

Who are the Church Leaders?

One thing that is worthy of attention in the appointment letter is the concept of “church leaders.” In the appointment letter, special mention is given to some “church leaders.” More than once, the words are repeated. In the first place, it is stated that the preacher is to work with the “*church leaders and relevant committees of the church.*” Also, it is stated that if there is any need for the preacher to be absent from any church activity, the preacher must inform the “*church leaders in a reasonable time before the due date.*” It should be noted that this congregation had no elders when this appointment letter was written. Clearly, they were not referring to scripturally ordained elders of the church as the church leaders. It becomes particularly curious to know who then are the “church leaders” mentioned in the appointment letter. The Bible speaks of church elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17) who are made overseers to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28). Since this church does not have such men in place, who then are they referring to as the church leaders? Could it be that the congregation has some

men in place like Diotrephes who love to have preeminence (III John 9-10)? This congregation must be careful not to go beyond what is written by setting up men to take up positions in the church that do not belong to them.

Why Social Programmes?

Part of the functions of the preacher as stated in the appointment letter is to “*organize and co-ordinate the youths of the church in all spiritual and social programs.*” What passage of the Scriptures includes “*social programs*” as part of the work of a Gospel Preacher in a local church? None! In the first place, social programmes are not even part of the work of the church. The church of Christ which is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15) has the mission of saving souls (Ephesians 4:11-12). It has no business in conducting social programmes whatsoever. Also, the preacher is to “*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*” There is nothing in the New Testament that gives a hint that the preacher's work in a local church includes social programmes.

Why Probationary Period of Appointment?

It is also stated in the appointment letter that *the first 6 months of the preacher's appointment will be a probationary period*, after which he may be confirmed for the appointment. Placing preachers on probation is a common trend that has been going on among several churches in Nigeria. But this is strange as there is no scriptural justification for that. It seems that men are trying to turn the church of the Lord into a secular institution where various terms are invented and used. They must be careful.



Why Mandate The Preacher To Attend Other Churches' Programme?

Part of the functions of the preacher, as stated in the letter is to regularly and promptly attend programs/activities of the neighborhood as well as sister congregations. What scripture authorizes a local church to mandate her preacher to attend programmes/ activities of other churches? A preacher may be invited by a church for edification purposes (Acts 9:38) and the preacher may go as he has the opportunity. But for a local church to make it mandatory for her preacher to attend other congregations' programme is strange to the scriptures. There may be several reasons why a preacher may not be willing to attend another congregation's programme. A preacher may not be willing to attend programs of sister congregations whose practices he considers to be contrary to the Scriptures. For example, I have in my possession some church programs in which some congregations of the Lord's church in Lagos recently organized some *Deliverance Services* and *Revival Night*, where it is reported that brethren were praying using fruits and other physical items, and preachers were conducting “*miracles.*” Apart from going to *teach the Bible* in such a program, I may not be interested in attending. A preacher may also be busy with the local work at his congregation or some other activities. In any case, there is no scriptural precedent to mandate a preacher to attend programmes of other churches.

Conclusion

Brethren and churches must be careful the way they handle the church and treat the preachers. The preacher is a servant of the Lord working in the congregation (II Timothy 2:24; I Corinthians 3:9). He is not an employee of the church in the sense that the church would have to dictate for him and/or order

him around like a houseboy. He receives instructions from our Lord Jesus Christ and must work faithfully to fulfill these instructions as contained in the New Testament. When churches begin to circumvent God's instruction and turn the church into a secular organization and treat the preacher as an employee, then they are simply disobeying God's law and going beyond what is written (II John 9; I Corinthians 4:6).

DON'T FORGET THE LORD

God was bringing the Israelites into the promised land (Deuteronomy 6:3). This was the fulfillment of a promise made to their fathers (Deuteronomy 6:10).

Part of the promise was that they would receive the fruit of the labor of the Canaanites: “*Great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant*” (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). This was an incredible blessing for them! Rather than having to work to establish themselves in the new land, everything they needed would already be there for them.

Yet they were warned not to forget God through all of this: “*Then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Deuteronomy 6:12). Despite His great blessings, those blessings could actually become a distraction if they allowed them to become such.

If they forgot God, He would no longer be bound by His covenant with them. So He would “*wipe [them] off the face of the earth*” (Deuteronomy 6:15).

God has richly blessed us. Every good thing we have in this life is from Him (James 1:17). Yet these blessings can distract us from serving Him (Luke 8:14) or even become an idol that rivals Him (Matthew 6:24).

So don't forget the Lord. Recognize, enjoy, use, and give thanks for the blessings He gives in life; but remember that they are only temporary. Remember the Lord and put Him first over everything in life.

–Andy Sochor

INSTITUTIONALISM

The History of the Institutional Controversy

By Jefferson David Tant | Tennessee, USA

This is a continuation of the article written by Jefferson David Tant on the history of the institutional controversy which was started in the previous editions.

What Does the Future Hold? (continued)

Even among institutional people, there has been alarm, as evidenced by a 1986 “Expression of Concern” signed by hundreds of institutional preachers. This document was specifically directed toward the teaching of theistic evolution and other concerns at Abilene Christian University but addressed several other issues.

I. We are deeply disturbed by the liberalism that is so evident in the brotherhood today. By 'liberalism' we mean especially the following items, though not excluding other specifics that could be mentioned.

A. There is drifting from the Bible-centered, definitive, distinctive doctrine that once characterized our preaching. Presently, uncertain sounds and weak messages emanate from many pulpits among us. Brethren are becoming accustomed to diluted and polluted preaching. We are rapidly approaching the point where many of our people, including preachers and elders no longer know the difference between true Christianity and the corrupted forms of it so prevalent among us.

B. There is a concerted effort on the part of some of our brethren to restructure the organization, worship, and work of the church along sectarian lines, thus tending to denominationalize the New Testament body of Christ.

C. A spirit of doctrinal compromise and fellowshiping those in blatant religious error has permeated our ranks.

D. The world has made alarming inroads into the

church. Instead of the church influencing the world for righteousness, as it should, the world has adversely affected many brethren in matters of morality and the conduct of life.

E. The typical emphasis of the denominational world on recreation, entertainment, and solving the social ills of society has been incorporated into the thinking and programs of many congregations, supplanting the God-given work of meeting the desperate spiritual needs of those born within and without the body of Christ.

No “anti” could have said it better.

We all know the story of the camel that asked to stick its nose into the Arab's tent one cold night. But it didn't stop there. The camel came in bit by bit and finally took over the whole tent. And so it is with allowing even small departures from the Biblical pattern. I time they creep in more and more until they become firmly entrenched. To reinforce the above-mentioned comments, a statement purported to be from Abilene Christian University has been circulated that is a real eye-opener.

“Dear Friends: The Abilene Christian University has taken a bold step in their 2004 Lectureship, and has clearly defined the terms for reforming Church of Christ in the 21st Century. These reforms are already being implemented in many congregations. These reforms will fundamentally change the Church of Christ as we know it. A few of the key elements of this reformation movement are as follows:

1. We should cease our elite and sectarian behavior, and ask our brethren in all denominations to forgive



our sins, especially that we said they weren't saved.

2. We must not say that we have the truth, but that we are on a spiritual journey, just as our brethren in the denominations are on their spiritual journey.

3. We should have open fellowship with all who say they believe in Jesus. We should follow the example of brave reformists who ask denominational preachers to share pulpits with their congregations. We should also share major social and religious events with our denominational brethren. We should be ecumenical in our thinking and practice, and should openly align ourselves with the current evangelical ecumenical movement.

4. We should continue to say that baptism is important, but that it is not essential for salvation. We should recognize that there are many non-immersed believers who are saved.”

Furthermore, A.C.U. recognized Max Lucado as their Outstanding Alumnus last year. This popular author preaches for the Oak Hills church in San Antonio. In recent times, that church has removed “Church of Christ” from its sign, introduced instrumental music in its worship, has exchanged pulpits with a Baptist preacher, and has built a McDonald's style playground on its property. I have material from Lucado that shows he no longer believes baptism is essential for salvation.

The aforementioned statement, reportedly from A.C.U., has been said by some to be of doubtful origin. To authenticate the document, I wrote to Royce Money, the president of A.C.U. asking about the document. He did not reply. But even if this statement was not officially issued by A.C.U., those who are familiar with the school testify that it pretty well represents what is going on there. I called a preacher in Abilene to ask him about this, and he verified that it was representative. I do not delight in mentioning

these matters, as A.C.U. is my own alma mater.

Lucado has appeared on Larry King's TV program. When asked point-blank if Lucado believed that faith in Jesus was necessary for salvation, he replied in the negative. It's hard to believe a supposed gospel preacher would make such a statement and on national TV!

One of the featured speakers at the 2005 A.C.U. Lectureship was Don Jeanes, President of Milligan College, a Christian Church school. What other denominational preachers would A.C.U. invite? Royce Money, A.C.U.'s president, was interviewed by the Christian Chronicle about this matter and made this statement: “I would fight vigorously if instrumental music were attempted to be introduced into my home congregation. I am firmly within the a cappella tradition, but I have a tolerance for those who make other choices, and I don't see that it needs to constitute a complete severing of fellowship or alienation. I just don't see the need for that.” (April 1, 2006). Notice that he said that a cappella singing was just a “tradition.” That says much!

How far have our schools gone? The Christian Scholars Conference (CSC) convened in June 2008 on the campus of David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. With support from several sister schools, e.g., Pepperdine University, Abilene Christian University, Oklahoma Christian University, and Harding University. The conference represented sixty-eight colleges and universities, along with twenty-four additional institutions.

The CSC platform affirms that it “is dedicated to the virtue of diversity which expands world-views, fosters collegiality, demonstrates the highest quality of scholarship, and provides opportunity for all Christian scholars.” One participant was a former Abilene Christian University student, Jared Cramer.



He is now with the Anglican (Episcopal) church preparing for the priesthood. On his blog, the “Reverend Cramer” (as he calls himself) emphatically declares he has abandoned the idea of “restorationism.” “I don’t believe in Restorationism or Primitivism. I just don’t. It’s not Biblical, there’s no call to it. I don’t care two bits if today’s church looks like the first-century church, and I don’t think God does.”

Cramer’s presentation was titled “One New Humanity: Reconsidering Homosexuality in Light of the Ecclesiology of Ephesians.” After examining the ecclesiology of Ephesians, this paper engages in a case study on the place of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) Christians in the Episcopal Church. The main proposition the author attempts to argue is that there is nothing “wrong about a faithful, loving, monogamous same-sex relationship.” He says, “I fail to see what it is about homosexuality that declares it as inherently evil” [“Homosexuality: But Why?”].

It is hard to imagine a more egregious affront to the Bible and morality than for these so-called “Christian” schools to participate in, and thus endorse, an apostate’s attempt to clean up homosexuality and make it acceptable. This is “political correctness” gone amok. This was not a surprise to the participating schools, as Cramer had presented his position as a thesis at ACU in 2006, and his topic was printed in the program for the conference at Lipscomb.

Further evidence of Lipscomb’s drift was seen in the January-April issue of *Wineskins*. Gary Holloway, a Bible teacher at DLC, wrote: “My own experience teaching in a university where 70% of the students are from a cappella Churches of Christ confirms this cultural shift away from the importance of denominational labels to a deep concern for relational

and spiritual union. It is not unusual in a typical week for our students to attend a Monday night instrumental praise worship at a local Church of Christ, a Tuesday night ecumenical teaching session at First Baptist downtown, a Wednesday night church at a fairly traditional Church of Christ, and a Thursday night Taize worship at a Presbyterian church — all before going home on the weekend to their parents’ Church of Christ where many think we are the only Christians!” Professor Holloway goes on to say that “Many of us cannot deny that there are many devout Christians who are unimmersed.”

Mike Williams, a teacher of freshman Bible at DLC, delivered a sermon at Fourth Ave. Church of Christ on March 15, 2006, titled “Baptism and Christian Unity.”

“We need to view baptism in the context of God’s story, God seeks our hearts more than right ritual...” In the sermon, he spoke of three categories — those baptized into a denomination, those sprinkled, and those who have never been “baptized” at all. He warned his listeners to “avoid the proof-text approach,” and to “avoid pattern theology.” “We welcome all believers in Christ.” Well, what about the unimmersed — “perhaps sprinkled ... If they choose not to be immersed, we welcome them on the journey as part of the family ... What about those who have never been baptized?... And so, for those who have never been baptized, we welcome the opportunity to study with you about the beauty and significance of baptism, yet we will also welcome you...”

“The Great Communion” was held on October 4, 2009, in an effort to promote unity between Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ, and churches of Christ. Moody Coliseum at A.C.U. was the site of one of these meetings. In preparation for the Lord’s Supper, a choir sang with instrumental music. ACU’s president,



Royce Money, participated in the service. David Fleer of Lipscomb University spoke at a similar service in Nashville. The closing prayer was led by Rhonda Lowry, wife of DLU's president Randy Lowry. A closing song was sung by a group from the Disciples of Christ. This French-speaking African-American group used bongo drums as accompaniment.

Unsuspecting parents send their children to these schools thinking they are safer than public universities. Perhaps their motto should be: "Give us your children. We will destroy their faith and show them how ignorant their parents are."

I have seen many liberal trends through the years in the bulletins and journals I get from institutional churches. Bar-B-Q dinners and clowns with a charge for admission. Christmas pageants with instrumental music. Million-dollar gymnasiums and coffee shop facilities. Fashion shows in church buildings with an admission fee charged (Manhattan Church of Christ - \$15 admission). Pulpit exchanges with denominational preachers. Women take leading roles in worship assemblies. A survey was cited by the Christian Chronicle showing that 90% of the young people in institutional churches see nothing wrong with instrumental music in worship. Thus, in the next generation, when the old folks die off, its use will not even be questioned and the pianos will be moved in without controversy.

The White Station church in Memphis has opened a coffee shop, which is to be used for social activities, birthday parties, card games, etc. Some churches are hosting "Christian Rock Bands" and charging for admission. Others build family life centers, with basketball, shuffleboard, and yoga facilities. The claim is, "If you don't provide this, the young people won't come. So, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." A church in Birmingham has a dance teacher on staff to teach

dance to kids and adults.

Golf, anyone? The Hillcrest Church of Christ in Decatur, Georgia, has hosted its "First Annual Golf Tournament" (8/6/10). Participation was \$100. Perhaps their contributions were too low to fund all the projects of the church, so why not a big fundraiser? It is happening in more and more churches throughout the land. "On Saturday, Feb. 10, 2007, the Richland Hills Church of Christ will begin holding a weekly Saturday evening worship service that will include the use of musical instruments in worship and an observance of the Lord's Supper. Jon Jones (the former pulpit minister and one of the elders) said that the elders 'fully and completely' endorsed the decision. At an adult Bible study, he said, 'There is unity in our eldership, and we are so thankful for that.'" This church has 24 "ministers," and five of them are women.

On the TV program, "In Search of the Lord's Way," Mack Lyon spoke of the problem of women in leadership roles in churches. Many voiced strong protests to his words. One woman wrote, "God help us. This message is from Churches of Christ." She was upset that the TV audience might think this represented the church at large. She went on to say, "I couldn't disagree more with his message. And yet people in Abilene hear that it's from Churches of Christ. Pretty soon, they'll all be dead, including Mack Lyon, and the problem of traditional CoC'ers will snuff itself out."

Mike Cope, a preacher at Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, and a teacher at A.C.U. wrote, "Of course, I think this brother (Mack Lyon—jdt) is wrong. Way wrong. I'm becoming more and more convinced that only time will take care of this." This church is the sponsor of the national Herald of Truth radio and TV program.

Myth Buster

The Devil Made Me Do It

Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

Introduction

When some Christians are found in the act of sin, they sometimes say “The devil made me do it”. This phrase serves as a way to shift responsibility for wrongdoing. Does the devil make us sin? We will examine the validity of this claim by searching the scriptures.

The Nature of Temptation

The scriptures took great care to explain the concept of temptation and one of the foremost passages we can find is in James chapter 1 verses 12 – 15 “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But *each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed*. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”. From this passage, it is clear that temptation is not solely attributed to external influence from Satan but is also understood as a consequence of human frailty. The temptation of Jesus in Matthew chapter 4 exemplifies this truth. Jesus didn't fall into sin because He was not drawn away by His desires and enticed. Also, Joseph faced temptation from Potiphar's wife and yet refused to succumb to it at a grave personal cost (Gen 39:7-20).

Christians can exercise discernment and resist their immoral tendencies even in the face of temptation. This fundamental freedom encompasses the Christian's call to be separate from the world. Although the Scripture portrays Satan as a powerful adversary, it is frequently misunderstood how much of an impact he has on human behavior. Unlike what is

commonly believed, Satan cannot force people to sin against their will; instead, his strategies mostly consist of trickery and manipulation. Satan tries to entice people away from God's will by twisting the truth and playing on human frailties. This is no different from what the Devil did in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 1-7). The devil didn't *make* Eve eat the fruit, as we see in verse 6: “*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desired to make one wise, she took it and did eat, and also gave it to her husband with her and he did eat*”. We see that despite the Devil's approach to Eve, it was only when she was drawn away by her desires that she ate of the tree. Moreover, the Bible states clearly that Christians are strong enough in Christ to thwart the enemy's plans.

The Blame Game

Shifting blame is a tendency of humans that was clearly expressed on the occasion of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed Eve, while Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:11-13). However, God is not interested in blame games and held Adam and Eve accountable for their action. Besides, attributing our wrongdoings to the influence of the devil seeks to absolve us of individual responsibility and inhibits our spiritual growth in the face of sin. Rather than falling into excuse-making and blame-sharing, Christians are encouraged to take responsibility by acknowledging their mistakes, confessing them, and seeking forgiveness from God.

Overcoming Temptation

Regarding temptation, the scriptures provide great comfort for Christians as we constantly face this battle. The life of Jesus highlights the possibility of

Christians overcoming sin. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus “*was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*” That’s why He was able to say to us “*Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). Additionally, 1 Cor. 10:13 says “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; *he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*” Overcoming temptation is by no means an easy task but God has provided us with the advantage we need to succeed. We can overcome temptations through the following means:

- 1. Flee Temptation:** Most times, the best way to overcome temptations is to flee from it. When Joseph was faced with temptation from Potiphar's wife, he had to flee from the spot (Gen. 39:12). As 2 Tim. 2:22 says “*Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart*” (2 Timothy 2:22).
- 2. Resist the Devil:** We are to make constant effort to resist the devil when he comes to tempt us. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Jesus laid a good example for us in this regard. Each time Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He responded by using God's Word as a weapon. He said, “*It is written...*” or “*It has been said...*” So, when we are faced with temptations, we can also employ the tactic used by Jesus.
- 3. Don't Love the World:** Since we give in to temptations when we are enticed and drawn away by our desires, we are to make an effort to not make the things of the world the center of

our desires. 1 John 2:15 says “Do not love the world or the things in the world...” (1 John 2:15). When we amend our desires and make them spiritually inclined, we will easily be able to overcome temptation.

Conclusion

Christians need to realize that the devil's influence over our actions is limited. Instead of engaging in blame games, we are to take responsibility for our actions and make conscious decisions to live and maintain a righteous Christian life. We can do this by leveraging on the power God has given us to overcome temptation.

GOD'S PLAN CONTINUES

The book of Deuteronomy closes with the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5). He played a vital role in God's plan to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage and into the promised land. He was the main character throughout the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy.

God showed Moses all of the promised land from the top of Pisgah (Deuteronomy 34:1-3). God then restated His promise that He would give the land to Abraham's descendants (Deuteronomy 34:4). Yet Moses, despite all the good he had done, would not lead them in; instead, he died there.

God's promise would be fulfilled, but it was not dependent upon Moses. Even now, God's promises will be fulfilled, but they are not dependent upon anyone.

Regardless of what any of us do, God will fulfill His purpose. Jesus already died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead. He will return one day to judge the world and save the faithful.

We cannot stop God's plan. All we can do is be part of His people and do His will, just as Moses did.

So remember that God's plan continues. Whether we live to see it or not, God will fulfill all of His promises. Let us not think too highly of ourselves and our perceived importance; instead, let us humbly serve the Lord.

—Andy Sochor

IDEAL HOME

Twelve Commandments For Husbands

James E. Cooper

The fundamental responsibility for love in the home does not rest upon the wife. Yes, of course, she should show love, but the primary responsibility falls upon the husband. You see, husbands, you are commanded to love your wife as Christ loves His Church. Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). Paul uses the Greek word *agape*, which indicates a self-sacrificial disposition, an attitude that will act on behalf of what she needs rather than what he desires. A husband who loves his wife "as Christ loved the church" will look after her best interests, and will take proper care of her for her sake alone.

Christ did not love us because we were already lovable. Instead, He loved us when we were sinners – when we were rebellious and vile and loathsome creatures in His sight – and gave Himself for us. Why? Not because of what we were, but because of what He wanted us to become! He wanted us to be "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but (that it should be) holy and without blemish" (verse 26). Our love for Him is in response to His prior love, "We love because He first loved us" (I John 4:19).

The husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church (Ephesians 4:23). God placed the husband as the head of the home, but with that position comes responsibility. Too many husbands act as though they believe that being head over the wife gives them the dictate, or perhaps even to abuse them. To them, "love" is something they receive, but not something they give. But, husband, you are commanded to love. A command is something you intentionally obey. You, therefore, are responsible for initiating love. You do that with purpose of heart by

giving. You must give your time, your interest, your money, and above all else, yourself!

I cannot claim credit for the following twelve points; they were written several years ago by Reuel Lemmons (I saw them in PULPIT HELPS). I have expanded and added Scriptures and my comments. We hope that each husband will give serious thought to these commandments, and fulfill your responsibilities as a godly husband to your wife. To love your wife "just as Christ loved the church" is not only your Christian duty, but it is also the pathway to increased emotional, physical and spiritual benefits to yourself, your family, and to the family of God.

1. Thou shalt love thy wife and make of thy marriage an exclusive relationship so that thy wife shall never have occasion to doubt thy love nor occasion for jealousy or lack of trust. In the beginning God united the first man and woman, and established the marriage arrangement. He decreed that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). In discussion with the Pharisees about divorce and remarriage, Jesus referred to God's original purpose for marriage and concluded, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate (Mark 10:9; Matthew 19:6b). All of God's law, including a monogamous marriage relationship, were "for man's good" (cf. Deuteronomy 6:24; 10:12-13). When a husband is committed to love his wife just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it," he will never give her an occasion for jealousy or lack of trust.

2. Although thou shalt never completely understand her, thou shalt make a life-time effort to understand thy wife.



Peter devotes six verses to exhort Christian wives to be in submission to even unbelieving husbands. Her spiritual beauty might enable her to win her husband to Christ. But husbands were not left out. He said, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (I Peter 3:7). Peter does not actually say that the wife is a weaker person than the husband. In fact, in many ways, women may be stronger than men. What Peter says is that he should "give honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel." Value her and be gentle with her: treat her as you would your most prized possession. You may never understand everything, but you should make it your life-long purpose to understand her emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual needs, and do your very best to treat her with utmost honor and respect.

3. Thou shalt talk with thy wife when thou comest home from thy work, when thou sittest in thine house, when thou liest down and when thou risest up. Thou shalt even at times turn off the TV to assure her she is more cherished than thy favorite TV program.

Your wife is not a piece of furniture. You talked with her when you were courting, didn't you? You wanted to know what she thought and how she felt. She came to love you because you were interested in her ideas and feelings. Keep the lines of communication open, and "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2). Christ sacrificed His life for you; can't you sacrifice a little time for the "wife of your youth"? She may be starving for a little attention, but you come in and flop in your easy chair, take the remote in hand, start "surfing the

channels" and ignore her. Give her your time and attention. She will bless you for it.

4. Thou shalt not talk down to, nor belittle, nor use sarcasm and ridicule toward her, for her sense of self-worth is much dependent upon your appreciation of her.

Some husbands seem to forget that Scripture when it comes to their wives. They abuse them mentally, if not physically. They make their wives feel lower than dirt, and then expect them to be affectionate toward them. Paul describes how true love [the agape kind] behaves itself: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (I Corinthians 13:4-7). In all relationships Christians should "do all things without complaining and disputing" (Philippians 2:14). This includes the home as well as the church. Husband and wife should "be kindly affectionate to one another..., in honor giving preference to one another" (cf. Romans 12:10).

5. Thou shalt listen to thy wife, asking for her advice and opinions, recognizing her mental abilities and talents.

Believe it or not, your wife may sometimes have ideas better than your own. She may see dangers, or opportunities, that you have not recognized. The virtuous wife was a woman of good judgment, both in business and home affairs. Her husband could and did "safely trust in her" (Proverbs 31:11). Because of her industry and good judgment, he was "known in the gates" (31:23), a leader in his community. She "opened her mouth with wisdom" (31:26). No wonder he praised her saying, "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all" (31:29). A man who truly loves



his wife will not "behave rudely" toward her; insisting on having his own way in everything, and he will not be offended if she offers some sage advice from time to time (cf. I Corinthians 13:5).

6. Thou shalt not lord it over thy wife, recognizing the two of you are equal before God and that leadership in the home does not mean dictatorship. Nor does it mean being waited on nor having the best piece of chicken; it means moral, financial and spiritual responsibilities.

Have you ever noticed that immediately before telling wives to submit to their own husbands are the words, "submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). There is a sense in which husbands are to submit to their wives. They are to submit themselves to her needs, treating her with dignity and respect. God did not give him the arbitrary authority of a dictator. He gave him the responsibility of loving his wife "as himself." In Christ "there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Her relationship with God stands on the same basis as his. She does not come to God through her husband, but directly on her own obedient faith. He is to love her, and not be "bitter" toward her (Colossians 3:19).

7. Thou shalt see that thy wife is thy best friend; thou shalt share affection and confidences with thy wife and long to be in her presence.

Life is filled with all many things that are "vanity and vexation of spirit, a striving after the wind." The wise man concluded that a man should "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

8. Thou shalt help thy wife in all those ways that sacrificial love would help, giving her of thy time, money, attention and affection (yea, even washing

the dishes as needed).

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). Should not a husband help to bear his share of the burdens? There may be times when he has to share 90% of the load, but there will be other times when she has the heavier burden. The secret here is for each to look out for the best interests of the other. The husband who expects his wife to bear all the burdens has a mistaken concept of what being a Christian husband should be.

9. Thou shalt accept thy wife as she is; thou shalt not expect perfection, but forgiving her mistakes and confessing thine own to her.

Some couples marry, with each expecting to make the other over in his or her own image. Unrealistic expectations lead to disappointments. If you "dwell with her with understanding," you will come to know her strengths and weaknesses, and she will know yours. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

10. Thou shalt practice tenderness as an essential emotion, realizing that sex is a gift of God which expresses and enhances love. Sex is giving joy as well as receiving it. Selfishness erodes sexual joy.

God intended for "each man to have his own wife" and "each woman to have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). One purpose for marriage is to "avoid fornication," and provide for the sexual enjoyment and satisfaction of both husband and wife. In order to accomplish that end, the husband is to "render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (7:3, NKJ). Paul reminds us that "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (I Corinthians 7:4). The



husband who loves his own wife as his "own body" will be as concerned about her as he is about himself (cf. Ephesians 5:28).

Depriving "the affection due" one's mate as a form of punishment for offenses, imagined or real, is contrary to the principle of marital love found in the Scriptures.

11. Thou shalt in some way each day show thy wife that "I need you," that "I appreciate you," and that "I want to help you."

God did not intend for man to be alone. He provided Eve to provide that companionship for Adam. He realized that every man needs a companion, and established the marriage relationship. Each needs the other. The husband who by word and deed shows that he loves and appreciates his wife, and wants to look after her interests and needs will be rewarded with reciprocal expressions of need and appreciation. Little things count a lot.

12. And, should thy marriage become trying and seemingly an endurance contest, thou shalt not give up.

Try as one might, circumstances sometimes arise that makes a marriage difficult. If you have the misfortune to be in such a marriage, thou shalt "bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things" (I Corinthians 13:7). Continue to "love your wife as Christ loved the church," and strive in every way you can to show her that your love is that sacrificial kind which looks out for her welfare. If anyone gives up, let it not be you. As Churchill said when encouraging Britain to persevere during World War II, "Never give up. Never, Ever, Give Up!"

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WRITE DOWN GOD'S WORD

God knew the Israelites would one day have a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-15). So He gave instructions regarding the man who would rule over them (Deuteronomy 17:16-17).

One thing the king was to do was write down his own copy of God's law (Deuteronomy 17:18). This would make it accessible – since it would be "*with him*" he could "*read it all the days of his life*" (Deuteronomy 17:19). This would allow him to learn it and, therefore, obey it (Deuteronomy 17:19). Doing all of this would also keep him humble so that "*his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen*" (Deuteronomy 17:20).

God's word is much more accessible to us today. Yet this practice of writing down God's word is something to consider.

We need the benefits the king would derive from this exercise –the word of God readily available to us, knowledge of God's word leading to personal application and obedience, and humility in light of its teaching.

Writing down (copying by hand) God's word can be a way to do these things. Therefore, this can be a worthwhile exercise. Yet regardless of whether we are engaged in this specific activity or not, we need God's word so we can gain knowledge, obedience, and humility from it.

So write down God's law. Try this as a helpful exercise – you will likely benefit more than you think. But in everything, exercise humility, grow in knowledge of God's word, and obey Him in all things.

–Andy Sochor

Salvation

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

James E. Cooper

What must I do to be saved?" is a question that carries with it a definite implication: namely, that a man is lost – without God and without hope in the world. It appears in the book of Acts, with slight differences in wording, at least three times. The Jews who heard Peter's sermon on Pentecost were "pricked in their heart, and said... Brethren, what shall we do?" and received an answer. Saul of Tarsus, on the Damascus road, said: "What shall I do, Lord?" and was told to go into the city where he would be told what he must do. He was approached by Ananias and told what to do. When the Philippian jailor asked the question of Paul and Silas, he received an answer (Acts 2:37-38; 22:10-16; 16:30-31). The answer they received is not always the answer men get when the question is asked today.

Think About The Question

Let us think about the question itself. It is a very *personal* question. It is not a matter of what God must do, or what Christ must do in order for me to be saved. It is a question of *what I must do*.

It is also a very *practical* question. It is not a question about what I must feel, or think, or say. It is a question of what I must do. Becoming a Christian and living the Christian life requires activity; it requires *doing*. Jesus said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

It is also a question that *recognizes the imperative*. It is not a question of what I *may* do, but one of what I *must* do to be saved. Each of the three examples cited in the beginning of this article recognizes that one *must* do something in order to be saved. The word *must* is often used in the Bible. One must be born

again (John 3:7). He must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Saul would be told what he must do (Acts 9:6). And we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (II Corinthians 5:10). Yes, there are many things we must do.

Finally, the question is one of *vital importance* to us. It has to do with the eternal destiny of our souls. If we are not saved, we shall remain lost – separated from God because of our sins, and doomed to an eternal hell. If we are saved, we are saved from the guilt of sin, and from the punishment justly due sin. We shall be in fellowship with God in this life and enjoy the hope of eternal life with Him in heaven.

What Do Men Say?

Men often tell us that there is nothing for us to do in order to be saved. They say this because of various philosophical reasons.

The atheist not only rejects the idea of God, he also says there is no such thing as sin, no heaven and no hell; hence, there is no salvation, and nothing to do. The universalist says that all men will be saved unconditionally, and therefore there is nothing that one must do. The Calvinist says that if you are one of God's elect, you are already saved; if you are not one of the Elect, you are doomed, unconditionally, and there is nothing you can do about it. The faith alone theorist says that all you have to do is "just believe" there is actually nothing to do - just believe.

What Does The Saviour Say?

Jesus Christ came "to save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), and in none other is there salvation (Acts 4:12). He had the "words of eternal life" (John 6:68). He delivered God's Word to the apostles when on earth (John 17:8, 14), and after His resurrection



sent the Holy Spirit to them to bring to their remembrance what He had spoken (John 16:12-14; 14:26). Therefore, we can know what the Saviour's answers to the questions are, not only by reading the red "letters" in our Testaments, but also by reading what the apostles taught.

After Jesus shed His blood for the remission of our sins, and was buried and raised from the grave, He sent His apostles forth to preach the gospel, saying: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16). "Repentance and remission of sins" was to be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Hence, when we find the apostles and other inspired teachers answering the question, "What must I do to be saved?," we know that they were acting under instructions from the Saviour.

The specific words used in answer to the question on the three occasions formerly mentioned are slightly different – because the persons asking the questions were at different points along the road to salvation. But the answers are all consistent with the Lord's commission and statements to the apostles.

When the Philippian jailor asked the question, he was an unbeliever, and was told to "believe on the Lord Jesus, and ... be saved" (Acts 16:31). Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), Paul and Silas next "spake the Word of the Lord unto him.." (Acts 16:32). He then took them and "washed their stripes, and was baptized ... and rejoiced greatly ... having believed in God" (Acts 16:33-34).

When the people on Pentecost asked "What shall we do?" they were already believers. They had heard the gospel preached by Peter and the rest of the apostles, and were pricked in their hearts as a result of what they had heard. Peter answered, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). The KJV

reads: "for the remission of your sins." Hence, they believed, repented and were baptized for the remission of their sins.

When Saul of Tarsus was approached by Ananias, he was already a penitent believer, as evidenced by his conduct. Hence, he was told to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16).

Christians do not live sinlessly perfect lives, but Christ's blood takes away those sins also. One is not commanded to believe, repent and be baptized, for he has already done these and has become a child of God. As an erring child of God who sins, one is to confess his sins and pray for God's forgiveness (I John 1;8-9; Acts 8:22).

Have you been saved from your sins? Are you now saved? Do you stand before God with your sins forgiven? If not, why don't you obey the Lord's commands today? ***Be saved... today!***

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SALVATION

The Providence of God and Miracles

Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

Introduction

It is a common teaching among the Pentecostals that miracles exist today. Often, we hear of various claims among different churches about certain miracles that were performed. Sadly, even among some members of the churches of Christ, there seem to be those who believe this view. Some brethren have been advocating that God is still performing miracles as He did in the first century. Recently, a church of Christ in Lagos, Nigeria organized an all-night special prayer. It was reported that certain preachers conducted deliverance sessions for people with all kinds of spiritual problems. As I write this article, I have in my possession a flyer by a congregation of the Lord's church (church of Christ 44b Ligali Street) inviting people for a "Revival Night, October 2023 Edition." The theme of the Revival Night is tagged: "*Deliverance from darkness dominion of witchcraft*" (sic). It is important to state at this point that the Bible speaks of deliverance from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13) and this refers to the conversion of people from the world of sin into Christ's kingdom (the church) after they have obeyed the gospel by hearing, believing, repenting, confession of faith in Christ and baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins. The Bible teaches that the Lord adds the saved to the church after baptism (Acts 2:41, 47). This deliverance is done by God himself. So, one wonders what type of deliverance this congregation would like to do. Besides, would one imagine that they have not been properly delivered by God and so, they needed another deliverance? If the deliverance is meant for the unbelievers, does the Bible speak of anything like a special night of deliverance service? These questions

are pertinent.

The surprising thing is that when these issues were brought up to be discussed in social media groups comprising of gospel preachers, there were ministers of the gospel who defended these churches and their practice. The claim was made that anyone who says that miracles have ceased is limiting God's power. But how true is this? Indeed, without an iota of doubt, God is all-powerful and He is still alive. But He chooses how He does His work. In this writing, we are going to look into God's Word to understand certain concepts such as providence and miracles in relation to how God works today.

What is Providence?

The word "providence" can be defined as "the care or benevolent guidance of God." The dictionary defines providence as "exercising foresight; divine guidance or care; intervention." The English word comes from the Latin, "*providere*" which is made up of two words, "*pro*" (before) and "*videre*" (to see), thus "to see before" or "to foresee." The corresponding Greek word is "pronoia" (forethought). Thus, the idea "to see before," which expresses the idea of foresight and forethought, implies a future end or goal with a definite purpose and plan for sustaining that end. This word is used in Acts 24:2, not in reference to God's providence, but man's. That said, the concept of divine providence is, however, clearly taught in the Scriptures.

One problem encountered in a study of providence is the thinking of some that God can only exercise His providence through miracles. And when we say (as clearly taught in the Bible) that the age of miracles has now ceased, they assume that we are saying that God's providential care has also ceased. In so doing, they think that we are limiting God's exercise of care and



guidance to the past ages. But this is not true at all. While it is true that God sometimes used miracles to accomplish His will, on other occasions He used natural means, often unseen by man, to bring about His purpose. We must keep in mind that both the natural and the miraculous are under the control of the Creator. God, by a miracle, created the universe and then established natural laws by which it would continue. Both are expressions of His will. Both employ a supernatural source. While the supernatural means have ceased, the supernatural source in ways unseen by human eyes continues to control His universe and His people today.

Miracles

That miracles are a reality in Biblical teaching is a fact that no believer could deny. However, many individuals have a wholly inadequate view of the true nature of miracles. In general, a “miracle” can be said to be an event in the external world wrought by the immediate power of God, intended as a demonstration of His purpose and will. In Scripture, there are three terms used to define and describe the idea of a miracle. They are signs, wonders, and powers. These three terms come together in the work of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22), the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 2:4), and the Apostles (II Corinthians 12:12).

These are the kinds of miracles we read of in the Bible: a man is raised from the dead (John 11), a lame man walks instantaneously (Acts 3), blind people are given their sight immediately (Mark 10:49-52), a man's ear is attached back to his head automatically (Luke 22:50-51). But we must admit that these kinds of miracles are not happening today. Most importantly, it must be understood that the ultimate purpose of Bible miracles was to confirm the Word of God (Mark 16:17-20; Hebrews 2:1-4; John 20:30-31. See II Timothy 3:16-17 and Jude 1:3; Romans 10:17 cf.

Romans 1:16; I Corinthians 1:18).

Many today claim to have the power to perform miracles. But, when you take a look at the teaching of the Bible on miraculous spiritual gifts, I Corinthians 13:8-10 teaches without an iota of doubt that:

- Miraculous gifts (prophecy, tongues, knowledge) will stop at a certain time and will not continue forever.
- These miraculous gifts are “in part” (v.9)
- They will all be done away “when that which is perfect has come” (v.10)

A popular understanding of the “perfect” is that this is a reference to the return of Jesus. So many interpret this verse to mean that Paul is saying that miraculous spiritual gifts will continue until Jesus returns. However, there are many problems with this understanding of Paul's teaching.

First, what is the point of saying that the miraculous spiritual gifts will end at the second coming of Christ? Of course, those gifts would end! Everything is going to end at the second coming of Christ, according to 1 Corinthians 15:23-24.

Second, what is the point of saying that right now we cannot know all of God's will but when Christ returns, we will know fully? Again, this is not helpful, especially to these first-century Christians who are arguing over spiritual gifts.

Third, Paul says that three things will remain: faith, hope, and love (verse 13). But faith and hope cannot remain after the Second Coming of Christ. The scriptures are very clear that hope that is seen is not hope (Romans 8:24). No one hopes for what he sees. Hope is necessary until we are joined with Christ. Hope will not remain after the second coming. Further, faith will not remain either. The writer of Hebrews teaches that faith is the evidence of things **not seen** (Hebrews 11:1). There is no need for faith in



Christ when we are gathered at home with Him. So, Paul is describing a time after the ending of spiritual gifts when faith, hope, and love will remain.

Also, many jump to verse 12 and state that we have not seen God face to face. Therefore, Paul is talking about the second coming when we will see God face to face. But this is not what Paul says if we carefully read it. The text does not say *we will see God face to face*. Paul simply says that we will see clearly like being face to face, rather than dimly.

Since the partial refers to the limited knowledge and information the Christians had in the first century through the spiritual gifts, the most natural understanding of “the perfect” is a time when that knowledge would be complete and no longer limited. Thus, the perfect is the complete Word of God. James calls it the “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25).

However, it must be emphasized that saying that miraculous gifts have ceased is not to say that we do not believe in the power of God or prayer. We believe God can heal people through prayer and providence (James 5:13-15). In His time and way, God will heal people, but people no longer have the power to do biblical miracles. Why is it that not one miracle worker can go down to the cemetery today and raise a dead person? Because that power no longer exists for us!

How God Works Today

Today, God does not use miracles to work (I Corinthians 13:8). He has told us to ask in prayer what we need and he would hear us (I John 5:14). Those who are sick should pray (James 5: 13-15) The truth is: modern-day miracles are fake because there are no genuine miracles happening today. In a day and age when all people can seem to think about is miracles and the Holy Spirit, maybe we should start turning our attention to the product of the Holy

Spirit—The Word of God (John 16:13). Instead of getting in a fizzle about miracles today, Christians need to be fired up for the Words of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 20:9). May God help us to study to show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15).

WE NEED DAILY REMINDERS

The Israelites were to “*always*” keep God's commandments (Deuteronomy 11:1). If they would obey, God would bless them (Deuteronomy 11:8-15). But if they turned away from God, they would perish (Deuteronomy 11:16-17).

Therefore, they needed to keep God's law at the forefront of their minds. God provided instructions that would help them do this: “*You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*” (Deuteronomy 11:18-20).

God's word would be impressed upon their hearts by teaching their children, by talking about it, and by writing visual reminders for themselves.

We also need to be reminded regularly of God's word. As was the case for the Israelites, there are consequences for obedience and disobedience. The Lord offers salvation for those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9) and punishment for those who disobey (Romans 6:23).

It is good and necessary to read and study God's word, but we need to keep it in our minds at other times as well. We can do this by teaching it, talking about it, writing it, and seeing it.

So we need daily reminders. Life is filled with distractions that draw our attention away from God and His word. Let us strive to keep God's word at the forefront of our minds.

—Andy Sochor

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question:

What is meant by a new heaven and a new earth? And what is meant by a war in heaven?

Answer:

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea" (Revelation 21:1).

The first heaven and earth refer to where mankind currently dwells. This world is destined for destruction.

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (II Peter 3:10-13).

Thus the new heaven and new earth are the replacement of the first. It is the new place God is preparing for His people to dwell. *"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).* In other words, the new heaven and new earth is a reference to heaven.

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was

cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7-9).

It means there was a conflict in heaven between those following Satan and those following God -- and Satan and his followers lost.

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Source: <https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/what-is-meant-by-a-new-heaven-and-a-new-earth/>

GET EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE

The latter half of Deuteronomy 27 contains instructions about what was to be done when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the promised land. They would assemble on two facing mountains and the Levites would recite several curses (Deuteronomy 27:11-14).

For each curse, the steps would be repeated. The Levites would recite a curse, such as, *"Cursed is the man who makes an idol..."* (Deuteronomy 27:15). Immediately after each curse, they were instructed, *"And all the people shall say, 'Amen'"* (Deuteronomy 27:15-26). The people would acknowledge and agree to each statement.

It was important that everyone was gathered together so that everyone would be "on the same page." No one would be left out or be uninformed. All would be in agreement.

For people to be able to function together, they need to be on the same page – have the same rules; understand their responsibilities; and be committed to obey, follow, and cooperate. This can apply in many areas of life (in the home, at the workplace, in society, etc.). It is especially applicable to our service to God. We must all be in agreement and following the same standard. We are not just to do this in word, but also in deed, just as the final curse stated, *"Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them"* (Deuteronomy 27:26). It is one thing to affirm one's agreement to a statement; it is another to follow it.

So get everyone on the same page. We are all under God's law – a perfect standard. That must be our basis for agreement and the foundation of our common commitment.

–Andy Sochor

Addendum

Ignoring Our Differences: A Hurdle in Achieving Unity

Dylan Stewart | Alabama, USA

We must never desire to maintain a false picture of unity where disagreements are never voiced or explored, nor should we ever sacrifice the truth for the sake of unity.

In John 17, we can find Jesus' prayer for unity. During that prayer, Jesus said, *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me"* (v.20-23). In trying to become *"perfect in one"* as Jesus prayed, we face many hurdles. However, what I believe is the greatest hurdle to unity and is the hurdle I think is most visible in the church today is the fact that **too many Christians would rather ignore our differences rather than work through them in order to achieve real unity.** The problem with this, of course, is that unity does not happen unless we recognize and work through our differences!

While most denominational people are so committed to achieving unity that they compromise God's Word in order to attain what they perceive to be unity, I am afraid a great number of Christians are so committed to what they believe is biblical unity (which is really only a facade of unity) that they refuse to discuss differences they have with each other out of a fear of being outcast and ostracized or causing divisions. Yet, several passages in the Bible tell us that adherence to and proper stands for the truth will cause divisions. In fact, during His earthly ministry, Jesus flatly stated that His gospel would divide people: *"Do you suppose*

that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Luke 12:51-53). Furthermore, when you really think about it, wherever Jesus went division often came with Him. Consider John's gospel account, where we can read of various divisions Christ caused by proclaiming His truth:

- *Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him* (John 7:40-43).
- *Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them* (John 9:16).
- *Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings* (John 10:19).

Similarly, in Acts 15, Luke records multiple debates between Christians trying to settle their differences/divisions. One division was over doctrine,



i.e. circumcision (v.1-21), and another division was over Barnabas' desire to bring back John Mark (v.36-41), which the Bible describes as a "*sharp*" dissension between Paul and Barnabas. Most notably, Paul told the Corinthians, "*For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you*" (1 Corinthians 11:18-19). Here, Paul says there "*must*" be divisions and factions among believers because these disagreements will show forth the people who are "*approved*" and, thus, "*recognized*" by God as faithful servants. If we desire unity as we ought, it must be unity in the truth, not in something that creates a false image of unity. True unity (unity in God's truth) is only achieved when we all remember there is only one truth and we make it our aim to remain faithful to it. This means we must continually abide in God's word and stand for the truth on every Bible topic in order to be set free from sin (see John 8:31-32), not just the topics in which we are already unified. This requires us to actually discuss and not ignore differences we may have among brethren. After all, when our brother/sister believes or says something about a Bible matter that we disagree with and we do not speak up, then it is rather difficult to "*be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Corinthians 1:10), isn't it?

To be clear, we all should be "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:3). We should never go about voicing our differences in an argumentative, hateful, or abrasive manner (see Ephesians 4:12). However, we must never desire to maintain a false picture of unity where disagreements are never voiced or explored, nor

should we ever sacrifice the truth for the sake of unity. The Bible tells us that the first-century Christians "*were of one heart*" (Acts 4:32). How can we possibly be of one heart today if we **choose** to ignore our differences as they pertain to Bible matters and truth?

FOCUS ON WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

After reminding the Israelites of God's covenant with them, Moses mentioned things that were secret and things that were revealed: "*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law*" (Deuteronomy 29:29). When it comes to God's wisdom and understanding, some of it has been made known; some has not.

We can know certain things about God from the natural world. He is the Creator. His creation contains evidence for Him (cf. Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20).

Yet nature does not reveal God's will for us or the instructions on how we can please Him. These are revealed in His word. The Israelites received this message in the Law of Moses. It did not answer every question they might have, but it showed them what they needed to know so they could obey God's law.

We might have many questions about the world around us, the past, the future, and so on. Some questions are beyond the scope of what God has revealed. Rather than spend our time on speculation and opinionism, we need to see what God has actually revealed and commit to doing His will.

So focus on what the Bible says. God hasn't revealed everything He knows, but everything we need to know. Let us spend time with God's word so we can follow it as He desires us to do.

—Andy Sochor