

May 2016

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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.

*"All departure from the word of God concerning entrance into the church and into Christ come from the idea that the Spirit teaches outside the word of God. All additions to the church in its order, organization, and work come from the idea that the Spirit dwells in, guides, and directs the church apart from his teaching in and through the word of God. To give up the word of God as the only direction and guidance of the Spirit is to give loose reign to the dreams and imaginations, the reasonings, and philosophies of men as the direction of the Holy Spirit" (David Lipscomb, **A Commentary on the Gospel of John**, 232).*

*"One can see God's hand in history but not in the present" (Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, 277).*

Brief Answers to Brief Questions

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

(At the Pleasant Run Church of Christ in Lancaster, Texas we have questions members submit which we try to answer, the last Lord's day every month. These are for this month (May) and I start nagging about

the first of the next month for the questions for that month)

Question

After Christ went through the crucifixion He took away sins for all people. Does this mean people before Him were cleansed of their sins, all the way from the Garden of Eden?

Answer

Yes. Romans 3:23-25; Hebrews 9:15

Question

Please give scripture(s) for local church buying real estate, holding it for a number of years, sell it and make a profit, donate profit to human institutions.

Answer

Know of none. No problem with owning real estate (a place of meet), nor even of making a profit when it is sold; the problem arises when the intention is to buy for future profit; the work of the church is to be financed by the free-will offerings of members (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). (The problem is also the church contributing to a human institution, which the Scriptures do not authorize. - KS)

Question

God is longsuffering. Could this statement be understood to mean why He doesn't render immediate judgment as He did in the Old Testament?

Answer

But He has (Acts 5:1-10). He did not render immediate judgment in the Old Testament, in every instance (Genesis 3).

Question

What are the dead works referenced in Hebrews 9:14?

Answer

Context seems to indicate that these were sinful works (purify ... by the blood of Christ). Reference seems to be works of the Law offered in lieu of the blood of Christ, which works would have demanded a flawless performance.

Question

2 Timothy 4:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:17. If error is being taught and accepted in a local church, and the majority are indifferent, what must the minority do?

Answer

If there is a positive reaction from the elders, or anyone else, putting the errorist(s) under pressure, stay to teach and support. Otherwise, LEAVE.

Question

What are two or three things principally to be learned from Hebrews 11?

Answer

Faith is essential; the essential faith works; faith enables sacrifice.

Question

Romans 7:8-11. Can a commandment from God result in death for us today? How? Can sin deceive and kill us today? How? Please attempt to explain to us what Paul is telling us about commandments, law, sin and death in these verses.

Answer

Yes, Romans 7:8,9, if man does not obey; yes, Romans 7:11 - by temptation yielded to commandments - instructions to be heeded
law - the vehicle of commandments
sin - transgression of law, separating from God (Isaiah 59:1-2)

Question

Does Revelation 22:18 encompass the entire Bible or only Revelation.

Answer

Language indicates that it is Revelation: "Prophecy of this book"; "this book ... this book ... this book" :18 (twice); :19 (once) - "words of the book of this prophecy." The fact is the whole Bible comes from the mind of God, and the demands of not meddling are elsewhere expressed (Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Corinthians 4:6).

Question

What is a right way to get married so God won't be upset?

Answer

Pick someone who is a Christian; understand your responsibilities; understand that it is a lifetime commitment, for better or worse; be sure you are mature and of sufficient age

Question

Reference Matthew 21:22 and Mark 11:24. These passages seem to promise the disciples anything they ask for in prayer. Many preachers cite such passages to teach a health and wealth gospel. What are the limitations on these promises?

Answer

Not everything taught on a subject is in one verse. The plan of salvation, says belief (Acts 16:31), OR repentance (Acts 17:30), OR baptism (1 Peter 3:21) save - but they must be taken together, not separately.

Jesus said, in Matthew 21:22, "whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith"; but the rest of the story is, "if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15). According to his will ... the key.

Question

Why don't people obey the gospel?

Answer

A bunch of reasons: not convenient (Acts 24:24-25); demands of living as a Christian should, absence of popularity, pleasure of sin.

What Is Your Legacy?

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

"If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work up brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust. But if we work upon immoral minds and instill into them just principles, we are then engraving that upon tablets which no time will efface, but will brighten and brighten to all eternity." (Daniel Webster)

We erect monuments honoring meaningful people and events. We are mindful of the Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument, the statue of Abraham Lincoln, historic Appomattox, etc. Yet we know that in time

they will all be gone. And we seek to leave a legacy to our children which may consist of lands and houses, a good reputation, pictures and other mementos. But we know that in time all of these precious things will fade and finally be lost forever.

But God reminds us of a far greater legacy that will never fade into obscurity. It is that which is engraved in the heart.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

But this was not some new idea, as we are reminded of what God said about Abraham long before.

"For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19).

Many generations later, the Psalmist Asaph wrote:

"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:2-7).

Moving on to hundreds of years later, we find the same admonitions given concerning the teaching of God's principles to succeeding generations.

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

And mothers also have an important role in teaching children, as we see in the case of Timothy and his mother Eunice, as well as his grandmother Lois.

"For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well" (2 Timothy 1:5).

"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

Evidently God placed great value on parents making a vital impression on the hearts and minds of their children. Now, think with me for a moment. Would this have been easier thousands of years ago? Obviously! No distractions of TVs, cell phones, video games, Facebook, email, etc.

But is this any less important today? It may well be that these principles are even more important today, as our children are faced with ungodliness, immorality and worldliness on every hand. The internet, movies, TV and magazines present all sorts of pornography, from PG13 to X-rated. Our educational systems are rife with an anti-God philosophy, from schools forbidding students to bring a Bible for a free reading period, where students are disciplined for giving silent thanks for their food in the cafeteria, where

college professors clearly state their goal is to destroy the faith of their ignorant students.

It is therefore imperative that parents make time to instill God's word into the hearts and minds of their children. Our family routine was a breakfast devotional with our children, as well as faithful attendance at our local church meetings and gospel meetings all around the area. What are you doing for your children's future—their eternity?

It's Not About You!

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

*Too many Christians, just like their unsaved counterparts, are impressed by appearances rather than structure; are seeking thrills and excitement rather than substance; are more apt to respond to emotional manipulation rather than to rational discourse... **The problem is that the main business of entertainment is to please the crowd, but the main purpose of authentic Christianity is to please the Lord** (Gary Gilley, **This Little Church Went to Market**. 31, emphasis mine, KS).*

The Lord's church is not in the entertainment business. It's a spiritual relationship (John 18:36; Romans 14:17; Ephesians 1:3, 22-23). It is not wrong to enjoy worshiping the Lord and hearing the message of Christ proclaimed, but the goals of our public assemblies are to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and to edify one another (1 Corinthians 14:26) not to entertain. If you don't find the worship assembly to be fun, just get over it. That's not our purpose. It's not about pleasing you or me. It's about pleasing the Lord. "For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10b). "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:8-9).

A Dwelling Place for God | Ephesians 2:19-22

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Paul has already reminded the Ephesian Christians of their prior condition as "Gentiles in the flesh" (2:11-12) - strangers and aliens, hopeless. He sounds that note again, beginning in verse nineteen, to draw their attention to their present blessed circumstance: saints and family members.

All Christians are saints. Many try to excuse transgressions by saying, "Well, I'm no saint ...". That is a true statement, if they have not obeyed the gospel. People who have obeyed the truth are "saints", as the "saints who are in Ephesus ..." (Ephesians 1:1), and in Rome, Christians who had been "called to be saints" (Romans 1:7).

Saints are not sinless; they are struggling against sin, as was the church at Corinth. This church had its "dirty linen" thoroughly displayed in First Corinthians: quarrelsome (1:10-11), tolerating intolerable immorality (chapter 5), and the list goes on (6:9-11). And yet, First Corinthians 3:1, 3, Paul said these "people of the flesh" ("carnal", **ASV**) were "sanctified ... called to be saints." In this we see the error of the Roman Catholic Church in styling, after their deaths, certain ones as "saints," who are then venerated as superior to members who are not so honored.

In the Lord's prayer, John 17, He appealed to the Father to "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"

(verse 17). When one sets himself apart from the world by determining to obey the Father, and “suiting his actions to his words” by doing what he determined, he/she is sanctified. Saints are not made by the deliberation of some council, but by “obedience to the truth.”

The word translated “saint” is also rendered sanctuary, sanctify, holy (holiness) and hallowed. It is accomplished by submitting to the Word of God (John 17:17). It tells of a setting apart from worldly things. It is achieved in conversion (1 Corinthians 6:11) and advances as the Christian strives for it (Hebrews 12:14).

Christians are members of the family of God, His household. This construction project has apostles and prophets laying the foundation, Christ himself being the cornerstone. We are not familiar with this use of cornerstone. Our “cornerstone” looks at a block of granite with information etched in it regarding the structure. In the first century, though, the “cornerstone” determined the lines and angles of the building. In it the architect had set the angles etc. of the building, and the construction had to comply with that determination. The builder had to do according to the dictates of that cornerstone, else he was building something other than the architect had designed.

Christ is the cornerstone of His church. Man must “listen to him” (Matthew 17:5), else the church becomes something other than what He died for. In every specific relative to the church: worship, organization, and/or work, the dimensions revealed by “the cornerstone” must be upheld.

Because we are instructed to “meet together” (Hebrews 10:25) it is necessary that some place to meet be provided; and for convenience it is styled “the church.” Some tiptoe around the misunderstanding this suggests by calling it the “church building.” Others take more drastic steps. Our text, Ephesians 2:21-22, provides the solution to this problem, by identifying the church as a structure composed of saints who are being built together “into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (verse 22, confer 1 Peter 2:5).

The place where we meet, whether borrowed, rented, or purchased, is just that: a place where we meet. The “church” is the saints who meet in that place.

Is Islam Compatible With Christianity? No. 5

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

As pointed out in the previous issue, Muslims know they cannot deny that Jesus Christ lived. In fact Jesus Christ is mentioned nearly 100 times in the Koran. While admitting He lived, they deny His Deity. They seek to shape Him into simply one of the prophets and messengers of Allah, but not as great as the prophet Muhammad. The Koran (Qur’an) their holy book, teaches that Allah (the one they call god) inspired many of the Biblical prophets. Adam, the chosen of Allah, shares the highest honor of a prophet with five others. Noah, the preacher of Allah, Abraham, the friend of Allah, Moses, the speaker of Allah, Jesus, the word of Allah, and Muhammad, the apostle of Allah, who is venerated to the extent that he is referred to as “Savior of the world” and “Lord of the universe.” In fact, to Islam, Muhammad is “the seal of the prophets” - the final prophet, superior to all other prophets including Jesus. One Muslim writer, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, even wrote, “You can deny God, but you cannot deny the Prophet!”

But, when one takes the time to honestly compare the life and teachings of Muhammad (the founder of Islam) as recorded in history, their Koran and Hadith (a book they revere just behind the Koran) with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (the founder of Christianity) found in the Bible, the only conclusion to be reached is that Muhammad as the founder of Islam is an “antichrist,” i.e., one who opposes Jesus Christ.

Note, I wrote, “an antichrist, not “the antichrist.” Read First John 2:22; 4:3; Second John 7. Some think John was writing of one specific individual who was to come and establish himself as a great ruler who will ultimately lead the world into the battle of Armageddon, but this is a misinterpretation of what the Bible really says. Read carefully what the apostle John wrote. He said there would be many antichrists, not just

one. Anyone, or any movement that denies the deity of Christ and His work on behalf of mankind, can be truthfully called an antichrist, and Islam certainly fits that category.

Why is Islam an antichrist? The Islam religion claims to honor Jesus as a prophet. But what kind of honor can it be when they repeatedly deny His Deity? In Jesus' advent into the world, He was said to be God, the Son of God (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:23). He admitted to being God, the Son of God, equal with God the Father (not in authority, but in character and attributes) (John 5:18; 10:30-31; 36; Luke 22:70). He challenged the people of His day when they denied His Deity by asking, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" (Matthew 22:41-45).

But Islam teaches that Jesus, if He made such claims, would be a blasphemer (one who speaks evil of, or contemptuously defames or defiles God and other sacred things). So, instead they say He was simply confused when He claimed to be the Son of God. In fact it is considered a sin called Shirk – the association of another god with Allah, which will condemn any Muslim unless they repent (Surah 5:72-73).

Now recall what the apostle John wrote. Anyone who denied Jesus' claim to be Deity were liars, deceivers, and antichrists (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7). This includes Islam, since they deny the basic fundamentals of the Gospel of Christ, the foundation of Christianity. Note that Paul wrote that the central theme of his preaching was "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11; John 14:6). Each of the basic tenets taught in the Bible about Christ is denied by Islam. So how can they say they honor Christ when they say that He was only one of many messengers from God and that He was confused when He claimed to be the Son of God? This is much the same doctrine taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses, who deliberately added the adjective "a" in John 1:1, making Him the first of created gods. See also Colossians 1:16. "Firstborn" does not refer to Him being created (born to the Father), but refers to His preeminence and authority, His being subject only to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

In the last issue I pointed out that Jesus was part of the triune Godhead, not three different Gods, but One God (plural Elohim) in three persons, all acting as One (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9). Jesus possesses all the attributes that make God God.

Jesus is referred to as God in Hebrews 1:8. John declared Him to be God (John 1:1-4, 14). In His preexistent state with the Father He helped to create all things (John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-16). As God the Son, He received and accepted worship (Matthew 2:11; 4:10; 14:33; Revelation 22:9). He died on the cross by the predetermined plan of God and shed His blood for our sins (Acts 2:23; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:28). He will not return to win the world to Islam. He will come in judgment (Acts 1:11; 2 Peter 3:10-11).

Another point that can be made is contrasting how the Islamic religion is advanced and how Jesus taught His disciples to advance His kingdom. The nature of the kingdom of Islam is earthly, sensual, and violent. Muslims advance their cause by the use of force and the sword. One is given the choice, either conform to Islam or die. This is seen at the present time in the Mid-Eastern countries, and as they invade other countries. Today they are known as a religion of war, violence, and terrorism. But Jesus told His disciples to put up their swords and advance His cause by preaching the gospel. The disciples of Christ carried the gospel to the whole world in about 30-35 years, and turned the world upside down with just the word of God (Acts 8:1-4; 17:6; Col. 1:5-6, 23. (to be continued).

Lessons From Jesus' Prayer At Gethsemane

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

The apostle Paul said, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). If there was ever a person who exemplified this in his life it certainly would be our Lord. He taught His disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1-4). Parables were spoken by Him to encourage His followers to petition God (Luke 18:1-8). Prayer was offered by Him so that all believers would be united in serving His Father (John 17:20-21). Often we read in the

Scriptures of Him approaching His Father's throne in prayer. On one occasion He arose long before daylight, going to a solitary place, to pray (Mark 1:35). Luke tells us of an instance when He prayed all night to God (Luke 6:12). Take the time to read Matthew 26:36-44. Our Lord is in the garden of Gethsemane pouring His heart out to Jehovah just prior to His crucifixion. There are some valuable lessons here for us.

We need to pray. If Jesus, the sinless Son of God saw the need to pray, we surely need to be a people of prayer. Could you ever think of a time in which we could truthfully say, "I don't need God or His help"? I'm dependent upon Jehovah for all my physical and spiritual needs. As He provides these necessities, then I should gratefully express my thanks to Him for everything I have. I also have family, friends, and neighbors who need the type help I cannot provide; only God can supply the things needed by them. The one thing I can do? Pray for them!

The One who can help – the Father. Think of all the things Christ was about to face. One disciple betraying Him, all the other fleeing, His rejection by the Jews, the mockery of a trial, the ridicule, being spit upon, hit in the face, scourging, being crucified on the cross, etc. Our Lord recognized the only source from which help could come. The Psalmist said, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills-- From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2). My grandson, Canaan, while visiting with Sylvia and I had a seizure. I cannot ever remember feeling so helpless and so in need. There are some things no one can help you with but God.

Persistence in prayer. The text says, "So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words" (Matthew 26:44). The word of God warns us about drifting (Hebrews 2:1), not growing in the faith (1 Peter 2:2), failure to be steadfast (1 Corinthians 15:58), being lukewarm in our service to God (Revelation 3:16), etc. We see members of the church slowly but surely drifting away from the Lord. One of the first signs to us is their lack of attendance (Hebrews 10:25). Yet as one examines his own life, one of the first signs to that individual, is his prayer life. How often do you find yourself praying to God? Do you have time set aside each day to enter your closet in prayer to the Father? Paul was not the only one who said pray without ceasing. It was said of Jesus, "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

It is about the Father's will. As the Lord prayed that the cup of His suffering might pass from Him, His conclusion was "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). When teaching His disciples to pray, He said "Your will be done" (Luke 11:2); speaking of the Father's will. John says, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). Jehovah did not remove the cup of suffering faced by our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice what He did do, "Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him" (Luke 22:43). Paul's thorn in the flesh was not removed, though he asked three times for its removal. Yet look what the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). As we pray to our God His answer might be no or not now yet strength will be given to help us in doing His will. Our prayers should always be not my will but yours, Father, be done. What an awesome God we serve. Help us to accept Your will for us Father!

It's Naked Season

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Now is the time of year when many get naked in public by wearing skimpy, provocative clothing. As the temperature rises, the clothes start coming off... in public. It's not that provocative clothing is not found in colder temperatures; a woman can be just as seductive in a tight dress as in short shorts. It's just that people don't get naked in public as often as they do when the temperature is warmer.

One of the traits that will be true of a person living for God is a sense of shame when it comes to dressing their bodies. They will try to present themselves in public in clothing that is not provocative, revealing, or

suggestive. The Bible term for this desire for decency is modesty. A child of God will want to dress themselves in a modest manner. The Bible tells women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation ... which is proper for women professing godliness" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). Certainly this principle would also apply to men professing godliness.

When Adam and Eve's eyes were opened after eating the forbidden fruit, they saw their nakedness and "sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Genesis 3:7). God had to later clothe them in tunics made from animal skin (verse 21). Why do you think God made them tunics? What was the point of further clothing them, especially since they were the only humans on earth? Indeed it was to set a precedent for proper clothing. When He later pronounced a judgment against Babylon, God likened their demise to a woman being improperly dressed in public - "take off the skirt, uncover the thigh... Your nakedness shall be uncovered, Yes, your shame will be seen" (Isaiah 47:2-3). Imagine that! God referred to an uncovered thigh in public as nakedness!

Honestly folks, are skimpy shorts, low shirts, and modern bathing suits any less revealing than Adam and Eve's fig leaves or Babylon's uncovered thigh? Do we have a sense of shame and a desire for modesty when wearing such thought-provoking attire? Can we honestly say we are professing godliness in trying to get as close as we can to Adam and Eve's condition before God clothed them? Would God further clothe us if He was still making clothes for people?

Why Matters

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

What do I mean by "why matters"? Simply this, the reason or purpose behind doing something (the why) is as important as the doing itself. We understand this is the secular world. Would it be OK if your spouse married you, not for love, but for your money? Is it acceptable for an employee to show up to work every day, but to do nothing but chum with co-workers, spend time on social media and play games on the computer? A parent gives gifts to their children, not simply for the sake of giving, but as a bribe to cause obedience. Someone helps you in a time of need, but rather than being charitable about it, makes it clear that you are now indebted to them. There are numerous examples we could consider where people may do something that is good in and of itself (get married, go to work, give gifts, help the needy), but do so from the wrong motives or for the wrong reasons. Why matters.

Why matters when it comes to religious things.

Preaching the gospel

Paul spoke about some who preach the gospel "*...from envy and strife ... selfish ambition, not sincerely...*" (Philippians 1:15-16). Don't mistake Paul's rejoicing that Christ is preached "*...whether in pretense or in truth...*" (18) as approval of those who preach Christ from selfish motives. Those who do so are exercising the works of the flesh, and "*...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:20-21). Why matters.

Christian Service

Our service to the Lord and in the name of the Lord is spoken of throughout the New Testament. We are called to do good works, to oppose evil, to show the love and patience of God, etc.. Why we do all this is as important as doing it. The first of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation was sent to Ephesus. In it, the Lord commended them for their "*works ...labor ...patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil*" (Revelation 2:2). He goes on to say that they had "*...labored for My name's sake and not become weary*" (2:3). As good as this all sounded, notice verse 4: "*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*" Their what was right, their why was wrong. Was that a big deal to the Lord? Verse 5 says they had fallen, that they needed to repent, and if they didn't, the Lord would remove their lampstand (ie. they would no longer be His). Why matters.

Prayer

The Bible encourages us to pray. Paul commends prayer to us, acknowledging that God wants to hear our requests, and that we can find peace by coming before the throne of grace (Philippians 4:6-7). However, why we pray is important. James says, *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures"* (James 4:3). Why matters.

Giving

The need for us to give of our means is addressed several times in the Bible. The early Christians sold their goods so they could minister to the needs of others (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-6; etc.). Not only did they do so for their local brethren, but for Christians in other areas also, as they had opportunity and ability (Acts 11:29; Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; etc.). In 2 Corinthians 9:5-8 the apostle speaks of our attitude towards giving. He contrasts phrases like *"...generous gift ... bountifully ... purposes in his heart ... cheerful giver..."* with *"...grudging obligation ... sparingly ... grudgingly or of necessity..."* The spirit in which we give, our reason or purpose for giving - the why of our giving, is important. Why matters.

The Lord's Supper

Each first day of the week, God's people come together to break bread (Acts 20:7). It is an opportunity to remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us at Calvary. Paul warns those who eat and drink *"...in an unworthy manner..."* stating that they are *"...guilty of the body and blood of the Lord..."* and that such a one *"...drinks judgment to himself..."* (1 Corinthians 11:27-31). It is not enough for us to just eat a piece of bread and drink a sip of grape juice. We need to do so in a worthy manner, in remembrance of Jesus, proclaiming His death till He comes (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). Why matters.

Assembling

That we are to assemble together with God's people is evident from Scripture. We see the example of the early church assembling regularly (Acts 2:42, 46-47; 5:42; 19:9-10; 20:7; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25). However, it is possible for us to be at every assembly, but not be there for the right reason. We are to gather to hear about the work of God (Acts 14:27), for worship and to encourage our fellow brethren (1 Corinthians 14:26). Unfortunately, there are some who do not focus on the purpose for assembling, but only see the gathering of the church as a social thing, or do so out of habit, but not with a view towards praising God and edifying others. Why matters.

Baptism

It is commonly taught in the religious world that believers should be baptized. Some fail to teach truth when it comes to how baptism is performed, teaching that sprinkling or pouring is as acceptable as immersion. It is not. God's word reveals that baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3-4). In fact, the Greek word *baptizo*, from which we get our English word, means to submerge or to whelm with water. But even if we get the how correct, it is also important that we get the why right. Most religious groups (I hesitate to set a percentage on it - but it is a huge percentage) teach that baptism is a good thing, it is right to do, but that it has nothing to do with salvation. Rather, it is taught that folks are saved by "faith alone," by saying a "sinner's prayer," by "receiving the Lord into your heart," and then you are baptized sometime afterward. Those who teach such things have failed to understand the purpose of baptism. Hear the apostle Peter, *"Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."* (Acts 2:38; cf. Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; John 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5; etc.). Have you been baptized? Great! Why were you baptized? Why matters.

Praying Effectively

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

One of the greatest blessings Christians have to enjoy is communing with our heavenly Father through prayer. There are several "giants" of praying men recorded for us in the Scripture. Nehemiah, Daniel, and Jesus each have some of the most beautiful, thought-provoking prayers that can be read in the Scriptures. These powerful examples can teach us how we ought to pray. By following in the footsteps of these men we may

learn how to pray effectively to our heavenly Father.

Praying Daniel

1. Pray Repeatedly

There was a plot against Daniel by the wicked counselors to King Darius. They wanted to find some fault in Daniel, but they could find none. They knew they must create a law that was in opposition to the law of the Lord, and they knew what Daniel's decision would be — obedience to God, not the king's law (Daniel 6:5). So after the decree was made which forbade any prayer to be offered to anyone besides King Darius, Daniel went and prayed to Jehovah (Daniel 6:10). Yet, he did not just pray once and think that to be sufficient. He proved his obedience and diligence to God by repeatedly turning to God in prayer. Sometimes we mistakenly think that if we pray one time, then God is obligated to hear our prayer and answer it when we expect. However, that ends up treating God as if he was Santa Claus. No diligence is learned, and no commitment is proven in that sort of circumstance. Repeating a prayer is not a bad thing. In fact, it might end up proving just how strongly we feel about a matter and just how much we desire God's guidance and providence.

2. Pray Fervently

Daniel 9 records a beautiful prayer of confession and petition for God's forgiveness. Near the end of Daniel's prayer, he says, "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act!" (Daniel 9:19). These are not irreverent requests and demands that Daniel is making. Daniel is turning to the only one that can answer his requests and he fervently desires the Lord's blessings. When we pray, are we simply pacifying a guilty conscience? Our prayers need to recognize that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, especially our salvation, (James 1:17) and He is able to answer our pleas.

3. Pray with Repentance

Daniel acknowledged the guilt of Israel, but that is not the only thing he acknowledged. He pledged himself as a servant of God, renewing himself in obedience to the Lord (Daniel 9:17). It is sad if the only time we turn to God in prayer is to ask for the forgiveness of our wrongs. That is not the only reason we need prayer for. We need to pledge our sincere desire to repent of sins and commit ourselves to obedience to God and Christ.

Bold Nehemiah

1. Pray Reverently

Nehemiah described God in a perfect way and one that God is completely deserving of receiving. He identified God as the Lord of heaven, great, and awesome (Nehemiah 1:5). When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said: "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). When we give God reverence, we honor His lordship and rule in heaven, and we pledge our willingness to obey Him. One of the most basic things we need to do as we pray is remember that we are addressing the Creator of all things and the one who has control over the universe, and can accomplish great things.

2. Pray Confidently

What might strike a reader of Nehemiah's prayer is how confident he approaches God. There is nothing wrong with being confident in the faithfulness, mercy, and perfection of God. Nehemiah acknowledged God for His existence and rightly praised Him for it. He also recognized God as the giver of covenants, the keeper of promises, and mercy which He offers to those who serve Him. Christians, in like manner, can boldly and confidently approach God in the same manner as Nehemiah did so many years ago (Hebrews 4:16).

3. Pray Devotedly

One much needed aspect of prayer that we often forget to mention is the aspect of commitment and devotion. When we pray to God, we ought to not only make requests of God to fulfill. Our prayers should reflect our willingness to obey the Lord in all His commands. Nehemiah acknowledged the children of Israel and their disobedience to the laws and commands (Nehemiah 1:7). However, he reflected his change in

heart by offering himself as a servant to the Lord (Nehemiah 1:10). When we pray, we need to pray that God's will be done on earth as in heaven, but how will that be done? Through our obedience and demonstration of the will of God. Pray with a sense of devotion and commitment to God, as His servant Nehemiah did.

Devoted Jesus

1. Pray at Emotional Times

Fear. Anxiety. Sorrow. Depression. Gladness. Joy. All of these are natural human emotions. Times of death and loss, or times of birth and life — all are times to go to God in prayer. Jesus acknowledged why He needed God's strength when He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death..." (Matthew 26:38). Deep sorrow and fear must have captivated the Lord's heart and mind. Jesus did not sit around and speculate what might happen. He prayed to God.

2. Pray God's Will

Especially at heightened emotional times, we do not know what to pray. Sometimes we know what we want, but we ask if that is what we really need. Our desires might appear to clash against the Lord's will. A new job opportunity may present itself with ample opportunity for financial success, but it might take us away from times when the church meets and family obligations as a father, mother, and parent. We are between the metaphorical rock and hard place. Pray like Jesus. His prayer in the garden was "not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

3. Pray with Others

We studied how Daniel and Nehemiah both prayed. Jesus is just as powerful an example as those two, but what is intriguing about Jesus' example in prayer is how He enlisted the help of others to pray with Him. He told His disciples "Watch and pray..." (Matthew 26:41). Jesus' disciples knew Christ was willing to teach them how to pray and they asked Him to do so (Luke 11:1-4). When we need help from God, do we also turn to other Christians and ask for them to pray for us and with us? We need to.

Conclusion

Prayer is a wonderful blessing and one we should utilize each day. Sometimes we grow discouraged in our prayers. However, it is a blessing that we ought to cherish. As children of God we need to learn how to pray effectively. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). When we pray fervently, reverently, devotedly, and repeatedly, then we can trust that God will hear our prayers. When we pray at the times we need God and ask for His will to be accomplished, then we can count the promises of God as assurance for our souls.

Reward for Labor Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

A rich, young ruler had come running to the Master asking what to do to inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:16). The Lord's reply caused the ruler to sadly turn away and the twelve disciples to be astonished (Matthew 19:17-26). Peter then asked a logical question. "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27)

So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:28-29).

Pretty heady stuff! Undoubtedly Peter and the other eleven were very pleased with this answer, though

they totally misunderstood the part about twelve thrones.

But then the Master, as He customarily did, threw in a paradoxical statement that seemed to throw cold water on His grand promise. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matthew 19:30). He then taught the twelve the parable of "the Laborers in the Vineyard" (Matthew 20:1-16). He concluded the parable by announcing, "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16, **English Standard Version**).

We can safely conclude that the parable primarily teaches that "many who are first will be last, and the last first." The story, the parable, is just a vehicle to illustrate and impress these truths. But what do these statements mean?

It was grape harvest time - late summer, early fall. The farmer had to harvest his grapes before the September rains. As farmers have always done, they worked from sun up until sundown. At the beginning of the day the land owner hired day laborers to help in the harvest. They worked for an agreed upon wage, one denarius for one day's work, the usual pay for a day laborer in ancient Palestine. But the farmer needed more workers to get the harvest in, so he went out at mid morning, midday, mid afternoon, and just an hour before sunset and hired more laborers. He did not promise these later workers a set amount. He just promised to pay them what was right, and they trusted him and went to work in his vineyard. Those hired later were not shirking work. Rather, no one had hired them.

As the Law required Jewish employers of poor day laborers to do (Deuteronomy 24:14-15), the land owner paid his workers at the end of the day. But then the master acted in a most unusual way. He paid the last laborers first, so those hired at the beginning of the day would know how much those hired at the last were paid. Imagine the surprise and heightened hopes when the land owner paid those who had worked only an hour a full day's wages! Wow! He must plan on paying us a really handsome salary!

We don't have to imagine their disappointment. They looked on with "evil eyes," the angry leer brought on by jealousy. These late comers who worked but an hour in the cool of the evening were being paid as much as those who had labored long and hard through the burning heat of the day. It just didn't seem fair. They openly complained.

But the logic and firmness of the owner's reply put an end to all complaints.

But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' (Matthew 20:13-15)

He had paid those who worked through the day all they had contracted to receive. They had not been shorted at all. He had been just with them. It was his business if he wanted to be gracious and pay the other workers a full day's wages, though they had only worked a short while.

The parable has nothing to do with "death bed repentance." And it really has little to do with length of service in the Master's vineyard. Remember, salvation and all the spiritual blessings that accompany it are gifts from grace, undeserved favor, not earned wages (Romans 6:23).

Peter was in danger of proudly believing he had earned a great reward for great service. After all, he had done what the young ruler wouldn't do, and, the Lord had promised he would sit on a throne! Such a proud attitude would not only cause him to be last, it would cause him to be lost.

If you think you contracted with God for so much reward for so much work, you're well on your way to becoming a Pharisee, and you need to learn the basic nature of our salvation in Christ. We must labor in His vineyard through trust that He will give us far more than we can ever earn if we but faithfully labor.

When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders. The first will be to see many persons

there whom I did not expect to see; the second will be to miss many whom I did expect to see; the greatest wonder of all will be to find myself there (John Newton, quoted by Lightfoot. 151).

Divorce - A Follow Up

Unintended Consequences - Evangelical Feminism

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Brethren contended that a woman who "feels" threatened is obligated to leave her husband and file for divorce to force him into agreeing to get counseling, in direct violation of divine law. The woman's feelings, justified or unjustified, trump the law of God.

The book **Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them** is endorsed by "Focus on the Family" and recommended by brethren. It asserts that the church should "validate" the wife's claim she is abused, whether or not she has any proof. It lists the husband's insistence on making major decisions along with violence as abuse. Couple this with the threat of divorce, that my brethren contend she is obligated to use, and the wife effectively assumes headship in the home.

From a practical standpoint, the wife leaving her husband to avoid violence (or vice versa) or to protect the children actually accomplishes nothing, for, statistically, the danger of violence from the abandoned spouse actually increases for the spouse who leaves (Ibid). The answer, both scriptural and practical, is to call the police and press charges, an exercise of civil rights allowed both by Scripture and civil law (Acts 25:9-11).

What do you think are the consequences of such rebellion against the divine plan for the home? Please seriously consider the following scholarly material.

"The decline of the family has now reached critical and truly dangerous proportions. Family breakdown touches virtually every family and every American. It is not only the major source of social instability in the Western world today but also seriously threatens civic freedom and constitutional government."

....

"Almost invariably, the involuntarily divorced spouse will want and expect to continue enjoying the protections and prerogatives of private life: the right to live in the common home, to possess the common property, or—most vexing of all—to parent the common children. These claims must be terminated, using the penal system if necessary."

"... Unilateral divorce inescapably involves government agents forcibly removing legally innocent people from their homes, seizing their property, and separating them from their children. It inherently abrogates not only the inviolability of marriage but the very concept of private life."

"By far the most serious consequences involve children, who have become the principal weapons of the divorce machinery. Invariably the first action of a divorce court, once a divorce is filed, is to separate the children from one of their parents, usually the father. Until this happens, no one in the machinery acquires any power or earnings. The first principle and first action of divorce court therefore: Remove the father."

"This happens even if the father is innocent of any legal wrongdoing and is simply sitting in his own home minding his own business. The state seizes control of his children with no burden of proof to justify why. The burden of proof (and the financial burden) falls on the father to demonstrate why they should be returned."

"But while sensational examples can be found of anything, there is simply no evidence

that the family and fatherhood crisis is caused primarily or even significantly by fathers abandoning their families, beating their wives, and molesting their children. Irrefutable evidence indicates that it is driven almost entirely by divorce courts forcibly separating parents from their children and using these false accusations as a rationalization”

“Contrary to popular belief, child support today has nothing to do with fathers abandoning their children, reneging on their marital vows, or even agreeing to divorce. It is automatically assessed on all non-custodial parents, even those divorced against their will who lose their children through no legal fault or agreement of their own. It is an entitlement for all single mothers, in other words, regardless of their behavior.

“Originally justified as a method of recovering welfare costs, child support has been transformed into a massive federal subsidy on middle-class divorce. No-fault divorce allowed a mother to divorce her husband for any reason or no reason and to take the children with her. Child support took the process a step further by allowing the divorcing mother to use the now-fatherless children to claim her husband's income—also regardless of any fault on her part (or lack of fault on his) in abrogating the marriage agreement.

“By glancing at a child-support schedule, a mother can determine exactly how large a tax-free windfall she can force her husband to pay her simply by divorcing, money she may spend however she wishes with no accounting requirement. It is collected at gunpoint if necessary, and nonpayment means incarceration without trial.

“Like the welfare it was supposed to replace, child support finances family dissolution by paying mothers to divorce. Economist Robert Willis calculates that child-support levels vastly exceeding the cost of raising children create ‘an incentive for divorce by the custodial mother.’ His analysis indicates that only one-fifth to one-third of child-support payments are actually used for the children; the rest is profit for the custodial parent. Kimberly Folse and Hugo Varela-Alvarez write in the Journal of Socio-Economics that child support serves as an ‘economic incentive for middle-class women to seek divorce.’” (“[Divorced from Reality](#),” by Stephen Baskerville; Stephen Baskerville is Associate Professor of Government at Patrick Henry College and the author of Taken into Custody: The War Against Fathers, Marriage, and the Family [Cumberland House, 2007]).

Brethren speak only of a husband abusing his wife and of a husband using pornography. They can do a little research, as I did, and find out these important facts. Violence in marriage is about equally distributed between men and women: about half of the time it is both husband and wife, a fourth of the time just the husband, and a fourth just the wife. The overwhelming majority of domestic violence occurs between unmarried partners, but the press lumps it all together.

According to a 2010 national survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Department of Justice, in the last 12 months more men than women were victims of intimate partner physical violence and over 40% of severe physical violence was directed at men. Men were also more often the victim of psychological aggression and control over sexual or reproductive health. Despite this, few services are available to male victims of intimate partner violence

(<http://www.saveservices.org/2012/02/cdc-study-more-men-than-women-victimsof-partner-abuse/>).

The end result of this evangelical feminism is a dramatic increase of unmarried young people because young men are afraid of the consequences of marriage and young women are pursuing careers outside the home, a dramatic increase in casual sex, and a dramatic increase of homosexuality. The position these brethren are espousing is a greater threat to the church than the positions of brethren Hailey, Freeman, et al. It is based on the “Situation Ethics” philosophy of Joseph Fletcher that is the basis for the moral

quagmire in which American society wallows!

The Real Victims

The truly innocent victims of divorce are the children. Research has verified that the effects of divorce on children is worse than the effects of a violent marriage. Divorce for any cause other than fornication is an act of hatred toward the innocent children. Those who advocate divorce for any cause other than fornication share the blame for the inestimable harm done to the children of divorce.

“The homicide rate for children in step-families is seventy times higher than it is for those living with both biological parents. The old family legends about evil stepparents were literary expressions of a grim fact: people care about their own children more than they care for those of others” (James Q. Wilson, *The Marriage Problem*. 3)

“Children in one-parent families, compared to those in two-parent ones, are twice as likely to drop out of school. Boys in one-parent families are much more likely than those in two-parent ones to be both out of school and out of work. Girls in one-parent families are twice as likely as those in one-parent ones to have an out-of-wedlock birth.... Children in one-parent families are much worse off than those in two-parent families even when both families have the same earnings” (Ibid. 7)

“The children of single moms are more likely than those of two-parent families, to be abused, to drop out of or be expelled from school, to become juvenile delinquents, to take drugs, and to commit adult crimes.... holding income constant, young people in father-absent families were twice as likely to be incarcerated as those in two-parent families” (Ibid. 8).

“Even the health of children is at greater risk if they are raised by a single mother” (Ibid. 9).

Baskerville adds:

“What is ironic about these witch-hunts is the fact that it is easily demonstrable that the child abuse epidemic—which is very real—is almost entirely the creation of feminism and the welfare bureaucracies themselves. It is well established by scholars that an intact family is the safest place for women and children and that very little abuse takes place in married families. Child abuse overwhelmingly occurs in single-parent homes, homes from which the father has been removed. Domestic violence, too, is far more likely during or after the breakup of a marriage than among married couples.

“According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), “Children of single parents had a 77% greater risk of being harmed by physical abuse, an 87% greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect, and an 80% greater risk of suffering serious injury or harm from abuse or neglect than children living with both parents.” Britain’s Family Education Trust reports that children are up to 33 times more likely to be abused in a single-parent home than in an intact family.

*“The principal impediment to child abuse is thus precisely the figure whom the welfare and divorce bureaucracies are intent on removing: the father. ‘The presence of the father ... placed the child at lesser risk for child sexual abuse,’ concludes a 2000 study published in *Adolescent and Family Health*. ‘The protective effect from the father’s presence in most households was sufficiently strong to offset the risk incurred by the few paternal perpetrators.’ In fact, the risk of ‘paternal perpetrators’ is miniscule, since a tiny proportion of sexual abuse (which is far less common than physical abuse) is committed by natural fathers, though government statistics lump them in with boyfriends and stepfathers to make it appear that incest is widespread”* (Ibid).

Conclusion

The home is the bedrock institution on which society is built. As soon as the Lord God created mankind He instituted the family. Christians should be the salt that preserves our society (Matthew 5:13). We live in a society desperately in need of godly, moral influence. Dear brethren, I plead, don't be part of the problem. Don't succumb to the influence of the world. Be lights for the Lord in a dark and sinful world.



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