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Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

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"They might have come if they had chosen, but they would not. So all the difficulty that sinners ever labour under in regard to salvation is in the will. It is a fixed determination not to come and be saved" (comment by Albert Barnes [1798-1870], Presbyterian scholar, on Matthew 22:3).

"...even in our democratic age you do not come into the presence of royalty heedlessly. You must be coached in the proprieties of dress and conduct. That is true many times over for those who propose to stand in the presence of the living God. One must clothe himself in the submissive spirit of reverential awe if he proposes to eat bread in the heavenly kingdom" (Paul Earnhart, **Glimpses of Eternity**, 120)

"Blessed indeed are those who 'eat bread in the kingdom of God' (Luke 14:15) but woe to the man who thinks he will sit down at that table not having loved heaven's kingdom above all else." (Paul Earnhart, **Glimpses of Eternity**, 124)

VISIT ORPHANS AND WIDOWS

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

God requires that His people care for the poor and helpless (James 1:26-27). There is an order of responsibility. We must support our aged parents when they cannot support themselves, and a contribution to the church cannot meet this obligation (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13; Ephesians 6:2-3). We as individuals have an obligation to

care for widows and orphans who are kin to us which we cannot push off onto the church (1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16). Whereas the local church is only authorized to give benevolent aid to needy Christians (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-4; Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 13-15; 9:1, 12-13; 1 Timothy 5:3, 10, 16), if a Christian has widows or orphans kin to him and needs help to support them, the church can assist him (1 Timothy 5:8; Acts 4:34-35). Christ has given the local congregation elders to rule (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 5:17), deacons to administer (Philippians 1:1), and a treasury to supply funds (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) - everything needed to do all its own benevolent work (Acts 6:1-4). Organizations receiving donations from the church to do the benevolent work the Lord assigned to individual Christians or to the local church are both unneeded and unauthorized (2 John verse 9-11).

QUESTION FROM AMERICAN SAMOA ABOUT ECCLESIASTES 7:15-22

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Question

Last night this verse was brought up in class suggesting that we shouldn't try so hard to be righteous. You have any thoughts on this?

Answer

First a general remark on Ecclesiastes helps set the context. Solomon set himself to "see what was good for the sons of men to do under the heaven all the days of their lives" (2:3). The phrases "under the sun" (1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 12; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5) and "under heaven" (1:13; 2:3; 3:1) are used in Ecclesiastes to refer to life here and now, upon this earth, in contrast with eternity, or life after death. Thus, Solomon does not really address himself to the question of eternal salvation. The book of Ecclesiastes answers the question, How can I live the good life upon this earth?

Verse 20 also helps us see the wise man's point. "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." We cannot rely on our own sinlessness to gain us advantages in life, simply because none of us is sinless (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). It is interesting that wise Solomon is the earliest biblical writer to state this fundamental fact (1 Kings 8:46).

What he witnessed was a reversal of what traditional wisdom taught; the righteous die early and the wicked live a long life! In other words, life does not always turn out the way it is supposed to...

...The point is that neither the righteous nor the wicked hold privileged positions in this life. A person profits from neither extreme. The individual who practices excessive righteousness is the one who trusts in his goodness to get him through life... the excessively righteous person is the one who does not admit mistakes (v 20).

On the other hand, do not come from the perspective of the wicked, thinking that your wickedness will get you anywhere... Instead the proper perspective is to acknowledge human limitations... The only course to follow is reverence toward God. (Dave Bland, **The College Press NIV Commentary Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs.** 357)

Verse 21-22 is a specific example. Do not be outraged if you hear someone speak evil of you. Use it as an opportunity for self assessment. How many times have you spoken evil of others?

In short don't trust in your own righteousness for success in life. In the first place none of us is without sin. But don't turn to wicked schemes for success either. Both trusting in our own goodness and resorting to wickedness can destroy us. And life is not always fair. Rather, fear God.

QUESTION FROM TEXAS ABOUT THE USE OF A YOUNG MAN IN THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Question

Hi Keith, I have a question. We are a very small congregation (11 of us) here... We have only one young man 22 yrs or so. He has very long hair and has asked if he could start to help waiting on the Lord's table and helping out in the services. Should [NAME REMOVED] and the preacher talk with him first about cutting his hair or just let him do it?? We have mentioned to him before about cutting his hair and he said no. Another thing, since we are such a small group [NAME REMOVED] asked us all to sit on one side of the auditorium, we all did but he didn't. He refuses to. Help!!!

Answer

I appreciate the confidence you show in me by asking me this difficult question. First, I would put this in the realm of opinion and would not bind my judgment. Of course, the passage that deals with men wearing long hair is 1 Corinthians 11:14. This is part of the longer passage (1 Corinthians 11:2-16) dealing with the woman's head covering. I believe Paul places both these issues in the realm of "custom" (verse 16). The word "nature" in verse 14 is used in the same way it is in Romans 2:14 and Ephesians 2:3 - long, customary practice. He is not establishing a universal law for women to wear long hair and an artificial head covering, and he is not establishing a universal law for men to wear short hair.. However, both of these may have spiritual significance. Some, not all, young men wear long hair as a symbol of their rebellion against their more conservative elders. Such young men need to learn to submit to their elders in matters of judgment (1 Peter 5:5). The fact he refuses to sit where all the others do indicates a rebellious attitude. More than likely his long hair would be offensive to some in the congregation and to some visitors. He needs to learn to be sensitive to social customs so as to not be offensive (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). I would not use him publicly until he learns to submit to his elders and to be inoffensive in matters of judgment.

QUESTION FROM CONWAY, ARKANSAS ON THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Question

Please help me understand Hebrews 5:8-9 and answer the following questions? I would like your thoughts on the meaning of this passage.

1. What does it mean that Jesus learned obedience by things which he suffered?

2. What does the word perfect mean in v 9?
3. what does it mean that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation?

Answer

In Hebrews 5:1-10, the inspired writer shows why Jesus is qualified to be our High Priest and introduces the idea,, fully developed in chapter seven, that He is High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (verses 6, 10).

1. As a man, though still the divine Son (verse 8), yet sharing fully our human nature (Hebrews 2:17-18), He learned by experience to obediently submit His will to the Father's will to suffer for us (Hebrews 5:8).
2. He was thus made complete (perfected) as Savior (Hebrews 5:9).
3. Therefore, He is the cause or source of our salvation (Hebrews 5:10).

LIVING ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Jesus said something about bread that is a challenge for anyone to consider. When Satan tempted Him to misuse His powers to turn stone into bread, Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). He was referring to what Moses told the Israelites after God had given them bread from heaven (manna) to satisfy their hunger. He "fed you with manna ... that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3). The manna was to demonstrate to the Israelites God's love for them and ability to meet their needs. This should have convinced them to love and trust Him no matter the circumstance—even above physical sustenance. As long as they followed Him, they had everything they needed. Jesus understood this principle and remained true to God's word when confronting the devil. We must do the same with our temptations. Nothing should be more important to us than following God and keeping His word. Nothing.

What Moses and Jesus said about bread is a bold statement. Bread is a staple in most societies and has been for centuries. In America, grocery stores have entire aisles and sections dedicated to it. Nevertheless, even it cannot meet our greatest need. James said, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). If we want to be saved from sin, we must learn, understand, and obey God's word (Romans 10:13-17). Nothing else in the world has that power or ability. No medicine, no exercise, no currency, no administration, no person, no thing, and not even food and water can provide us with forgiveness. The only thing on planet earth that can save us from sin and cause us to be raised from the dead is the word of God. Specifically, this hope is found in the teachings of Christ, who said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51).

Our physical body is going to die, no matter how well we feed and care for it, but if we are wise our soul will last forever because we fed our spiritual man with the bread of life. "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8). God gave the Israelites daily bread to teach them to depend on Him. He has given us the Bible so we might live "by every word of God." Do we?

JAMAICA PATOIS WISDOM (No. 10)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

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: Nuh cup nuh bruk, nuh coffee nuh dash weh.

English: The mug is not broken, so don't throw the coffee away.

Meaning: If it's not broken, don't try to fix it.

That's good advice in many areas of life. There are times when you have something that works just fine, but someone comes and is not satisfied, so the "fix" commences, which can mess up the whole thing.

How well that describes what has happened through the centuries to the Lord's church. The explosive growth of the early church is well documented. Just look at the record in the early chapters of Acts. We know what happened on Pentecost, as 3,000 were baptized into Christ. In Acts 4:4, 5,000 men were added. Multitudes are mentioned in 4:32 and 6:1. The church was described as multiplying in 8:6 and 9:31. How do we explain this explosive growth? There may be various factors, but a major ingredient is that these early Christians were committed—so committed and excited that they must have felt an obligation to share the good news with families, neighbors, friends and even strangers.

The early church functioned well under the plan God had given. Local churches were organized under elders, with no central hierarchy. As problems arose here and there, God's plan called for the shepherds in each church to deal with false teaching, or whatever else came up. The qualifications for these local leaders include these words: "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

That was all well and good, but in time men tried to "fix" the problems of false teaching that arose here and there. They began to hold area-wide meetings, and certain men were

chosen to be the head bishop over an area. And of course this in time led to the Pope of Rome, which office has been so full of scandal and false teaching through the centuries. From that we now have thousands of denominations.

In time the Restoration Movement began in the early 1800s. Once again we have an impressive growth, as some estimates give the number of New Testament Christians in the hundreds of thousands within 40 years. But this was not good enough, so we have the "fix" of the American Christian Missionary Society in Cincinnati in 1849, which led to a major division. And along the way some were not satisfied with the simple worship of early Christians, and instrumental music was brought in, another "fix" which further fostered division. Now in our own time churches of Christ are having fellowship with denominations, appointing women elders, establishing all sorts of para-church organizations to do the church's work, selling goods to finance the church, and on and on.

My question is: What is wrong with the plan God gave? After all, he designed and built the church. Didn't he have enough sense to design something that would work, and work well? If so, then why do we have to come along and "fix" something that was not broken? What this says is that some men think they are smarter than God, and they have enough smarts to improve on God's design. Paul warned us: According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). The "mug" is not broken, so let us be content and not "throw the coffee away."

ROMANS THE EIGHTH CHAPTER (No. 5)

This series of articles by the late Elmer Moore is reprinted from **Truth Magazine** by permission of the editor.

We must keep in mind that the Apostle Paul is presenting a contrast here in the eighth chapter of Romans. A contrast presents opposites and we will endeavor to consider these opposites. You will note that, in verses six and seven, he identifies the result of following the wrong director in the contrast. He describes one as death and enmity, and the other as life and peace. Death is the exact opposite of life and enmity is the exact opposite of peace. I don't see how anyone could miss this obvious contrast.

In Romans chapter eight and verse five the Apostle Paul begins to identify the conduct that results from the two directors identified in verse four. He declares that "they that are after the flesh," (i.e. walking after the flesh), "mind the things of the flesh." The word "mind" suggests, "to think, to be minded in a certain way" (W.E. Vine. 752). The English definition is "To attend to or regard with submission; to obey" (**Websters Unabridged Dictionary**). This man is submitting to, or obeying the desires of the flesh. He is doing what he wants to do.

Likewise, the apostle declares "they that are after the Spirit" (i.e., walking after the Spirit), "mind the things of the Spirit" (the word "mind" is implied by the contrast). This man is submitting to, or obeying the law of the Spirit, the gospel of Christ.

Paul declares in verse six, "for the mind of the flesh" (i.e. the one walking after the flesh or, minding the things of the flesh) "is death; but the mind of the Spirit" (i.e., walking after the Spirit or, minding the things of the Spirit) "is life and peace." He is saying that the man who is minding the things of the flesh is in a state of spiritual death (8:7); the man who is walking after the Spirit is in a state of spiritual life and peace. The word "peace" is defined to mean "set at one again" (Strong's). Literally, he is in a right relationship with God and thus is walking as God's word directs.

Paul explains, in verse seven, why the man who is walking after the flesh is in a state of spiritual death. He declares, "Because the mind of the flesh is enmity with God." The word "enmity" suggests hostility and indicates a reason for opposition. The English word means "a state of opposition" (**Webster**). Thus, this man is walking in opposition to God. The apostle goes on to say "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." The word "subject" is capable of more than one meaning. It may mean to be amenable, answerable to or, of being under the power and dominion of another. It may also mean to be in submission, or subordinate to. For example, a man is arrested and put into jail because he was subject to the law of the land. Someone replies: no he is in jail because he was not subject to the law of the land. Both are correct. He is in jail because he was answerable to the law of the land. He was in jail because he was insubordinate to the law of the land. The passage shows that the man was **insubordinate** to God's law. He was at **enmity** with God; in a state of **opposition** to God's law, to the law of the Spirit.

Paul declares, "neither indeed can he be." Here is a man who is totally devoted to satisfying his own desires. While a man is in that state of mind he will never be subject to God's will. He is only interested in satisfying his own desires. I do not believe that the statement implies that he cannot change his attitude; but it is declaring that he cannot live only for the things that please himself and be in subjection to God at the same time.

SEEING HIM WHO IS INVISIBLE

Tanner Campbell | Piggott, Arkansas, USA

Consider the man Moses for a moment. Only a man with great courage could have brought God's people out of the land of Egypt. But where did his courage come from? Was he a skilled military leader? How about a trained expert in communications and gifted in motivational speaking? Certainly that was not the case for Moses. So then, what was it that fueled such an amazing display of courage? The Hebrew writer answers this question in only a few words, Moses "*endured as seeing Him who is invisible*" (Hebrews 11:27). The reason for Moses' perseverance is because he knew that God's hand was there to save him. He was convicted that the power of Pharaoh was nothing to the power of God. The hand of God was so evidence to the sight of Moses. God was so clearly present that Moses could see Him there, even

though He remained invisible to the human eye. This is why Moses was able to endure. This is where his courage came from. He knew he was not alone.

This article is designed to celebrate the hand of God in the lives of those who live for Him. Many have questioned whether God still has a hand in the life of a Christian, and on the other side, many have heartily accepted the hand of God in today's world without a single argument based on scripture. This article will utilize scripture to the aim that both sides will have a better understanding of the providence of God.

By the term "providence" I mean God's divine care, management, and direction. Those who no longer believe that God provides for, cares for, guides, and directs us, may not realize the implications of such a belief: (1) It cannot be founded on scripture, and (2) one must also reject prayer. Indeed, prayer and the providence of God are so fused together that without providence, prayer is pointless. Maybe that's why many Christians rarely pray anymore. Maybe they can no longer see "Him who is invisible" in their lives. It seems that Satan has published the idea that we are not to rely on God for any kind of help, but we must trust in ourselves, our family members, and our careers to pull us through life. How foolish it is to trust in these things. Look around and consider how many, by not trusting in God alone, have *"fallen on the sword"* of their family, or job, and more commonly fall on their own sword, just as king Saul did not put his trust in God, and his life was ended by falling on his own sword (1 Samuel 31:4). Christians, we need to place all trust in the hand of God. In doing so, we will begin to see more clearly the hand of "Him who is Invisible."

It shouldn't be a hard task for a Christian to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), unless the Christian is lacking in knowledge of God's power and providence. The scriptures are filled with examples of the unseen hand of God. Consider Acts 14:17, *"Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."* How can we not see "Him who is invisible" every time the rain falls, or the sun comes up (Matthew 5:45), or when the crops produce good things? Have we been so influenced by a world that cares not to acknowledge God that we no longer do either?

Jesus made a number of valuable points that are essential for our study. Beginning in Matthew 10:29, Jesus asked, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? and not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."* Friends, why does Jesus speak of the sparrow? Why is the sparrow the example He uses? Because they are insignificant and almost worthless (worth only a copper coin). Here He teaches us that even the things we count as insignificant are ruled by the unseen hand of God: *"not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."* This example Jesus gave sets the stage for a more personal example to us: *"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."* Even the smallest details about us or our lives are well known to God. So then, how much more do we stand or fall at His will? The text is clear, it exemplifies what so many have forgotten: the LORD is invested in our lives, He loves His children and seeks to do

good for them (Matthew 7:11; James 1:17).

May we never fail to see that the LORD is in control. I know a lot of Christians say that, but do they really see it? The Bible does not leave us with an excuse not to see it: Psalm 66:7, *"He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; do not let the rebellious exalt themselves."* Daniel 4:35, *"All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"* Daniel 2:21, *"And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding."* Proverbs 21:1, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."* Romans 13:1, *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."*

In application of these things, we all need to *"pray without ceasing"* as Paul told the Thessalonians. Why would Paul command so much time in prayer? If we asked that question, we need to reread this article. God's hand is in this life, and in a more special way, His unseen hand is with His true followers, in that, they are the only ones who can ask Him for help, guidance, and sustenance, and know that He will help them, guide them, and sustain them, according to His will. Only to them, has God given authority for prayer (1 Peter 3:12).

How much will we be able to see "Him who is invisible" in our lives if our relationship with Him is strong and we pray continually? James provides a good answer to this question in James 5:16-18, *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit."* James' answer is that prayer *"avails much."* You may not see a needle in a haystack, but a needle in your toe *"avails much"* attention. Thus, if fervent prayer *"avails much,"* then it will be easy to see "Him who is invisible." Look at Elijah, how easy could he see the work of God? And remember, *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours,"* i.e, we can do it too! We have the same faculties at our disposal.

SATAN'S LIES ABOUT EVANGELISM

Sean P. Cavender | Bradley, Arkansas, USA

Jesus stated that the devil is the father and source of lies and the truth could not be found in anything the devil says (John 8:44). Satan speaks of his own authority and refuses to submit to the rule of God. The devil has always been a liar, slanderer, and accuser against the people of God, from the very beginning when he lied to Eve, to the time that he slandered Job's good name and accused God of protecting Job, to his constant work against Christians today (1 Peter 5:8).

When it comes to the kingdom of God, Satan wants to see it destroyed. He will try his best to get Christians to quit working for the cause of

Christ. If he can stunt the growth and effectiveness of the church then he will be pleased with his progress. The devil has many lies about a vast number of subjects, but perhaps one of the most dangerous set of lies that he has is in regard to evangelism. Sadly, many Christians have a lackluster approach to evangelism. Or, in an opposite extreme, Christians evangelize using unscriptural means and methods. Either way, it is due to the influence of Satan.

"Times have changed."

Perhaps this is Satan's most used and most believed lie. Many people think back to the "good 'ole days" to when "times were better and times were different." This general philosophy of thinking that times have changed is not limited to the religious realm, which is what makes it such a believable lie.

This lie has caused many people to give up on efforts of the Lord's church to teach, evangelize, and plant the seed in the hearts of men. Brethren will start saying, "times are different now ... we must have too much to compete with." We think of the influences of TV, sports, work, school and family events. "People are just busier than they have ever been. Times have changed," we are told.

When has there ever been a time that leisure, entertainment, recreation, family, work, and education have never been around? These influences have always been around!

One problem that has not changed is the problem of sin. Consider the immorality of the Gentiles while reading Romans 1:26-32. Homosexuality, fornication, covetousness envy, murder, strife, whispering, backbiting, hating God, and disobedience to parents are all mentioned. It almost sounds as if we turned on the evening news in 21st century America! Are times really all that different? Sin is still prevalent in the lives of men and it will continue to bring folks to eternal damnation.

Realizing the great problem of sin ought to motivate us to preach with more zeal and affection. The sad reality is it's not the times that have changed, but it's that Christians have changed. Too many Christians have been swept away by the influence of Satan. Too many Christians are enthralled with the world of television, sports, school, and family. They have lost their commitment unto the Lord of hosts. Zeal that once ignited churches to influence a community has been extinguished.

Instead of accepting Satan's lie that "times have changed" let's begin taking the message of change and repentance to the lost world around us (cf. Matthew 3:8; 4:17)!

"Gospel meetings will NOT work."

There seems to be a growing attitude that gospel meetings are antiquated and ineffective today. This lie of the devil's usually finds great company with the lie that "times have changed." Often in times of despair, brethren will think back to the days when people would attend gospel meetings, and several baptisms might occur as a result of those meetings. This goes back to some of the same problems as we have already identified. Who has changed: the world or Christian's attitudes?

There once was a time when Christians would attend a gospel meeting for two weeks or more to listen to an hour long (if not longer) sermon. Would Christians do that today? Perhaps we have lost confidence in the preaching of the gospel!

A big indication that this is a lie from the devil is that it uses his favorite three letter word, the word "not". Just as the devil told Eve a lie and added the word "not" to tempt her to sin, the devil wants us to accept this falsehood. If you take out the word "not" then the truth is revealed: gospel meetings will work!

Gospel meetings remain an opportune time to teach someone the gospel. It is through the instruction from God's word that faith is formed in the hearts and minds of alien sinners (Romans 10:17). Gospel meetings can still be effective today, but we need Christians to make a commitment to this opportunity to teach lost souls. Do not believe Satan's lie. The problem is not in the meetings, but the problem may lie in us and our attitude.

"They'll never obey the gospel."

When we meet people that are not Christians we quickly realize just how pitiful their lives are without the blessing of salvation. Many are ruined by sin, and it is obvious to us. Sometimes people's lives are in such a wretched state that we begin to think they would never take the time to listen to us teach them, much less actually repent and obey the gospel.

The Scriptures are full of wonderful examples of those who were in some dire situation who did, in fact, repent of sin. The woman at the well had been married a number of times, yet she believed Christ (John 4:16-18, 28-30). Cornelius was a captain in the armies of Rome and he was a Gentile, yet he obeyed the gospel of Christ (Acts 10:47-48). One of the greatest antagonists against the Lord's church was the apostle Paul. He was a blasphemer before his obedience to Christ. Yet, even he changed his life!

Imagine the great effect of just these examples. The woman at the well went and immediately told others of her conversation with the Christ. Cornelius' household also was converted to the Lord. And the great effect that the apostle Paul had in his preaching and travels so impacted the early church.

Perhaps if we speak to that person we are just so certain "will never obey the gospel," we would end up being surprised. If that person did obey the gospel of Christ, then just imagine the effect that they might have upon others (friends and family). How zealous might they be to teach others? Would you become more zealous and encouraged to engage in conversations about the forgiveness of sins through Jesus? We should never be ashamed of the gospel that has power to save men's souls (Romans 1:16).

"You must be their friend first."

This is a lie that seems to be catching on like wildfire among several folks. It is argued to have any success in teaching your neighbors the gospel then you must first become their friend. This is greatly

influenced by the mindset of the social gospel. It is thought that a friendship must first be formed before someone will listen to us teach them the gospel.

This is not to suggest being unfriendly or a poor neighbor. However, we must ask what your actions reveal about you. Are you really concerned about a person's soul or are you concerned about having a friend to go out with? Are you marketing the gospel? Do you really love your neighbor as yourself?

Paul did not believe this lie of Satan's. He went into the city of Athens, noting their blatant involvement with idolatry, and began preaching a message of repentance (Acts 17:16-30). Paul did not attend every assembly for an idol. Neither do we have to attend any denominational meetings to try and get others to come to our assemblies. Paul did not befriend the religious leaders in Athens to be accepted in the community. The apostle preached the gospel and when he did some believed (Acts 17:34).

Imagine the effectiveness of simply preaching the gospel of grace. It will interest those with good and honest hearts. We should give up on any man-made ploy and tactic to try to disguise the preaching of the gospel. If we try to disguise the gospel under the cloak of friendship then what else will we be willing to disguise about the gospel?

Conclusion

We need to dedicate ourselves to the preaching of the gospel. Let us not be gullible to believe the lies and deceptions of the devil, but let us be ready to combat him. We may become effective teachers in the service of the kingdom once we are no longer handicapped by these lies. Just think about how effective the church might be in your community if we all commit ourselves to the work of the Lord!

AVOIDING THE SPLINTERED FAMILY : JACOB, RACHEL AND LEAH

Genesis 29-31, 37

from the e-book, "*...And They Shall Become One Flesh...*"

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah... Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. (Genesis 29:30; 37:3).

Dealing With Deceptions

At the request of his parents, Jacob went to Padan Aram, seeking a wife from the daughters of Laban (Genesis 28:2). Having arrived in the land, Jacob saw Rachel coming to the well (Genesis 29:6-10). His affection for her is immediately evident, as he "...kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept" (verse 11). He had found the woman he wished to marry. His love is summarized well in Genesis 29:20, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her."

When his years of service for Rachel were complete, he asked Laban

for her. Laban threw a feast for his daughter's marriage to Jacob, and then brought his daughter to him in the evening. However, it was not until the next morning that Jacob realized that it was not Rachel whom he was with, but Leah (Genesis 29:21-25). Jacob would receive Rachel a week later, but needed to serve an additional seven years for her (Genesis 29:27). Laban failed his daughters and Jacob, for the polygamist relationship which he encouraged would bring manifold turmoil for them.

Few if any today will ever be in this particular circumstance, but deceptions are equally real and possible in our lives today. It may be perpetrated by an in-law, as in Jacob's case; or by "friends", or even by your spouse. The consequence of some deceptions are life-altering, as was the case for Jacob, Leah and Rachel.

Hurt Feelings & Lack Of Control

There are some questions which arise when we consider Jacob's marriage(s). Was his marriage to Leah "valid"? Should he have also married Rachel a week later? How did Jacob not know that it was Leah, and not Rachel? Should he remain with Leah, and give up Rachel, the woman he truly loved? Should he put away Leah and demand Rachel? But Laban may not give her to him then. Should he remain married to Leah, and take Rachel to be his wife also? What a mess!!

In the end, Jacob had two wives (sisters) who completely despised one another, and two additional wives (Rachel & Leah's handmaids). Consider a quick log of how messed up his marriage(s) became:

- He loved Rachel more than Leah (Genesis 29:30)
- Rachel envied Leah, because she had given Jacob children, but Rachel was barren. She demanded, "Give me children, or else I die!" (Genesis 30:1)
- Rachel gave Bilhah, her maid, as a wife to Jacob. He went in to her and she conceived twice, causing Rachel to conclude: "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." (Genesis 30:4-8)
- Leah gave her maidservant Zilpah as a wife to Jacob, who also bore him children (Genesis 30:9-13)
- Leah purchased the opportunity to lay with Jacob from Rachel (Genesis 30:14-16)

When troubles arise, it is important to consider very diligently what the best course of action is. Sometimes what we perceive to be a solution is more self-serving than problem solving, and may result in more, and unforeseen problems. It is obvious that the decision arrived at by Jacob and Laban (were Leah and Rachel even considered?) did not promote intimacy and trust in the marriage relationship.

Possessive Parents

Jacob sought to leave Padan Aram, and to return to the land of Canaan, but Laban convinced him otherwise (Genesis 30:25-27). Laban was an unrighteous man, described by Jacob as one who had "...deceived me and changed my wages ten times..." (Genesis 31:7, 41).

Though Rachel and Leah did not see eye to eye on many things, they did agree regarding their father:

Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. (Genesis 31:15)

Jacob's departure is characterized as fleeing on account of fear (Genesis 31:21, 31), which speaks of the character of his father-in-law. Three days after Jacob departed, Laban became aware of it and pursued him. Hear the patriarch's words, and notice his disposition:

What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing. It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' (Genesis 31:26-29)

And again,

These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? (Genesis 31:43-44)

How destructive it can be for a marriage when the parents of either spouse exert control in the relationship. Laban did so with Jacob, Rachel and Leah for 20 years! Laban was so oppressive that he completely disregarded Jacob - he was nothing more than an acquired servant to him. He considered all that was Jacob's (wives, children, goods) to be his.

We must never allow our parents to control our marriage. They may provide wise counsel at times, and certainly are not expected to abandon all contact with their child, but the umbilical cord must be severed - the marriage consists of man and wife, not man, wife and in-laws.

Favouritism And Its Fruit

There is no indication that either Leah or Rachel favoured one child over another, though one can almost be certain that they favoured their own children above the others. However, with Jacob, there was an obvious favourite - Joseph (Genesis 37:3-4).

Jacob repeated the error of his parents, placing his affections for one child above the others. Being a favoured child himself, he may not have known all the upheaval such caused in the lives of the others. And yet, he was certainly aware of the pure anger which resulted in his own brother against him. He may have reasoned, 'It will be different with my children.' It was not. Joseph was the object of his brothers' hatred. So much so, that they would eventually sell him into slavery (though some wanted to kill him), and return his coat, torn and stained with goat's blood, to Jacob, leaving him with the conclusion that his son had been killed by a wild beast.

Albert Einstein is attributed with defining insanity as "...doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

Jacob's favouritism of Joseph was an act of insanity. Favouritism destroyed his relationship with his brother, it presented a constant challenge in his marriage, and it caused troubles among his own children.

It behooves the next generation to learn from the errors of their predecessors; learn and do not repeat. If you were a favoured child, do not favour one of your children. The hostility which happened among your siblings (even if you didn't know about it, it was there) will also consume your own children.

THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM (POSSESSING THE PRICELESS ¹)

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

Two men each found an object of surpassing, even preeminent value, each recognized the worth of what he had found, and each joyfully made the necessary sacrifice to obtain the valuable object.

Hidden Treasure

Ancient Palestine lacked real banks as safe places to deposit money, and the country had the problem of being repeatedly overrun by enemies and infested by brigands and thieves. Money could be deposited with money changers in the Temple for a low rate of interest (Matthew 25:27, **King James Version**) but there was certainly no FDIC to insure deposits. It appears that people often hid valuables in various places in hope of keeping them safe, died, and left no record of the treasure. People thus engaged in "treasure hunts" (cf. Job 3:21; Proverbs 2:4; Jeremiah 41:8). It was common in America after the bank failures of 1929 for people to hide their valuables and money rather than employing a bank.

So the Master tells the story of a man who found a treasure hidden in a field. There is no indication the man had been treasure hunting. Joyfully he hid the treasure again, sold everything he had, bought the field as his own, and thus gained possession of the fortune. The 19th century scholar Aldred Edersheim maintained that the man's actions were legal under Jewish law ², but this is really irrelevant to the story. Christ is defending neither the legality nor morality of the finder's course. He is using him as an example of placing correct valuation and acting accordingly.

Pearl of Great Price

Pearls were as prized in ancient society as diamonds are today. Myths circulated about how pearls were formed. Of course, without cultured pearls or modern diving equipment, they were much harder to acquire than today, and thus their value was greater.

The Master related how a pearl merchant, one who would have a trained eye for pearls, found one jewel of surpassing value. He was

actively seeking pearls, recognized the preeminent worth of the pearl he had found, and made the appropriate sacrifice.

Value

Both short parables illustrate the value of the heavenly kingdom. Of course, the kingdom of heaven is the rule of God through His Son Christ Jesus in the hearts of His people (Luke 17:20-21). But here the parables emphasize the blessing of kingdom citizenship, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 1:3; Romans 14:17).

The value of the kingdom of heaven surpasses that of anything the world has to offer or even of the entirety of this world (Matthew 16:26-28). The benefits of the kingdom exceed in worth all earthly wealth (Matthew 6:19-21, 33), pleasures (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2; Galatians 6:7-8), and popularity (Romans 3:3-4; 8:31).

Sacrifice

Some people, as the woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria (John 4:5-29) more or less accidentally encounter the gospel. Others, as the eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-39) and Cornelius (Acts 10) are actively seeking salvation. But each, in order to obtain the righteousness of the kingdom, must be willing to sacrifice everything, even his own life (Matthew 16:24-25).

Joy

The man who found the treasure did not mourn at the sale of all his possessions, nor did the merchant weep at giving up everything he had previously owned. Because he realized the preeminent value of the hidden treasure, the man who found it joyfully sold all that he had in order to gain it.

Paul, recognizing the preeminent worth of the blessings in Christ, willingly sacrificed all that had formerly been his reason for living (Philippians 3:3-11). Rather than looking back longingly on the things he had given up, rather than mourning, weeping, and complaining over his sacrifices, as he contemplated the possibility of a violent death for his service to Christ, he declared, "I am glad and rejoice with you all" (Philippians 2:17).

Conclusion

We will have made the shrewdest of all transactions if we sacrifice all the world has to offer for the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 16:24-27). "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." So much the more so when that which he cannot lose is of preeminent worth.



unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp

Editor, Keith Sharp
Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Designer, William J. Stewart
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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Highway 5 South Church of Christ
2950 Highway 5 South
Mountain Home, AR 72653
US

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