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(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

are of good report

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

**PHILIPPIANS
4:8**

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.

*Jesus went back to the original law propounded by God and recorded by Moses, and shows from it: 1. That marriage is a fundamental principle of social order, God having it in view from the creation. and hence making male and female. 2. That the relation of marriage is superior even to the parental relation. 3. That by it the pair become one flesh, so that a man is as much joined to his wife as he is to his own body. Now, since a man can only be separated from his parental relations or from his own body by death, which is an act of God, so it follows that the superior or similar relation of marriage can only be dissolved by the act of God. Thus Jesus draws the conclusion that no man or body of men, whether acting in private, civil or ecclesiastical capacity, can dissolve marriage otherwise than according to the decrees of God (J.W. McGarvey, **Fourfold Gospel**. 539 [comments on Matthew 19:3-6 and parallel in Mark chapter 10]).*

"Holding on to resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die" (submitted by Rossie Stansbury).

Men who are in error can never be convinced that they are wrong by denying them freedom of speech. Not till they have been allowed to express themselves to the last word are they capable of listening dispassionately to the other side (Ibid. 2:62 [comments on Acts 15:7-11]).

Question from Nigeria about Matthew 11:12

Question

Please explain Matthew 11:12.

Answer

The Lord is comparing the kingdom of God to a walled city which armed invaders were trying to take. He is using the figure of speech called a "metaphor." Men thought John the Baptist was the Messiah (John 1:20) and wanted to force him to set up an earthly kingdom in opposition to the Romans. They did the same with Jesus (John 6:15). They did not understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of heaven (John 18:36; Romans 14:17).

Question from Texas about Salvation as a Gift

Question

I am always confused on the salvation/gift facts.

Answer

Indeed salvation is the gift of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Does this mean there are no conditions we must meet to be saved? The apostle Peter commanded, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). We must repent and be baptized to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those are conditions we must meet to receive the gift.

A wealthy friend of mine promised each of his grandchildren a new car if each grandchild graduated from college. Each grandchild had to graduate from college to receive a new car, but the car was still a gift. Graduation from college does not earn one a car; it earns one a college degree.

Repentance and baptism do not earn us the forgiveness of our sins. They are conditions upon which the Lord promises salvation.

Question from Nigeria about Withdrawal

Question

Explain more on 1 Cor 5:11 First Corinthians Chapter five verse eleven. The word (NO NOT TO EAT) Is it limited only to the Lord's supper that you will not eat with the disfellowshipped, or did it extend to outside worldly gatherings that you will not eat with such a brother.

Answer

The command not to eat with an impenitent, erring brother is a specific application of the broader command "not to keep company" with him (1 Corinthians 5:9, 11). The one Greek word translated "not to keep company with" in the **New King James Version** is translated "not to associate with" in the **New American Standard Bible** and the **English Standard Version**. It is the negative form of the compound Greek word meaning to mingle one's self with, to associate with, have familiar intercourse with" (Wesley J. Perschbacher, **The New Analytical Greek Lexicon**. 389). It is also applied to withdrawal from a brother who is sinning in Second Thessalonians 3:14. These are the only New Testament occurrences of the word. It certainly includes the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 5:8), but it is not limited to the Lord's Supper or even spiritual activities. The apostle observes that if it applied to our relationship to sinners in the world, we would have to leave the world (1 Corinthians 5:10). Thus, it certainly applies to social activities, including eating a common meal with an erring brother from whom the church has withdrawn. In order to purify the church, we withdraw our spiritual fellowship from him (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). But, additionally, in order to shame him to repentance so his soul will be saved (2 Thessalonians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5), we refuse to associate with him socially, even to the point of refusing to eat a common meal with him. However, we must "not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:15).

Consider Me Irrelevant

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Rob Bell, former pastor of a megachurch, said in an interview with Oprah Winfrey that any church that does not endorse same-sex marriages will become irrelevant. Regarding accepting homosexuality in spite of the Bible, he says, "I think culture is already there and the church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense" ("The Huffington Post," 2/20/15).

Our nation is gradually adopting Bell's reasoning. More and more "Christians" are rushing to the defense of homosexuality and learning to "approve of those who practice" it (Romans 1:32). The current tactic of the devil is to convince people to view it in the same light as the racial injustice of the past. "It was wrong to reject a black man for his skin color and it is wrong to reject a homosexual for marrying someone he loves." We all can see that racism is a sin (Acts 10:34-35). But by duping us into thinking we are just as unloving for opposing sexual perversion, the devil has tricked us into defending error. And now that "Christian pastors" are telling us churches are irrelevant if we do not endorse same-sex marriage, and that the Bible is outdated in condemning it, we are that much closer to what God said of Sodom and Gomorrah before He destroyed them: "their sin is very grave" (Genesis 18:20).

Believe what you want, dear friends, but I choose to act like Lot when he lived in Sodom—he "was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked...from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:7-8). He did not let the world convince him to redefine God's will on this matter, and hopefully, neither will I. The Bible says it is a sin for a church to endorse any sin, especially that of a sexual nature (1 Corinthians 5). The only way God forgives homosexuality is when it is repented of and removed by the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Acts 18:8). The church I attend might become fewer in number for upholding these antiquated principles, but the truth of God's will has never been determined by the number of people who deem it relevant (Genesis 19:14; Matthew 7:13-14).

Is That Really What It Means?

Two Or Three Gathered Together

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

You're going on vacation, but there is no faithful congregation of God's people meeting anywhere near your destination of choice. You believe it is important to meet with Christians each Sunday for worship. So, what do you do?

1. Do you choose a different vacation spot?
2. Do you go to the desired location, but leave a day late or come back a day early so you can assemble with Christians on the Lord's day?
3. Do you just skip out on worship for the Sunday in question, and trust that God will understand? *[NOTE—if this is your choice, know for certain that God understands. He understands that serving Him is NOT the most important thing in your life. Read Matthew 16:24-26, and consider your need to repent before it is too late.]*

Options #1 & #2 are both viable. Option #3 is not a suitable choice for anyone who loves the Lord and desires to go to heaven. However, some would suggest there is a 4th option. Go ahead and plan your vacation to wherever you want to go—it's ok if there isn't a congregation to meet with. Just be sure to take some unleavened bread and grape juice along, and your family can meet together in your hotel room or in a park or wherever you choose. Don't worry, the Lord is OK with it. He told His disciples:

...where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

Is that really what that verse means? Is the point of this text that anytime 2 or more Christians meet together, it is equally acceptable to the Lord as an assembly of the local church? Let's see what the context says.

A good rule of thumb to ensure that we are understanding verses in context is to go back 7 verses and forward 7 verses. Sometimes we may need to go further than this to truly capture the context, but in most cases, this will suffice. Our 15 verse context spans Matthew 18:13-27. The specific context of the verse is Matthew 18:15-22.

Please read it before continuing to read this article.

Matthew 18:20 is not about gathering with a few family members in a hotel room while on vacation. The context is about discipline in a local church. The two or three are not eating bread and drinking grape juice early on a Sunday morning prior to a deep sea fishing adventure. The 2 or 3 are in verses 16 & 19 as well. They are not worshipers, they are witnesses. Jesus cited Deuteronomy 19:15 in a discourse about how to deal with an brother who will not repent of sin. That's the context. To use this verse to justify a few Christians gathering apart from a local congregation of God's people is a misuse of Scripture!

OK, so Matthew 18:20 doesn't justify *Super 8* sanctuaries. But we're still able to worship in a hotel room if there isn't a faithful church near our destination of choice, right? Let me answer the question with a question: where does the Bible say it is OK?

A comment in a blog on this topic calls my position "absurd legalism."¹ Is it absurd to stress the importance of putting God first in our lives, even when we are on vacation? Is it OK to take a vacation from the Lord?

In Acts 20, Paul and Luke met with several men who had gone to Troas before them. In Acts 20:6-7, the writer says their travel plans were made in such a way so they could be with the Troas church on Sunday. They didn't leave on Saturday and just share some bread and grape juice the next morning in their hotel room. They made sure they were gathered with a local congregation of God's people.

1 Corinthians 11:18ff identifies the Lord's supper is an activity for "when you come together as a church." Do two or three Christians informally eating bread & drinking juice in a hotel room constitute a church? When 2 or 3 vacationers casually eat bread and drink juice in their hotel room, are they also taking up a collection? The same apostle who identified the Lord's supper as an activity of the church also instructed brethren to give when the church is assembled together (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). If they are giving, what do they do with it? Is it then given to a church somewhere? If so, then they have admitted that assembling together in their hotel room doesn't mean they're a church.

A church does not meet once a year when we happen to vacation near our favourite golf course or beach. A church is an assembly that regularly comes together for worship and to work in the cause of Christ. A church should be working towards having faithful men who will serve as elders. There are no elders, and never will be in the once a year *Marriott meeting*.

Might occasions arise where it is impossible for us to get together with God's people on Sunday? Sure. But let's not create such circumstances, and then misuse a Bible text to justify our absence.

¹ godsbreath.net/2011/10/05/truth-about-patternism/

"Let It Go"

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

A popular song is "Let It Go," from the movie "Frozen." The title reminds me of a Biblical principle.

As humans, we tend to want to hold on to things—possessions, relationships, anger, bitterness, ill feelings. Of course, some "possessions" are proper, but others are harmful and destructive.

In summer sometimes children fly kites. As the breeze lifts them in the air, the children are excited as their kites soar in the skies. But then the fun is over and the kites are pulled back and saved for another day.

Sadly, that's just what happens too often with hurt feelings, anger and bitterness, etc. Oh, we may let them loose for a time, but then we enfold them once again when the occasion is right. But we must realize that these negative feelings do more harm to us than to those who are the object of our bad feelings.

I may have some resentment towards Joe, and he may live 1,000 miles away. So I seethe and fume from day to day, and may toss and turn in bed, having trouble sleeping. Meanwhile Joe may be going about his normal

activities, unharmed by my arrows of anger. Sometimes he may be aware of my ill will, but it doesn't change the course of his life even though he may be saddened by my attitude.

A question asked in Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?" Job speaks of one who "dies with a bitter soul, Never even tasting anything good" (21:25). Is there a cure for my mental distress? Most certainly, for the Great Physician has some good balm for the illness. Paul wisely counsels, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). Paul also addresses cures for the diseased heart: "Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:12-15). It may not be easy to change bitterness to kindness and forgiveness, for even medical remedies for physical ailments can be painful, but God helps us change. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

So, instead of kites, we can take lessons from balloon flying. At times I have witnessed the release of balloons. Children (and sometimes older folks) have gathered for a great balloon release, and they cheer as the balloons are released to fly away into the sky, sometimes carrying messages. And wouldn't our lives be happier if we determined to release those harmful feelings that weigh us down? Sometimes it is feelings even about ourselves that need to be released. I recall an incident when a person who had wronged another made yet another apology. The recipient of the apology responded in words like, "I distinctly remember forgetting that some years ago." He wanted the apologizer to no longer punish himself.

Aren't there times when we need to release our own balloons? Years ago we had a young woman live with us for a time. One day she came to me with much weeping. She had committed fornication the night before, and was overcome with remorse. She asked me to pray for God to forgive her. I told her, "I can't do that, because God won't know what I'm talking about." She looked puzzled, so I went on. "Haven't you repented and asked God to forgive you?" "Yes," she replied. I went on, "God has told us that when he forgives, he forgets (Jeremiah 31:34), so he won't know what I'm talking about. Now, what you need to do is forgive yourself. In a sense, you are telling God to move aside and let you handle your own case, because you want to punish yourself some more."

And we do that sometimes, becoming depressed because of our weakness and failures. Even though Paul considered himself the chief of sinners, he did not continue to beat himself up, but joyfully accepted his forgiveness. "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

"Let it go, let it go, let it go."

Paul, To The Ephesians **Having The Eyes of Your Heart Enlightened**

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

We are studying Ephesians 1:15-21. Paul has heard of the godly behavior of the Ephesians, and gives thanks for them. Two thoughts occur as we consider these words: the first is of Paul's thanksgiving. We cannot overemphasize the importance of gratitude. Reluctance to say "thank you" is hard to explain; perhaps it is a result of unwillingness to admit that we owe anybody for anything: whether it is someone's opening the door for us, all the way up to the grace of God which gives us every good gift. Whatever, the Holy Spirit frequently calls for thanksgiving; and the call should be taken seriously.

The second thought is of the godly behavior -- their faith in the Lord; their love toward the saints -- that called forth the thanksgiving. First Thessalonians one is outstanding in its praise of the brethren in Thessalonica; the language of Ephesians 1:15 comes closest to joining it. The Ephesians' faith in the Lord sustained them in the face of

adversity (Acts 19:23-41). Their love toward the saints was in response to such directions as “bearing with one another in love” and “walk in love” (Ephesians 4:2, 5:1).

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians involved three requests: that they be given a spirit (human spirit, attitude; capital “S” in English Standard Version translators’ whim); that they be receptive to the message; and that they know the immensity of His power.

The “spirit” Paul prayed for them to receive was, first, of wisdom. “Wisdom” refers to common sense, to the ability to make appropriate application of the will of God revealed in Scripture. There must be meekness connected with wisdom (James 3:13), lest what is thought to be wisdom degenerate into arrogance.

Again, Paul wanted the Ephesians to receive the spirit of “revelation.” He is not asking for a direct revelation to every Christian, but their reception of that which the apostles and prophets preached.

This spirit of wisdom and revelation has to do with the knowledge of Christ: that they (and we) should ponder, meditate on, the Word as given, that our “powers of discernment” (Hebrews 5:14) may be matured.

The second petition in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians was “having the eyes of your heart enlightened.” In Acts 26, making his defense before Agrippa, he speaks of his commission to go to the Gentiles, “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God...” (verse 18). When people obey the gospel it is not a matter of performing meritorious works, but of becoming “obedient from the heart ...” (Romans 6:17). If the heart is not involved, the deeds are empty. So this is but a further application of the proverb, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Mark Well Her Bulwarks | Number 3

Tommy Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

Some may wonder why so much emphasis is placed on this bulwark, “God’s word is the only and final authority in religious matters.” The reason should be obvious to any student of the Bible. The enemy (a sinful world controlled by Satan) knows that the bulwark of God’s authority is the cornerstone that holds all the other bulwarks together. If it can be destroyed the rest of the bulwarks will also crumble and the city (the local church) will be conquered by the world. God’s people must not allow this to happen.

This is why the present day “change agents” work so hard to destroy the need for God’s authority to bind people. As mentioned in the last article, they take Second Corinthians 3:6 out of context and stress that it is the “spirit,” not the “letter” of the law that counts with God. In the context of Second Corinthians 3:6, Paul is pointing out that the Law of Moses (the letter) was done away in Christ. In its place there is now the law of the Spirit (the New Testament) to direct people. A secondary application for us today is that the New Testament is now God’s pattern for us to follow, and one must keep both the “spirit” (right attitude toward) and the “letter” (obedience to) of the law, “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25).

This law of Christ is what people want to do away with. They tell us that we are not under law but under grace. But God’s grace does not exclude us from obedience to law, but it does exclude us from the Law of Moses (Galatians 5:4). We are always under obligation to obey God (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:9; Romans 1:5; 16:26). Obedience requires something to obey, and that is the law of God. The law of liberty does not give us license to “...think beyond that what is written...” (1 Corinthians 4:6), but to do what the Lord says for us to do. Note that Paul wrote, “the things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do (this would require obedience – t.t.), and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). He also wrote, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions (the inspired words of the apostles –t.t.) which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

People want to be known as Christians, yet they don’t want to be bound too closely to a “thus says the Lord” in religious matters. This would be too restrictive for their personal desires and interests. So, if they can destroy this bulwark, that the New Testament as God’s law is to be followed as closely as humanly possible, they will have no need to justify their beliefs and practices by Scripture. They will be able to do as they think best.

This attitude has been a continuing problem with those who claim to be God's people. This can be seen in the attitude of the people of Jeremiah's day. They had destroyed the bulwark erected to keep them faithful to God. Speaking for God, Jeremiah writes, "Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be very desolate," says the Lord. For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:12-13).

What was the problem? The people had turned their backs to God and were making their own laws. He later says of this, "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?" (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

The great tragedy was that while the prophets and priests (the leaders of the people) were leading the people away from God, the people were rejoicing over their actions. After noting these things, God's prophet then called for the people to come back to God. "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls, But they said, 'we will not walk in it'" (Jeremiah 6:16).

What Jeremiah wrote about in his day, the attitude and action of the leaders, is the very same attitude and action being practiced by many preachers and teachers (change agents) today among God's people. They are trampling upon and seeking to destroy God's bulwark of authority, so they will have the freedom to teach what they like without any restraints. And the peoples' reaction in many congregations is exactly the same as the one Jeremiah described in his day. They love it this way because they now can do as they please.

Their justification in this is to say, "Our leaders tell us it is alright, so we can do it." When this attitude is exhibited in a congregation, then the world has entered the city (the ship of Zion) and the ship is sinking into apostasy.

I believe this bulwark has been firmly established in the congregation here at Etna. And as long as I remain the preacher, and keep a sound mind, I will also strive to be sound in the faith (2 Timothy 1:13).

"What Have They Seen In Your House?"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Let me remind you very briefly of the setting of this statement. King Hezekiah had been sick and near death. Isaiah the prophet had gone to him, telling him to "set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1). Upon hearing this, the king prays to God, weeping bitterly, stating to the Lord about his faithful service rendered to Him (verses 2-3). Jehovah hears and responds to the prayer of the king by granting him fifteen more years to live (verses 4-6). Berodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, had heard that Hezekiah had been sick, so he had sent letters and a present to the king of Judah. Those who delivered the message and the gift from the king of Babylon were shown "all the house of his treasures" (verses 12-13). Isaiah asked Hezekiah, what did these men say, from where did they come and "what have they seen in your house?" (verses 14-15) The prophet tells him all the things he had shown these men would eventually be taken to Babylon (verses 16-17).

What would guests in our homes see if the true picture of our home life is portrayed to them? I found a quote about home life, not sure who made it, but it says, "Tell me what is in your house by choice and I will tell you your home life." Home life is regulated by God. We must make sure we follow the pattern given to us by the Lord for our homes.

Is there a book lying somewhere in one of the rooms in this house, easily seen by our guest, that it is cherished above all others? Its cover is worn, the ends of its pages are tattered, words are high-lighted, comments are written through-out, and it is falling apart with use yet is highly prized by its owner (Psalm 19:10; 119:103). Upon closer inspection one can see it is the Bible. Yet in some homes the Book of God is only used as a decoration, placed on a coffee table to collect dust. It is seldom opened, read very little, and is not valued it seems. There are other books on display in this house which have a greater role in the life of this individual than does the inspired Word. What have they seen in your house?

Would a visitor see a husband, wife, and children (if the home is blessed to have such) who have great respect for what this great book of God teaches about their relationship? The husband is placed in the leadership role (head),

she is submissive, and the children honor their father and mother (Ephesians 5:22-23; 6:1-3). The parents love and train their children, bringing “them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4; Titus 2:4). This takes time and effort. TV’s need to be turned off, computers shut-down, phones put away, and Bibles opened. We should set aside time to spend with our families, just doing good wholesome things together. Is that what one would see in your house?

When company comes to our house would they see a very loving, caring and compassionate people? Some homes exude love and devotion to those who live there and others as well. It is not hard to see a husband who really loves his wife (Ephesians 5:25) and a wife who deeply cares about the man to whom she is married (Titus 2:4; Proverbs 31:12); parents who love their children (Colossians 3:21; Proverbs 31:27-28) and children who lovingly obey the commands of their father and mother (Proverbs 1:8-9; Ephesians 6:1-3). There is no domineering husband, a wife who is unwilling to submit, nor rebellious and unruly children. We sing a hymn at worship entitled “Where Love Is In The Home.” This is a beautiful song with very profound words. It says where love is in the home there is happiness, joy, harmony, bliss, contentment and peace. How true are these words! Would a guest in your home see this?

If someone stayed a few days at our house would they see individuals who are truly devoted to serving the Lord? Would they ask their guest to study the Bible with them? “You know it is Tuesday night, this is the time I have set aside to prepare my lesson for Wednesday night Bible study, would you like to study with me,” they ask. On Saturday night, members of this household begin preparation for services on Sunday. They will be present at Bible study, worship and back on Sunday evening for another period of praise and edification. There are phone calls made to check on the sick, cards are mailed to those who have experienced a death in the family, visits are made to those with whom they are trying to teach the gospel, and prayers of thanksgiving and intercession are offered to the Father without ceasing. What would one see in your house?

Just remember, the Lord sees and knows everything that goes on in your house! He is fully aware of the things which are truly important to you. Always put Him first (Matthew 6:33). If you do, then what He sees, with that He will be pleased.

Themes of Proverbs: The Two Women

Tanner Campbell | Rapid City, South Dakota, USA

In consideration of the book of Proverbs and the themes that run through it, the “compare and contrast” that Solomon engages in extensively can be readily observed by the reader. One of the most fascinating discussions in Solomon’s proverbs is the contrast he points out in two women.

Most of the time, when speaking of women and the book of Proverbs in the same sentence, the mind goes to “the virtuous woman” of Proverbs 31 which was penned by King Lemuel. However, Solomon speaks more at length on the subject of women prior to the virtuous woman; in fact, speaking in general, the first nine chapters (about one-third of the entire book) is about women. Two women to be exact, whom Solomon tells stories about to his son to whom he wishes to impart wisdom. The discussion of these women is longer than our discussion but I’ve selected from the text a few portions for us to consider.

One of these women is described very well in Proverbs 7:5-27. The first thing Solomon does here is provide us with her name: “the immoral woman,” and “the seductress.” Solomon makes use of a story to expose the truth about this woman to his son. The story begins with an average evening and a young man devoid of understanding walking the streets. He chooses to take the way past the house of a woman, who is the wife of a husband who is away for work. She appears before him in the attire that a harlot would wear, she attracts him in a sexual manner, kissing him. She makes the situation appear safe for him both physically (verses 19-20) and spiritually (verse 14). She paints over the sin with a picture of delight and pleasantness (verses 16-18). And she makes him feel wanted and desired (verse 15). The result of this is twofold, he immediately makes the rash decision to go with her, “as an ox goes to the slaughter;” and the husband comes home ahead of schedule, only to find this young man in his bed. The husband sent an arrow through the heart of this young man. Solomon closes with a solemn statement worthy to be placed first on his gravestone: “He did not know it would cost his life;” a statement that should be placed on the many gravestones of men and women who gave their life for immorality.

But this is not the only woman engaged in the battle to win over the young man! There is another woman that Solomon describes to his son that is also an enticer. She is mentioned in Proverbs 3:13-18. We are immediately told, in verses 13-14, that this woman is a personification of wisdom. She is really not a literal woman at all, and honestly, neither was the first woman we considered. They are both representations; one represents the life of immorality and its ending result, the other represents the life guided by godly wisdom and its ending result. The only comparison I see in the two is that they both entice the young man to come their way. Other than that, there is a significant contrast between the two women that Solomon makes clear. The words that describe the one who follows after Lady Wisdom are “happy,” “length of days,” “riches and honor,” “pleasantness,” and “peace.” Solomon’s statement that “all the things you may desire cannot compare with her,” is significant in the understanding of the man Solomon, who in deed had all that he desired. And, although we haven’t seen in this text Lady Wisdom actively enticing like we saw with the immoral woman, we can see this idea expounded in Proverbs 1:20-33. Solomon certainly spends a great deal of time talking about Lady Wisdom; chapter eight of Proverbs is dedicated to her. Therein, she speaks for herself, calling and inviting all to dwell with her. Her speech is directed not to the wise, the godly, and the prudent, but rather to the simple, the fool (verse 5). The foolish and ungodly of this world are those whom she desires to dwell with. Therefore, they are not to be seen as hopeless and helpless. If they, at some point in their lives, would accept the invitation to abide with Lady Wisdom, then surely there is help and hope for them. Wisdom is learned, the gospel is taught, and neither of the two are understandings that we are born with. Further, one thing of importance in the eighth chapter is the readiness and willingness of wisdom. She does not whisper her invitation from a dark corner, she cries out loud. She is found on a hill overlooking the place where the travelers cross, and then we see her again at the entry gate of the city. She has not made herself scarce. Her presence is demanding attention from all. The eighth chapter of Proverbs is positive proof that no man will have an excuse on the Day of Judgment. Wisdom has given her invitation, but many have rejected her cries to go their own way.

Another thing of great importance in the eighth chapter is the subject of the creation of the world. Verses 22-31 is a tremendous passage that demonstrates from the highest argument the vast difference between the two women. The immoral woman is as a blade of grass that sprouts forth and is gone before the next season. Her strength fails quickly; her death is sudden and inevitable. There is no glory, nor honor to be found in her life, just corruption. But what of Lady Wisdom? Solomon explains that she is eternal, enduring forever, from everlasting to everlasting. Even at the beginning of the creation, wisdom testifies that she “was beside” God “as a master craftsman,” and His “delight daily” (verse 30). She also testifies that “the LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (verse 22). Just picture that! The same wisdom that was in the sole possession of God before the world was; this master craftsman that God delighted in and used in the creation of all things; this same wisdom is that which cries aloud to the simple, with a ready invitation for them to possess her as God has since everlasting.

At the close of Solomon’s discussion of the two women of contrast, we reach chapter nine, which records the final chance of both women to entice the simple to their ways. The chapter begins with Lady Wisdom’s invitation (Proverbs 9:1-6). The text shows how wisdom has built and furnished her house. She has put great effort into the preparations of a visitor. After the preparations are completed, she goes once again to where we have seen her before, up to the highest places where one can’t help but see her and hear her invitation. Her invitation is this: “come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.” This is the food and drink of wisdom, knowledge, discretion and understanding that she invites the simple to come in and partake. Unfortunately, the immoral woman is not done, but comes back on the scene in verses 13-18. Unlike Lady Wisdom, who is strong and knowledgeable, one who has built her house, hewn out her pillars, slaughtered her meat and was a well prepared host; the immoral woman is only lazy and unprepared. She is depicted as one who sits. She sits at the door of her house, and she sits at the high places of the city. The image of her sitting at the high places of the city certainly shows the fact that she has made some intentions to be noticed and heard by the passerby. Her call is by no means similar to the call of wisdom, it is as follows: “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here; and as for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” The secret bread and the stolen water is an allusion to sexual immorality and the unfaithfulness of adultery. The immoral woman calls these things “sweet” and “pleasant.” But wisdom knows the truth behind these things, and Solomon, immediately following her call, says “but he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell.”

Which of the two women have you decided to dwell with?

"I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life" (Proverbs 4:11-13).

What is Premillennialism?

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The doctrine of premillennialism is a popular doctrine that is accepted and believed by many mainstream denominations. Besides its long and difficult name to actually articulate, many do not understand premillennialism. Tackling a whole system of doctrine is difficult and overwhelming. It is time consuming and space consuming. But to convey some of the popular thoughts associated with premillennialism will be beneficial to us so that we may be able to correctly teach the truth.

The prefix "pre-," of course, means before. The term "millennial" refers to the number 1,000 – specifically the 1,000 year reign of Christ that is referenced in the book of Revelation. So the premillennial system deals with beliefs of what will happen before the 1,000 year reign of the Lord and things concerning the nature of that 1,000 year reign. Much could be said, but given the limited space, we will look at some popular thoughts in this false doctrine.

Secret Rapture – Premillennialists believe that there will be a "secret and quiet" rapture before the Lord returns. Jesus will secretly take away all of His saints into heaven, leaving the erring to be left on the earth to endure 7 years of tribulation. Corresponding to the secret rapture is a "first resurrection" of those saints that are dead. They will be raised and taken up to glory. The Bible teaches the coming of the Lord will not be secret. The raising up and taking saints to glory will be open and announced with the shout from the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

7 Year Tribulation – Bible passages in Revelation and Daniel are abused from their context in attempts to prove a 7 year tribulation. The book of Revelation mentions 1,260 days (42 months) and Revelation 13:5 mentions 42 months, totaling 84 months (7 years). Nothing in these highly figurative passages indicates that this is a literal time frame. Even if they were, then nothing indicates that these are two distinct 42 month periods of time to add to 7 years (Revelation 11:7-10; 13:5-7). Similar events are happening in the 42 month period of time, describing a time of trial and great persecution. A literal 7 year tribulation is hard to prove and even more difficult to accept that persecution will only be limited to 7 years. Jesus told the church in Smyrna that they would only have tribulation 10 days (Revelation 2:10). All of these numbers of figurative, representing a time of persecution and trial. However, it also points to the redemption and hope that is given to the child of God that if they will overcome, then there is a reward. Persecution will not last eternally for the saints of God Almighty.

The Antichrist – Of all the people in the system of premillennialism the one that is most infamous is the Antichrist. The Antichrist figure in premillennialism is the crusader in the 7 year tribulation. Surely, the Bible speaks of a person who is "the one and only Antichrist," right? Actually the Antichrist is not a person, but it is a spirit, or a movement, of denying the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 4:3). Sadly enough, premillennialism does deny that Jesus is reigning over His kingdom. It is still awaiting a physical, national restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Premillennial doctrine denies the church being the kingdom of Christ. Thus, it denies the kingship and lordship of Jesus Christ.

Christ's Second Advent – One of the basic tenets of premillennial doctrine is the fundamental belief that Jesus Christ will return to the earth a second time in order to establish His kingdom. Again, this is a denial of the kingdom already existing. One passage is cited in Zechariah 14:4, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives..." This passage is taken out of its context to try and support the idea that Jesus will return to Jerusalem, waging war against the nations that follow the Antichrist and then Jesus will successfully set up His kingdom in Jerusalem. This completely misses the point of Zechariah's prophecy. In Zechariah 13:1 and 14:8 a fountain is promised that will open and from it will spring forth living water. This water is "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1). Jesus came to the earth, bringing the water of eternal life (John 4:13, 14; 7:37). The Hebrew writer spoke of Jesus' first coming to earth in respect unto offering Himself for sin (Hebrews 9:28). Zechariah's prophecy is not predicting something that has not yet happened. Zechariah was promising the Messiah would come, be killed (Zechariah 13:6; Matthew 26:31) and provide living water. These things were fulfilled when Jesus came to the earth the first time. His work has been accomplished. "It is finished," was the Lord's cry upon the cross.

Jesus will return once again, but not to the earth and not to establish a physical, national kingdom. He will call His saints to meet Him in the clouds of the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

1,000 Reign – The pinnacle of premillennial theology is concerning the 1,000 reign of Jesus. Many supporters of premillennialism turn to Revelation 20 to try and support the passage. Premillennialism asserts that Jesus will return to Jerusalem, establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem with the saints that had been raptured, destroy all the enemies (including the devil), and Christ will bring peace upon the earth, and then after 1,000 years take all His saints (raising up those who had died in the 7 year tribulation) and then go to heaven. Revelation 20 is the supposed text in the Bible that teaches such. Yet, none of those things are in Revelation 20! Revelation 20 does not mention Jerusalem. Revelation 20 does not mention 2 different resurrections that would take place 1,000 years apart. Revelation 20 does not mention an establishment of an earthly kingdom. Revelation 20 does not prove any of these teachings. We already looked at how many of the numbers in Revelation are figurative language. The 1,000 year reign is a long period of time in contrast to the devil's power for a "little season" (Revelation 20:3, 7-10). What Revelation 20 does promise is that the saints of God will be rewarded and victorious, reigning with Christ for a long period of time, for 1,000 years, or what is a description of eternity (Revelation 20:4-6). And the devil and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Premillennial doctrine is dangerous because it denies the lordship of Jesus Christ. It denies His kingdom and the power of His kingdom. Premillennialism is an assault upon God and the promises of His word. We must carefully study some of these difficult passages, but we must not misapply the truths that are contained in His word.

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

Refreshing The Romance

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife. (Genesis 26:8)

The Sparks Of Romance

It has been said that the Bible, especially in its narrative segments, offers the reader many intriguing facets of the human story. Indeed, there are stories (true stories) of deceit, betrayal, wars, treason, courage, overcoming great foes, etc.. Let us not forget the stories of love and romance. In all the narrative detail provided, there are lessons for us to learn, including the stories of love.

It would seem that Jacob fell for Rachel the moment he saw her! Genesis 29:11 tells us,

"Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept."

Genesis 29:18 & 20 confirm his great passion for her with statements that will make the heart of any woman melt.

Recall that God commanded the men of Israel to neither go out to war or be charged with any business after marrying, that he might

"...be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken."
(Deuteronomy 24:5)

God was interested in the sparks of romance igniting in the marriage relationship.

The Song of Solomon is an entire book about love and romance. It pictures the Shulamite woman and her beloved, who are enraptured with one another. There are segments of the book which may make some blush; but the book very effectively pictures the passion, enjoyment and romance which God desires to exist in the marriage relationship (Song of Solomon 2:8-9; 4:9-10).

When reading the book of Ruth, one can perceive a budding romance. Ruth and Boaz were married to perpetuate the name of Naomi's deceased husband in Israel, but their words to one another reveal that a romantic interest was also present. From the very time he met Ruth, Boaz revealed his concern for her (Ruth 2:8-9, 11-12). It only grew from there. It brought joy to his heart when Ruth came to him for refuge (Ruth 3:10-11).

The story of Esther centers around a conspiracy by Haman to exterminate the Jews. It would seem that God providentially gave the young woman Esther as wife to King Ahasuerus. The king, unaware of the plot until near the end of the book, is quoted as saying on more than one occasion,

"What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you - up to half the kingdom!" (Esther 5:3; 7:2)

What a display and affirmation of his love for her!

Stoking The Fire

Romance does not belong to those who are young, but to those who are in love. As such, it is important to cultivate, water, and allow romance to flourish in our marriages. As Solomon gives advice to his son, he declared,

"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times, and always be enraptured with her love." (Proverbs 5:18-19)

Again, this wise king stated:

"Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

You will have to forgive Solomon's somewhat cynical manner in stating this truth. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we have the chronicle of his pursuit for purpose and happiness. He came to understand that life, without grasping our primary purpose (Ecclesiastes 12:13) is nothing but vanity. This however, does not negate God's desire for us to *"live joyfully with the wife whom you love,"* but sets the context in which we should do so - in faithful service to God.

In Genesis 26:8, we find an instance of romantic affection between a mature Isaac and Rebekah. Abimelech, looking out his window saw *"...Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife..."*

The boys were grown up and out of the house; they had been married for several years; but the flame of love still burned in them for one another. What a beautiful picture!

How do we stoke the fire of romance in our relationship? Weekend getaways and fancy trips are enjoyable, but may not be practical for all. And, in the greater picture, these alone will fail to maintain romance in a relationship. We do not want a weekend of romance once every 5 years, but a culture of romance in the marriage.

Focus on the little things. A love note here; helping with a chore there. Give regular hugs and kisses. Take up a hobby with your spouse, because he / she is interested in it. Open the door for her. Cook his favourite meal. Make a phone call in the middle of the day, just to say "I love you." Enjoy a picnic for two. Take a quiet night time walk. Give her flowers or chocolates. The list goes on. The key is to focus on your spouse, not yourself; to serve one another - to look out for the other's interests. Regular deposits in the love bank will result in greater interest and rewarding returns.

Parables of the Master

Counting the Cost

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

It was late in the personal ministry of the Lord, He had already plainly warned His disciples of His impending death and the sacrifice they themselves would have to make (Luke 9:22-25), and the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him (John 7:1), nevertheless great multitudes followed Him (Luke 14:25). He wanted them to understand what it means to be His disciple. In the context of this warning the Master spoke two brief parables each with the same point, the necessity of counting the cost.

First He reminded them how foolish it would be to build a tower without first stopping to compute its price (Luke 14:28-30). In vineyards and olive groves around Palestine, land owners built stone towers where a steward could watch for thieves and oversee workers. But before the landowner erected such a tower, he would do some

planning. How tall would it be? How much stone was needed? How much would it cost to pay the stone mason who built it? How embarrassing it would be to start to build and to run out of money! Who has never witnessed the aging, incomplete shell of a house and thought of it as a stark reminder that someone started to build but couldn't finish? Even so, an old, partially complete tower would be a lasting monument to the folly of a man who began a project but couldn't complete it. He had failed to properly plan. An important and difficult task requires adequate forethought. Better not to begin than to start and not be able to finish.

Then Christ used the analogy of a king setting out to engage in battle with another king. If the king under consideration had only 10,000 soldiers, whereas the ruler he desired to conquer had 20,000, he had a potentially deadly problem. Ancient kings usually led their troops into battle. David did so until he was middle aged and was almost killed in combat (2 Samuel 21:15-17). Regardless of how much the king coveted the land of his rival, he would think long and hard before leading his army against one twice its size. Unless he could arrive at a plan he was confident would bring victory, he would meekly send a delegation to beg terms of peace from the foe. An important and difficult task requires planning. Better not to start than to begin and not be able to finish.

Could any undertaking be more important or more difficult than starting a life of walking in the steps of Jesus (Luke 14:33)? Those who begin the journey and then turn back are in worse spiritual condition than those who have never followed the Master. Salt that has lost its saltiness is worse than useless, it will sterilize the soil. The salty clay that is left is only fit to throw on foot paths. It doesn't help even there, but at least it doesn't hurt the land (Luke 14:34-35). Better not to start than to begin and not be able to finish.

So, what does it take to be a disciple of Christ? "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24). These three requirements sum up everything expected of a Christian. Let us carefully examine each demand.

Deny Himself

The disciple of Jesus must "deny himself." He must forsake "all that he has" (Luke 14:33). The Master doesn't ask for a portion of your time, your ability, or your money. In fact, no amount of those will do. He wants you. He wants you to be able to truthfully claim:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

He demands that you agree with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ..." (Philippians 1:21). He will settle for nothing less than the presentation of your body as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). You must willingly suffer the loss of all things and count it as gain (Philippians 3:7-8). Your will must no longer matter. All that matters is the will of Christ.

The one who denies himself will hate his own family (Luke 14:26). Does this mean I must despise and turn against my loved ones? No, in fact there is no greater example of the love of a son for his mother than that of Jesus, as He was suffering on the cross, committing his mother to the care of beloved John (John 19:25-27). The word "hate" in the Scriptures commonly means simply "to love less" (cf. Matthew 6:24). The Lord demands that we love our own families less than we love Him (Matthew 10:34-37). Even though my family might turn against me because of my faith, I must follow on to truly be the Lord's disciple.

To be Jesus' disciple, I must put the Lord ahead of riches. In Mark 10:17-27, Jesus told of a young man who lacked just one thing to be pleasing to God - he put his riches ahead of Christ (verses 21-22). The Master observed the extreme difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (verses 23-27). I must faithfully follow Christ, even if it is damaging to my job and wealth.

To be a faithful disciple of Christ, I am directed to put Him ahead of worldly pleasures (2 Timothy 3:4). I must be willing to give my life for Him if necessary, rather than reject my faith (Matthew 16:25-27). I must willingly forsake all the sins that stain my soul (Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:24). I must truly put the Lord ahead of all else. He must be my everything.

Take Up His Cross

The disciple of Christ must "take up his cross" (Matthew 16:24). This does not mean to endure aches, pains, and

hardships unrelated to being a Christian. Rather, this refers to willingness to cheerfully suffer the daily persecutions and hardships that come from following Jesus and to remain faithful (Luke 9:23).

The Jews insulted Jesus by calling Him "Beelzebub," literally, "lord of flies," a blasphemous insult (Matthew 10:24-25). Why should we be amazed if we are called "Campbellites" or "Antis"? All who faithfully follow the Master will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

To bear the cross, we must never be ashamed of nor hide the fact that we are Christians (Mark 8:38). Christians are known, not by bumper stickers, special clothing, or self-righteous attitude, but by their lives.

Follow Me

To be a disciple of Christ, I must follow Him (Matthew 16:24). This means I will continue in His word (John 8:31-32), letting it be my guide each day. It means my life will be like Jesus' (Luke 6:40), as I walk daily in His footsteps. It means I will seek to save those who are lost, even as my Master did (Luke 19:10), thus bearing much fruit for God (John 15:8).

Is It Worth It?

The cost of discipleship is indeed high! Does the return justify the investment? The apostles left everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). Jesus promised them that, for every sacrifice they made, they would be rewarded "a hundredfold now in this time, ... with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). The fellowship with those of like precious faith, the sharing we have with one another of both spiritual and physical blessings, the promise of life everlasting - what a wonderful reward! Will you not determine to pay the cost of discipleship?



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