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Editor, Keith Sharp
Designer, William Stewart
(unless otherwise noted, answers
to questions by Keith Sharp)



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Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER
THINGS**

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

"The Father is possessor of all humanity as the Creator; the Son by gift from the Father possesses the believing portion of humanity as its Redeemer" (J.W. McGarvey, **Fourfold Gospel**, 680 [comment on John 17:6])

Question from Nigeria about Galatians 6:10

Question

Beloved Bro. Keith,

Thank God for Tanner Campbell health. May God keep being with him. Amen.

Having perused Tanner Campbell's article, "The Beauty of Galatians 6:10 in its Context," I have the following for consideration.

In explaining verse 6 he said, "...The one 'who is taught the word' (6:6) is one who has chosen to obey the word and therefore reenters into fellowship with God and His people. The one who is 'spiritual' (6:1) now shares 'in all good things' with the one who was once "overtaken in a fault.'

Question 1: Is the one who was once overtaken in a fault now occupying the place of the teacher (that is, "him that teacheth", Gal.6.6, **KJV**; "his teacher", **Amplified Bible**)?

Tanner went further by saying, “....the sharing of ‘all things,’ refers to all things spiritual.”

Question 2: Is it spiritual if or when one, in obedient to the words of the Spirit (1 Cor.2.13), respecting “the fruit of the Spirit which is love....goodness, (Gal.5.22) gives to the need of others (saints & non-Christians) (Gal.6.6, 10; 1 Jn.2.17,18) ? He also said, “Those who act presumptuously and venture away from the context might see this scripture to be about paying the preacher. But contextually, that idea is not present. We can look elsewhere for that commandment (1 Corinthians 9:7-14).”

Momentarily, on Gal.6.6, I believe it is about individual student (saint) communicating, sharing all good things with him (his teacher, the preacher) that teaches him. And this is the belief of all preachers I have known until now; and I do not think Bro. Keith Sharp believes to the contrary. Even, when we were answering one of the questions some of our listeners on air sent to us, Bro. Ojeva made use of Gal.6.6 to mean that members in the Lord church should, individually, share....with the preacher, the teacher.

On the same Gal.6.6, **Amplified Bible** says : “Let him who receives instruction in the Word [of God] share all good things with his teacher [contributing to his support].”

Similarly,Roger E.Dickson's Biblical Research Library, Vol. VII comments thus: “The Greek word used by Paul in this verse is koinonia. Though the word is used in a broad assortment of contexts with varying definitions, a general definition is ‘to share in joint partnership.’This verse teaches that the student must financially support the teacher. Here is the teaching of Paul in the context of 1 Corinthians 9:9-19.”

Thanks for meditation you will give to this as I await your response.

Answer

Tanner Campbell | Rapid City, South Dakota, USA

Brother, I appreciate your questions and your desire to look into the scriptures further.

Answer to question 1:

The “him that is taught in the word,” in Galatians 6:6, would be in respect to the man “overtaken in a fault” in verse 1. Likewise, “him that teacheth” in verse 6, is equivalent to “ye which are spiritual” in verse 1.

Answer to question 2:

First, I certainly did not mean to come across to anyone that an individual providing or supporting someone’s needs is not a good thing; on the contrary, the bible greatly supports the idea of giving and helping others in need. Second, I do believe that that is not the point of the text here in Galatians 6:6. The “all things” of verse six, when taken out of context could mean anything, including the giving of monetary needs, but the word “all” is always limited to the context that it belongs to. Here, in Galatians 6, the subject is that of the faithful Christian’s responsibility to work to bring their fallen brother out of the fire, and from there, the context blooms into the fact that we actually have that responsibility to the lost world as well (6:10). The purpose of this context is due to the many erring brethren within the churches of Galatia that have “fallen from grace” (5:4) and need help to be restored. The help they needed could only come through being instructed in the proper truths by faithful Christians (“ye which are spiritual” of 6:1). The object of Galatians 6:6 is the reward shared between the hard working spiritual man and the brother he helped pull out of the fire. Contextually, the “all good things” that they share in is limited to spiritual things that they have from God (not the things one might give to another as payment), such as their peace with God, their relationship with their Savior, their participation in the cleansing from the blood of Christ, and their reunion in the body of Christ. Many other such things are incorporated in the “all things” that occur when a brother brings an erring brother back from the dead, including that of simple joy on both sides. In other places

of scripture these ideas are also addressed (1 Corinthians 3:14, where “reward” is not heaven, but rather the observation of one entering heaven due to the hard work you put into them on earth; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). I understand that many may have heard Galatians chapter six taught differently, but all I can practice and teach is what is revealed within the context. Context trumps all; there is no commentary, dictionary, or words of a preacher that ought to say something more than what the context has revealed. In answer to your question of “Is it spiritual if or when one, in obedience to the words of the Spirit (1 Cor.2.13), respecting “the fruit of the Spirit which is love....goodness, (Gal.5.22) gives to the need of others (saints & non-Christians) (Gal.6.6, 10; 1 Jn.2.17, 18)? Whether financial support is a spiritual work or not, it is still a commanded work and must be accomplished. A case can be made for the spiritual side of the work from Philippians 4:18, likewise the case can be made for the non-spiritual side of the work from 1 Corinthians 9:11, where Paul makes a distinction between spiritual things and financial support being a part of material things. I think there is both a spiritual side to the work and, of course, the end product being money, is a material thing. Therefore, since there is a spiritual side to benevolence, does it apply to Galatians 6:6 where the context is about the spiritual. I cannot see it. Firstly, what the two parties share in is what God has granted them and not what one party shares with the other. When we look at the context, it limits the “sharing in all good things” to the idea of the fallen brother and the faithful brother united with Christ and “all things” spiritual that they now share in common with Christ. I’d have a hard time making the case that since there is a spiritual side to financial support that that is exactly what Paul is speaking about here, and further, that that is the only thing Paul has in mind (making this just a verse about paying preachers). One concluding thought; the context does not make “him that teacheth,” of verse 6, a preacher, but rather he is that spiritual man back in verse 1 who is bringing his erring brother back to Christ. To make verse 6 about financial support would authorize the financial support of every spiritual man who has ever brought someone to Christ. But that would not be in harmony with the rest of the scriptures, which authorize the financial support of those who have dedicated the teaching of the gospel to be their work. 1 Corinthians 9:14, “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.” I hope this answer well suits your question and that it will ignite more study into the great truths of God’s word.

The Autonomy of the Local Church

Sunday Ayandare | Ibadan, Nigeria

One of the principles of the New Testament church that is grossly misunderstood by many is the autonomy of the local church. There are those who opine that congregational autonomy has to do with each local church being an island to itself, having nothing to do whatsoever with Christians in other local churches. Some even go to the extent of asserting that congregational autonomy confers on each local church the right to bind and loose anything under the sun!

On the other hand, there are those who consider the concept of congregational autonomy as not only unbiblical, but also divisive and therefore, devilish. These views are wrong!

What Is Congregational Autonomy?

Autonomy is derived from two Greek words, namely, “auto” and “nomy.” “Auto” means self, while “nomy” has to do with the quality or state of being self-governing. Hence, when we talk of congregational autonomy, we are expressing the idea that each congregation is self-governing and is independent of every other.

Congregational autonomy does not mean each local church can make laws for itself. We have only one lawgiver who is Jesus Christ (James 4:12). He is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23); the King of the kingdom (1 Timothy 6:15). Autonomy of the local church simply means that each local church reserves the right to make decisions as to what expedencies it will employ in executing God’s laws.

Let us illustrate: In Hebrews 10:25, we read, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

The direct command here is, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” Implicit in this command, however, is the need for a time and place of meeting. It is inconceivable that there can be a meeting without a specific place and time. The Lord does not bind any specific place or time.

This is where congregational autonomy comes in. Each local church has the right to decide at what time it is going to meet, how many times within the week, who is to do the preaching, for how many minutes or hours.

Autonomy of each local church does not mean a congregation could decide to make a 25 year old, unmarried preacher an elder. The Lord states in His word that an elder must be the husband of one wife and have believing children (Titus 1:6) A local church cannot decide on which day to eat the Lord’s Supper. The Lord has decided that – the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). To break bread on any other day is to transgress the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). The Lord has specified the elements of the Lord’s Table – unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:17, 26-29). To eat garri and drink coke at the Lord’s Supper in the name of congregational autonomy is to eat damnation (1 Corinthians 11:29). The Lord has given the method we should follow in giving of our means to support the work of the church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8). Any other method is to go beyond that which is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Congregational Autonomy Is A New Testament Concept

After Paul and Barnabas had preached and established churches in several cities on their first journey, they came back to appoint elders for each of these churches (Acts 14:23). That elders were appointed in every local church in apostolic times underscores two principles which form the basis of the concept of congregational autonomy. One, the independence of each local church. Two, the equality of all the churches.

Let us keep in mind that Barnabas and Saul were sent out by a local church – Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Having accomplished their task, they returned and gave report to the same local church (Acts 14:26-27). The church at Antioch did not oversee these local churches in spite of the fact that it (Antioch) was responsible for the sending out of the preachers who established the churches.

In the New Testament, there was nothing like “mother church” or “supervising congregation.” Every local church was independent and all the congregations were on the same footing – equal before God – in spite of size or location.

Moreover, the principle of congregational autonomy is seen in the limitation of the authority of the elders. Elders in the New Testament period were local officers, not state or provincial or national officers. Each church had its own elders. What was the jurisdiction of these elders? Paul, addressing the Ephesian elders charged them to, “take heed ... to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). That is how it should be today. The jurisdiction of elders should not extend beyond the congregation where they are appointed. Apostle Peter says, “the elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder ... Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof...” (1 Peter 5:1-3). That conclusively shows the limit and extent of the authority of elders. Succinctly put, the elders of a large congregation cannot, by divine approval, oversee the work of another nearby, small church. The New Testament teaches that each congregation did its own work under its own elders. The church at Jerusalem, for example, sent out Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:22). The church at Antioch on the other hand sent Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-4). There was no centralized, inter-congregational pooling of funds. The church at Jerusalem relieved its own needy members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). When the need became greater than the ability of the Jerusalem church, other churches like Macedonia, Achaia and Galatia sent benevolence to “the poor saints at Jerusalem” (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

While Paul was working at Corinth, he was supported by many churches (2 Corinthians 11:8). How was this done? It was not done through any committee or Board or agency. Each church sent directly to Paul through its own chosen messenger (Philippians 4:15-18). This is the principle set forth in the New

Testament for the Lord's church.

Autonomy and Jerusalem "Conference"

It has been argued by some that the meeting held at Jerusalem in Acts 15 to consider the matter of circumcision was a precedent for inter-congregational organization. It is asserted that since the church at Antioch sent "Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them" to Jerusalem, that is veritable proof that today local churches can send representatives to an organization, or a Board or a committee for "the work of God." That is just not so!

In the first place, the meeting at Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 was a one-time event. It was not a regular or a continuing "conference" arrangement. Secondly, it was not composed of representatives from various congregations of a state or a country, but of members of just one congregation (Acts 15:2). Thirdly, it was occasioned by a question of doctrine which nobody could answer except the apostles who constituted the repository of divine revelation at that time (Acts 15:28). Fourthly, it featured the apostles of Christ who had special qualifications and special authority and had no successors.

Abuse of Congregational Autonomy

Like every other arrangement ordained of God, we have seen and heard of instances where the principle of congregational autonomy has been abused and bastardized. We have heard of some of our preaching brethren shouting, "autonomy, autonomy" to the high heavens when their blatant sins were about to be exposed. To such we would appeal that they repent before their sins find them out (Numbers 32:23). Others, like Diotrefes, love pre-eminence and lord it over God's heritage and invoke the principle of autonomy to cast people out of the church (3 John 9-11; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Apostle Peter admonished, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5: 5-6).

Congregational autonomy is not and should not be used as a cover for the sin of any Christian or any preacher. It is not a cloak for false teaching. Rather, it is a divine arrangement whereby the Lord protects His church from wholesale apostasy.

Paul, To The Ephesians

The Mystery Of His Will

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

When I was a kid, in pre-television days, every afternoon we stopped whatever we were doing to come in and gather around the radio – to listen to Tom Mix, Superman, the Lone Ranger, and, especially, "The House Of Mystery", complete with appropriately eerie plots, a chilling laugh, and a creaking door. We never thought much about what a "mystery" was; it was obviously whatever the writers could conjure up to get people wrapped up in the story they were presenting. A "mystery" was ... well, mysterious -- right?

Wrong. A mystery is, by definition, "any truth unknowable except by divine revelation." When Paul writes that God was "making known to us the mystery of his will" (Ephesians 1:9), he is saying that, things we could not otherwise know, God was revealing to us. So Paul speaks of the mystery of his will, in Ephesians 1, and then, Ephesians 3:6, that this "mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." He speaks of "God's mystery, which is Christ"; and of "this mystery, which is Christ in you" (Colossians 2:2, 27).

Paul's uses of "mystery" are many. He uses "mystery" to direct the Corinthians toward an understanding of things associated with the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:51). Our text speaks of God "making known to us the mystery..."; in Ephesians 3:6 this "mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs" etc.; this mystery was to be boldly proclaimed, Ephesians 6:19, fully known, Colossians 1:25-26.

He described himself and the other apostles as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1); and again, “that words may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains ..” (Ephesians 6:19-20). A steward is one in charge of that which belongs to another; an ambassador is a representative of a governing entity who speaks only the will of the one who empowered him. This is why Paul says “that words may be given me,” as an ambassador.

The “mystery” of which he speaks to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians was of Jesus as the Savior of the whole world: not only of Jews, but also of Gentiles. Ephesians and Colossians are written primarily to Gentiles, to drive home the proposition that “you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:11-17); and, “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:24-27).

It was a mystery; it is a mystery no more. To Paul “grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Ephesians 3:9). John wrote that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus’ “great” commission instructed the apostles to make disciples “of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), to “proclaim the gospel to the whole world” (Mark 16:15; and salvation “to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

The gospel is for all.

Model or Mission?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

The assembly of people that began on the Pentecost following Christ’s resurrection serves as a model for us, even in the 21st Century. We follow the patterns that were set up by the early church in that we respect the way they understood the authority that governed them. We observe how the early church worshiped, and follow the pattern of a capella singing and remembering our Lord’s death and resurrection each first day of the week. We seek to follow the words given to Timothy and Titus in that we want the fullness of the gospel proclaimed in ways that befit sound doctrine. And of course there are other things that define us as imitators of what was practiced by the early church—the appointment of elders, the funding of the work by the first day collections, the work of deacons, etc. It is therefore good that we follow the model of that church. I believe this is what God wants.

Now consider an illustration.

Suppose some years ago a couple of men put together a plan for a sales organization. These entrepreneurs had the idea of gathering together groups of people, having regular meetings, introducing them to the products they had for sale, and then sending them out into the marketplace—neighborhoods.

So...let us suppose that they were able to set up local chapters that had regular meetings so that the members could learn about the products, understand their organizational structure, discuss various ways of spreading the news about their products, and be informed about the benefits of their organization.

They faithfully met every week, had some good discussions, got to know one another, and thus developed a close relationship. After each meeting, they would go home and go about their normal routines, and then meet again the next week, on and on.

Guess what. They had the model down, and profited from their times together, as they learned more and more about their company and their products, and enjoyed their friendships, but they rarely sold

any of the products. Their mission was to get new customers and sell products. The company had both a method and a mission, but was only carrying out the method. Do you see a connection? Can we apply that to the church today? It is possible that we have the model pretty well down pat, but what are we doing about the mission of the church? Just like the company, we have a product to sell—the good news of the gospel!

I have known people who had a driving passion to sell some health product that would produce amazing results. If you have a goal of helping people improve their health, or if you work to produce an income to provide for yourself or your family, then a driving passion is the road to achievement.

Let's now make the application to God's "company," his church. In multiplied congregations that I have visited through the years, I see multitudes that have the model down pat. They meet regularly to worship, to study together, to remember our Savior's death and resurrection, etc. They want sound teaching, and enjoy the company of other Christians. After assembling, they go home, and out into the world. They live godly lives, and treat others with kindness. Yes, they have the model down, but do we see the mission carried out?

And just what is the mission of the church? To spread the good news of the gospel of Christ! Some may counter, "Yes, our church is active in this. We support several preachers in the U.S. and overseas. We have gospel meetings, and a VBS every summer." All very good, but why then do we see so many churches that are barely growing, if at all, or are even declining in membership, or just "holding their own?"

Could it be that we are satisfied that we have the model well in place, but that we are not carrying out the mission? I'm not talking about the mission of the church, as a body, but the mission of individual Christians. Please understand, the carrying out of the Great Commission is primarily given to individuals. Note the Great Commission instructs the apostles to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..."

Notice—the apostles were to go "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...(then) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..." What had he commanded the apostles? To teach the disciples to go make disciples! That then makes it the mission of every Christian to do what they can to spread the news. That contributed to the fantastic growth of the early church, and will do much for the growth of the kingdom today. It takes the mission as well as the model. One without the other is not very productive. How many people have you talked to about the gospel lately?

Three Things Needed For Discipleship

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:57-62).

The word "disciple" is defined as "*Mathçteis* (transliteration of the Greek word, JRM) means more in the NT than a mere pupil or learner. It is an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct...Jesus had disciples in the sense that they believed and made His teaching the basis of their conduct" (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament**). This word is used approximately 275 times in the Bible; once in the Old Testament and all other occasions in the gospels

and the book of Acts. Though not used in our text, it is referred to in a parallel account in Matthew 8:19-22. Notice with me three things the Lord mentions about following Him in these verses.

A disciple must be willing to sacrifice – count the cost. Jesus warned this one who volunteered to follow Him, *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”* (verse 58). The ground might be your bed, a rock your pillow, and the sky your covering. There is a cost involved in choosing to serve our Lord. One must give up the practice of sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Family members may now become our enemies (Matthew 10:34-37), yet the Lord must come first (Luke 14:26). Christ said, *“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”* (Luke 14:27). Self must be crucified. I must be willing to bear any ridicule or criticism involved in being a Christian; willing to suffer and even die if such is required (Revelation 2:10). God expects us to present our *“bodies a living sacrifice”* (Romans 12:1) unto Him. Do you still want to be His disciple?

A disciple must have his priorities in order. The second man encountered by the Lord was extended an invitation, *“Follow Me”* (verse 59). His response *“let me first go and bury my father”* (verse 59). Yet Jesus said, *“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God”* (verse 60). We know little about this man to whom Christ is speaking. It is for certain we don’t have all the facts surrounding this case; is the father already dead or is he near death, etc.? To you and I what is said to this man seems to be insensitive. Yet we must not miss the point the Lord is making. Our priorities must be in order. Far too many who claim to be disciples of Jesus put other things ahead of serving Him. The Lord tells us *“to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matthew 6:33). Early in the life of Christ we can see One who has his priorities in order. Jesus told Mary, after leaving Him behind in Jerusalem and coming back finding Him in the temple, *“Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”* (Luke 2:40). Where is the Father’s business on our list of priorities?

A disciple must keep his focus in life. The third man to whom Jesus speaks says he will follow *“but”* (verse 61). There was some unfinished business at home, I need to *“bid them farewell who are at my house”* (verse 61). Yet notice what the Lord said, *“No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (verse 62). In plowing a field you want straight rows. One who looks back and does not focus on the job at hand will not succeed. The same is true spiritually speaking. Israel looked back to Egypt, desiring the cucumbers, onion, melons, leeks and garlic (Numbers 11:4-6). God was not pleased with them, striking those who yielded to their craving with a great plague (Numbers 11:33-34). They lost sight of the promise land, of a land which flowed with milk and honey, and perished in the wilderness. May we never be guilty of looking back to the ways of the world from which we have been delivered by the grace of God. Where are your eyes focused? Are they on heaven? Are you looking unto Jesus? Notice the admonition of Paul, *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:13-14).

Do you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Count the cost, get your priorities right, and keep your focus in life. *“Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All”!*

Mark Well Her Bulwarks | Number 2

Tommy Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

We noticed in the last issue that a bulwark is a defensive wall or rampart, a fortification erected to protect the people within the walls. To assure their continued protection the people had to guard and maintain the bulwarks to keep them from falling into disrepair, which would allow the enemy to breach the walls and destroy the city.

The church that Jesus built is God’s Zion, His spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16). God has erected His bulwarks to protect His people from the world. As long as the bulwarks are guarded and protected, His

people are safe. (Let me remind you, that I am talking about local congregations, not the church universal which can never be destroyed). But, as history repeats itself over and over again, God's people have failed to mark (maintain) His bulwarks, allowing the walls that separate and keep the church distinct from the world, to fall into disrepair. This has allowed the enemy to breach the walls and lead His people into captivity (apostasy). But again, history repeats itself. As people in each generation escape this captivity, they return to God, to rebuild His Zion, the Lord's church, and repair the bulwarks of God to protect them from the surrounding world.

As they begin the repairing of the bulwarks, the first thing they rebuild is respect for the word of God. This bulwark is most important because it is the one that towers over all the other bulwarks. This tower, in the very middle of the bulwarks, is God, speaking His mind and will to us through His inspired word. "...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit (who knows the things of God - verse 11) who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). Once He gave His word to man, they have no right to tamper with it or change it (Psalm 119:89). "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven." If this bulwark is not built first, then guarded and protected, the other bulwarks will not stand.

Why emphasize this? Since the Bible is God's word, it is important that we make sure we are listening to God. He is the one who created us, and by right of creation He has the right to tell us what to do. In fact we are told, "See that you refuse not Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him (God's Son - t.t.) who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn from Him who speaks from heaven ... for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:25, 29). This being true then we need to make sure we have God's authority behind everything we believe and practice in worshiping and serving Him. If one recognizes the warning in the just quoted scripture one will understand why respect for, and adherence to, Bible authority is so important.

This bulwark (respect for Bible authority), must be continually guarded and maintained. When the Psalmist wrote, "mark well her bulwarks," he then added, "that you may tell it to the generations following" (Psalm 48:13). By inference, he is telling his readers that if the bulwarks are not carefully watched over and kept in good repair they will soon crumble, and the enemy (the world, false teachers, false doctrines) will find it easy to infiltrate the church and capture the people, and lead them into apostasy. That is why we have the admonition to "mark well the bulwarks" and tell each succeeding generation about it, so it will continue to stand firm and strong against the encroachment of the world.

But today, this bulwark, in many places is being guarded by careless watchmen who are not overly concerned with the people's safety. In fact they are turncoats, who allow the enemy (the world, false teachers, false doctrine), to "secretly bring in destructive heresies...causing many to follow their destructive ways" (2 Peter 2:1-2) into apostasy.

These traitorous watchmen, or "change agents," as they might be called, desire to be free from the restraint of God's law. They say it is the "spirit," not the "letter" of the law, that counts with God. This allows them to do things not expressly forbidden in the Bible. They feel that to be bound too closely by a "thus says the Lord" in religious matters is too restrictive to their personal desires and interests. They think that if they can do away with the idea that the New Testament is God's law to be followed as closely as humanly possible, they have no need to justify their beliefs and practices by scripture. In that way they will be able to do what they feel.

With these thoughts established let us notice some bulwarks we need to mark so that we remain the people of God. The first is that the word of God is our only authority in all religious matters. As already seen, God has the right to tell us what to do. He has given us His word to lead and guide us. We must be bound by a "thus says the Lord" for anything we do in service to Him. Peter tells us, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God ..." (1 Peter 4:11). The word of God provides us all that we need to be His people. As Peter writes, God's word contains "all things that pertain to life (how to be made alive in Christ) and godliness" (how to live to please God) (2 Peter 1:3).

This bulwark (the word of God as our only authority) also warns us that we must “not think (presume to go) beyond what is written...” (1 Corinthians 4:6). And, “whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). It is sinful and wrong to add to God’s word, whether it be in the written creeds of denominationalism, or the oral creed of some man’s opinion or hobby. Thus, to appeal to any other authority in things religious is out of harmony with God’s word. This very important bulwark must never be destroyed.

Is Easter In The Bible?

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

I realize that I’m walking on sacred ground in asking this question, but is Easter in the Bible? The only reason I ask this is because I can’t find its practice in the New Testament. I know that the term “Easter” is found in the King James Version of Acts 12:4, but it is obvious that the term “pascha” should be properly translated “Passover,” as done in every other translation. No, I am talking about the practice of Easter as emphasized today. Is it a holiday instituted by Christ and the apostles? If you look closely in the New Testament, you might be surprised to see that it’s not there! I’ve searched all throughout the New Testament for it and all I can find regarding a memorial to the Lord is Christians remembering the Lord’s sacrifice every first day of the week, on Sunday (Acts 20:7), and not once a year.

So where did Easter come from? History shows that it originates in the worship of the pagan goddess Eastre (Eostre), who was also known as Ashtoreth in the Old Testament (1 Kings 11:5). In time, this worship was adapted to Christianity in conjunction with the Lord’s death and resurrection, which occurred near the time of the Jewish Passover (John 13:1). However, the first Christians were taking the Lord’s Supper on days other than the time of the Passover (Acts 2:42; 20:6-7). Obviously, if Easter is to occur near the Passover, and the first Christians remembered the Lord’s death weeks and months after the Passover, what does that say about the manmade tradition of Easter?

I completely agree with the importance of memorializing the Lord’s resurrection. It’s the basis of Christianity! (1 Corinthians 15:17) However, God has specified the manner in which we are to remember the Lord’s sacrifice, which is through a weekly memorial of the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He said to “do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It isn’t until after the beginning of Christianity (Acts 2) that we learn when and how frequently this memorial is to occur, which was on Sundays. If this is how the Lord wants us to memorialize Him, why would we give Him something else, invented by men? (Matthew 15:8-9)

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

Concerning Children

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

The Blessing Of Children

The Psalmist identified children as "...a heritage..." from the LORD, and pronounces happiness and blessing for the one who has many. One chapter later, he refers to them as "...olive plants all around your table...", and speaks of the joy of seeing "your children's children!" (Psalm 128:3, 6) - grandchildren! Indeed, children are a wonderful blessing from God.

Solomon had much to say about the blessedness of having children. He extols the value of having a wise (Proverbs 10:1; 15:20; 29:3) and righteous (Proverbs 23:24-25; 28:7) son. The virtuous woman's children "...rise up and call her blessed..." (Proverbs 31:28). Again, among the blessings to look forward

to are your "...children's children..." (Proverbs 17:6).

If a man would serve as either an elder or a deacon in the Lord's church, it is essential that he have faithful children (1 Timothy 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6). Children are of great importance and to be cherished in the Lord's eyes.

It is sad to hear someone complain about their children or indicate that they are bothersome rather than a blessing. Some in our society simply do not realize the blessings they have. Having been unable to bear children, my wife and I are especially angered when we hear folks speak negatively about parenthood. We know intimately the type of stress, distress and turmoil endured by people such as Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 11:30; 15:2; 16:1-2; 18:10-12), Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25:21), Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:31; 30:1), Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:2), Elhanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:2, 5-8, 10-11), and Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6-7). Friend, know for a surety, all children are a blessing from the Lord!

The Responsibility To Children

Along with the jubilant excitement of having a child should come the sober understanding of parental responsibility. Babies are not toys - they are real, living people, whose care and training God has entrusted to their parents. What an awesome responsibility!

Solomon instructs,

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it"
(Proverbs 22:6).

That is not a 100% guarantee of perpetual faithfulness in children raised properly by Christian parents, but is a generic promise - if we will raise our children according to the principles of the Bible, teaching them the importance of always putting God first in their lives, then they are unlikely to depart from that course. The apostle Paul complimented Timothy's

"...genuine faith ... which dwells first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." (2 Timothy 1:5)

He would later remind Timothy,

"...that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15)

Paul commands fathers,

"...do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4; cf. Colossians 3:21)

Throughout the Proverbs, we find Solomon's instruction for his son (Proverbs 1:8; 4:1; 6:20), and the wise king referencing the instruction of his own father (Proverbs 4:3-4). All fathers must take hold of this God-given responsibility, to raise their children to live faithful to God. For a man to qualify to serve as an elder, it is essential that he rules his household well (1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6), not that he delegated his wife to rule there. This should be the case in every household.

Having said that, the mother is not a second-level authority in regard to parenting - she is his equal. Children ought not be caused to regard one parent above the other - mom and dad are a unit ("one flesh", Genesis 2:24). Mothers are to have a natural affection (Gr. *philoteknos*) for their children (Titus 2:4; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8). Notice that Solomon emphasized the role of both father and mother:

"...hear the instruction of your father ... do not forsake the law of your mother..."
(Proverbs 1:8; cf. 6:20; 30:17)

It is essential that discipline come from both father and mother. To do otherwise may skew a child's perception of parental roles, and leaves the door open for destruction (ie. favoritism, unwarranted fear, etc.). Do not avoid discipline because it is "unpleasant." An undisciplined child will be much more

unpleasant. And, to fail to discipline is to prepare the child for hell (Proverbs 23:14; 19:18). Solomon emphatically says, "*Do not withhold correction from a child...*" (Proverbs 23:13; cf. 13:24; 29:15, 17)

The Deity of Christ

Sean P. Cavender | Raymore, Missouri, USA

When we read of the teachings, miracles, and life of Jesus the Christ, we cannot help to be impressed with who He is as the divine Son of God. While Jesus was on the earth and living among men, He revealed unto mankind the Father, who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). The Son of God came here to do as the Father had commanded; He did not come by His own initiative and authority (John 5:19). However forceful the teachings of Christ were, and as amazing His miracles impressed people, still people rejected Him and His bold claims to be eternal in nature, and to be equal with the Father. Even today, many reject the notion that Jesus of Nazareth was divine. They claim He was a good man, but not God. Let's consider what the Bible teaches and how the Deity of Jesus is defended in Scripture.

The apostle John begins His record of the gospel account with a defense of Jesus' Deity. The apostle recognized the importance of this very subject because he wrote of how Jesus would be rejected (John 1:11). However, for those who would be willing to accept and believe in Jesus, they may become the children of God (John 1:12, 13). Thus, this subject is a matter of eternal salvation.

Pre-Existence Before Time (John 1:1a, 2)

The Word, the same Word which became flesh, existed at the beginning of time. "In the beginning was the Word..." The Word was in existence in nature, in function, and in person. Jesus claimed this pre-existence even in His teachings. In one of His many confrontations with the Jews about His ministry, He said that father Abraham looked forward to the day in which Christ would come to fulfill the promise (John 8:56). Abraham had been dead for many hundreds of years by the point of Christ's ministry. The Jews asked Jesus how He had seen Abraham, and His reply: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am," (John 8:58). "I AM" was a reference to the name of God by which Moses was to identify the Lord unto the Egyptians in freeing the Israelites. This was an audacious claim of Christ to existence before the day of Abraham.

Fellowship With God (John 1:1b)

The Word which became flesh had also dwelt with God. The Word had been in close communion with the Father, seeing God as no other had ever done before (John 1:18). Christ, in His heavenly state, was in the bosom of the Father - a place of closeness and intimacy. Jesus had dwelt with God and shared a unique relationship with the Father, being able to see God in His full power and majesty. By implication, we see there are two distinct persons, i.e., rational individualities, that make up two persons in the Godhead. These two persons in the Godhead unified, and are one in purpose (John 10:30).

The Word's Divine Nature (John 1:1c)

The Word was God. We noted that the Word was distinct from God the Father, but the Word is God. The Father and the Son are not two different gods, but they are both partakers of the one divine nature, i.e., the state of being God. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," (John 10:30). Jesus also claimed that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:17,18).

The Word's Divine Power (John 1:3)

The Word was instrumental in the creation of the heavens and the earth. Jesus Christ possessed the power of God which was evidenced during His time on earth by the miracles He performed. The miracles that He performed were to substantiate His claims to be God, and prove Himself to those who heard Him. The purpose of those miracles was to instill belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Jn 20:31).

By believing in Jesus, the Son of God, then we may have eternal life (John 3:16). It was for this purpose that John wrote this gospel record (John 20:30, 31). The miracles and acts of our Lord Jesus point to

Purpose of the Proverbs

Tanner Campbell | Rapid City, South Dakota, USA

The book of Proverbs is a deep well of wisdom that will never run dry. The book contains a number of major themes and numerous other themes that run like veins throughout the entirety of the book. If the Lord wills, we will examine these themes in future articles; but for now, I'd first like to consider the true purpose of the book.

The book does not shy away from its true purpose but fully discloses this information from the very beginning of the book, the first six verses addressing this subject. Verse one of chapter one declares "The Proverbs of Solomon." The word "proverb" comes from "pro" (for) and "verba" (words), thus a proverb is a short set of words used "for words," i.e. instead of many words. There is nothing simple about a proverb save its initial appearance; it is an art where the choice of only a brief strand of words is used and therefore limits the author to convey the truth in what would normally take a longer discussion. The positive to a proverb is its compact style that leaves one wanting to sit back in meditation on the subject, and not only that, but an audience cannot memorize the sermon they hear; however, they can memorize a proverb that speaks the same truths.

Immediately following the first verse, Solomon explains, in specific detail, the intention for penning down these proverbs:

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings."

1. To know (ascertain by seeing) wisdom and instruction. Wisdom refers to skillfulness in the ways of life. Vine's dictionary states that wisdom "was viewed as a mastery of the art of living in accordance with God's expectations. In their definition, the words 'mastery' and 'art' signify that wisdom was a process of attainment and not an accomplishment." The word "instruction" means to be disciplined and chastised. Thus these proverbs are to make one well trained and disciplined to the intent of becoming skillful in how to live properly in the eyes of God.
2. To perceive the words of understanding. A perceptive person is one who is able to properly separate one thing from another in their mind. In this case, the proverbs help us to mentally separate words of understanding from words of worldly foolishness. Solomon's statement reminds me of Hebrews 5:14, where the writer, speaking of the mature Christians, explains that "by reason of use" they "have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."
3. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity. The word for wisdom in this verse is a completely different Hebrew word than that in verse two. This word refers to being circumspect; meaning, therefore that the proverbs give instruction that will result in a person of prudence, patience, caution, and control. A person with full 360 degree insight into every situation. Justice, as used here in verse three, is referring to righteousness (having a right standing in the sight of God), and is equivalent to the statement of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, that the words of God (such as the proverbs) are profitable for "instruction in righteousness." To receive instruction in judgment is also of critical importance. Judgment is to pass the rightful sentence upon human actions, and is therefore a significant aspect to many everyday decisions. Lastly, the third verse ends with "equity;" which is evenness or straightness. The importance of living straightly and uprightly is a purposeful subject in this great book.
4. To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. Subtilty, or prudence, literally refers to emphasizing the small distinctions in any situation. This is an aspect of great skillfulness and is significant in the group that the word is applied to: the simple, who, by definition is a person that is unable to single out the distinctions between good and evil.

Thus, the book is capable of completely changing the mentality of man, if man would only listen to the instruction. Likewise, what the book can do for the simple, the book can do for the young. This word “discretion” is interesting; it literally means “a plan.” The ability to have a well-planned life; to have already purposefully made the decision of action in any situation. For example, for many young folks, the decision to attend the worship assembly can be a difficult war in the mind every single Sunday morning. But when one has “a plan,” then the decision to be in faithful attendance needs to be made only once and for all. All Sunday mornings to come will not involve a decision to attend or not.

5. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels. The book of Proverbs is not a high school textbook that imparts wisdom to the young and simple. The well goes much deeper than that. While providing wisdom to the simple, the same words are wiser than the wisdom of the wise man and the man of understanding. The book makes the simple good, the good even better, and the better even more improved in their understanding. A note on the words “wise counsels;” from the Hebrew, this literally means steersmanship. The ability to turn in the right direction and be our own wise guide is the goal of the book.
6. To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. His final statement in this section addresses a much deeper purpose of the book. Studying the Proverbs will result in a stronger ability of mind to be able to understand and interpret great wisdom. It is ability by familiarization. To have our nose in foolishness will not result in wisdom, but to study from the wisdom of God will result in great abilities to understand wise words.

Altogether, in considering the above, there can be no doubt in the significance of the book of Proverbs to the rest of the Bible. The promised purpose of the book might seem too good to be true, and it would be, if this was a man-written-self-help book; however, this is the wisdom from Almighty God. Let us look into what He has provided for us.

Question from Arkansas about Sectarian Names

Our Newspaper Article
Where Is Authority for Sectarian Names?
Keith Sharp

We must have authority from the Lord Jesus Christ for all we believe, teach, and practice (Colossians 3:17). Where is authority from Christ for the sectarian names worn by denominations and their members? Collectively, the people of Christ may be called the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), church of God (1 Corinthians 1:2), temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16), body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), family of God (Ephesians 3:14-15), bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-32), house of God (1 Timothy 3:14-15), church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23), kingdom (Hebrews 12:28), and even the Way (Acts 9:2; 24:14). Individually, we may be called members (1 Corinthians 12:20,27), disciples (Acts 6:1), saints (Acts 9:13), believers (Acts 5:14), Christians (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16), and children of God (Galatians 3:26). But we must not be divided into sects wearing sectarian names (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Not only does the Lord not authorize sectarian names, He forbids both the names and the sects they denominate.

Response

I read your ad in the Bulletin about sectarian names. I've scanned your ad several times over the years.

I agree Christians should be united. If one accepts the basic tenants of the Christian faith; God, Christ & Holy Spirit represent a trinity and that through Christ's sacrifice on the cross one is saved, then receives the Holy Spirit to assist them in their walk. Turns their life to worship and follow the will of God to the best of their ability, then I would consider that person a Christian. I think that many Christians attend churches that don't have the right name on a sign out front. I think a lot of Christians attend churches where they have different opinions on what a particular scripture means to the preacher or elder or

fellow member.

You seem to want an individual to come to the point where they agree on the Bible as you define it. If the Bible could be defined that clearly then their would not be so much separation. The reasons for the separations are many and yes I believe that every separation is wrong in the sense that it is not perfect. Our imperfection is why we need Christ. Each denomination believes they are right, as does the Church of Christ on Hwy. 5. Each can 'turn' the scripture to support to their particular belief. Many times I hear a Christian explain something and I wonder "How could they think scripture is saying that?" I'm sure some of my beliefs invoke the same response in other Christians, like yourself for starters.

As a general rule I rarely expound on what I call the "set of beliefs that are not all so important." That is just my phrase, as every word of God is of the utmost importance. I do not think that just because a Christian does not accept and falls in line with someone else's identical beliefs that they will end up in hell. What I do consider important is what Jesus said was the 2 most important commands; Love the one God and love each other. I believe you have to hear, believe, confess, repent and be baptized as the scripture says. I believe we are to tell others the Good News of how Christ can provide a way out of sin's bondage. After that, while this is oversimplification, "It's all small stuff." To the Church of Christ, nothing is small stuff. It's all this way, is the only way. I've always wondered exactly what and how the guy in Mark 39 - 41 was doing. The apostles considered it wrong, but Jesus didn't. I believe that if Christians loved each other more then Romans 12:18 might be more effective.

If you stay busy loving God and others and spreading what Jesus told us to spread then you will be doing what God wants. I don't think telling people how and why they are wrong is what Jesus meant in the Great Commission, nor do I think it is an effective way of turning folks into Christians. I'm pretty sure Jesus had the inside track on how he wanted it done. : -)

Just some thoughts.

Answer

Thanks for taking the time to read and to reply to our little article in the "Baxter Bulletin." We've had a number of people who either respond or tell us they read it. That is very encouraging.

We seem to agree on many things, particularly on using the inspired Scriptures as our standard (1 Peter 4:11). That's an excellent start. I won't belabor things on which we agree.

If I understand your position, you think some biblical doctrines are central and essential for unity, whereas others are peripheral and unnecessary.

I don't disagree that some things are fundamental and central, whereas other things are less so. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees thus:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23).

Justice, mercy, and faith were more important than tithing garden herbs. But the Lord didn't tell them not to bother with the tithing. They were to do both.

The same is true today. Indeed love for God is still the most important command and love for one another the second (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Romans 13:8). But to love God is to obey Him (John 14:15; 1 John 2:5; 5:3). We must observe all things the Lord commands.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

To draw up a list of necessary and unnecessary divine commands is to draw up a human creed and to disobey God.

Indeed churches of Christ are divided. Baxter County is a notable example. If I have counted correctly there are fourteen churches of Christ in Baxter County divided into at least six camps that have no fellowship with one another. Division is not just imperfection but is sinful and carnal (1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:2-4; Titus 3:10-11) and a major impediment to reaching the lost (John 17:20-21).

What should we do? Not dismiss our differences as trivial. I must respect the conscience of my brother (1 Corinthians 8:12). Rather, we should do as first century brethren did over the issue of circumcision and observance of the law of Moses, come together for an honest, open, loving discussion of our differences (Acts 15:5-6,22). I am willing to have such discussions with all who are likewise willing.

Rather than dividing the commands of God between necessary and unnecessary, we need to distinguish between faith and opinion. Faith is God's revealed will (Jude 3; Galatians 1:11-12,23; Romans 10:8,17). Faith should determine our fellowship (2 John 9-11), be the basis of unity (Ephesians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 1:10), be the standard by which we judge (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15), be what we preach (Galatians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:13; 1 Peter 4:11), and that for which we contend (Jude 3).

Opinion is what we think about things but cannot prove by Scripture (Romans 14:5). Human opinion must not determine our fellowship (Romans 14:1-3). We may have diversities of opinions (Romans 14:6), they must not be the basis of judgment (Romans 14:13), we must not preach our opinions (Romans 14:22), and we must not contend for them (Romans 14:22).

The apostle Paul commanded, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). God is just (Psalm 7:11; Isaiah 45:21; Revelation 15:3), therefore He doesn't command us to do what we are incapable of doing. We are able to understand His will revealed in His Word.

God's Word is truth (John 17:17). It is axiomatic that truth is consistent, i.e., it does not contradict itself. Thus, the will of God revealed in the Bible is consistent. It doesn't contradict itself.

This fact has several implications. If we understand the Bible at all, it will be alike. That's the reason Paul could command us to all speak the same thing (1 Corinthians 1:10). If God says one thing to you and something else to me, doesn't that make Him a liar? Of course, it would be blasphemy to call God a liar (cf. Romans 3:3-4).

Thus, if we accept conflicting answers, someone is wrong. If we disagree with each other, we could both be wrong, but we can't both be right. A man be wrong any way he wants, but there's only one way to be right (cf. John 14:6; 1 Timothy 6:3-5).

This also means that knowing the will of God is not a matter of personal opinion or interpretation. It's a matter of reading, believing, and obeying the will of God revealed in Scripture. We must all "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11) if we are to be united. Water baptism is how we enter Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). Surely no one outside Christ can be properly called a Christian.

I do not believe the Highway 5 South Church is Christ is part of any denomination. We have no organizational ties to any sectarian body, but the elders of this local church make the decisions for all its activities (1 Peter 5:1-2). We have no human creed but follow the will of Christ in all our work and teaching (Colossians 3:17; 2 John verses 9-11). We have no sectarian name. I don't quarrel about any scriptural name a congregation might wear, but surely there's nothing sectarian about being called a church of Christ (Romans 16:16).

Yes, people must be convicted of their sins before they can be led to repent (John 16:8; Romans 1:16 -

3:26).

I would be delighted to continue our studies in a manner convenient for you.

Second Response

Your response is gracious and knowledgeable.

You said “If I understand your position, you think some biblical doctrines are central and essential for unity, whereas others are peripheral and unnecessary.”

To clarify, I do not think any of God’s law is unnecessary, simply less important in a sense in that a believer does not even need to be aware of it to be saved. Example; an individual comes to you that has never been a believer in Christ. He accepts Christ in a biblical way you agree with. Is he saved? I believe, yes. This individual is not even aware of anything else in the Bible besides the initial steps to his salvation. Now, this individual continues to attend your church, progressing along, learning additional biblical teachings. One day he reads something that he believes means such-and-such. He realizes that your teachings do not agree with his understanding of the same scripture. He comes to you to discuss this. You explain why you hold your belief, he explains why he holds his. You both use scripture that you believe backs your beliefs. One of you is right or both of you are wrong. Are you both still saved? Is the wrong one still saved?

2nd example: The same as above but the individual dies right after his conversion. He was still unaware of the many commandments within the Bible, many of which he may be in conflict without his knowledge. Is he saved?

Here is an example of a scripture that is misinterpreted; take care of the widows and orphans.... Some argue that children abandoned by parents are foster children, not orphans, and women abandoned by husbands are not really widows. Those folks are correct in the definitions strictest sense. Other people argue that that scripture means any children or women in need. Who’s correct? If both groups of people have accepted Christ in a way that you agree with as needed for salvation, are both groups saved? Have a great day,

Second Answer

It’s really a pleasure to communicate with you. I appreciate the thought you have put in and your lack of anger. I think we could sit down together and talk profitably.

The Scriptures discuss salvation in two senses: immediate salvation from sin (Mark 16:16) and final salvation in heaven (Romans 13:11). Of course, people are saved from past sins and become Christians without being aware of all their obligations as Christians. That’s the reason we speak of “babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1; Hebrews 5:13-14). But both these passages indicate we must not remain at this level. We must go on to perfection, i.e., maturity (Hebrews 5:12 - 6:3).

The danger of falling into sin is greater for babes in Christ particularly because of their ignorance. And their ignorance and spiritual immaturity does not excuse them if they violate any divine law. There is a New Testament example that directly addresses this problem. Philip preached Christ in Samaria, and Simon, who had been a sorcerer, believed and was baptized (Acts 8:5-13). The apostles Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and imparted the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17). Simon tried to buy with money the power to impart the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-19).

“But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ‘You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ‘Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ‘For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity’” (Acts 8:20-23).

Simon was a babe in Christ, was tempted in that point in which he was the weakest, and sinned just

one time through ignorance, but the inspired apostle declared, “For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23, English Standard Version).

Ignorance is not a sin, unless it is willful, but ignorance increases the danger of sin. Simon was not “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” because he was ignorant. When he was saved by faith and baptism, he was just as ignorant. He fell because he tried to buy the power to impart the Holy Spirit.

Some laws of the Lord are black and white, either we’re guilty or innocent. Either someone is a fornicator, or he’s not (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Other laws are relative, a matter of growth, such as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). A fornicator is lost until he repents (Galatians 5:19-21). We can all stand to grow more in the fruit of the Spirit.

Is there no hope until we know everything? No, there are definitely different levels of maturity, from “little children” to “fathers,” among faithful Christians (1 John 2:12-14; cf. Philippians 3:15). But, our faith is in the Lord, that, as long as we’re sincerely, diligently seeking to do His will, we will find the way and be saved (Matthew 7:7-8; Hebrews 11:6). Thus, we can and should have confidence in our salvation (1 John 5:13).

It is not my place to judge whether or not others are saved (James 4:12). If I see a brother sin, regardless of which law of the Lord he violated, I should seek to restore him (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).

The judgment each of us must make toward others is fellowship. We must not share in the sins of others (Ephesians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 6:17). And we must not receive into our fellowship those who are divisive (Titus 3:10-11), walk in sin (1 Corinthians 5:11-13), or teach damnable error (2 Peter 2:1-3).

That doesn’t mean we must agree on the meaning of every passage. What is “the Day” of Hebrews 10:25? I think I know, but you may disagree, and that shouldn’t cause us to sever fellowship unless one of us “forsakes the assembling” of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). It’s the will of Christ contained in Scripture we must see alike.

Although I don’t think this is the reason you brought it up, I’ll comment on James 1:27 (“orphans and widows”). This is an instance of “for example” legislation. Both the Old and New Testaments require care for widows and orphans as examples of the principle of helping the helpless, compassion that leads to mercy. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the parable of “The Good Samaritan,” and the Samaritan felt compassion and showed mercy for one who was neither a widow nor an orphan. We must have compassion for those who suffer, and our compassion must lead us to show mercy to them.

Questions from Arkansas about Benevolence

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Questions

My high school Bible class is studying church benevolence. Please answer the following questions about benevolence:

1. If a member of the local church is hurt and unable to work, is there authority for the local church to help him/her financially? (Please give yes or no answers and verses of scripture to prove your answer)
2. If a member of the local church has some accident or physical problem but is unable to pay for necessary medical help, is there authority for the local church to help him financially?
3. If a member of the local church wants to go to college but cannot afford it, is the local church authorized to pay his college tuition?
4. A group of Christians decide to help orphans by building and maintaining an orphan's home. Can they ask other Christians and non-Christians to fund their home?

Answers

These are excellent questions by your class, and they indicate the students are thoughtfully studying this important, biblical subject.

1. Yes. The New Testament passages dealing with the local church helping its own needy do not specify what caused the need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35). Acts 6:1-4 and 1 Timothy 5:3-16 deal specifically with widows, whereas Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; and 2 Corinthians chapters 8 - 9 deal with assisting other congregations to relieve their needy. Being hurt and unable to work is certainly a justifiable reason for poverty. Neither the church nor individuals should assist someone who is lazy and unwilling to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).
2. Yes. Again this is covered by the general authority of Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35. Medical help is a legitimate benevolent need (Matthew 25:34-45).
3. No. A college education is not a benevolent need (Matthew 25:34-45), and secular education is not the work of the church. The work of the church is limited to evangelism (1 Thessalonians 1:1,6-8), edification (Ephesians 4:11-16), and benevolence toward needy saints (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-4; 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8 - 9 ; and 1 Timothy 5:3-16). These are all spiritual works, in harmony with the spiritual nature of the church (John 18:36; Romans 14:17). Benevolence toward needy saints is spiritual in that it is an expression of fellowship in Christ (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).
4. Yes, but.... The care of orphans is certainly a benevolent need (James 1:27). The fact that one's "own" for whom he is responsible includes more than his own household (1 Timothy 5:8), implies that the responsibility for the care of orphaned children lies first and foremost with the extended family. For example, both my brother and I have four children. If he and his wife had been killed or had become destitute while our children were small, it would had been my responsibility to care for them. Had this been a greater burden than I could handle financially, the church could assist (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35). The family is the divinely ordained relationship for raising children (Genesis 1:28; 2:24; Malachi 2:15; Ephesians 6:4; Titus 2:4). If there are orphans with no relatives to care for them, married Christians should adopt them (James 1:27). In this way they have a loving mother and father rather than being institutionalized.

It is possible for there to be so many orphans that families cannot take them in, although that is certainly not true in America. Uganda, the last I heard, has the highest per capita orphan rate in the world. In such a situation, where there is such a large percentage of orphans, and where there is widespread, deep poverty, an institutional orphanage might be necessary. Since the Lord has not specified the organizational structure through which individuals may help the needy, it would be permissible for Christians to set up such a structure and for other individual Christians to assist. This would be parallel to individuals establishing a college to educate young people and other individuals assisting. Brethren may operate any legal, moral business (Acts 18:1-3; Colossians 4:14), they may operate a business as a joint venture (Acts 18:1-3), and they may incorporate their business to comply with civil law (1 Peter 2:13-14). Individual Christians may do many things the local church is not authorized to do (1 Timothy 5:16), and we may share in any thing that has the right to exist and to do the work it is doing (Galatians 4:18).

Question from Nigeria about Eating Blood and Blood Transfusions

Questions

I will be delivering a lesson on **eating blood and blood transfusion** this Sunday and will like you to shed more lights on this.

Answer

- The Bible never forbids "ingesting" blood.

- The Bible does forbid eating blood.
 - Law of Patriarchs - Genesis 9:3-4
 - Law of Moses - Leviticus 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:15-16,23-25; 15:23; 1 Samuel 14:31-34
 - Law of Christ - Acts 15:19-20,28-29; 21:25
 - Is blood transfusion eating blood?
 - If one eats blood, the blood cells die.
 - If blood is transfused into one, the blood cells continue to live.
 - Should Blood That Leaves the Body Be Disposed Of? - Leviticus 17:13; Deuteronomy 12:15-16, 23-24
 - This is animal blood, not human.
 - This is a dead creature; thus its life (soul) left with its blood. - Leviticus 17:13-14
 - It is the Law of Moses. - Galatians 5:1-4
 - The Watchtower (organization that controls Jehovah's Witnesses) Has Changed Its Position on Blood Transfusions.
 - The Watchtower formerly forbid all use of blood removed from the body. "Witnesses believe that blood removed from the body should be disposed of, so they do not accept autotransfusion of predeposited blood. Techniques for intraoperative collection or hemodilution that involve blood storage are objectionable to them" (How Can Blood Save Your Life? [1990] 27).
 - Now they allow some use of blood removed from the body. "... the Center for Bloodless Surgery utilizes alternatives to blood transfusions, including the reinfusion of a patient's own blood—a technique that some Witnesses may find unobjectionable under certain circumstances" ("The Watchtower," August 1, 1995. 30)
 - Has the Word of God changed since 1990? - 1 Peter 1:22-25
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