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(unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp)

In This Issue...

- Question on Eating in the Church Building
- Question About the Law of Christ
- By Grace Through Faith (Pat Farish)
- The Pillars of the Temple (Jefferson David Tant)
- Mark Well Her Bulwarks (No. 7) (Tommy Thornhill)
- The Glorious Gospel (Jim Mickells)
- The Promise of the Spirit (William J. Stewart)
- Church Discipline (Mike Thomas)
- Unforgivable Sin (Tanner Campbell)
- Jesus On The Mountains (Sean P. Cavender)
- Laziness (David L. Cooper)
- Aiming For Leadership (William J. Stewart)
- What Is a Christian? (Keith Sharp)
- Christ Receiveth Sinful Men (Keith Sharp)

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.

Question on Eating in the Church Building

Question

I love the series of lessons on institutionalism and I have challenged some of my brethren who believe, that it's ok to eat in the church building after services Acts 20:11. The question asked, which I have not biblical answer is: where in the bible does it authorize us having water payed from the treasury of the church? I know that this will be one of the items which would fall into the incidental items since it speaks to health issues. please help!

Answer

Thank you for your commendation of the material.

It is not wrong to eat in the church building. It is true that the apostle Paul ate a meal in the same place the brethren assemble to worship (Acts 20:7, 11). It is wrong for the church to come together for the purpose of eating a common meal. It is both an unauthorized church activity (Colossians 3:17) and a forbidden activity (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). When the church remains after worship is over for the purpose of eating a

common meal, that is not incidental to their coming together to worship.

The church is authorized to come together for worship (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25). The authorization to assemble includes all things necessary and helpful to assembling. That is the nature of authority. For example, Jesus commands us to go preach the gospel (Mark 16:15), but He doesn't say how to go. Philip both ran and rode in a chariot (Acts 8:26-31), and Paul and Barnabas went on a ship (Acts 13:1-4). To go to Africa, I have to purchase a passport and visa. Those are incidentals to going. A church building, water, toilets, seats, lights, etc. are all incidentals to the church assembling.

Thank you for your good question.

Question About the Law of Christ

Question

Is the non-Christian not under any of the commands of the N.T.. My position is that there are some commands that pertain to the alien sinner Thanks for your thoughts

Answer

Thank you for your good question.

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church...” (Ephesians 1:22). Christ is over all things, and He is specifically Head over the church. There is nothing the Father has not put under Him (1 Corinthians 15:27). He rules the nations (Revelation 19:15-16). Obviously, some of His laws apply to specific groups of people. Only alien sinners must be baptized (Acts 8:12-13), whereas erring children of God must repent and pray (Acts 8:22). Only wives must submit to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22), but that is true of all wives, Christians or not. The law of Christ and the gospel of Christ are the same thing (Romans 1:16-17; 8:2). The law of Christ applies to all, whether alien sinner or Christian.

Paul, To The Ephesians | Ephesians 2:8-9

By Grace Through Faith

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Grace, the unmerited favor of God, abounds in our lives. The food we eat is produced from seeds empowered by God. Men have tried to make seeds. They analyze seeds of fruit or vegetables to determine of what materials they consist, and they create their own “seed.” To resounding failure - the seed they got out of the ground is connected with the grace of God carrying life, and the “seed” they made is not. Yes, we prepare the ground, put the seed in it, water and fertilize the seed – and God makes it grow. We could do all this stuff to the “seed” human wisdom has concocted, and still nothing would happen, because the power of God is not present in it.

Grace through faith: in life on this planet, and in the hope of heaven.

Paul says, “by grace you have been saved.” These were dead people, dead in trespasses and sins who have been “made ... alive together with Christ.” Their salvation, like the tomato, did not happen apart from the power of God. The seed had to be sown – whether a tomato seed or that which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). Their trust in God led them to obey God.

“Through faith.” As with everything that grows for man’s nutritional well-being, so with the provision of salvation: human effort is involved. That essential human effort is not meritorious, the efforts with the man-made seed show that there is no merit apart from the power of God – but as with God’s tomato seed there must be preparing, planting, and tending to bring about the harvest, so that seed which is the word of God: the soil (heart) must be prepared, the seed must be sown – and none of these things earn the reward. Which is probably why Paul writes in First Corinthians 3:6 “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

“And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” What does “this” refer to? Many think that “this” refers to faith: that faith is the gift of God. The Bible teaches, rather, that faith comes from hearing “the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Even the devil knows how faith is produced, Luke 8:11-12 (and confer John 20:30-31). The Bible further teaches that the real gift of God is salvation, “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). The effort to make faith be the gift of God grows out of the notion that some are predestined to be saved, and others to be lost, irrespective of the manner of their lives. According to this view, God picks the ones He will save, and bestows faith on them. This idea, false from the start, has had more effect on the views of some preachers than we would like to admit.

Salvation is the gift of God, because “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).

“Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” This is a favorite place to which they fly who would impugn baptism, or the obedience of faith. They miss the mark in this, also. There are, certainly, works which are not involved in salvation; but the works which are excluded in this passage are works about which “one may boast.” What is there to boast about in being baptized? Would Naaman have boasted about being immersed in the Jordan River? No, what could a “commander ... a great man ... a mighty man of valor” (2 Kings 5) have to boast about in such an awkward activity? Would the children of Israel boast about having marched around Jericho thirteen times? No, they were granted these blessings by the grace of God, “not as a result of works, so that no man may boast.”

The works that are excluded are works man could boast, or brag, about. If Naaman could have confronted a mighty army, and defeated it with but one little sword, it would have been glorious; but dipping in the Jordan? -- nothing to brag about there. If the children of Israel could have stormed the walls and defeated the people of Jericho because of their bravery, it would have been a feather in their cap; but marching around the city?—nothing to brag about there.

If one wishing to convert to Christ could deny himself in some heroic fashion, many would be drawn by such a glorious prospect; but allow oneself to be immersed in water for forgiveness? – nothing to brag about there.

God wants us to understand our frailty, our dependence on Him. He has carefully and specifically given instruction that emphasizes our dependence. Notable in this list would be Gideon, in Judges 22. The reason for all the action in this chapter is set forth in verse two, where Jehovah tells Gideon “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’” So, Jehovah had Gideon reduce his army (which was already outnumbered) from 32000 men, to 10000, to 300; so that the Israelites would not think “my own hand has saved me.”

God’s demand is that the person desiring to be forgiven and saved submit to baptism, which makes no sense according to human wisdom. The point is, though, that no one arising and being baptized to wash away sin is going to think that by his mighty right arm, or by his soaring intellect, or by whatever else one might try to lean on, his salvation was accomplished.

The Ephesians were saved “by grace ... through faith.” In terms of their conversion, what did salvation by grace through faith call for? We read about their conversion in Acts 19. In speaking with some people

there, and learning they had been baptized with “John’s baptism”, Paul said “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus ... There were about twelve men in all” (verses three through five).

The problem with John’s baptism was that, though in earlier times it had been valid – Jesus was baptized with it, and He also baptized others, John 4:1, 2 – with the day of Pentecost baptism in the name of Christ was prescribed for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). And apparently, these Ephesians were baptized with John’s baptism after Pentecost.

So: salvation by grace through faith required believing in Jesus, and being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus - to which twelve men immediately tended.

The Pillars of the Temple

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

In giving Solomon instructions for building the temple, God gave a somewhat unusual command concerning two pillars at the entrance. “And he set up the pillars at the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz” (1 Kings 7:21).

There were no names given to any other of the numerous pillars that were a part of the temple. So what was the significance of these two that set them apart from all the other pillars? Why were they given names?

Although we have no explanation for this, we can glean something from the Hebrew meanings of their names. From the detailed instructions given for the temple, it does not appear that these pillars supported the roof. In other words, they were apparently freestanding at the entrance. The **Pulpit Commentary** suggests that “the balance of evidence appears to favour the view that Jachin and Boaz were monuments erected in the porch, to dignify the sanctuary, and to symbolize the power and eternity of the Being to whom it was dedicated” (**1 Book of Kings**. 181).

Jachin means “He shall establish” and Boaz means “In it is strength.” Would not the names of these pillars, which one had to pass in order to enter into the temple, serve as a visible reminder to all those who entered, that this magnificent edifice was ordained and built by their God, whose strong arm would shield and protect them?

Also noteworthy is David’s charge to Solomon. David wanted to build the temple, but God did not permit it. David did make preparation by gathering the material. Then before his death, David gave Solomon the plans. “Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; and the plan of all that he had in mind...” (1 Chronicles 28:11-12)

What do you think would have happened if Solomon had not built according to “the plan,” the blueprint? Certainly God would not have been pleased.

Is there an application for us? Isn’t the church God’s temple today? Paul declared that we are God’s temple, not a physical building, but a spiritual building. “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).

Then Paul continues to admonish: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of

God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (verses 16-17).

No one ever builds without a plan or blueprint. When Christ said he would build his church (Matthew 16:18), let us not foolishly suppose that he didn't have a pattern or blueprint in mind for that spiritual building.

Some today have the idea that we are free to conduct ourselves with respect to the church in whatever ways seem good to us. They don't like rules or restraints. They want freedom. The idea that we have to follow a “pattern” is not to their liking.

Is God less concerned about such than when he instructed Moses about building the tabernacle? “Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain’” (Hebrews 8:5).

Consider Hebrews 9:1: “Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.” Now, consider the implications of that statement. I tell my 16-year-old daughter, “Look, even your 10-year-old sister knows how to make up her bed and keep her room clean.” The very strong implication is that the older daughter should know how to do it even better than her younger sister.

So, what is the author of Hebrews telling us? If “even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship...,” then the inescapable implication is that the second covenant also has rules of divine worship. Some don't like “necessary implications,” but that verse has one, even if they don't like it.

Brethren, let us take heed how we build. “But each man must be careful how he builds on it” (1 Corinthians 3:10). As those pillars symbolized the power and eternity of the Being to whom the temple was dedicated, let us respect those principles with regard to the church which was built by Christ. We have no right to change the blueprints. Let the temple's pillars remind us of the divine builder of the spiritual temple.

Mark Well Her Bulwarks - No. 7

Tommy Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

Is all of life worship? This is a concept dreamed up by some who want to avoid being limited by God's bulwark of worship. The following is from Kevin Kay – “Biblical Insights,” July, 2006.

What do the scriptures teach? The New Testament clearly teaches that a Christian is to present his body a “a living sacrifice” to God (Romans 12:1-2) and do everything in the name of the Lord (Colossians 3:17) and to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is also true that a Christian can and should worship God apart from those times when the church assembles together (Acts 16:25; Hebrews 13:15). Does this mean, however, that all of life is worship?

Just a few examples in the Bible clearly illustrate that all of life is not worship. Abraham told his servants that he and Isaac would “go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5). God told Moses to “come up to the Lord...and worship from afar” (Exodus 24:1). After the death of his son, David “went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house...” (2 Samuel 12:20). The wise men came to Bethlehem to worship Jesus (Matthew 2:2), and when they found Him, they “fell down and worshiped Him” (Matthew 2:11). John, “fell at his feet to worship the angel” (Revelation 10:10; 22:6). The Bible clearly teaches that worship has a beginning point (Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 28:9, 17; Mark 5:6; John 9:38; Hebrews 11:21) and an ending point (Luke 24:52) and that worship does involve a “when” and a “where” (John 12:20; Acts 8:27; 24:11).

In light of this evidence, from where does this “all of life is worship” concept come? The proponents of this concept hang their hat on Paul's statement: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of

worship” (Romans 12:1, (**NASB**; cf **ESV, NIV, NRSV**). Other translations say, “which is your reasonable service” (**KJV, NKJV**) or “which is your spiritual service” (**ASV**). Although the original word translated “spiritual service or worship” (“*latreia*”) can refer to worship (Romans 9:4; Hebrews 9:1, 6), it more generally refers to service (John 10:2; Luke 1:74). In fact, the verb form (“*latreuo*”) is contrasted with the usual word for “worship” (“*proskuneo*”) (Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Romans 1:25), suggesting a difference between the two. This evidence indicates that **while all of life is service, not all of life is worship**.

What is behind this “all of life is worship” concept?

1. **Informality**. Of the assembly in Troas Acts 20:7, Mike Root says: “The first day of the week assembly was as unstructured and informal as an unplanned reunion of college friends” (**Spilt Grape Juice**. 50-51). Who says so? Luke certainly doesn’t say anything like that, and since Paul taught the same things in all the churches (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17), there is every reason to believe that the assembly in Troas followed the principles of decorum that Paul taught in the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:26-40). If not, why not?

2. **Pep-rally religion**. For the promoters of the all-of-life-is-worship concept, it’s all about me (or to be as charitable as possible, it’s primarily about me); it’s not about God. Root says: “Encouragement is the glue that keeps us close, the rah-rah that keeps us going, and the book that keeps us coming back for more. It’s a drug we can’t get enough of and a gift that we never tire of giving (**Spilt Grape Juice**.73). The New Testament teaches however, that worship is not about me; it is all about God (Matthew 4:10; John 4:21-24; Revelation 14:6-7).

3. **Eating together**. That sounds pretty innocent until you learn that this includes, in Root’s theology, the eating of a common meal when Christians assemble. All of this despite the fact that Paul told the Corinthians after they had turned the Lord’s Supper into a common meal, to “eat at home” (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34).

4. **An expanded role for women**. With a touch of sarcasm, Root writes, “...women can talk all they want before and after their magical opening and closing prayers, because being silent in the church is referring to the formal assembly. Five minutes before that opening prayer, the same women in the same building, sitting in the same seats, could comment, share and edify others, simply because it was called ‘a Bible class,’ and everyone knows that’s not the same as the formal worship. There is some sense of consistency in this: neither Bible classes nor formal worship are found in the New Testament, so we can make up the rules as we go” (**Unbroken Bread**.128).

Root suggests that Paul’s restrictions on women (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:35) were “just dealing with specific first century problems in Corinth and Ephesus” (**Broken Bread**.180); but in the context Paul instructs men “everywhere” (1 Timothy 2:8), and his instructions for the Corinthians were the same “as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33-34, **ASV, ESV, NIV, NRSV**). Others argue that these restrictions were based on first-century culture, and therefore, have no application in twenty-first century America, but Paul based his restrictions on women on Creation (1 Corinthians 11:7-9; 1 Timothy 2:13), the Fall (1 Timothy 2:14), and the Law (1 Corinthians 14:34), three things that have absolutely nothing to do with culture.

Brethren, some preachers are trying to affect radical change in the church as we know it today. The all-life-is-worship concept is a step in that direction. This concept, however, lacks divine foundation and must be rejected .

The Glorious Gospel

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

Paul, in writing to the young evangelist Timothy, called the good news of salvation through Christ (the gospel) "glorious" (1 Timothy 1:11). The word "glorious" is defined as "In the NT, spoken also of that which excites admiration or to which honor is ascribed" (**Complete Word Study Dictionary**). Why is the gospel considered glorious? Let me suggest a few reasons for your consideration.

It is glorious because of its origin. It originated in the mind of God. Luke reveals to us the sermon Peter delivered to the Jews on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Notice one thing revealed there, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). The fact Jesus came to this earth, was rejected and crucified by wicked men was according to the foreknowledge of God. The definition of "foreknowledge" is "forethought, prearrangement" (Thayer, 538). Wuest in his word study, when speaking about the determined purpose (KJ uses the word counsel) and foreknowledge of God says, "In the councils of the Trinity, it was decided that the Lord Jesus should be given over into the hands of wicked men" (vol. 3). The good news of our salvation through the suffering and death of the Son of God was all part of the God's eternal purpose and plan (Ephesians 1:2-6; 3:8-12, etc.).

It is glorious because it reveals the gift given by God. Jehovah gave His Son to redeem us from our sins. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is hard for me to fathom the Creator of the world loving me so much that He would allow His Son to die for me, such an awful sinner. Not only does the Father love us but Jesus does as well. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). The theme of the Bible is about "Someone." Someone is coming, someone is here, and someone is coming again. That someone is Christ. The Old Testament contained prophecies about His coming and what He would do when He arrived – I have been told there are over three hundred such prophecies. In the gospels someone is here – mostly about the last three years of His life on earth. In Acts through Revelation someone is coming again – we are reminded of His second coming to judge the world. What a gift given to such undeserving world!

It is glorious because of its purpose. Look at what Paul says when writing to those at Rome. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17). The gospel when believed and obeyed will save the souls of sinners (both Jews & Greeks) by the grace of God (1 Peter 1:22). "For in it" (v. 17) – the gospel; "The righteousness of God" – Jehovah's way of making man righteous or just; "Is revealed from faith" – justification comes by faith (an obedient faith, Hebrews 5:8-9); "to faith" – by knowing we can be righteous by faith it induces us to have faith. The end result is "The just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). What a message to a sick and dying generation of men.

It is glorious in its availability. I have heard of people dying because the medicine needed to treat their disease was either not available because of where they lived or else they could not afford it. How sad! Yet this is not true of the gospel, the only cure for the problem of sin. The apostles were told to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19); "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This message is for all, regardless of the skin color, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, American or African, the nationality does not matter to the Lord. He is interested in the hearts of men irrespective of such external matters. It is also written so we can understand it as well. Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Even I can understand the conditions set forth by the Father to receive the benefits of His grace through Jesus Christ. One must be taught the gospel (John 6:44-45; Romans 10:15), believe in the Father and His Son (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confess his faith in the Lord (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10), be baptized in water for remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and faithfully live for the Lord once his sins have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb (1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10).

Is it any wonder, when we consider just a few of the facts about the gospel, why Paul said it was “glorious?” Thanks be to God for loving us enough to reveal such a message to us!

Is That Really What It Means?

The Promise of the Spirit

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

It is important when we read the Bible to set things into their context. Here are a few guidelines to help us set a verse in context:

1. Read at least 7 verses before and after, to give a 15 verse span. That is usually sufficient to set a verse in its literary context.
2. Who was the original recipient of the text? Make sure our understanding or application of the verse doesn't ignore its significance to them. Are we in a similar situation to the original recipient?
3. What are the historical circumstances surrounding the text? Noting this will sometimes help us see the limitations or scope of a verse.

Our title speaks about the Holy Spirit, and we will get there, I promise. But first, I've got a question I want to ask. Have you started building your ark yet? You do know that Genesis 6:14 commands:

Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.

In the next few verses, we are given details about the size of the ark, as well as how many decks, doors and windows to make.

I suspect all Bible students understand that the command given in Genesis 6 was intended for Noah and no one else. By applying the three principles mentioned above, we know this is not for us to obey. It is important for Bible students to realize some commands and promises are exclusive.

That brings us to the Holy Spirit. Don't misunderstand, I am not saying that ye ol' average Christian does not receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible certainly affirms that if we are God's people, then we have the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14; etc.). However, that doesn't mean everything that is said or promised regarding the Spirit is given to every Christian.

If we rightly divide the word, we will find that there are three different measures of the Holy Spirit. There is the indwelling of the Spirit (listed above), the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44-47) and the miraculous measure of the Spirit (Acts 8:14-19). All of God's people have the indwelling of the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit is exclusive, it happened just twice! And the gifts of the Spirit were given by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Since there are no apostles remaining (and the purpose of the gifts has been fulfilled, Hebrews 2:1-4), the miraculous gifts have ceased (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-12).

In John 14-16, the Lord promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples. Plenty of people have staked claim to these promises. Why are these folks not also building arks? They seem to know the ark command is exclusive, but fail to even consider the possibility that the promises of John 14-16 may be exclusive. Let's consider the texts in their context.

Who were the promises made to? This was not a public discourse. Only the apostles received these promises. In fact, Judas was gone before Jesus told them about the Spirit (13:31-33). This doesn't necessarily exclude us, but it is important to note.

What is promised? A special relationship with the Spirit is presented in the text. The Spirit is the *parakletos*, which means Helper or Comforter. This is the only time this description is used of the

Spirit. Just as their relationship to Jesus differed from the average follower (not just disciples, but apostles), so their relationship to the Spirit would be unique. John 14-16 gives details about that relationship.

Stop for a moment and read John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27 & 16:7, 13.

How do we know this describes an exclusive relationship of the Spirit and the apostles? Many claim this relationship for themselves, but if we are honest with the text, we will see that it is no more about us than the command to build an ark. There are 4 things in particular Jesus said the Spirit would do for them.

Teach you all things (14:26). This is not the subjective "leading of the Spirit" some claim to have. Jesus didn't say he'll give warm fuzzy feelings and confirm what is in your heart. The Spirit would be their teacher, and give them ALL THINGS. Others, like Timothy, must give attention to reading (1 Timothy 4:13, 15-16).

Bring to your memory all things Jesus said (14:26). If you were not there, if you did not hear it in the first place, then you cannot remember it. They would remember ALL things Jesus said.

Guide you into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit would give the apostles perfect knowledge of God's word. Sadly folks who claim to be led by the Spirit often disagree with one another on this or that point of doctrine. The apostles were guided into ALL TRUTH.

Tell you things to come (John 16:13). I've met some who claimed to have the gift of prophecy. In each case, I was baffled at their utter lack of knowledge and respect for what the Bible says. If someone is unable to correctly speak about God's word (the first 3 gifts), then what should make us think they can correctly reveal the future?

The promise of the Spirit in John 14-16 is not for all, but was for the apostles alone.

Church Discipline

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

The apostle Paul taught Christians to practice church discipline by marking and avoiding erring Christians (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). The incident at Corinth centered around a member guilty of sexual immorality, but discipline is not limited to that sin (verse 11). It is to be applied any time a Christian refuses to repent of sin (Titus 3:10). We are expected to do this to:

1. **Perform God's will.** One of the identifying marks of a congregation that is faithful to the Lord is their willingness to practice church discipline—to be "obedient in all things" (2 Corinthians 2:9). No discipline is pleasant at first, but painful. It is hard on everyone involved, which is why some churches avoid it. They will have to answer to God for their disobedience (Revelation 2:20-23). Nevertheless chastening sin "yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). Spiritually-minded people understand this and will perform it.
2. **Produce shame.** We are to "note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14). God has already judged that person for refusing to keep His will, and is no longer in fellowship with them (1 John 2:3-5). He expects His church to do the same in the hopes that it will bring them to repentance "and save a soul from death" (James 5:20). True love demands it (1 Corinthians 5:5, 11-13).
3. **Protect the church.** We are to deliver erring Christians to Satan because "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." Sin never sits still. If uncorrected, it will spread and multiply. Thus, those "who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20). When a church compromises for one member's sins, they encourage sin in other members. This is inevitable. The only way to protect the church's integrity, as well as their influence in community, is to discipline

members who do not repent of sin. Sinful members who are given full fellowship are cancerous and will corrupt the rest of the body (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

Unforgivable Sin

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In this article, we will be examining one of the scriptures that has continued to confuse, worry and scare many who stumble upon it in their bible reading. Some examples of this are Matthew 12:31-32, Hebrews 10:26-31, and Hebrews 6:4-6. Today, we will be looking at Matthew 12:31-32 and give diligent consideration to this difficult scripture and come to a conclusion of the matter based on the original context of the passage.

The text in question is this: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." From an initial reading, it seems that Jesus actually talks about an unforgivable sin; however, we need to understand the context before we draw such a conclusion. To get a proper sense of these words, we need to back up to at least verse 22, where Jesus performs a miracle, healing a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. Many were able to witness this with great amazement, and they began to question if the one before their eyes was the great king to come. Now obviously, this is the time when the Pharisees had to step in, for they couldn't bear to have anyone believing that Jesus was the Messiah. Therefore, the Pharisees spread the lie that Jesus was able to cast out the demons because he was of the Devil, the ruler of demons. When Jesus heard this nonsense, He made a logical point addressing the contradiction it would be for evil to cast out evil. Jesus continues, and in verse 28-29 He says, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house." This is the first time that the Holy Spirit appears in the discussion, so we need to make a note of that. Jesus identified where His ability to cast out demons logically comes from; it comes from the Holy Spirit. Jesus then proceeds to teach them that God is willing and able to forgive all sins and all blasphemies (verse 31). So essential, in the same verse where many believe an unforgivable sin is spoken of Jesus tells us that all sins and all blasphemies God is able to forgive. There is no such thing as an unforgivable sin. Jesus makes that point very clear. God is willing to forgive all things of all men; but just because he is willing does not mean that we are willing to have Him wash away our sins. Many reject the very simple steps that God has instructed us to take in order for Him to do what He desires to do for us; wash away our sins. He even sent His son to die for that very purpose. What many mistake as "the unforgivable sin" in the text is not what Jesus ever said. His words are quite different. He said "but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." His point here is that men can live their lives in such a way as to not receive forgiveness. The way in which these individuals choose to live is in blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? It means they have rejected the Holy Spirit. How does one reject the Holy Spirit? Scripturally speaking, there is actually only one way to reject the Holy Spirit, and that is to reject the words of the gospel of Christ. It is the words of the New Testament which the Spirit gave to us. To reject these words in our lives, or to be a false teacher who speaks a different word than what the Spirit provided us, or to be a believer of a different word, is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Jesus is making the point that as long as one stays in that position of rejection, they cannot receive forgiveness of sins. He never makes the point that in the coming days, if they realize what they need to do in order to be saved, that God will refuse to forgive them. That is a ludicrous doctrine! The Apostle Paul is a great example of this point. Paul, himself, gave testimony that he was a blasphemer of the way which the Holy Spirit taught (1 Timothy 1:12-16), but he lives on to become one whom God displayed as a pattern to all other blasphemers that He is longsuffering in his desire to forgive them as well (vs 16).

Going back to the text of Matthew 12, verse 32 is just as important to the subject, because Jesus provides

a fuller understanding of what he is speaking about in the context. Again, He says: "and whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." He tells the Jews something very personal here when he says that whoever rejects Him, it will be forgiven, because he is referring to his crucifixion. Even though they will have a hand in the death of Christ, as long as they accept the words of the gospel which the Spirit will bring, they will be forgiven even of this great sin. Acts chapter 2 is the fulfillment of such words. Notice the people that Peter is preaching to when he says: "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (v 23), and later Peter says: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (v 36). Following this, Peter tells these who blasphemed the Lord that they would be forgiven of their sins if they heeded the words which they heard that day. And what words did they hear? Back in verse 33, Peter said this: "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." What they heard was the words from the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Peter, these words told them to repent and be baptized (vs. 38). 3,000 of these blasphemers of Christ were forgiven because they chose to not blaspheme the Holy Spirit (vs. 41). The rest of the Jews who were there that day not only rejected Christ, but the Spirit that was poured out on the Apostles, and as long as the Spirit is rejected, they will not follow His words toward repentance and baptism; they will not be forgiven. This is the actual point that Jesus is making back in Matthew 12:31-32. These who did not obey the Spirit on that day, may have also been the blasphemers along with others in Acts chapter 7 who stoned Stephen. Of these individuals Stephen said: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! **You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers." So again, as long as this description that Stephen gave fits them, their sins will go unforgiven. Jesus said that this is applicable to both "worlds," i.e. ages (Matthew 12:32); meaning this truth stretched from the age of the Jews under the Law of Moses through the age of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and therefore, these words of Jesus apply today. Will we heed the Spirit's words unto salvation?

Jesus On The Mountains

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While examining the life of Jesus and some of the spectacular and greatest moments in His life, you will notice the geography and location where Jesus was. Many times the Lord stood upon mountains at important times in His life on this earth. This is really no surprise when you consider the geography of Palestine. Jerusalem was a city set upon a hill. It was a very hilly and mountainous region. However, it is interesting to study a few of the wonderful events that occurred in the Lord's life where the gospel writers specifically indicate that Jesus was upon a mountain.

The Sermon On The Mount

Matthew writes, "And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain..." (Matthew 5:1). This is the opening of what we traditionally call "The Sermon On The Mount." It was there that Jesus gave some of the most memorable and often quoted teachings of His ministry.

He taught us about the character of those who would enter the kingdom of heaven when He gave us the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). The humility, mercy, meekness, desire for righteousness and purity of heart are just a few of the qualities a person must possess in order to receive the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus taught about morality, especially in regards to sexual sins. "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in His heart" (Matthew 5:28). Looking and desiring to be with a woman to commit fornication is sinful. But what Jesus emphasizes is that sexual sins begin in the heart.

The importance of loving your enemies is another fascinating teaching that Jesus gave. When we begin to truly love our neighbor as ourselves then we are on our way to being like our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:44-48). Jesus taught about the importance and value of the kingdom and how we should trust in God and seek His kingdom above all other things in this world (Matthew 6:33).

Perhaps the greatest lesson we could learn from this sermon was Jesus' point about obeying God. He warned that those who disobeyed God would be told to depart from the presence of God (Matthew 7:23). A person who does the will of God is like a wise man (Matthew 7:24), but those who will refuse to obey Christ are like a foolish man (Matthew 7:26). There is a wonderful value in obeying God. We should seek to trust in the Lord at all times and do as He commands!

How did the people respond to this sermon? They recognized that Jesus taught with authority, not as the scribes (Matthew 7:29). This kind of authority is not referring to mere confidence. The scribes and Pharisees had plenty of confidence and self-boasting in their teaching and practice.

The authority between Jesus and the "authority" of the scribes was different in regards to where their authority came from. Jesus' authority came from the Father in heaven. "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). Jesus was showing that His teachings came from God in heaven, but the people refused to accept it as divinely revealed truth. However, they were quick to accept and believe someone who would come "in his own name" or by his own, self-righteous authority. Jesus was different. His teachings were far superior and greater than anything that had ever been proclaimed. He was God's Son, bearing witness to the truth. If we want to be wise, then do what Jesus says.

The Mount Of Transfiguration

Jesus went up to the top of a mountain with Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1). It was upon that mountain that Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17:2). His face appeared as the sun and His clothing appeared to be white as the light. Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:3). The subject of their conversation is revealed to us by Luke. Luke records in Luke 9:30-31 that they spoke of "His [Jesus] decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem."

Jesus having a conversation with Moses and Elijah bears a great deal of significance. As Jesus knew He was going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, falsely accused, and killed, conversing with Moses and Elijah would bring comfort to Him. Moses, the mediator of the old covenant and Elijah the great prophet were both honored by God. They were not annihilated once leaving this earth. Death is not the end; it is not annihilation and a ceasing to exist.

While upon the mount, God approved Jesus as the lawgiver and prophet that must be heeded. "...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). Peter confirms his witness to this wonderful event when he wrote in his second epistle, "For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17-18).

God bestowed upon Jesus honor and glory. This was God showing His favor and approval of Jesus of Nazareth. This was the Father's witness and testimony of Jesus and the Father's command that we should hear and obey His Son.

Also, Moses spoke of a prophet that would come that we should hear (Acts 3:22) as well as one like Elijah who would come to prepare the way for the Son of God (Matthew 17:10-13). Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and God the Father all confirm the message: hear Jesus! It is no wonder that Jesus was "the last man standing" on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:8). He is the lawgiver, prophet, and mediator of a new and better covenant!

The Mount Of Commission

After Jesus died and was resurrected from the dead, but before His ascension to heaven, He gave His apostles an important task. Jesus and the apostles went upon a mountain (Matthew 28:16) and He told them to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:19-20).

Why do Men not Respect the Word of God?

Laziness

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Many would rather have someone else study for them. Unbeknown to themselves, let others do their:

- Personal work
- Caring for widows and orphans
- Caring for their neighbors
- Teaching their own children
- Raising their own children
- Reading and understanding the word of God

All these examples come from not respecting God's Word, because these are responsibilities that God expects of us. What are some of the Godly admonitions which we may glean from the scriptures about laziness?

First of all, the lazy are not wise in what is truth (Proverbs 24:30-34). The slothful, lazy man is not aware of the responsibility God has placed on man to maintain his blessings. The rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), but all do not receive the blessing of it, as they do not utilize the rain as God intended. This does not mean they are not wise in their own way. Some sluggards are wise in their own conceit according to Solomon (Proverbs 26:12-13). They think they are wise, but slothfulness (laziness) kills (Proverbs 21:25). Solomon says the house of the lazy man decays (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

Secondly, the slothful (lazy) person is a coward (Proverbs 22:13; 26:13). They don't want to take the chance of getting eaten. Christians, like Peter and John, need to be bold for the Lord (Acts 4:11-13, 29). Paul was unashamed to preach the Gospel (Romans 1:16). Fear kept the one talent man from working with the talent he was (Matthew 25:25).

Thirdly the lazy man will not inherit the promise (Hebrews 6:12). We must be diligent, earnestly hard working to the end (Hebrews 6:11). According to Solomon, the sluggard will not plow for reason of cold, therefore he is hungry at harvest (Proverbs 20:4). We were never promised that following God's way will be easy. In fact it will be difficult (Matthew 7:13-14), partly because it is fraught with false teachers (Matthew 7:21-23). Their meddling with the truth will not exempt us from our responsibility to the truth (Matthew 7:15-20). Only those who follow the Lord Jesus are safe (Matthew 7:23-24). We must be diligent to be acceptable to the Lord (2 Timothy 2:15; Psalm 119:4-6).

Remember the slothful man's house decays (Ecclesiastes 10:18). So does the church with slothful workers (1 Corinthians 3:9-11). Jeroboam's false religion grew as a result of laziness and false teaching (1 Kings 12:26-30). Israel is our example (1 Corinthians 10:11). They did not heed the prophecy that they should remain diligent in keeping God's commandments (Deuteronomy 1:26-28).

Most religions that claim Christ today believe in the necessity of faith (Hebrews 11:6). They ignore the part that says we should diligently seek Him. James says that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-17). Acceptable faith should transform us so that we exhibit Christ (Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 3:26-27). Why would our perfect Lord be expected to be obedient and we his followers not need to be obedient? The Hebrew writers says we should be obedient to Christ as he was to the Father in Heaven (Hebrews 5:8-9).

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

Aiming For Leadership

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...that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things... (Titus 2:2-3)

Qualifying As An Elder / Deacon

The qualifications for a man to serve as either an elder or deacon in the Lord's church have nothing to do with education, social status, or popularity, but deal with character, experience and faithfulness. God desires individuals who have been molded by His word to exercise the leadership in the church. It should be the desire of every man to develop the character which God demands in elders and deacons, whether he will ever serve in that capacity or not. Though these characteristics are specifically mentioned with regard to the leadership of the church, they are attributes which are necessary in all Christians.

Consider the qualifications of these men (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9):

- Blameless. Not that he has never sinned or made errors in judgment, but he displays an upright, honourable and honest character. His life is exemplary.
- Husband of one wife. He is not unmarried, nor is he a polygamist. By implication, he is what God would have him to be as a husband, thus enabling him to be an example for others.
- Temperate. He is alert of the power of sin, and ready to overcome, and help others to do so also.
- Sober-minded. He is not swayed by emotional impulses, but is able to think clearly and make appropriate application of God's will to situations.
- Of good behavior. This speaks both to his physical appearance and how he carries himself. He is not disorderly, but always of good conduct.
- Hospitable. He makes others feel welcome, whether friends or strangers. He is generous and ready to serve others.
- Able to teach. He is knowledgeable with regard to God's word, and possesses the ability to convey it to others in an understandable fashion.
- Not given to wine. He does not long for intoxicating drink or the effect which it has on the body. He does not allow his faculties to be compromised.
- Not violent. Though circumstances may anger him, he does not allow rage to control him. He can be angry and not sin (Ephesians 4:26).
- Not greedy for money. His earnings are received through moral and legal labour. He understands that spiritual matters are of greater importance than monetary.
- Gentle. He has learned the compassion of Christ, which extols righteousness, rebukes sin, but encourages sinners. He does not seek to offend, but displays a spirit of patience and helpfulness.
- Not quarrelsome. He is able to interact with folks without being contentious. He does not need to have his way; but will "*contend earnestly for the faith*" (Jude 1:3).
- Not covetous. He realizes the temporal nature of earthly possessions.
- One who rules his own house well. He is respected in his own household, and acknowledged by his wife and children as the God-appointed leader of the home. In that position, he serves his wife and children well, providing an environment which maximizes the spiritual growth of all. His children are identified as "faithful" or "believing."
- Not a novice. He has been a Christian for some time, having grown to a place of spiritual maturity. Among the traits which he has learned in maturing in Christ is to not be given to pride.
- A good testimony among those who are outside. His reputation is not just good among those who are Christians, but non-Christians also are aware that he is a godly man. He has not hidden his commitment to the Lord, but shines as a light before men (Matthew 5:16).

- Not self-willed. He is not inclined to put himself before others (Philippians 2:3-5)
- Not quick-tempered. Not easily provoked, "*slow to anger*" (James 1:19). When he is angered, he does not allow it to become sin (Ephesians 4:26)
- A lover of what is good. He delights in the things of God. He finds no pleasure in the things of the devil.
- Just. He does not show prejudice or partiality. He makes decisions and judgments based upon the precepts of God's word.
- Holy. He is an imitator of the Lord (1 Peter 1:13-16). He has determined to set apart his life for God.
- Self-controlled. He does not lose his head, his tongue, his temper; he is able to hold passions in check.
- Holding fast the faithful word. God's word is of paramount importance to him. He acknowledges it as the source of life eternal, and clings to its every statute.
- Reverent. He has a serious and respectful attitude towards the Lord and the things of God.
- Not double-tongued. He does not deal in deception or hypocrisy. He says what he means.
- Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. He clings to the message of Christ, and is obedient (thus the pure conscience).

The Wife Of A Leader

In the midst of giving qualifications for men to serve as elders and deacons in the Lord's church, Paul wrote:

Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.
(1 Timothy 3:11)

Though this instruction appears in the midst of the qualifications for a deacon, surely it would be correct to understand that the wives of both elders and deacons should have these particular qualities. Does it make sense that a man's ability to serve as a deacon (a servant tending to physical responsibilities in the church) is dependent upon his wife's character, but that a man's ability to serve as an elder (a servant tending to spiritual responsibilities in the church) is not?

As much as young men should seek to develop the characteristics outlined as qualifications for elders and deacons, all young women should likewise seek to match those defined for the wives of elders and deacons. Whether her husband ever becomes an elder or deacon does not matter. She must seek to be the best possible wife - suitable to aid her husband in qualifying to serve in a leadership capacity, if the local church so chooses.

Consider the qualifications of the wife of an elder or deacon:

- Reverent. She has a serious and respectful attitude towards the Lord and the things of God.
- Not slanderers. She has control of her tongue. She is not one who gossips about or criticizes others.
- Temperate. She is aware of the power of sin, and ready to overcome, and help others do so also.
- Faithful in all things. She is faithful in every duty which God has given her. She is a faithful Christian before the Lord, and faithful wife to her husband, and a faithful mother to her children.

Role Of The Older Couple

In writing to Titus, Paul instructed that the older men and women (which would include married couples) be examples to the younger. We read:

...that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (Titus 2:2-5)

Some have observed that if the young woman does not heed this instruction, she becomes a blasphemer

of God's word. As much as this is true, it is equally true that if the older men and older women are not the examples of faith which Paul writes about, they too have blasphemed the word of God. Truly, if any child of God is not what the Bible calls them to be, they blaspheme His word.

It has been stated above that all Christians should have the characteristics which qualify elders, deacons and their wives. Notice:

- Blameless (Philippians 2:14-16)
- Husband of one wife (Romans 7:1-4)
- Temperate (2 Peter 1:6)
- Sober-minded (1 Peter 5:8)
- Of good behavior (1 Timothy 2:9; Matthew 5:16)
- Hospitable (Romans 12:13)
- Able to teach (2 Timothy 2:2)
- Not given to wine (Ephesians 5:18)
- Not violent (Matthew 5:38-39)
- Not greedy for money (1 Timothy 6:9-10)
- Gentle (James 5:7-8)
- Not quarrelsome (Titus 3:2)
- Not covetous (1 Timothy 6:9-10)
- One who rules his own house well (Ephesians 6:1-4)
- Not a novice (Hebrews 5:12)
- A good testimony among those who are outside (Philippians 2:15)
- Not self-willed (Philippians 2:3)
- Not quick-tempered (Colossians 3:8)
- A lover of what is good (2 Timothy 3:3)
- Just (1 Timothy 5:21)
- Holy; Reverent (1 Peter 1:15-16)
- Self-controlled (2 Peter 1:6)
- Holding fast the faithful word (Ephesians 4:14)
- Not double-tongues (James 3:9-12)
- Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience (1 Timothy 1:9)
- Not slanderers (Titus 3:2)
- Faithful in all things (1 Corinthians 4:2)

(list modified from "ELDERS & DEACONS and their wives," Frank Jamerson)

What Is A Christian?

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Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26)

*Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.' (Acts 26:28)
Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name (1 Peter 4:16, ESV)*

Our nation is often called a "Christian" nation, even though actual Christians comprise only a tiny minority of its population. In fact, the term "Christian" is so loosely used in common speech, I actually heard of a so-called "Christian basketball team," called the "Holy Bouncers." The New Testament usage of the word is far more restricted. Since we are to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), we should find how the New Testament uses the term "Christian." What is a Christian?

First, we need to know what is **not** a Christian. Contrary to popular opinion, not all good, morally pure people are Christians. One would be hard pressed to find a man of higher morals than Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:1-2,22). But Peter had to tell him how to be saved (Acts 11:13-14), implying he needed salvation and was, thus, not a Christian. Furthermore, not all religious people are Christians. Cornelius was certainly religious (Acts 10:1-2,22), but he was not a Christian. Not even the godly characters of the Old Testament were Christians, because "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Nor are the members of the various denominations Christians. Their membership in these divisive bodies violates the Lord's prayer for unity (John 17:20-21) and is specifically condemned as a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 ("Dissensions" means "divisions," and "heresies" means "sects").

What, then, is a Christian? The New Testament word "Christian" means "a follower of Christ." It is a noun, not an adjective, the name applied to certain individuals, not a description of anything and everything that has religious or moral overtones. A Christian is a "disciple" (learner, follower) of Christ (Acts 11:26). Disciples are also called "saints" (Acts 9:1,13), meaning one "separated from sin and consecrated to God." Since Saul's persecution of the disciples is also termed doing evil to "the church" (Acts 8:3), Christians are members of the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 12:27), the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). "Christian" is the proper name for members of the church of Christ; "disciple" describes their relationship to the Master; and "saint" relates them to sin and to God.

Thus, a Christian bears certain spiritual relationships that other people do not. To the body of Christ, he is a "member," i.e., a part, of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). Since Christ has only one body (1 Corinthians 12:20), this is a distinguished privilege. To the family of God, he is a child (Ephesians 3:14-15; Galatians 3:26). Since God has no children outside His family, this is a great honor. In relationship to the kingdom of God, the Christian is a citizen (Ephesians 2:19; Colossians 1:13). There are only two kingdoms in the spiritual realm, one of Satan and one of God, and all are citizens of one or the other. The Christian is also a living stone in God's temple (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5). This is the only realm where God will accept our worship and service.

Christians are not to be called by human religious names. The name "Christian" is of divine origin, being used for the first time ever in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The word for being called by a name in New Testament Greek is usually "*kaleo*" (139 such New Testament uses) or "*lego*" (36 such occurrences). But here the word is the much less used verb "*chrematizo*." The word is primarily used "of God," to "*impart a revelation or injunction or warning* (of oracles...)" (Arndt & Gingrich. 893). The only other time in the New Testament it is used in reference to calling people by a name, it obviously means they are called this because God has so designated them (Romans 7:3). The remaining occurrences refer to divine revelations (Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22; Hebrews 8:5; 11:7; 12:25). The term "Christian" glorifies God (1 Peter 4:16) and honors the name of Christ, in whose name alone salvation can be found (Acts 4:9-12). Thus, Paul forbids us to wear sectarian names, as they demonstrate sectarian loyalty (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

If you are not a Christian, you can become one simply by being saved by the Gospel (Romans 1:16). If you will hear the word of God (Romans 10:17), believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 10:8-10), repent of your sins (Romans 2:5), confess your faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 10:8-10), and be baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4), you will become a Christian.

A Christian is simply a disciple of Christ. If you are a Christian, strive always to live worthily of that noble name (Ephesians 4:1). If you are not a Christian, you need to become one, for only in Christ is salvation to be found (2 Timothy 2:10). Are you a Christian?

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Parables of the Master

Christ Receiveth Sinful Men

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Introduction

The Master certainly had a way of making the scribes and Pharisees angry, so angry they eventually killed Him. He tried to explain Himself to them, but they wouldn't listen. They were enraged by His failure to keep their traditions about the Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11) and outraged by his maddening practice of associating with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Of course, they were also jealous of His popularity (Matthew 27:12, 18).

John 3:16 declares the greatness of the love of God for lost sinners. In Luke 19:10 Jesus declared His mission here was to save lost sinners. Luke chapter fifteen vividly pictures in three unforgettable stories, The Lost Sheep (verses 3-7), the Lost Coin (verses 8-10), and the Lost Son (verses 11-32), the intensity of the love of God for those lost in sin, the reason Jesus associated with these sinners, and the attitude the saved must have for all lost sinners. This chapter has been aptly called "The Gospel within the Gospel."

In the first two parables the Master boldly revealed to the Pharisees that He was even worse than they charged. He didn't just associate with the immoral outcasts of respectable society, He actively sought them out.

But, in all three parables He employed a method of reasoning that completely disarmed His detractors. Each parable implicitly argues, What would you do in this situation? In fact, in the first two the Master even asked this probing question (verses 4,8). The implicit argument is that surely a lost person is more valuable and important than a lost sheep or a lost coin.

To the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, tax collectors, who were traitors to the nation of Israel, and those who lived notoriously sinful lives were human scum unfit for their company. To touch them was to be defiled. They even believed the destruction of sinners brought joy to God.

But to the Lord sinners are lost children of God who need to be found (Luke 19:1-10). Their salvation rather than their destruction brings great joy to God and the heavenly host (Luke 15:7,10).

In the first two parables the emphasis is entirely on the attitude of God toward the lost. The last parable of the chapter broadens the focus to describe the lost sinner, the love of God, the self-righteous Pharisees, and all who today walk in their steps.

The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:3-7; Matthew 18:12-14

Sheep were very important to Jews. Their forefathers, the twelve patriarchs, were shepherds (Genesis 46:31-32). The Lord took David from the sheepfold to become ruler of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8). Sheep provided clothing (Job 31:20), meat (2 Samuel 12:4), milk (Deuteronomy 32:14), and sacrifices to the Lord (Exodus 20:24).

Sheep were very dependent on the shepherd's supervision (Psalm 23:2). The shepherd knew each of his sheep, called each by name, and led them wherever they went (John 10:3-4). They knew the voice of their shepherd and followed only him (John 10:4-5). The shepherd who owned the sheep would defend them

from all predators even if it endangered his own life (1 Samuel 17:34-35; John 10:11).

Domestic sheep were prone to wander into danger and lacked the instinctive sense to return home (Isaiah 53:6). If one went astray, the shepherd would search tirelessly and heedless of danger until he found it (Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4). When he found the lost sheep, he would carry it home on his own shoulders, and gather all his neighbors together for rejoicing (Matthew 18:13; Luke 15:5-6).

All this pictures vividly the love of God for those who have wandered astray into sin. He loves all who are in the fold of safety, but because of relief when one lost sinner is found and returned, "... there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7; cf. Matthew 18:14).

Is not a lost person with a soul in the image of God worth more than a lost sheep? If we would rejoice over the return of a lost animal, shouldn't we rejoice over the return of a lost child of God? God does. The angels do. Shouldn't we?

The Lost Coin Luke 15:8-10

A woman had ten silver coins. These coins were the Greek *drachma*, each of which was worth approximately the same as a Roman *denarius*, which was one day's wages for a day laborer in first century Palestine (Matthew 20:1-2). Thus, although it might seem very insignificant to us, it could mean the difference between a meal and a day without food for this woman's family.

The homes of common people were poorly lit, having one small window, and had dirt floors covered by straw. Thus, it would be difficult to find a lost coin, and she would need the light of an oil lamp to search for it.

But she would search diligently until she found it. Upon finding it, not only would she rejoice, she would call together her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her.

The lesson is the same as that of "The Lost Sheep." There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents. If there is rejoicing in heaven, shouldn't we rejoice?

The Lost Son Luke 15:11-32

The third parable is more complex and is one of the truly great short stories in all literature. In it not only do we learn more about the love of God for lost sinners, we also learn about ourselves as sinners, and we receive an unforgettable warning against self-righteousness.

This parable "ups the ante." A lost sheep is bad; a lost days wages is bad; but a lost son! Many parents have experienced the heart rending agony of having a child turn his back on the family. And each of those parents has experienced a sample of the pain the Father in heaven feels when one of His beloved children foolishly, selfishly turns away from his God and Father to wander away to the alluring far country of sin.

The story has three characters - a man and his two sons (verse 11), and each segment of the parable develops one of the three.

The Younger Son (verses 12 - 21)

The younger son demanded his part, one third (Deuteronomy 21:17), of his inheritance while his father was still alive - selfishly, coldly treating his father as if he were already dead. He set out feeling freedom from

the constraints of his father's rule, declaring his independence, even though all his wealth was lovingly bestowed by his father. He foolishly wasted all his inheritance on prodigal, "loose" (**NASB**), "reckless" (**ESV**), living.

Those who turn to sin show complete disregard for their loving Father and act as if they don't need Him, whereas everything good we have is a gracious gift from Him (James 1:17). If you can do without the air you breathe, the water you drink, the food you eat, the clothing you wear, the home in which you live, you can do without God - for awhile.

As they always do eventually, hard times came. Out of alternatives, the young man found the worst job imaginable for a Jewish youth - he fed the hogs, unclean to Israelites (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8), of a Gentile. In his pitiful circumstances he would willingly have filled his belly with the pods off the carob tree that the hogs ate, but no one even allowed him this small sustenance.

He was reduced to desperation. His pride was broken. Finally, all self-esteem was gone. He realized even the most humble servants of his father had sufficient food, while he perished with hunger. He had reached rock bottom.

"Self-esteem" is just a modern word for pride. Rather than instilling it in our children, both they and we need to replace it with the humility of a broken and contrite spirit (Psalm 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2). Only such contrition will lead a rebellious, head strong sinner to humbly turn to the Lord.

"He came to himself." He had been beside himself, spiritually insane. He came to his senses, waking from his insane course. Sin is insanity. Those living in sin are foolishly pursuing a course of self-destruction, both in this life and in eternity (Proverbs 13:15).

The younger son then returned to his father, confessing he had sinned against heaven and him, not asking for a return to his status as a son, but only to be a "hired servant," a status in some ways even lower than a slave, for a slave belonged to his master and was fed, clothed, and housed, but a "hired servant" received a meager pay and could be dismissed at any time.

Children of God who have left the Father must turn from their sins, humbly acknowledge them, and ask His forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). The most humble station in the household of God is far better than any position in the world of sin (Psalm 84:10).

The Father (verses 20-24)

The father saw his son while he was still far away and ran to him and embraced him. Like any broken-hearted father, he had been gazing daily down that road by which his son had brazenly left, longing for the day he would see him return. And there he was! Oh, he was older, tattered, torn, emaciated by sin, but it was his son! Even far off he could recognize that boy he longed to see. No waiting for him to come. No "I told you so." Just the expression of love - the embrace, the paternal kiss. How our Father loves us. How He misses us when we stray and longs for our return.

The son made his confession and asked for the place of a hired servant. But this was not the return of a hired servant. This was the return of a son! Put the ring on his finger, the robe on his back, the emblems of a son.

Kill the fatted calf! Rejoice! My son was dead, but he is alive. He was lost, but he is found! The Lord doesn't extract penance from us when we repent. He and the heavenly host rejoice over the return of one lost sinner. What a beautiful, happy picture of the God whom we serve. How can we not love Him?

The Elder Brother

(verses 25-32)

The picture of the older brother is not pretty. When he learned what all the commotion was about, he had no joy over the return of his brother. He was only angry and peeved. He was envious of the attention his father gave to the returned wanderer. He wouldn't even go into the house, even though His father came out and begged him! He refused to recognize the penitent sinner as his brother - "this son of yours." He complained he had never even been given a young goat to celebrate with his friends, unappreciative of the fact that he was the heir to everything his father possessed. He accused his brother of wasting the father's substance on prostitutes. He may or may not have been right in his accusation, but that was past, and his brother had repented. He self-righteously claimed he had never even once transgressed his father's will. Can any of us claim we have never sinned? (1 John 1:8)

What a description of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who were scandalized that the Lord associated with tax collectors and sinners. They should have been seeking the repentance of sinners themselves (Daniel 12:3). Did they really think they themselves were without sin? (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

What a picture of self-righteous Christians who refuse to rejoice over the return of a prodigal child of God. "Oh, he's done this repeatedly." How many times will God forgive if the sinner repents? How many times should we? (Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4) Instead of complaining about the return of a sinner and his acceptance by the church, we should be diligently seeking his repentance (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).

Conclusion

"Christ receiveth sinful men
Even me with all my sin" (James McGranahan).

What a loving Savior and gracious Father! Sinner, come to the Savior. Christian, seek the lost and rejoice when they are found. Your Lord, your Father, and the angels in heaven do. Shouldn't we?

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