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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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*There is no such thing as standing still in the Christian life. We either get more or lose what we had. We either advance to greater heights or slip back every day. (William Barclay, **The Gospel of Luke.** 248)*

*Carnal tests are not suited to spiritual truth. (J.W. McGarvey, **The Fourfold Gospel.** 454)*

WE STAND FOR THE FAITH

Kennedy Odongo Adhiambo | Nyatike, Kenya

With us here, we stand for the faith. We love God, share God's word, and move from place to place strengthening one another and preaching salvation to those who are not saved.

Even though those who want to rule other congregations out of their locality murmur, we don't care.

Even though they call us by what name, we press on.

Even though they chase us on their meetings, we preach

everywhere.

Even though they talk bad concerning us, we love one another.

Even though they hate us because of you, God protects us.

Even though they hold meetings to talk about us even wasting their time, fund and resources from America to Kalamindi, we pray for them, preach the soul saving gospel, and the church grows.

Their jealousy expands the field for us and encourages by inspiring us to work even harder for the Lord.

They dream our downfall, we dream our steadfastness as we contend to the faith.

Have us in your prayers to stand firm.

QUESTIONS FROM ETHIOPIA

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Questions

1. The Opening of the Graves of the Righteous: Matthew 27:52-53 'And the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised.' please explain for me.

2. As the bible shows, Jesus had brothers and sisters and their names mentioned (brothers).

Are these family members born from Joseph and Mary? Explain for me. I thank you. Look forward.

Answers

1. Matthew is the only gospel writer who mentions this event in connection with the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. This occurred after Jesus' resurrection, as verses 52-53 indicate, and this harmonizes with the fact that Christ is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Matthew mentions it at this point in connection with other miraculous occurrences that would add to the evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The record does not indicate what eventually became of these saints, whether they ascended to heaven or died again, and I will not speculate (Deuteronomy 29:29).

2. "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55-56; cf. Mark 6:2-3). I see

no reason to avoid the obvious conclusion that Jesus had four fleshly brothers and several sisters, the children of Joseph and Mary, but who were actually half siblings to Jesus since Joseph was not actually Jesus' father (Luke 3:23; Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:26-35).

70 AD - SOME PROBLEMS (Pt. 2)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

(4) Realized eschatology also theorizes that all prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D., and that the Law of Moses was in force for the Jews until that date. They use Matthew 5:17 to support the theory. "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

Evidently it was all "fulfilled" at the destruction of Jerusalem, and that is when it (the Law) came to an end. They abuse this text to make it mean something that Christ did not intend. The Seventh Day Adventists also abuse this passage to justify their insistence that the Ten Commandment Law concerning the Sabbath is still in force. Their argument is that the Law of Moses was not "destroyed," but that Christ "fulfilled" it evidently by giving it a greater meaning.

We know that many passages clearly show that the Law of Moses came to an end before 70.

In several passages, Paul makes this point.

"Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God" (Romans 7:4).

If we are dead to the Law, then we are no longer under the law. Paul gives the analogy in verses 1-7 of Romans 7 of a woman whose husband is died, and she is therefore no longer bound to him. His point is that the Law is dead, and Christians are thus no longer bound to it, but are free to "marry" another, just as the widow was.

2 Corinthians 3:4-11 and Colossians 2:13-17 both clearly teach that the Law "has been taken out of the way," as Christ "nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). Then Paul makes a most definitive statement in Galatians 5:4: "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

If, as they claim, all New Testament writings are to be dated before 70 A.D., then certainly these, and similar passages, would establish that the Law was gone well before 70 A.D.

Now, if we can find just one prophecy that was not fulfilled

before 70, then the theory is invalidated.

It fails. I will not cite various New Testament passages concerning the end that I believe are still in the future. The 70 A.D. theorists try to explain them all away. But I will turn to one familiar prophecy in the Old Testament, where Daniel is explaining Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him, and comes down to the feet and legs of the great image the king had seen.

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy" (Daniel 2:44-45).

We know the 4th kingdom in the dream was the Roman Empire. Daniel said this kingdom would be in power when God's kingdom would be set up, and God's kingdom would be in power when that 4th kingdom, Rome, would be destroyed. Rome is gone; the Kingdom of God endures.

The Roman Empire met its destruction in 476 A.D., not 70 A.D.! That was the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 2. Therefore, all prophecy was not fulfilled in 70 A.D.

(5) The 70 A.D. theory also teaches that the church/kingdom began at Pentecost, but did not come into the full exercise of its power until 70. I suppose this would have some connection with the "resurrection" that took place when they claim the Jewish economy was destroyed in 70 A.D.

But an examination of God's Word gives us some different ideas on the kingdom and power. Note Christ's promise in Mark 9:1:

"And Jesus was saying to them, 'Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.'"

Christ states that some would be living when they saw the kingdom come with power. I would take that to mean that when the kingdom came, it would simultaneously come with power. In Christ's farewell address to his disciples, he told them they would receive power: "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). We know that the power came when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of

Pentecost. Acts 2:1-4:

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance"

This is in keeping with the promise Christ made to the disciples in John 14:16-17a: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive..." In Peter's sermon on that great day, he quotes from Joel's prophecy and applies it to the events that were taking place at the very moment he is speaking: "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: **And it shall be in the last days,**' God says, **'that I will pour forth of my spirit on all mankind...'**" (Acts 2:15-17a, cf. Joel 2:28-29). Now, putting all this together, we note that (1) the Holy Spirit would come (2) with power, (3) and it came to pass on the Day of Pentecost (4) at the inauguration of the church/kingdom. Therefore, the kingdom did not have to wait for more than three decades for power to come.

We note that "power" and "church" are linked together in Ephesians 2:20-21:

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

The proponents of the 70 A.D. theory will sometimes use Luke 17:20-21 to support their cause.

"Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

I would suppose the claim is that the Day of Pentecost came with great signs, therefore that could not be the fulfillment of Christ's promise. But the point Christ was making was that his kingdom was not a political system, but rather a spiritual kingdom. No armies were going to march against Rome to overthrow the emperor and establish Israel as a great nation again.

But if we accept the 70 A.D. theorists' premise that the visible signs preclude Acts 2 being a fulfillment, their argument also goes against 70 A.D. being the fulfillment, as well. Jesus warned the disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, and gave definite and visible signs so the disciples would know when to flee the city.

*"Therefore when you see the **abomination of desolation** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains;... So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (Matthew 24:15-16, 33).*

Not only were there signs of the coming destruction, but the fight against Jerusalem was most certainly visible as the Roman army destroyed structures and slaughtered so many that the blood was running in the streets. Thus if the 70 A.D. theorists want to have a "sign-less" coming of the kingdom, they will have to find it somewhere besides Matthew 24 and Luke 17.

As to the idea that the power did not come until 70, I repeat a paragraph written earlier in this treatise:

"It is truly amazing what this dead church accomplished. 3,000 responded to the gospel on one day (Acts 2:41); soon there were 5,000 men, not counting women (Acts 4:4); multitudes were added (Acts 5:14); the gospel had such an effect that when Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica, the Jews claimed that these men had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6); by the time Paul wrote to the Colossian church about 62 A.D., he stated that the gospel had been "preached in all creation" (Col. 1:26). If that is what the "dead church" accomplished, perhaps we need more dead churches today."

(6) If, according to the 70 A.D. theory, Jerusalem's destruction was "the end" and "the coming of the Lord," then what purpose is realized in partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week? Paul wrote to Corinth about problems concerning the eating of this supper in 1 Corinthians 11:26-29:

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he

does not judge the body rightly"

Thus, by 70 A.D. teachings, there is no point in partaking of the Lord's Supper, as he has already come, for Paul said we are to partake and thus we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." They would say it is OK to partake, but not necessary.

But it seems to me that if their theory is right, we must not partake, for to do so would be to leave a false impression, i.e., that we think Christ is still coming in the future. So by giving a false impression, would we not be partaking in an "unworthy manner," and thus bring judgment to ourselves? If not, why not? How do you proclaim something is coming when it has already come?

It is very interesting that various early writers commented about the observance of the Lord's Supper. These include Ignatius, the Didache, Hippolytus, Clement of Rome, Justin, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Cyril of Jerusalem and the Apostolic Constitutions. With one voice they write of the great importance of the Lord's Supper and its regular observance.

Obviously, all of these writings came after 70 A.D., and yet they were very concerned about the observance and meaning of the Supper. But remember, the Supper, according to Paul, was to be taken "until he comes." Would we not rightly conclude that they did not think Christ had come as yet?

(7) A necessary tenet of the 70 A.D. theory is that all of the writings of the New Testament were completed before Jerusalem's destruction. Thus, if we can find evidence of even one book that was written after that date, then the proposition fails.

Consider the Gospel of John. Irenaeus was a pupil of Polycarp, who in turn was a friend as well as a pupil of the apostle John. Irenaeus wrote that John

"for sixty years after the Ascension preached orally, till the end of Domitian's reign; and, after the death of Domitian and John's return to Ephesus, he was induced to write (his Gospel) concerning the divinity of Christ..."

"It is generally held that he wrote his Gospel not long before his death and, as indicated by Clement, at the request of Christian friends" (from the introduction to the gospel of John in *The New Analytical Bible* by Dickson). Clement of Rome was a contemporary of John, and died in 101 A.D. Domitian ruled in Rome fifteen years from 81 to 96 A.D., thus if John's Gospel was written after Domitian's death, this was obviously many years after 70 A.D.

In relating various ideas for the date of the Gospel, the **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** draws the following conclusion:

“Thus, the appearance of the Johannine writings at the end of the 1st century may safely be accepted as a sound historical conclusion. Slowly the critics who assigned their appearance to the middle of the 2nd century, or later, have retraced their steps, and assign the emergence of the Johannine writings to the time mentioned.”

I have found no credible source that dates John’s Gospel to an earlier date.

(8) One of the books supporting the 70 A.D. doctrine is **Revelation Explained**, by Kurt Simmons. A man named W. N. (Bill) Fangio wrote the Foreword to the book. On page 3, he wrote these words.

“James’ report in the first century that the coming of the Lord was at hand can be taken at face value without any accommodation whatsoever (James 5:8). When Jesus told Peter that John would remain until he come, it was an actual indication John would live to see the day of our Lord’s return (John 21:23).”

Then in the text of the book on page 13, Simmons makes this statement: “Shortly before his ascension, Jesus affirmed that John was one of those chosen to abide until his return. ‘If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?’ (John 21:22).

Both of these men are twisting the Scripture. The scene described in John is where Christ is having a conversation with his disciples, and makes mention of Peter’s death. Consider the conversation:

“Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, ‘Lord, who is the one who betrays You?’ So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, ‘Lord, and what about this man?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!’ Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?’”
” (John 21:20-23)

Simmons and Fangio both ignore the significance of the word “if” in the text. Jesus did not tell Peter that John would remain, but if. That’s a big difference. That’s not an “actual indication.” I might tell someone, “If I had a million dollars, I

would do thus and so..." Would anyone in their right mind therefore assume that I, of a certainty, did have a million dollars? Of course not. Jesus is simply telling Peter that what happens to John is really none of his business.

Yes, there were some even then that misunderstood what Christ said, so John, in writing the gospel, corrected the misunderstanding. The misuse of the passage by both Simmons and Fangio indicates to me the weakness of their position. If the foundation of your house is built on sand, then your house is clearly in trouble.

Another problem with Simmons' misuse of Scripture has to do with his mention of the statement in James 5:8: "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." Simmons asserts that statement is proof that the destruction of Jerusalem was the final coming of the Lord. As mentioned earlier, there were signs of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, but the Bible emphatically says that at the last coming, there will be no signs. Thus when James says that the coming is not in the too distant future, he would have been referring to the signs that were present concerning Jerusalem' destruction. Matthew 24 makes a clear distinction between the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the Lord in final judgment.

Jesus points out that the faithful will recognize the signs of Jerusalem's coming destruction in the Matthew 24. Note verses 15 and 16: "Therefore when you see the **abomination of desolation** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains." He goes on in verses 33 and 34 and again refers to the signs of the coming destruction: "So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

Then in verses 36 and 37, our Lord makes a transition: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah." What happened in the days of Noah? There were no signs of the coming flood. In the ensuing verses, Christ goes on to describe the end of the world when he would come in judgment.

In these verses, Christ is answering the questions the disciples had asked in the beginning of chapter 24:1-3.

"Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not

one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.' As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?''

The “signs” Jesus spoke of were in answer to the matter of “not one stone...” That literally came to pass in the dismantling of the temple when Jerusalem was destroyed. The other part of the disciples’ question concerning “the sign of Your coming” was answered in verse 36 and those following. No sign will be given!

Thus Simmon’s statements about John 21 and James 5 are based on the twisting of the Scriptures. Thus he is guilty of the same charge Peter made concerning those who misused the writings of Paul.

“As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16).

In conclusion, I trust that these observations have been of some value in pointing out some false concepts held and propagated by those who believe in the 70 A.D. or Realized Eschatology theories. These are not the only false concepts, as there are many other considerations. Those covered will suffice for the present writing.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44, 45)

The word rendered “love” in our text has been a challenge to translators and Bible students. It is “charity” in some passages in the **King James Version** (1 Corinthians 13, for instance). The problem is aggravated by today’s idea that “love” is an affection, a feeling, perhaps a progression from “like”.

When Jesus says “love your enemies” some respond by recommending hypocrisy (“pretend you like them”) but of course that cannot be what is intended by the instruction (cf. Romans 12:9, ASV). So, where do we go from here? Our text has the solution within it. The understanding that children look, and think, and often act like their parents, is in view as

Jesus says love and pray for adversaries “that you may be sons of your Father.”

His point is, just as God does what is good for everybody, friends and enemies alike (“sun ... rain”), so those who would be his sons should behave that way, “Love ... pray”. Nothing is suggested in these verses about having to “like” your enemies – but we do have to “love” them, as Paul loved Peter when he “opposed him to his face” (Galatians 2:11).

So, to “love” as we should means, not only that we admire our friends, but also that we correct them when they err – because, in both cases, they are treasured.

John 3:16 is another helpful passage: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”. The “world” is not likeable; it has always been rebellious to God; but nonetheless He so loved it that He gave his only Son. It is our privilege to imitate “God, as beloved children. And walk in love ...” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

THE TRADITIONS YOU WERE TAUGHT

Sean P. Cavender | Raymore, Missouri, USA

It seems that the word “tradition” has quickly become a bad word among many members of the Lord’s church. Some claim that churches are only following tradition without any love or zeal. They cry out: “You’re just bound by ‘church of Christ’ tradition,” “Legalist!” or “You’re just a Pharisee.”

Maybe you’ve heard these phrases before, or someone’s complaint about the Lord’s church that was similar to these statements.

I want you to consider some things with me that might make me sound like a “traditionalist.” Actually, they won’t make me sound like a traditionalist. They will make me a traditionalist! “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

1. Assembling upon the first day of the week is a tradition that I will not abandon.

The New Testament church assembled upon the first day of the week from its very beginning. The day of Pentecost was a celebration that was upon the first day of the week. The prefix “penta” means 50. The Israelites would count 7 Sabbaths (the Sabbath only occurred once a week, so 7 weeks must pass). The 7th Sabbath was the 49th day + 1 = 50 (day of Pentecost). So the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, the one where 3,000 souls were baptized and

added to the church (Acts 2:41-47), occurred upon the first day of the week.

However, this was not just a one time occurrence. Later in the book of Acts, the church assembled upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This tradition was known in other congregations in other parts of the world, too (1 Corinthians 16:1).

2. Singing without the use of instruments.

This is perhaps the one thing that truly distinguishes the church of Christ from so many people today. The Lord's church is commonly known for their lack of instrumental music in worship services. Why do we not use instruments? Do we just not like the piano? Do we think our voices make music that is more beautiful than what any instrument could make? No and no.

The reason that we do not use instruments is because God has not commanded the use of instruments to be used. In the Old Testament worship, in the temple, He did command instruments to be used.

"And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the LORD by His prophets"
(2 Chronicles 29:25).

Using instruments was explicitly commanded in the Old Testament system of worship. Which makes God's silence and lack of a command in the New Testament even more powerful! If God wanted to have instrumental music in the worship assembly of the New Testament church, then He most certainly would have commanded it. However, He told us to sing and make melody in our hearts. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

I intend to hold to the tradition of singing without the use of instruments -- not because it is the "tradition" that I have simply grown up with, but because it is the tradition that God wants in His church.

3. Identifying the church as Christ's.

One of the most disconcerting trends among many brethren today is the "renaming" or "re-branding" of the church of Christ. Some contend that the name "church of Christ" is just based upon tradition and causes the church of Christ to look and feel like a denomination. So, some opt to re-brand the church by calling it something non-traditional. Maybe

they put a disclaimer: “nondenominational,” or “Christians meet here.”

A concern that I have about “renaming the church” is that this is exactly the trend of denominations. If people are so afraid that the “church of Christ” designation is making us a denomination, then why do we want to follow the trends that other denominations follow? The “nondenominational” movement is very popular by churches. They might not designate themselves as “Baptist,” “Methodist,” “Catholic,” or “Lutheran”; instead they simply identify themselves as “nondenominational.” However, based upon their actions you know that they are not the New Testament church.

However, my biggest reservation about “re-branding” the church is that we are removing the most important part: Christ! We keep the name church (even though the denominations use that name). We keep the name Christians (even though members of denominations would consider themselves to be Christians). No, we take the name of Christ off the signs. Are we ashamed of the traditions of Christ? Are we ashamed that Christ purchased the church with His blood?

Christ called the church “my church” (Matthew 16:18). The church does not belong to me, or to you. The church does not belong to “the Christians that meet here.” The church belongs to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I want to hold fast to the tradition that identifies the church as belonging to Christ. I don't want to hold on to this tradition because it is all that I know. I want to hold onto this tradition because it glorifies and honors the Savior, who redeemed the church with His blood. Unashamedly, I desire to hold to the traditions that have been taught and handed down not by family, not by friends, but by the word of God.

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

SOME THOUGHTS ON CHURCH AUTONOMY

Tanner Campbell | Rapid City, South Dakota, USA

The subject of autonomy has proven to be a difficult subject among the brotherhood, and my convictions on this subject have been altered numerous times as I have revisited the subject for a number of years. Needless to say, the following words will not be the results of my finalized study of this topic, but only a presentation of what I believe to be the truth about autonomy, based on my current study.

It is important to see what the bible says alone. With the

subject of the autonomy of the local church, many opinions have been presented that might very well be considered additions to what the bible teaches. To me, I see local church autonomy as one subject, not a thousand. Some are quick to offer the argument “This violates church autonomy,” on many situations that arise within the church, when we should only hear that argument used rightfully in a few situations alone. Let’s break it down. The word “autonomy” simply means self-governing, and therefore independent and free from the control of others. When applied to the local church, autonomy is very scriptural. The bible certainly teaches that each local church is self-governing, and therefore is in 100% control of every decision made by that congregation, and 100% in control of all its finances and other resources. The bible is clear on these facts, we will not find any word, or example of a congregation giving up its control to another (whether it is to individuals not a part of that local group, or another congregation, or a man-made institution). We see from the bible that the local congregation has full control over itself, and no other. The Holy Spirit, through both Peter and Paul, taught on this point:

1 Peter 5:1-2 “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.”

When Peter wrote this letter, he actually wrote to many Christians who were a part of many different local churches (1 Peter 1:1), therefore, when he speaks on the subject of the eldership, he teaches them to be overseers in the group “which is among you,” not the church in any other location. So the authority that any eldership has is limited to the local church that they are joined to.

Acts 20:28 “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Notice that Paul just made the same point as Peter. Paul, while talking to the elders of the church in Ephesus, told them to take heed to those “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” That statement presents a limitation upon the eldership. Therefore, we see from the scriptures that the highest authority that a man can obtain in the church is limited to the local church where they may serve as one of the elders. An elder is an essential part of the “self-governing” (autonomous) local church. Their realm of rule begins and ends in the local church.



Certainly autonomy is made clear in the bible, but a problem arises when men “pull the autonomy card” for any and all associations that one might have with another congregation. This is wrong. Autonomy is not a word where we can make up our own definition to in order to fit a particular situation. Autonomy refers only to the self-government within a congregation. Therefore, autonomy can only be violated if the local church allows another party (whether an individual not a part of that church, another church, or a man-made institution) the right to have a hand in the decisions made by that local church. This is the only means by which the church relieves itself of its self-governing status that Christ authorized it to have. All other situations of fellowship and associations, whether scriptural or unscriptural, do not fall on the argument of violating autonomy.

Let’s consider some example of non-violations of church autonomy. Visiting another congregation while out of town, or for an event like a gospel meeting, does not put us in the position of having a vote in the decisions made by that congregation. What if, while visiting, we happen to catch a glance at the budget information that they have posted on a board? Have we now been placed in a position to decide where some of their money will go? Certainly not! So we see that, even having knowledge of the whereabouts of another congregation does not violate their autonomy. Calling a wise brother whom we know from another congregation to seek his wise counsel over a particular problem we’re facing within our local church, has not given him authority to make decisions for us or for the local church that we are joined to. The fully sufficient self-governing system within the local church has not been violated in any of these situations. Sometimes we find out things about other churches, sometimes good things, and other times bad things. If we are searching out this information, then we may very well have other issues to take care of, and a careful biblical attitude check is in order. Other times this is not the case when we happen to obtain information about other churches. Again, this has not affected the self-government within those churches that we have information on. We could discuss slander, gossip, and meddling, but I am assuming that the readers of this article understand those sins, but here, we are simply discussing what is scriptural and unscriptural between churches as it relates to autonomy. Many other examples can be made, such as listening to the opening announcements made by a congregation we are only visiting, or picking up a bulletin from another church. In no way can these situations be brought into the discussion of violating autonomy.

Paul had information on many churches that he was not

joined to, such as Corinth, Ephesus, and the churches throughout Galatia. In fact, he even wrote letters to some of them, sometimes to encourage them, other times to speak to them about his concerns for that local group that he was not a part of. Autonomy was not violated, as he did not disrupt the self government of any of those churches.

Other examples that we find in the scriptures show the sharing of knowledge about churches in other places. In Acts chapter eleven, the church in Jerusalem did not violate the autonomy of the church in Antioch when they heard of the affairs among the disciples in that area and even sent one of their evangelists to help the church grow in that area (Acts 11:22). No actions altered the self-government of any church involved. Today, we have many evangelists go overseas to preach the gospel. I receive e-mails from some of them, telling me nearly everything, it seems, about the work that is going on in the areas they travel to. In no way does my possession of such knowledge place me into the authority to be a part of the decisions made by any of those congregations. Further, if I do not hear of the affairs of other congregations, how can I fulfill one of the works of the local church that I am joined to: benevolence of needy saints? The scriptures are filled with examples of churches sending relief to other saints who are a part of another local church (Acts 11:28-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:3-4; 2 Corinthians 9:1-2, 12). Did they violate their autonomy when they heard of the struggling affairs of other churches? Certainly not! There are even times within the scriptures where Paul has a particular desire to learn of the affairs of another congregation for which he has personal affection, although not joined to them. Consider, for example, Philippians 1:27

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.”

Hearing good things happening within other churches was an encouraging thing to the Apostle, as it is to us too. Further, to hear of a congregation that is having problems does not have to be brought to the lows of meddling and gossip, but rather, by understanding their sad state, many offerings of prayer can be made on behalf of them.

Acts chapter fifteen contains another example for us. Those in Jerusalem had heard of the estranged teaching of some who had gone up to teach in Antioch, and therefore entered into a discussion as to what the truth is. In no way

do I see Acts chapter fifteen teach that the church in Jerusalem had any authority over the church in Antioch. I do see, however, men coming together to discuss the words of the Holy Spirit, and those who were a part of that discussion where able to come to an agreement on what God teaches, and further, men began to preach what they learned from this discussion against the false teachings of some who were in Antioch. Autonomy did not come into the picture, as some have said. It is not wrong to discuss the scriptures with anyone, or a group of people. Today, we even have public debates sometimes, but I haven't personally heard anyone cry out for autonomy because of them.

In closing, I again encourage the reader to take note that I am currently working to come to a fuller knowledge of the truth on the subject of autonomy, this article is not a declaration that I have the answers to the question of autonomy, but it is a compilation of some of the thoughts I have had lately on this subject. In sharing them with you, I anticipate that you will be noble if you disagree with me. My hope is that you will be interested in looking more into the subject yourself.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

from the e-book, "...And They Shall Become One Flesh..."
William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Therefore just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.
(Ephesians 4:24-25)

Subjection Of The Wife

From the beginning, God has required a woman to be subject to her husband. Eve was made "*a helper comparable to*" Adam (Genesis 2:18). After the sin, in addition to pronouncing the consequence for her sin, God also reminded her of her role, "*...your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*" (Genesis 3:16). This was God's will from the beginning, not a consequence of sin.

Paul used the wife's submission to her husband as an illustration of the church's submission to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22-24). The apostle addresses the nature of the submission, in stating, "*...just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*" (Ephesians 5:24)

It is equally suitable for a wife to rebel against the word of her husband as it would be for the church to rebel against the word of the Lord.

Paul commands Titus to instruct the older women to instruct the younger women. They are to

"...admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." (Titus 2:4-5)

Notice the importance of women conducting themselves in their role appropriately - "that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

Two things are specifically commanded with regard to her husband; she is to love (Gr. *philandros*, literally, be friend to man) and be obedient (Gr. *hupotasso*, literally subordinate, in subjection, submit self unto) to him. The other traits mentioned (loving children, discreet, chaste, homemakers, good) will develop as she gives attention to loving and being obedient to her husband. In commanding her to be a homemaker (KJV, keepsers at home), Paul is not saying that she cannot work outside the home (ie. the virtuous woman, Priscilla, Lydia, etc.), but that her primary concern is to be the keeping of the home.

Peter, in a discussion of a woman's submission to her husband emphasized the need for her to appropriately adorn herself - display the beauty which is "*the hidden person of the heart*." He reveals,

"...in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands." (1 Peter 3:4-5)

Solomon also addressed in several proverbs by way of contrast the spirit in which a woman ought to conduct herself (Proverbs 9:13; 11:16, 22; 12:4; 14:1; 21:9, 19; 27:15).

It is essential to understand, a woman is subject to her own husband, not to all men. I have authority over my wife, not another man's wife. The CEO of a company has authority, but it is beyond the scope of his authority to issue commands to the employees of another company. The wife is subject to the elders of a local church, and to the men in regard to spiritual service, but their authority over her does not extend beyond the scope of that particular realm.

Headship Of The Husband

Paul states,

"...the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church..." (Ephesians 5:23)

Excuse the pun, but gentlemen, don't let that go to your head.

The man is charged with a role of leadership. An effective leader takes into account those who are entrusted to him. That is precisely the picture we see of Jesus in Paul's instruction. Notice that Jesus:

- *"...loved the church and gave Himself for her..."* (Ephesians 5:25)
- Worked to *"...sanctify and cleanse her..."* (Ephesians 5:26)
- Caused her to be *"...a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle..."* (Ephesians 5:27)
- Led her to be *"...holy and without blemish."* (Ephesians 5:27)

Men, it is a high calling to be the head of our wives. Jesus had authority and acknowledged such (Matthew 28:18-20), but it is important that we examine His conduct. He did what was for the benefit of His bride. He lived for her, He died for her, and rose again from the grave for her. He said of Himself,

"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45)

Too many husbands are here to be served rather than to serve.

Ephesians 5 focuses on a man's responsibility to love his wife, and do what is for her good, especially with regard to spiritual things. He also has a responsibility regarding his wife's physical needs. 1 Timothy 5:8 reads,

"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

A man providing for his family is not just an "old fashion" custom; it is a God-given command! In fact, the apostle goes so far as to say,

"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

Colossians 3:19 simply says,

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."

This word bitter (Gr. *pikraino*) is used in contrast to the word sweet (see Revelation 10:9-10; James 3:11). Men must approach their wives with the right disposition - she is to be a cause of joy and gratitude to God, not perceived as a nuisance or trouble to be endured.

Honour, Love, Respect

I think every wedding ceremony I've been to, and know for

certain that every wedding I've officiated, has contained these three words - honour, love and respect.

Romans 13:13 says we should render "honor to whom honor." Contextually, it is obvious that the marriage relationship was not the thought on Paul's mind, and yet honour is an essential part of marriages. Peter compels husbands to

"...dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel..." (1 Peter 3:7)

She is to be highly valued, precious in his sight, and showered with his esteem and dignity.

Ephesians 5:25 commands the husband to love his wife. The Greek word used is *agapao*, which addresses a love of moral obligation more than emotion. And yet, one cannot read of the Lord's love and service for the church without acknowledging His affection for her. Likewise, emotion is a component of the husband's *agapao* love for his wife.

The wife is commanded to love her husband in Titus 2:4-5. The love here is different from that which is used in Ephesians 5:25. This is *philandros* love. It is rooted in fondness and affection. A woman is commanded to be affectionate and to display warmth to her husband. Consider this in light of what God commanded Eve, *"...your desire shall be for your husband..."* (Genesis 3:16).

The Hebrew word used here is *tashuwqah*, defined by Strong's as *"...stretching out after, a longing : desire."*

At the close of Paul's discussion about the marriage relationship in Ephesians 5, he made the statement, *"...let the wife see that she respects her husband"* (Ephesians 5:33)

Though the Greek word used is *phobeo* (from which we get our English phobia), don't misunderstand. She is not to have a sense of terror with regard to her husband, but to be in awe of him, to revere him. It is the equivalent and return of his honour to her.

Parenting

This is not a lesson on parenting, and yet it is the case that children will eventually come in almost every marriage. Thus, we would be remiss if we did not address at least briefly the roles and responsibilities which fall to the husband (father) and wife (mother) when children come along. The sometimes heard sentiment that raising children is the woman's job could not be further from the truth. Effective (and biblical) parenting requires both parents doing their part.

Certainly, the woman has an important role to fill. Paul encouraged that younger widows "...*marry, bear children, guide the house...*" (1 Timothy 5:14).

Titus 2:4 has the older women teaching the younger "...*to love their children...*" It was Timothy's mother and grandmother whom Paul praised for raising such a fine young man (2 Timothy 1:5). If a mother does not actively and effectively participate with her husband in training their children, Proverbs 29:15 reveals that the child will "*bring shame to his mother.*"

As much as a responsibility for parenting lies with the woman, the Scriptures actually address the father more than the mother with regard to his duty. Especially through the book of Proverbs, we see instruction given by Solomon to his son about parenthood. Note the instruction was given to his son, not to his son's wife.

In Ephesians 6:4, fathers are commanded,
"*...do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*"

Parallel to this, Colossians 3:21 reads,
"*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*"

Fathers are responsible for the training and esteem of their children. The dad who has no time or attention for his children has transgressed God's plan for the family.

Notice how Paul characterized the conduct of himself and his companions with regard to those who had just obeyed the gospel in Thessalonica. He wrote:
"*...we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So affectionately longing for you ... you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children...*" (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11)

What a beautiful picture of the parental role. May we enact it in our homes, for our children's and our own sake.

WHAT IS CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

The apostle Paul taught Christians to practice church discipline. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in

the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). The incident at Corinth involved that of fornication (verses 1-2), but the principle of withdrawal was not limited to this sin (verse 11), nor were these instructions limited to Corinth. Other churches that faced other forms of rebellion were told to do the same thing (2 Thessalonians 3:14). Church discipline is a commandment God expects all faithful Christians to perform.

What Is Involved?

First, there must be an effort to persuade the sinner to repent (Matthew 18:17). This will remain the intent of the entire withdrawal process. However, if there is no repentance, the faithful saints are to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:6). God wants us to “put away from yourselves that evil person” (verse 13). This involves a public statement before the congregation that condemns the behavior of the erring Christian and no longer recognizes him as a member of that congregation. The church then severs all ties with that person spiritually and socially, no longer keeping company with him—“not even to eat with such a person” (verse 11). The Christian who is withdrawn from may still attend worship services if he chooses, as may any other sinner, but he may not take part as a faithful Christian (serving as elder, teaching a class, leading in worship, etc.). His fellowship with God’s people is to be withdrawn.

Why Is this Practiced?

1. To produce shame. We are to “note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:14). God has already judged that person, for refusing to keep His will, and is no longer in fellowship with him (1 John 2:3-5). By withdrawing from that person, the church is using its relationship with the erring to demonstrate his loss of fellowship with God. This stand is not to be taken in bitterness, resentment, or the spirit of revenge. “Do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thessalonians 3:15). Nevertheless, it is a judgment that must be made as long as he refuses to repent (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

2. To protect the church. We are to deliver erring Christians to Satan because “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Other Christians could be influenced to also rebel in sin if the erring Christian is not rebuked. Thus, “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20). When we compromise for one member living in sin, we will eventually compromise for other sins in other members. Sin is a cancer that will spread throughout the entire body if it is not quickly removed (2 Timothy 2:16-18). The only way to

protect the church's health and integrity, as well as its influence in community, it is to discipline members who do not repent of sin.

What If They Leave?

There are some who try to avoid withdrawal by removing their membership from a local church before action is taken. They convince themselves that if they can avoid an official act of withdrawal, they can still be considered righteous. There are several things wrong with this reasoning.

They are still without God. It matters little what "action" has been taken against them because God is not in fellowship with them as long as they reject His will (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The Lord's response is the same for all sinners: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). The "unmarked" erring Christians may successfully avoid judgment from a local church, but he won't avoid judgment from God. "The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Timothy 2:19).

They still must be marked. How will the world know that we do not condone the sinful rebellion of the erring if we do not mark them? How will other members know to avoid such sins if no formal statement is made to oppose the erring? The only biblical remedy for ungodly Christians is to "note" these brethren and "avoid them" (Romans 16:17). We acknowledged publicly when the person obeyed the gospel or placed membership (Acts 9:26), so it is only proper that we acknowledge publicly when that relationship has changed.

They still must be avoided. Protecting the integrity of the church is not the only reason for discipline. Another purpose is to bring the sinner to repentance. Paul wrote, "And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14). We do not keep company with them so they might be ashamed of their sin. This principle is true whether a formal withdrawal has occurred or not. As long as that Christian is in rebellion to God, they are to notice a difference in their relationship with all of God's people, in every congregation that learns of their rebellion.

Why Such a Strong Stand?

God takes a strong stand against sin because of its destructive influence. Erring Christians can convince other Christians to also rebel against God. Therefore, "from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into

households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts” (2 Timothy 3:5-6). No one is immune to rebelling against God. The strongest of Christians are capable of leaving their first love if they are closely associated with compromise and ungodliness. Thus, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding... Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:5, 7).

What If They Repent?

If the erring Christian humbles himself and repents of his sin, he is to feel genuine love and acceptance from his brethren. When the Corinthians obeyed the command to withdraw from the erring, and he eventually repented, they were told, “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). Praise God for His marvelous wisdom and mercy.

Conclusion

I am the first to admit that no discipline is pleasant at first, but painful. Nevertheless, “It yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). May God grant us the wisdom to stand where He stands in opposition to sin. If He loves the erring enough to command a public withdrawal against them, we must love them and God enough to administer it. It is a test of our faith. This was Paul’s conclusion when the Corinthians withdrew from the erring, “For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things” (2 Corinthians 2:9). They passed the test of obeying God’s word even in matters as difficult as withdrawal. Will we also demonstrate the same love, faith, and wisdom?

GAMBLING

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Gambling is all the rage in our nation. Our little “Bible Belt” state has had race track betting for generations in Hot Springs (horses) and West Memphis (dogs). Old folks have choices of places to play bingo. And young people will receive college scholarships from the state’s earnings on the lottery. Now, surely that’s a good cause!

I often hear brethren argue against gambling on economic grounds. Not only is their position hard to prove, it is irrelevant! If gambling is morally wrong, what difference does it make whether it makes money or not? Nevada has turned a desert into a sinner’s paradise on the foundation of legalized gambling. Gambling is wrong because it is immoral.

By “gambling” I mean “the act or practice of betting: the act of playing a game and consciously risking money or other stakes on its outcome” (Webster. 932). Often people argue, “Life is a gamble. You can’t walk across the street without gambling you won’t get run over. A person can’t go into business without gambling he won’t go broke. Every time a farmer plants a crop, he’s gambling.” Gambling is more than taking a risk. The key difference between legitimate business risks and gambling is that in a morally upright business, when one makes a profit, all involved profit. You buy a car from an honest dealer. He makes money, and you have dependable transportation. In gambling, one profits at the loss of others.

We can only acquire material wealth in ways the Lord permits (Colossians 3:17). The New Testament condones only four methods of acquiring wealth: work, fair exchange, investment and love. We may, and should, work to feed our families and to give to the needy (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10,12). We may exchange one form of wealth for another, a fair sale or trade (Acts 5:3-4). We may invest money or goods in order to increase them (Matthew 25:26-27). In each of these ways there is a fair exchange to the benefit of all involved. Each involves a “win-win” situation. Also, one may, as a voluntary act of love, give something of value to another with no monetary return expected (Acts 20:35; Ephesians 4:28).

Gambling not only fails to fit any of these categories, it actually violates the principle behind them all. Earned wealth involves a fair exchange to the benefit of all involved. In gambling, the winner gives nothing in return to the losers. One wins to the detriment of all others involved. The whole premise behind gambling is “get rich quick” - the attempt to acquire wealth without work. Rather than giving through love, the winner takes what the loser does not want to give up.

Mature Christians are able to “discern good and evil” by recognizing when a specific practice violates a scriptural principle (Hebrews 5:14). Gambling violates the most basic quality of Christ-like character: unselfish love. We must love all people (Matthew 5:43-48). Love is manifested by concerned giving (1 John 3:16-18). We must never be selfish, but must seek what is good for others (Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:4). How can we claim to have such unselfish love when we selfishly take what belongs to another, with no regard for his needs or the needs of his family, and give nothing in return?

Furthermore, the basis of gambling is the desire to acquire something for nothing, wealth without work, whereas the

disciples of Christ must desire to earn what they receive (2 Thessalonians 3:8).

The basis of gambling is “covetousness,” the “greedy desire to have more” (Thayer. 516), which is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5-6). It is caused by the love of money, and “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Often the evil nature of gambling is hidden by a worthy cause as its object. How many school needs have been funded by raffles? A worthy purpose does not justify a sinful method, i.e., the end does not justify the means (Romans 3:8). Shall we permit doctor assisted suicides to alleviate the suffering of the terminally ill?

Will legalized gambling simply cause more economic problems long term than it cures short term? Probably. But that’s not the issue. The issue is, Is it right? The answer, **NO!** Christ does not authorize it, and His word condemns it in principle. There is no more to say.

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THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12:13-21

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Years ago a young man asked me, “Keith, how much is your dad worth?” What do you mean how much is he worth? How much was he worth to me? How could I put a monetary value on that? How much is his soul worth? More than the entire world (Matthew 16:26). How much were his worldly possessions worth? Not much.

And isn’t that how most people determine a person’s value? If they are wealthy, they feel important. If an acquaintance has a large income, they want to be his friend and will boast about knowing him. How many people brag about knowing the school janitor?

But the Master teaches that to measure life or personal worth by a monetary standard is to be guilty of covetousness. “And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Life is more than things. The church is to withdraw from covetous people (1 Corinthians 5:9-11), and they will be eternally lost unless they repent (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5). God

declares that a covetous man is a fool! (Luke 12:20) How might we be guilty of covetousness?

The Greek lexicon defines it as “greediness, insatiableness, avarice” (673). The **New American Standard Bible** translates it as “greed.” Covetousness is a form of idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). Thus, it is putting material things ahead of God. The apostle Paul admonishes us to be content with the necessities of life and warns us against the desire to be rich, the love of money, and greediness (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

There is a popular belief that covetousness is limited to such desire for wealth that we would commit crimes or act dishonestly to obtain what we crave. But the rich farmer Jesus used to illustrate covetousness obtained his wealth honestly (Luke 12:15). For all we know he was simply a sterling example of hard work and prudent management. Now one who would cheat, steal, lie, or swindle to become wealthy is certainly covetous, for he puts wealth ahead of God, but we may be perfectly honest and legal in obtaining things we crave and still be covetous.

Jesus’ warning about covetousness was precipitated by the plea of a man from the audience as the Master was teaching vital spiritual truth pertaining to eternal salvation. “Then one from the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me’” (Luke 12:13). Under Jewish law the eldest son received a double portion of his father’s inheritance in return for the obligation of caring for the family (cf. Deuteronomy 21:15-17; Genesis 48:3-5; 50:15-21). But the younger brothers also had an inheritance coming (Luke 15:11-12). The man appeared to be a younger brother, and he implicitly accused his elder brother of misusing the power of his birthright to refuse to divide the inheritance.

Again, for all we know, the man’s claim was just, and he was a victim of injustice. But that wasn’t the Lord’s concern! Christ was teaching people how to inherit eternal life, and all this man got out of it was the idea, Here’s an influential man who can persuade my brother to give me the property I have coming. In the midst of a marvelous lesson about heavenly values, his concern was earthly riches. He was covetous.

The Lord emphatically refused to be drawn into this family squabble over finances. He

unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp

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